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Allan R. Morrison

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Educational leadership and change: structural challenges in the implementation of a shifting paradigm

Allan R. Morrison*

Delia School of Canada, Hong Kong, China

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding leadership and change. The impact of this research has not been limited to academe, but rather, government policy in different jurisdictions has been directly impacted by developments into collegial forms of leadership. While the positive correlation between leadership and change has been widely acknowledged, this article argues that a disconnect has emerged between the theory and practice signifying that the efficacy of change remains hampered by structural constraints and subjective factors that result in unpredicted outcomes. To explore this thesis, the fundamentals of educational leadership theory, our ability (or inability) to manage change and an analysis of the difficulties faced by leaders as they move from theory to praxis are examined.

Keywords: change; collaboration; collegiality; leadership; leadership development; management; structural constraints; vision

People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does. (Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*)

Introduction

In today's educational environment, the literature comparing the direct correlation between educational leadership and change is extensive (DuFour and Mattos 2013; Fullan 2002, 2006a, 2007, 2010, 2011; Gill 2003; Morrison 1998; Robertson 2008; Wells and Feun 2013). There are numerous theories that argue for a person's ability to implicitly and explicitly change a school culture and vision. This has been argued emphatically by Beare, Caldwell, and Millikan (1989, 99) who state:

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority.

Nevertheless, while there is recognition of the correlation between leadership and change, it will be argued that there has emerged a disconnect between the theory and practice, signifying that the efficacy of change remains hampered by structural constraints and subjective factors that result in unpredicted outcomes. Perhaps, historically,

*Email: a.morrison@delia.edu.hk

this reflects the reductionist notion that a singular entity – the leader – can implement and sustain effective change.

However, as will be demonstrated, there has been a considerable movement away from the singular leadership style towards one which supports concepts such as ‘distributed’ or ‘collaborative’ leadership. This emphasises the notion that while an ‘individual’ may initiate change, he/she alone does not sustain it; rather, it is the ‘collective’ that does. The argument is, therefore, that change must be holistic, systemic and dynamic and utilise a multidirectional approach in order to be successful (Fullan 2006a; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Mendels and Mitgang 2013). Top-down models are no longer appropriate or effective in the postmodern world (DuFour and Mattos 2013). And yet, this is where the systemic realities around change are constrained. Modern-day leadership development remains focused on preparing and recruiting leaders who are then transplanted into rigid hierarchical structures and forced, in many cases, to manage rather than lead. As such, these structural constraints actually hinder a leader’s ability to transform current systems and reinvigorate them for further development and growth.

As such, in this paper, I will investigate the complex relationship between ‘leadership’ and its interaction with ‘change’. In order to do this, I will explore: (1) the fundamentals of educational leadership theory; (2) our ability (or inability) to manage change, and finally; (3) the difficulties faced by leaders as they move from theory to praxis.

Leadership theory – making sense of reality

When one examines the mechanics of leadership, regardless of discipline, it becomes quite apparent that there is no ‘one’ definition or theoretical underpinning. Rather, the term is multifaceted and, as such, lends itself to numerous theories that are connected to time, space, culture and context. In addition, when examining theoretical models of leadership, one can see, at least in the literature, a shift from dominant-patriarchal (authoritarian) to collective-distributive (power-sharing) modes of operation in terms of organisational management. An important facet to keep in mind is that the concept of leadership cannot be over-simplified or reduced to general statements. The style of leadership engagement, and its success, really occurs at the micro-level and, yet, there are overarching structural constraints at the macro-level. While it may come down to individuals and their personal style of power and control, their ability to lead is not in isolation. There is a systemic dynamic that interacts at multiple levels within an organisation.

