

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Michael Fullan – Indelible Leadership

MICHAEL: The role of the leader is to spend five, six, seven years, whatever, developing a collaborative culture with the organization they're in, to the point where they become expendable, they become dispensable, which really is an odd thing to say. But in common sense terms, if you say if people do work, and no matter how good they are, if they leave and it falls apart, they haven't really done anything to leave an impact. So indelible leadership is leadership that sticks to a degree after the person leaves. This means that the leader has to do two things; one is to cultivate collaborative leadership, support teachers learning from each other, students learning from each other, and actually students as leaders are part of it, as I've said before. So you want that person to build a collaborative culture. In coherence, our model has focusing direction, collaborative cultures, deep learning and securing accountability, just those four. So I'm talking about the collaborative culture part. So the leader needs to do that. But they also need to be aware that they're developing leaders for the future. So, if you like, the junior leaders of the leadership team are the future leaders, after that.

So that's the concept, is to have leadership better in the short run by developing collaboration that works. And I'm not -- we have a very specific concern about defining focus collaboration that has the details, not just getting together. So assuming that it's focused the way we talk about it. So we have that commitment. We also have the commitment to say, let's look beyond yourself so that you're leaving something. So that's the concept. And the reason that the book was so easy to write in a sense is that we were seeing the new form of leadership and the NPDL scores. The new form of leadership is, and I captured in some of them, called them the "tension." I won't give all six of them, but for example, one of them is "Learn and lead in equal measure." So what we found when we looked at our NPDL success, because they were doing innovation, is that the leaders actually enabled a lot of things to happen because of their trust and wanting to support it. But at the beginning, they asked a lot more questions than they had answers for; they were learners. Then, as they started to test with the group, what are we learning here, they got a little more articulate feeding back to the group. They started to say, okay, this is what it looks like. Do we agree? So they helped consolidate it. They started to push the linkage to impact in that. So lead and learn in equal measure. This is a very important one.

Another sub-part of this actually comes from Roger Martin; I think is brilliant in his recent work on countries where there's been successful social entrepreneurship. He has a couple of tensions; one of them is this one. He said that in these successes, the leaders have to be experts and apprentices simultaneously. In other words, they have

knowledge; they've got to lead with that knowledge. But they've got to be apprentices, which means they have to learn from others. And those C-points that we find, the apprenticeship is actually learning from others who are at a lower level in the hierarchy, learning from students, learning from teachers, learning from principals. So this learn and lead in equal measure is a very big one. Within it, there's also the principle of co-learning. So it's not just the leader who's the learner, but students are learning. And co-learning means you're learning together, so this is a very embedded concept in Ontario now, co-learning, but we're kind of pulling it into a more integrated model. So the co-learning is very important as part of that.

Another one of the tensions, we say, "Feed and be fed by the system." We're talking about leaders now. So this means that if I'm a principal, I have to realize I'm part of a district. I'm part of other schools. So my role responsibility is to feed into that interaction to help others get better. And then to be fed by the system, because we can pull in what we're learning. So the districts that we've studied last year, the three districts, they were exemplars of that within their district, then they started to learn across the three districts. Co-learners feed and be fed by the system. So this is, I think, really another part.

Another tension that's directly to the indelible is to, "Be essential, but dispensable." So at the early stages, you're essential, because we know we're finding -- it needs leadership. It needs leadership to support this, it needs leadership to challenge it. It needs leadership to consolidate. So the role of leadership is quite powerful. And indelible leadership, what I try to do is say, what are we learning in the last 24 months, and how would I capture that in a kind of focused way? Smallest number of parts, there are six of them, I mentioned three.

One of the barriers I want to underscore is how new leadership is required, and how leaders who aren't comfortable with that, we're in short supply of them. And by that, I mean a leader who can be a co-learner, who doesn't have to be the decision-maker all the time, who really has helped cultivate the group. So this takes traditional leaders out of their comfort zone. And this is going to be essential. And the more examples we see, the more it can spread, the more that leaders are developing future leaders for. But in the short run, there is a transition point here, I think, that we're in, that will require that we see and cultivate. And this is why we like the system approach, because that's what it does, is leaders who are more comfortable as co-learners, but are also comfortable helping people focus and be challenging, and being affective at pushing the agenda. So the leadership is a big ask in this work that we're talking about.