

SECOND EDITION



LEADING IN A CULTURE OF CHANGE

MICHAEL FULLAN

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The first edition of this book was a game changer for many education leaders, especially for me. The second edition is even more insightful, in that it merges the moral imperative with courage, research, and pragmatism. This book will help transition leaders from being effective to exceptional. A must read!

—Ron Canuel, *Former CEO of Canadian Education Association*

Everything about this astonishing *Change Culture* revisited is timely, insightful, and compelling. Michael Fullan cuts deeply by having us discover present change leadership challenges while weaving far-reaching answers from education and business practitioners as well as his own personal wisdom. Through *Leading in a Culture of Change, Second Edition*, Fullan takes another leap forward by helping us navigate this current omnipresent complexity of change. A must read!

—Dr. Bill Hogarth, *consultant and former director of education, York Region District School Board*

With accelerating complexity, *Leading in a Culture of Change* is the new normal. In this updated edition, Michael Fullan notes that the more complex the change, the more people must be part of the solution. Like the first edition, moral purpose is job one, but this edition makes it clear that relationships are a close second. This new edition contains many fresh insights as it describes leading from the middle, listening, co-learning, and sense making—all part of the new leadership. The update is as valuable as the first edition was almost two decades ago.

—Tom Vander Ark, *CEO, Getting Smart*

The education sector is so full of change today, it can seem overwhelming to students, parents, teachers and administrators alike. Yet it often feels like we aren't moving anywhere fast – many students and teachers are disengaged with the way they are learning and the leadership they are being provided. In this revised edition of *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan shows us that to make real impact in this context, we must learn to

‘go slow to go fast’. This means taking the time to deeply engage with context so that we can become lead learners within our organizations. As Fullan shows, the insights and ideas apply equally to leaders in business and education. Whether you are a leader in a large system, an advisor, or practitioner on the ground, I highly recommend this thought-provoking and practical book to help you in taking the next step forward.

—William Gort, *professional economist and education sector consultant, Deloitte Access Economics*

Fullan delivers a brilliant and compelling strategy for increasing leadership effectiveness. The continual efforts to pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop grounded collaboration, foster deep learning knowledge, strive for coherence, and do so with energy, courage, and relentlessness are imperative as educators endeavor to prove that demographics do not determine destiny. *Leading in a Culture of Change, Second Edition*, is the gold standard for addressing the tools necessary to build a solid foundation for effective improvement efforts on behalf of students across all boundaries.

—Sandy Thorstenson, *former superintendent, Whittier Union High School District*

One of the many mistakes I made during my career as a school superintendent was not to place enough emphasis on ‘culture’ in the ‘early’ years. I started leading school districts in 1983, and it was Fullan’s 2001 book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, that helped me understand the link between culture and high, continuous, improvement. It was my ‘cultural’ savior! The second edition is even better. Unlike most business books, Fullan shows how to create, nurture, and benefit from a great culture. Today’s young group of leaders do not know what they do not know. If you want to thrive and survive, read *Leading in a Culture of Change*.

—Dr. Terry Grier, *retired superintendent, Houston Independent School District*

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Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Brand
111 River St, Hoboken, NJ 07030
www.josseybass.com

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Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fullan, Michael, author.

Title: Leading in a culture of change / Michael Fullan.

Description: Second edition. | San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, [2020] |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019040633 (print) | LCCN 2019040634 (ebook) | ISBN

9781119595847 (hardback) | ISBN 9781119595786 (adobe pdf) | ISBN

9781119595823 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Educational leadership. | School management and organization. | Educational change.

Classification: LCC LB2806 .F794 2020 (print) | LCC LB2806 (ebook) | DDC 371.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019040633>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019040634>

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: © Eoneren/iStock.com

Printed in the United States of America

HB Printing

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To WLIW

Preface to the Second Edition

WHAT IS A CULTURE OF CHANGE ANYWAY? I USE the phrase in two ways. One is the fact that changes are always rolling into and over all our organizations these days. One form of leadership in this latter case is protecting the organization from constant, superficial change. The second and more fundamental use is how to change the existing culture so that it has the capacity to manage and incorporate change on a continuous basis that serves the goals of the organization, including deliberately incorporating new goals and their implementation.