In addition, there is a significant difference between ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ that should be acknowledged. According to Morrison, ‘leadership’ refers to ‘vision, strategy, creating direction and transformation of the organization’ while ‘management’ focuses on, ‘ways of ensuring the vision happens in practice, organizational and operational matters . . . and [ultimately] ensuring the organization is run most effectively and efficiently to achieve its purpose and strategies’ (1998, 205). Cuban provides one of the clearest distinctions between leadership and management. He links leadership with change and management with maintenance activity (in Bush and Glover 2003, 9). While they are very different tasks, leadership and management are not mutually exclusive. There does exist a reciprocal relationship between the two aforementioned terms. However, in terms of organisational

change, leadership, rather than management, is the overriding force that provides the philosophical direction and structural foundation needed for any school improvement issue.

While leadership theory has evolved, a question that will be raised relates to the connection or disconnection to the realities of the workplace environment, in general, and the educational system, in particular. Are leaders driven by theory or, conversely, is theory attempting to reconstruct the realities we see in the workplace? What is the relationship between the two? To explore the concept of leadership, both definitional and in action, this section will focus on three very important elements of leadership: (1) differing theories (philosophical); (2) vision (psychological); and (3) personal traits (sociological).

Theory – the foundation to understanding

Let us begin with the importance of theory. In *theory*, theory establishes a foundation that provides a framework for analysis, for decision-making and, ultimately, for action. According to Bush, ‘theory is valuable and significant *if* it serves to explain practice and provide managers with a guide to action’ (2011, 24 – emphasis added). This assumes that leaders are cognisant of their theoretical underpinnings. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that there is not one theoretical model that encapsulates an understanding of a complex organism like an organisational system *en toto*. Rather, numerous theories have been developed which are based on a specific understanding (or viewpoint) related to the dynamics of organisational behaviour (cf. Knights and Willmott 2007; Buchanan and Huczynski 2010; Bush 2011). While there are a variety of different labels attached depending upon the writer, Bush (2011) has classified models to explain organisational behaviour as: formal (structural and hierarchical), collegial, political, subjective, cultural and ambiguity. Given the diverse range of theoretical models, many researchers select a specific theoretical underpinning depending upon what aspect of an organisation they are observing. If one theory does not fit, several may be combined. This is what Griffith terms ‘theoretical pluralism’ (Griffith 1997).

Historically, leadership has been viewed (and implemented) as a formalistic, top-down, patriarchal model that emphasises hierarchy, position and power (Bush 2010). Organisations were viewed in structural terms, and variables like gender, identity, sociocultural and economic factors were deemed irrelevant. Structure was structure, and people were expected to behave in a ‘more or less’ predictable manner. Organisations required strong, decisive leaders that operated in isolation from the main organs of an organisation. However, over the past few decades, we have seen a shifting paradigm in terms of understanding leadership (cf. Buchanan and Huczynski 2010; Burnes and By 2012; Bush 2011; Knights and Willmott 2007; Williams 2006). Moving away from a formal to a more collegial style, a dominant theoretical model to emerge in the early years of the twenty-first century has been *distributed* leadership. This has shifted us away from a more informal, voluntary interaction (driven by the formal leaders) towards a model with ‘a focus on collective, rather than singular, leadership’ (Bush 2011, 202). Furthermore, this theory represents a shift which redefines ‘how we think, how we solve problems, how boundaries are defined [and fundamentally] how we do business’ (Buchanan and

Huczynski 2010, 566). In theory, the focus has moved away from a single dominant individual at the top to a more collective approach to decision-making.

