

## P R E F A C E

**T**he need for a dramatically more skilled and highly educated workforce in a global knowledge economy—combined with profound changes in students’ and families’ life circumstances—have created unprecedented demands on education leaders. Although it is increasingly clear that schools and districts must change fundamentally, not just incrementally, most leaders in education are understandably uncertain how they might go about their work differently.

Working to ensure that no child be left behind, struggling to overcome longstanding achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups, dealing with the expectation that every school make progress annually—school leaders are being asked, in essence, to perform two very different jobs simultaneously.

Imagine being asked to rebuild an airplane—*while you are flying it*. Doing so would be difficult under any circumstances, but even more so if you—as all other hard-working, conscientious pilots—had received all your training in flying the plane *as it is*, rather than also learning how to transform the plane itself. Rebuilding it may require an entirely different set of skills.

Our goal in *Change Leadership* is to help school leaders, and leadership teams, better understand and develop the capacities needed to succeed at their second job of rebuilding the school system—while it operates. We offer a new *systems change* framework for education and a set of tools for leaders who are hard at work rebuilding the plane—while keeping it in the air, loaded with passengers.

The Change Leadership Group has spent the years since 2000 with school and district leaders from all over the United States—in urban, suburban, and rural districts; in districts with thirty-seven high schools and districts with one; in districts with decent financial resources and those forced to reduce personnel each year despite rising student populations. As different as these settings were, we never found an administrative team that was not working as hard as it could. What we've learned is that “improving our schools” on the scale now demanded cannot simply be added to the set of routine responsibilities and activities with which leadership teams in schools and districts are normally occupied. The problem is not lack of hard work, good intentions, or initiative.

We believe the successful leadership of transformational improvement processes in schools and districts requires sharpening capacities in two quite different directions at the same time:

1. Leaders need to see more deeply into why it is so hard for our organizations to change, even when there is a genuine, collective desire to do so. More than just seeing why, leaders need to learn how to take action effectively to help our organizations actually become what they need and want to be.
2. Leaders need to see more deeply into why it is so hard for individuals to change, even when individuals genuinely intend to do so. Beyond this merely diagnostic self-understanding, we as leaders need to learn how to take action effectively to help ourselves become the persons we need and want to be in order to better serve the children and families of our communities.

We must sharpen our capacities in both directions because, in the end, each depends on the other. It may be impossible for us to change at work in the ways we need to without new organizational arrangements, and it may be impossible to bring about significant changes in our organizations without considering deeply the possibility of our own change.

It is precisely this simultaneous attention to cultivating both a greater organizational savvy and a deeper self-awareness that distinguishes our approach. Not just ends unto themselves, these new forms of organizational and personal knowing are tightly linked to bringing about new results. We deliberately formed the Change Leadership Group to bring together an unusual collection of people knowledgeable about (1) the world of educational reform, (2) organizational development, and (3) adult learning because it was our judgment that many

improvement efforts founder on the limitations of a naïve approach to the complications of either organizational or individual change or both. Our goal here is to clearly illuminate what we at the Change Leadership Group call the dual focus—simultaneously sharpening our outward and inward attention. Like any discipline, this dual focus can be learned and develops gradually over time. In *Change Leadership*, we present a variety of ways to help you develop it.

## HOW DOES *CHANGE LEADERSHIP* WORK?

As much as possible, we have structured this book to permit you to experience the kinds of learning we seek to promote in our “Learning Labs.” To introduce another metaphor, we often refer to these three-day, interactive learning institutes as a kind of “school improvement fitness center.” We invite leadership teams into a novel environment that will put them to work, individually and collectively, developing new muscles to accomplish their improvement goals.

A natural question is: What can you reasonably hope to accomplish through a single three-day visit to a fitness center? Obviously, the muscles are not going to be developed in that time. The more reasonable expectation is that you will meet a series of “machines” (tools for development), begin to familiarize yourself with how they work and how to use them, and experience a comprehensive workout routine. Truth be told, you might also expect to be a little sore after the first exposure from all the stretching. But adhere to your new routine, use the tools, and over time, you will develop new capacities.

This metaphor of the fitness center should help make clear both what this book is and what it is not. It is not another treatise—a ten-chapter analysis, argument, or illustration of what is “wrong with our schools.” (“Here’s why they don’t work. Here’s what they should look like. You take it from here.”) Nor is it a point-to-point road map to guide you through an improvement process. Rather, it is a guide to help you develop the capacities that we believe—based on experience—will better enable you to lay down your own best road to the transformation of your school or district.

