

Leading in a Culture of Change, Second Edition

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Leading in a Culture of Change, Second Edition

by Michael Fullan

Jossey-Bass (2020), 192 pages

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*“Understanding change means understanding people.
If you don't treat others well and fairly, you'll be a leader
without followers.” – Michael Fullan*

“Change requires leadership” (p. 123). In a time of great uncertainty, with the rise of globalization, climate change, deeply rooted systemic racism, high unemployment, political distrust and increased mental health issues, leaders and effective leadership assume even greater importance. Leadership is an evolution. It grows and changes along with the changing times. The global pandemic has shifted leaders to address change in a way like never before, learning new skills and changing course at a moment's notice. This pressure on leaders to “manage a multitude of problems that can develop into crises without warning, navigate an increasingly turbulent reality, and act at a fast pace” (p. 6) illustrates the complexities and challenges leaders face. *Leading in a Culture of Change* offers a perspective in leadership development and application for these rapidly changing times. In order to operate in a culture of complex change, leaders must embody five core competencies: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation, and coherence making (p. 236).

Chapter 1 sets the tone for the book by emphasizing the need for leaders to change and adapt with the changing times, or “become obsolete and extinct” (p. 1). Leading in a culture of change “involves qualities that are below the surface, and not so much the obvious ones of confidence, presence, and articulation” (p. 8). “It is not about mobilizing others to solve problems, but to help them confront problems they have not been successful to address” (p. 6). The concepts of lead learner and learning organizations are central to this book. Fullan asserts that in order to survive this culture of accelerating change, businesses and schools must adapt to becoming learning organizations. Fullan offers six aspects of lead learnership: (1) participate as a learner (2) listen, learn and lead; (3) be both an expert and an apprentice; (4) develop others; (5) be relentlessly persistent and courageous about impact; and (6) focus on the “how” as well as the “what” of change (p. 60).

Chapter 2 suggests that in order to be effective in complex times, leaders must be guided by moral purpose, which is intricately built into the five components of leadership. “Moral purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial” (p. 20). Thus, moral purpose is not a state, but rather a dynamic process that requires purposeful collaboration, deep knowledge and coherence making, and urges leaders to constantly work on developing relationships at all levels of the organization (p. 37). Chapter 2 examines case studies from both business and education to demonstrate the importance of moral purpose in the long-term success of organizations and society. A key element of this chapter is the discussion around culture, ideas, knowledge, practices and beliefs, that are essential for effective leadership.

Chapter 3 offers insights into the nature of change, coining the term “change savvy” (p. 44). Drawing on the knowledge of practitioners, combining assertiveness and humility, listening and learning, and engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving, Fullan describes the recipe for effectuating change (Fullan, 2009).

Chapter 4 emphasizes: (1) the importance of relationships, recognizing leaders as relationship builders; (2) the importance of culture, in the way we do things, how we interact, and how we learn; and (3) the need for organizational accountability, focusing on “transparent and specific use of performance data” (p. 89). This chapter also highlights the commonality between businesses and schools, as they relate to organizational success. Businesses boost their moral purpose, for their own good and for the good of society. Similarly, “schools strengthen their intellectual and social quality as they deepen their moral purpose; learning is the center of gravity for both” (p. 64).

Chapter 5 underscores the importance of knowledge building, deep learning and leader emotional intelligence. Fullan distinguishes between information (machines) and knowledge (people) (p. 92), and emphasizes the necessity for cultural collaboration, beyond sharing best practices, and towards creating new environments conducive to learning and exchanging knowledge (p. 15). Fullan embeds the six C's of global competencies (character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking) within deep learning, which in turn, produces key characteristics essential for learning and leading.

Chapter 6 guides leaders on what to do when change inevitably occurs. Based on the concept of the business model of aligning organizations to goals, visions and strategic plans (p. 12), coherence-making is the tool used to reconcile the differences. "Coherence-making is integral as it serves to bring together moral purpose, the change process and knowledge" (p. 129). Fullan introduces leadership 'from the middle,' "where the middle (schools, school districts, regional jurisdictions) does not wait for the top to initiate change" (p. 86). This chapter asks us to consider "if top-down doesn't work, and bottom-up fails, where is the glue (i.e., accountability)? The answer is in the middle" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018).

Chapter 7 more deeply explores the notion of leadership for change, or the leadership continuum, by accomplishing greater change in shorter periods of time (p. 135). The book comes full circle by asking the questions posed in the first chapter: What are the essential qualities of effective leadership in complex times? How do we develop better leaders? The book closes by unveiling the main essence of the book, which is, "when you strip away all the layers, Leading in a Culture of Change is about human fulfillment" (p. 153).

While not ground-breaking inquiry, the findings are firmly established in research methodology, and substantiated in the works of prominent researchers and scholars in the realm of educational leadership. Fullan approaches leadership competencies from an anthropocentric stance, calling on leaders to be agents of change before changing others.

Leading in a Culture of Change is written in natural language, without overly elaboration or unnecessary nuance. This makes it enjoyable to read while allowing for greater readership. Fullan encourages "producing more leaders of leaders" (p. x) which benefits both the individual and the organization, and he provides numerous examples from both business and education which provides credibility and value. An additional strength is the

inclusion of geographical comparative data (case studies) from 1,200 schools across eight countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Netherlands, New Zealand, Uruguay, and United States), adding to the richness and diversity of the text.

One notable gap is Fullan's coupling of leadership and management, overlapping the two rather than recognizing the unique and distinct contributions of each in the application of leadership. Although educational responsibility is prevalent in both, management and leadership are conceptually and categorically different (Connolly et. al, 2019). "Educational management entails carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in an educational institution. In contrast, educational leadership is the act of influencing others in educational settings to achieve goals and necessitates actions of some kind" (Connolly et al., 2019). In short, educational management = functioning of a system; educational leadership = influencing others to achieve goals and impose action. A missed opportunity perhaps is that had this book been published only a few months later, it could have included the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of a global crisis and more concrete examples of leading change through crisis.

19 years after the first edition of this book, Fullan's five leadership capacities still hold true, and the book pushes us to examine a 'new' kind of leadership required to move society forward. It is beneficial for current leaders (who wish to enhance knowledge and increase effectiveness), as well as emerging leaders (who will require these sets of skills to survive in the complex and rapidly changing times). As Fullan illustrates, change is not linear; it is random and nearly impossible to predict with any degree of accuracy, and this causes discomfort (p. 192). Good leaders therefore know that "change brings with it initial setbacks that should not result in an initial overreaction, rather, the leader should remain focused on the initial moral purpose driving the change in order to make sure that purpose is finally met" (p. 192). If there is one statement that best summarizes what I have learned from this book, it would be that one must immerse themselves in the change process; it is not only imperative, it is inevitable.

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