While the exploration of organisational behaviour and theory has been largely limited to the confines of *academe* (Fullan 2006b; Miner 2007), the Ontario Ministry of Education, in recent years, has been a firm believer in promoting a collegial model for its educational system, most notably as it related to distributed leadership. Here the focus is on improving the level and quality of education across the system (as deemed by performance measures) in addition to supporting the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) to distribute knowledge and decision-making across the school system. These PLCs are meant to formalise the sharing of ideas, to promote shared values and vision and to encourage personal reflection on one's own professional practice. This must be done in a respectful and supportive environment (Stoll et al. 2006). It has been argued that, 'schools that promote trust in this way are more likely to motivate people all around, and in turn more likely to do better' (Fullan 2007, 50). Michael Fullan and the academic community at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto have driven much of this reform (cf. Fullan 1995, 2002, 2006a; Hargreaves 2010). However, not all scholars of leadership studies are supportive of this policy direction. Some argue that there is a lack of credible data to support the benefits of this theoretical model. Hartley (2010) argues that distributed leadership supports the great economic shift to neo-liberalism and 'collaborative capitalism' and that society is attempting to revamp the needs and foci of schools so that they reflect the economic skills needed for the twenty-first century. In addition, the impact of a distributed leadership model has not been fully understood in terms of the benefit to student learning. Similarly, the value of PLCs has been questioned given that very little evidence of their efficacy exists given the complexity of its implementation (Wells and Feun 2013). Yet, at the same time, government agencies like the Ontario Ministry of Education and the National College for School Leadership in England are perpetuating the belief that there is a 'causal relationship between distributed leadership and pupil outcomes' (Hartley 2010, 139). Hence, there is an academic 'leap of faith' that assumes there is a positive causal relationship between 'distributed leadership' and 'pupil achievement' without the necessary data to support it (Anderson, Moore, and Sun 2009).

Furthermore, Hartley argues that a correlation between leadership style and student outcomes, 'is a notoriously difficult matter to measure, for it is not easy to isolate the direct effect of distributed leadership as an independent variable' (2010, 139). In fact, Anderson, Moore, and Sun (2009), 'did not detect any clear correlation between the pattern of leadership distribution in the qualitative data and the student test results evidence' (130). Due to government policy development around a 'possibly' unproven theory, Hartley (2010) argues that government 'policy-makers have been ahead of the evidence in their endorsement of distributed leadership as a means to bring about the effective school'. While he does not go so far as to eliminate the possible benefits, he does urge caution and encourage additional research to empirically study the causal relationship.

Therefore, are these aforementioned theories of organisational behaviour effective in providing a lens with which to examine the dynamics of decision-making and ultimately school improvement? Do they provide a model of behaviour that educational leaders can utilise and incorporate into their practices on a daily basis? As noted earlier, many of the actual duties of a principal tend to fall into the

management rather than the *leadership* category. In fact, principals are often so overwhelmed with administrative/managerial duties (Boris-Schacter and Langer 2006; Fullan 2007, 2010; Goodwin, Cunningham, and Childress 2003; Harris Interactive 2013; Stricherz 2001) that finding the time to embrace a true form of collaboration is a challenge. It has been argued that the incorporation of language like 'instructional and transformative leadership' has functioned merely as an, 'implementation of centrally determined policies, not the identification of, and commitment to, school-level vision and goals' (Bush 2011, 202). As noted, leaders are expected to embrace the ideas around collaboration and distribution of leadership, yet the structural model they are functioning in still reflects the formal hierarchical system of yesteryear.

The 'vision' imperative

While there are a number of leadership and organisational behaviour theories, the perceived value of leadership *vision* is seen, across the theoretical divide, as a key ingredient for educational improvement. Vision means that the individual (or group) has a clear understanding of where they should be and has an action plan on how to get there. As such, '[v]ision is increasingly regarded as an important component of leadership' (Bush and Glover 2003, 5; Gill 2003). More emphatically stated, '[t]he point is simply this: to become a leader you must be able to envision the future' (Kouzes and Posner 2008, 125). According to one survey, the power to inspire is rated highest among desirable leadership qualities (Mullins 2007, 384). Mullins (2007) argues that, 'for the past 30 years there have been increasing amounts of data to suggest that leadership has a lot more to do with inspiration and vision than with straightforward technical competence' (384). In addition, 'managers demand visionary leaders who win not only results but also the trust and respect of their teams. *It is the relationship between people that results in action*' (384 – emphasis added). It is the ability to articulate your vision and build a strong relationship with staff that provides the foundation for effective change.