As a guide to the development of leadership capacities for transforming our schools (what we mean by “change leadership”), this book combines the conceptual with the practical, the thinking with doing. We present a set of practical concepts, invite you to “think about them by doing,” and then, in your own change leadership work, to “do by thinking” of the concepts that will gradually become more familiar to you.

Our framework includes several concepts that we introduce one by one, in paired chapters. Throughout the book, you are invited onto different “exercise machines,” each chapter exercising a different “muscle group” of the single “body.” This is why we really mean it when we say that if you are tired after the work of one chapter, you should rest and recharge before you go on to the next. It is best to come to each chapter fresh and energized, because each is “working you out” in a different way. We urge you not to race through the book or merely skim for the developing ideas. Instead, take the time to assimilate the concepts and to complete the exercises. With this combined effort, you will develop the capacities to make full use of the concepts.

## HOW IS THE BOOK ORGANIZED?

In Chapter One, we provide background for the lessons of the book. We consider some of the fundamental economic and social changes of the last quarter century as they relate to education, and make the case that the nature of these changes transforms what has been described as the education “problem” from one of mere failure demanding “reform” to obsolescence requiring “reinvention.” At the end of this chapter, we invite you to frame your school’s or district’s education “problem” as a challenge that you can work on throughout the book, using the tools in successive chapters.

In the four sets of paired chapters that follow, we describe key organizational improvement challenges for schools and districts. In these core chapters, we provide you with a series of diagnostic tools and exercises to help you identify more clearly what you want to work on in your school or district and how you can go about this work in a new way. To explore the dynamic, interdependent relationship between individual and organizational change, we describe the experiences of a superintendent, whom we call Arthur. We describe in detail how he uncovered—and worked to overcome—those personal beliefs and behaviors he discovered stood in the way of his being a more effective leader of educational change. We also provide stories from a variety of schools and districts across the country. In each of these chapters, we present a progressive series of exercises that can lead you to deeper insights into your own personal learning challenges as they connect to your school’s or district’s ability to improve. Separate exercises are designed to exercise your “outer” and “inner” attention, the organizational and personal learning aspects of the theme for each set of chapters.


Chapter Two makes the case for a laserlike focus on the improvement of teaching as the goal of a change process, and describes what a system that is designed for continuous improvement of instruction and instructional leadership might look like. The chapter is designed to help you assess the current status of your work related to improving teaching. In Chapter Three, we introduce the first step of an unfolding process designed to illuminate your own personal learning challenge, your inner challenge, as it relates to improving teaching and learning in your school or district.



Chapter Four takes up the question of what often gets in the way of change in schools and districts and, conversely, what generates the momentum and energy for successful initiatives. In Chapter Five, we ask you to take a second step in developing your personal learning curriculum by identifying what may be getting in the way of your working more effectively.

Chapter Six lays out a systemic model for thinking about the arenas of change in education and the ways in which they are interdependent and overlap as a system. We discuss competencies, conditions, culture, and context as necessary parts of transformation. In this chapter and in Chapter Seven, we help you create a sharper picture of your own system, organizationally and personally, to see more deeply into these outer and inner dimensions.

Chapter Eight outlines critical elements of a more strategic approach to the change work—starting and intervention points, and the sequencing of important steps. We describe the phases of a successful, sustainable change process, and we explore the importance of data, accountability, and relationships in each phase. These concepts are presented through case studies of two districts illustrating the different elements of our model and showing how they look in practice. Chapter Nine provides ways to help you work strategically at overturning your own individual immunities to change. It concludes with recommendations for how to enable success in your self-learning curriculum.

Chapter Ten explicitly brings together the two parallel outer and inner threads that we discuss throughout the book—the twin challenges of organizational change and personal growth. In this concluding chapter, we consider the implications of the dual focus for education leaders in the twenty-first century.