However, while a leader's vision may be well thought-out and detailed, that is only one side of the equation. If it is not 'shared' by those within the organisation, it is doomed to failure. Shared vision is the, 'collective commitment to a common sense of purpose and actions to achieve that purpose' (Buchanan and Huczynski 2010, 157). If the vision disseminates from the top-down with little or no support from staff, then the effectiveness of the change is going to be minimised, particularly in the long term. Why is a shared vision critical? In general, it brings people together so that they are working towards a common goal, thereby increasing organisational efficiencies (Gill 2003, 313). More specific to an educational setting, shared vision helps to refocus staff in determining and supporting school priorities which have a direct link to student improvement (Hallinger and Heck 2010, 657). Essentially, it gets all stakeholders on the same page so that there is a concerted effort towards attaining common goals.

In addition, the construction of a vision must be a collective process. The process is as important as the product. People are more committed to a shared vision when they believe that it reflects, at least in part, their beliefs and values. Since a *shared* vision is critical:

leaders must keep in mind that it's not one person's vision that people will willingly follow. If the vision is to be attractive to more than an insignificant few, it must appeal to all who have a stake in it. Only *shared* visions have the magnetic power to sustain commitment over time. (Kouzes and Posner 2008, 125–126; emphasis in original)

Ultimately, a leader who can develop a 'shared vision' will be in a much stronger position to advance an organisation on a new course and develop long-term sustainable changes.

The 'personality' factor

Tied to the importance of vision is the necessity for leaders to embody specific personality characteristics which support the interaction of people in a positive manner. It has been argued that a leader's ability 'to lead' effectively is tied to their methodology of interaction. Since a leader must be able to move staff, 'forward where they might not necessarily want to go, to make them go where they need to be, and to motivate them so that they overcome fears or qualms that they might have about the process' (Clegg, Kornberger, and Pitsis 2011, 124), it is imperative that leaders be strong motivators. Therefore, a key ingredient of *effective* leadership falls within the realm of how we go about motivating staff. Knights and Willmott (2007, 258) argue that leaders must focus, 'upon directing others through inspiration and motivation . . . and [this] is understood in terms of person(ality) qualities'. As such, in order to understand leadership and change, theorists must examine which human traits impact decision-making and are connected to motivational potential.

Traits like honesty, integrity, trust and approachability play important roles in the making of a leader (Gill 2003; Harris and Lambert 2003; Stoll and Fink 1996). In addition, implicit in the interpersonal aspects of leadership is *power*. Power can be defined as, 'the ability of an individual to control or to influence others, to get someone to do something that they would perhaps not otherwise do' (Buchanan and Huczynski 2010, 601). While there are many forms of power, the issue here is how that power is used between the power holder and subordinates. Leaders who have been identified with the ability to lead effectively tend to 'use personal power rather than positional power or authority' (Gill 2003, 311). This is where we can see a linkage between a visionary, their vision and effective change.

A question that comes to mind is if our personal style of leadership and social interaction will determine success, can it be changed in order to advance an organisation's objective(s)? Or are we who we are and is our interaction style impossible to change? This has significance for organisations that are in the process of transformation. Perhaps changing the leader will have more success than changing the theory. For example, Williams (2006, 8) found that, 'leadership style was a relatively fixed construct for an individual and that while some individuals may have the capacity to lead using more than one style, leadership style flexibility was not characteristic of all leaders'. In turn, if the leader has a comfort level with power sharing, the system *en toto* may be the limiting factor. Again, Williams (2006, 18) found that, 'for the majority of principals who appear comfortable with the conceptual leadership style the hesitancy to adopt it may be a product of systemic forces that reinforce a more hierarchical approach'. This, in turn, reinforces the notion that the formalistic/hierarchical structures are still very much in place. While

we have seen systemic pressures to adopt a more collegial-distributive model from both government and school leaders, the goal will be to get them in congruency.

Implementing institutional change

At the onset, most people in newly acquired positions of leadership (read ‘power’) want to initiate change. It is perhaps one of the greatest motivating factors in people’s passion for taking the lead of an organisation. With power and authority comes the belief in the ability to institutionalise ‘change’ – change that will improve or redefine the organisational objectives. In fact, ‘the overwhelming body of opinion over the last 30 or so years is that the prime task of leaders is to bring about change in order to maintain and enhance organisational success’ (Burnes and By 2012, 239). However, change can be either effective (the positive and ‘desired’ result) or ineffective (the negative and ‘undesired’ consequence). Many leaders are driven by the desire for change and, in fact, may be motivated by a multitude of factors – some objective, some subjective and some by pure ego. As contended by Machiavelli in *The Prince*:

And let it be noted that there is no more delicate matter to take in hand, nor more dangerous to conduct, nor more doubtful in its success, than to set up as the leader in the introduction of changes. For he who innovates will have for his enemies all those who are well off under the existing order of things, and only lukewarm supporters in those who might be better off under the new. (Machiavelli in Gill 2003, 307)

This road upon which leaders travel can be very precarious. One does not truly know who the supporters are and who the naysayers are. Yet based on the aforementioned sections, effective change with total support from staff requires a leader with vision and the ability to build positive and trusting relationships with all stakeholders.

When applying this to an educational setting, it has been argued that the principal plays a fundamental role in initiating change and in ensuring that effective change comes to fruition (cf. Fullan 2002, 2007; Hargreaves 2010; Gill 2003; Morrison 1998). In the previous section, I discussed the strong interrelationship between leadership and management, with leadership steering the organisation and management propelling it towards its target goals. While principals need both leadership and managerial skills, and they are expected to be functional in both, I believe that it should be leadership that plays the dominant role. As Gill argues, while ‘change must be well managed – it must be planned, organized, directed and controlled – it also requires effective leadership to introduce change successfully: it is leadership that makes the difference’ (Gill 2003, 307). Nevertheless, both skill sets are required. And yet, perhaps there is an inherent contradiction between the two functions. For example, Kotter argues that ‘[m]anagement’s mandate is to minimize risk and to keep the current system operating. Change, by definition, requires creating a new system’ (Kotter in Gill 2003, 209). A ‘new system’ means instability and increasing potential risk. Therefore, if leadership is about change, and change equates to instability, then there is a structural contradiction between the two concepts. Perhaps this is why the *status quo* tends to be the norm in many organisational environments (e.g. Fullan 2007, 2010).

From a governmental position, with pressure to have measurable school improvement results, the belief is that structural reform is needed in order to meet set goals of improvement, whether they be increases in graduation rates or higher results on standardised tests. While this may be true, it is believed by some that government ‘actions taken...[will] then set the stage for this transformation’ (Williams 2006, 3). The assumption is that these top-down government policy changes will be sufficient to mandate support from the administrative masses and result in measurable performance improvements. However, this top-down approach simply does not work. Rather, what happens is ‘teachers [find themselves] at the receiving end of policy changes generated at national levels’ (NCAA 2010, 16) and educational leaders are viewed suspiciously as ‘conduits of governmental policy’ (Bottery 2004, 202). As a result, teachers become ‘the object of implementation products rather than the subject of processes of educational change’ (NCAA 2010, 16).

At a systems level, as noted in the previous section, many jurisdictions are espousing the adoption of a more collegial or collaborative style of managing schools. Based upon recent theoretical models, schools in general and administration in particular are to be, ‘agents of change...that advance learning through collaboration and the exchange of ideas and best practices’ (Williams 2006, 2). This model of interaction has been deemed necessary for system-wide improvement and increases in student performance results. Policy-makers are supporting the ‘ever-changing’ models of educational reform that focus on many of the theoretical models discussed. However, the rhetoric is reflective of a movement away from the formalistic structures to one where there is an increase in a collaborative environment; however, the reality is the theory has not translated into practice.