Throughout *Change Leadership*, we include diagnostic tools, exercises, and links to additional materials to further your understanding of both the system at large and your personal system. All the tools intended for individual use only are marked with an “individual” icon ; many of the tools are also adaptable for group use,

and where that is the case you will also find a group icon,  which is your signal that, in Appendix A, you will find this same tool modified for use in groups or teams. It is our belief that you will gain more from this book if you actively engage the exercises included throughout the chapters. To aid this process, you can download full-page templates of each exercise that provide space for your own writing from both the Change Leadership Group (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/clg/news1a.html>; click on “Exercise Templates”) and Jossey-Bass (<http://www.josseybass.com/go/changeleadership>). Additionally, because you might want to put colleagues or other district members on these “workout machines,” we highlight a few exercises that we have learned may be especially challenging for an unskilled user to help a fellow first-time user with. We mark these exercises with a “caution” icon  to signal the importance of your taking stock of your comfort and skill level with the material in order to decide whether to ask someone else to engage it. We also provide a variety of examples from our practice. When we identify people with their full name and affiliation it is with their permission. In other cases, either to preserve privacy or because the person is an amalgam of real people with whom we have worked, we have used a first name only. Appendixes provide exercises to use in groups, as well as a list of recommended readings, grouped by topic.

## HOW TO MAKE BEST USE OF THIS BOOK

We recognize that many people will read this book on their own and have therefore designed the activities so that they will be meaningful and valuable to the individual reader. But, for the same reasons that we strongly encourage people to come to our Learning Labs in teams, we encourage you to engage in this work together with others. You might form an ad hoc group, where you gather interested colleagues in your school or district and use this book as the focus of a study group. You can then all benefit from trying on ideas, learning from your discussions, and encouraging each other.

For those of you who are in a leadership team, we recommend that you and your whole team read *Change Leadership* together. Individually and as a group, you will get even more out of this book if you read it, complete all of the exercises, and take the time to collectively think through the implications of what you are learning for how to lead. This suggestion of a “group read” follows from our understanding that to meet the new challenge of reaching all students with new skills, we need to work in fundamentally new ways ourselves. No one person can solve

this new challenge; neither can individuals working alone. We need each other, and we need to work together in new ways. Reading and learning together is a start.

Although you may already serve on some kind of central office or school-based management team, our observation is that meetings of these groups usually deal with administrative matters or “crisis management” rather than with the more substantive problems of change leadership—much in the way that most faculty meetings are often taken up with announcements rather than discussions related to improvement of teaching and learning. The work in education at every level remains highly isolated, compartmentalized, and increasingly crisis driven.

A central idea throughout this book concerns the way leadership teams themselves may need to reorganize the way they operate when they are at work on their second job—that of remaking the school or district at the same time they are running it. Because these groups will need to create new individual and organizational capacities (not merely apply existing capacities to a new task), they may need to reflect the features of a learning community, such as we see in the growth of teachers’ professional learning communities, critical friends groups, or the Japanese lesson study process. But they need to be something more, as well.

Looking at the profound transformation in how work is organized in most other professions over the last quarter century, we can see additional qualities an effective team must have. From law to law enforcement, to business, to medicine, individuals increasingly work in teams to solve problems, improve services, and collaboratively create new knowledge. The simple reason why most work is now organized around team structures is that focused, disciplined groups are far more likely to generate a better result than can individuals working alone. Communities of practice—groups “bound together by shared expertise and shared passion for a joint enterprise”<sup>1</sup>—are increasingly used in a wide variety of workplace settings to enable individuals and organizations to learn new skills and processes and to identify and address ongoing problems of practice. According to Wenger and Snyder, communities of practice help drive strategy, start new lines of business (or inquiry), solve problems quickly, transfer best practices, develop professional skills, and recruit and train talent.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the leadership teams we are advocating are not voluntary groups, nor are they focused on their own learning as an end unto itself. They exist to transform the larger system, the school or district. This may well require individual learning and change. But it is always tightly connected to their charge—to make something valuable happen in the schools or districts they lead. As such, they must also reflect the features of high-performing executive teams at work on transformational

change. We call these new kinds of leadership groups, which combine the work of leaderly learning with effective execution for systemwide improvement, leadership practice communities.

However you approach the information we present, we welcome you. We hope you will experience us as with you all along the way, encouraging your workout. May *Change Leadership* work for you as a renewable resource—more than a structured single visit to the gym, a guide to a new kind of ongoing leadership practice.

### **Endnotes**

1. Etienne Wenger and William Snyder, “Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier,” *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 2000): 139.
2. *Ibid.*, 140–141.