Today, schools are still very bureaucratic, and while the theories have evolved, the actual structures to facilitate true collaboration have not. While some school boards have implemented ‘professional learning communities’, this initiative usually involves similarly positioned staff with the power relationship between manager and teacher remaining the same. As Williams (2006, 5) argues, ‘while the strengths of the collaborative leadership approach made possible by this kind of professional interaction may seem apparent, ... it seldom exists in schools’. Rather, while boards are proposing a shift in the theoretical underpinnings of decision-making, the reality is current school leadership remains based upon more formalistic (hierarchical) structures that in fact can make effective collaboration near impossible. While boards are encouraging this at the micro-level, the formal model of governing the system still remains. While there are many different forms of governance in education, especially when examining international schools, it can be argued that there is a commonality vis-à-vis power relations. Whittington and Mayer (2002) state that, ‘for change to be successful, the “soft” human issues need to be integrated with “hard” structures and systems’ (in Buchanan and Huczynski 2010, 562). This argument can be taken further to state that while the soft human issues are critical (as outlined above), the hard structures also require change in order to facilitate actual systemic improvements.

Ultimately, school systems need: (1) leaders that have the right personalities and skill set; and (2) the structural openness required to drive the change process. While the process of change is ‘exciting for those who do it and threatening for those to whom it is done’ (Gill 2003, 314), the key is to focus on the process. By ensuring that

all stakeholders have an opportunity to be incorporated into the process of change, individuals will be motivated to take ownership of the vision and action that achieving it demands. However, this requires developing clear and transparent processes in addition to building on the subjective/emotional aspects of staff interaction in order to provide a layer of security. If we agree with the following statement, '[t]he future we create is fundamentally determined by the way we go about getting there' (Robertson 2008), then educational leaders must attempt to make the connection between theory and practice. This leads us into the next section that explores the movement from theory to praxis.

From theory to praxis – implications for the workplace

As educational leaders, we should learn and engage in the realm of theory. We should explore the relevance of theory to the contextual situations that we encounter. As such, theory must provide a framework for decision-making while taking into consideration current realities. The process should be dynamic as opposed to unidirectional. There needs to be a connection between theory and practice without negating or underrating the value of theory in terms of comprehending the dynamics of change. And yet we have seen that in many instances, theory and practice remain disconnected. While, at times, theories do translate into policy, they are implemented on top of existing managerial structures. Herein lies the irony. There is extensive research and understanding of the dynamic relationship between leadership and change, and yet, the structural entity surrounding both public and private education is such that radical reinterpretation of our actions is not a possibility within the current reality. New leaders within an organisation are presented with a dilemma – if the process of change 'comes on too strong, the culture will rebel...[conversely] if the leader is overly respectful of the existing culture, he or she will become absorbed into the status quo' (Fullan 2011, 62). While Fullan provides several suggestions to combat this, perhaps it is correct to state that it is, 'necessary to create dissatisfaction with the status quo and an understanding of the need to change' (Kotter, in Gill 2003, 312) in order for change to occur.

Another set of factors that has come out of the theoretical research is the need for change to be: (1) holistic and (2) long term. Holistic in the sense that it threads itself throughout the entire organisation and impacts all stakeholders and long term in the sense that it will have tremendous positive impacts for many years to come. We have also seen that principals and heads of school are the ones that are expected to evaluate and determine required change. This, to be accepted, takes time. And yet, 'in a study of 25 international schools...the average length of time a head spent in post was 2.8 years' (Hayden and Thompson 2008, 62). The issue of principal retention has also been identified within the public education systems of Canada, England and the USA (Earley et al. 2012; Fuller and Young 2009; Leithwood and Louis 2012; Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield 2011). This is simply too short a period for any leader to expect change to be first identified and then effectively adopted. Relationships need to be developed and trust needs to be established. As Martin (2007, 19) argues:

It's no longer the time of the heroic leader – the leader who walks in and takes up all the space in the room. The job of today's leader is to create space for other people – a space

in which people can generate new and different ideas [...]; a space in which people can be more effective, more agile, and more prepared to respond to complex challenges.

With a continuous cycle of leaders going through the revolving door, it would be very easy for staff to become frustrated by the continuous flow of ‘new’ ideas being generated that may be completely disconnected from the reality of the school environment – it is important to avoid implementing a change simply for the sake of change. Stability and long-term planning are required if change is going to be sustainable and effective. For example, ‘less than one-sixth of Fortune 1000 executives surveyed reported having favourable outcomes from major change programmes’ and ‘only one-third of change programmes have resulted in bottom-line improvement’ (Robertson 2008). In another study, only 58% of respondents felt that change efforts are sustainable, and those efforts focus more on systems/structures (76%) than culture and values (59%) (Martin 2007, 11). As such, it would seem to suggest that we are not applying our theoretical knowledge to applied situations. Once again, a disconnect exists between theory and praxis. Perhaps this is no surprise, given the challenges faced when implementing change. The movement from theory to practice is one that is hampered by many barriers. As Fullan (1995, 234) notes, ‘change is complex and extremely difficult’ and ‘teachers and educational systems are known more for their capacity to resist change than for their roles as agents of reform’.

The teaching profession can be one of immense isolation. In most cases, teachers are in their own classrooms with little or no opportunity for structured collaboration. As we have seen, change implementation is usually a top-down process with very little input from the majority of stakeholders. Even with new theories like collaborative, collegial or distributive leadership, most try to take a large institutional entity and transform the culture from outside. This has been met with limited success. Rather, what is needed is ‘a radical reculturing of the school as an institution and the basic redesign of the teaching profession’ (Fullan 1995, 230). While educational change is needed, over the past decades, proposed improvements have been viewed within a very narrow continuum driven by governmental policy and repeated (over long periods of time) in a pendulum-like manner. Michael Fullan (1995, 230) argues that, ‘reform movements in education result in bandwagons and rallying cries, but they also represent a debilitating form of dependency and superficiality’. Furthermore, the ‘majority of restructuring efforts have either resulted in divisiveness and confusion, or have been short-lived as the energy required to implement vague reforms eventually takes its toll’ (Fullan 1995, 231). Almost two decades after he penned these words, I still agree with his deduction.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have seen a paradigm shift in leadership studies that espouses a theoretical movement away from the formalistic to a more collegial model of engagement and decision-making if change is to be successful and long-term. More importantly, this model has been adopted by various educational jurisdictions. However, regardless of the theory, it has been argued within this paper that there remains, in effect, a disconnect between the theory and practice signifying that the ability to effect change will continue to be hampered by organisational structures and

subjective factors. Also, effective change requires a specific formula – one based on theoretical underpinnings, vision and leadership style. Structure and style must come together to set the necessary stage for transformation. However, this rarely occurs. As Foucault posited in the opening quote of this essay, while we may conceive of what we think is necessary for educational improvements, the outcome may be something completely different and, in fact, is difficult to predict given the numerous confounders. In addition, while leaders may introduce change (albeit many default to the status quo), they are limited (or hampered) by the larger structural entities in which they are governed. Nevertheless, over time, change can happen. Certainly, the intent of this paper is not to argue the opposite. But rather, the intent is to highlight the structural (or systemic) constraints that inhibit deeper and more fundamental change from occurring with the added recognition that what you want is not always what you get.

In summary, educational systems must apply theoretical models and ensure that the entire system supports change. Educational systems must be the vanguard of change, not the reactor to change. However, as argued by Gunter and Whitehead (2012, 94), this has not been the case. If theory is to meld with praxis, then the retention of the *status quo* is unacceptable. We must move towards more fundamental forms of collegiality that are endemic to the entire system. If the macro-level remains formalistic, micro-level change is near impossible to sustain. As Michelangelo stated, ‘the great danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it’ (Isaacson 2007, 106). It is time to set our sights higher. Ultimately, leaders and the educational systems they create must support fundamental change, not inhibit it.

Notes on contributor

Allan R. Morrison is assistant principal at Delia School of Canada, Hong Kong. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from McGill University, Canada, and a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Toronto, Canada. He has over 15 years’ teaching experience in cross-cultural and international education with a focus on school evaluation and school improvement initiatives. In addition, he is presently an MBA (Education) candidate at Keele University, UK.

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