The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change, but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change. Moreover, the pace of change is ever increasing, as James Gleick, the author of *Chaos*, pointed out in a book

called *Faster*, which he subtitled *The Acceleration of Just about Everything* (Gleick, 1999). That was two decades ago, much before the advent of the iPhone, introduced in 2007 and artificial intelligence! How do you lead in a culture such as ours, which seems to specialize in pell-mell innovation?

This is the leader's dilemma. On the one hand, failing to act when the environment around you is radically changing leads to extinction. On the other hand, making quick decisions under conditions of mind-racing mania can be equally fatal. Robert Steinberg said it best: "The essence of intelligence would seem to be in knowing when to think and act quickly, and knowing when to think and act slowly" (cited in Gleick, 1999, p. 114).

This book is about how leaders can focus on certain key change themes that will allow them to lead effectively under messy conditions. The book is also about how leaders foster leadership in others, thereby making themselves dispensable in the long run. And it is about how we can produce more "leaders of leaders."

Now 19 years after the first edition of "*Leading in a Culture of Change*" the five themes still hold true, but we have much more specificity about their role in change. And we need to relabel some of the concepts to make them more precise, relative to current knowledge. Moral purpose remains the rock, but we now focus on its actual impact and how to get it if you don't have it. Second, understanding change is laced with a new insight: *nuance*. In complex societies, effective change and nuance pretty much go hand in hand. Third, relationship building is still key but we have sorted out what effective and not-so-effective relationships are, which I examine under the banner of effective collaboration.

Fourth, knowledge building and sharing is ever critical, but now we see it in relation to “deep learning” that encompasses technology and innovation. Fifth, coherence making has turned out to be a powerful concept; we have pinpointed the role of leadership as coherence makers in complex times.

The other major development over the past 20 years is that the world has become much more complex, but more than that—the world is becoming ever more troubled. Worsening climate change, unknown job markets, greater superficial closeness via technology but less closeness, more stress and anxiety, and less trust decade by decade, and corresponding erosion of trust. All of this puts moral purpose to greater tests as it makes it more crucial. Leaders don’t need to become better at a bad game; they need to change the game! The framework and examples I provide in this book will put leaders in a position to lead change under ever increasing challenges to help people and organizations thrive. Complexity always brings new opportunities but only when society has strong leadership dispersed across the system.

Schools and businesses increasingly have more in common because both are trying to find their way in ever challenging circumstances. In our own work over the past decade we have pretty much concluded that schools as we know them are past their due date. They no longer serve the purpose they were originally assigned some 200 years ago—to produce reliable workers for an industrial society. We are in the midst of trying to change that in our work on “deep learning” that we will take up in various parts of the book.

Clearly these are difficult, even threatening times—there is a lot going on. Not the least of these developments is the new realization that leadership is key to large-scale improvement

yet must be radically different than it has been. Further, effective leadership is in very short supply. In the course of this book, I will map out the new leadership that will be required to take us forward from 2020 onward.

In complex, what I have called chaotic times, leaders must be able to operate under conditions that are not always clear—worse, not as clear as they appear to be. G.K. Chesterton identified the challenge best: “Life is not an illogicality, yet it is as trap for logicians . . . Its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude hidden. Its wildness lies in wait” (quoted in Bernstein, 1996, p. 331). Coping with wildness lying in wait may not be a bad job description for leading in a culture of change.

One last point: Over the years, we have found that about 80% of our best ideas come from “leading practitioners.” You will find that the ideas in this book are well grounded, and cutting edge. Thus, in the course of this book you will discover what it means to be leader in a culture of change. In many ways, the ideas and insights come from the horse’s mouths, although I have been able to articulate it in precise and, I think, insightful language. Commit yourself to leading in a culture of change, and find out how in the following chapters.

Although there are overtones of saving the world in this book, the core message is: Make your organization the best it can be. To do this effectively, you have to take into account the bigger picture. This is a practical matter for me. You have “to go outside to become better inside,” as we say. If many leaders do this, they will end up improving both the inside and the outside. All good solutions are system solutions.

Making Complexity Work

CHANGE IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. ITS RELENTLESS pace these days runs us off our feet. Yet when things are unsettled, we can find new ways to move ahead and to create breakthroughs not possible in stagnant societies. If you ask people to brainstorm words to describe change, they come up with a mixture of negative and positive terms. On the one side, fear, anxiety, loss, danger, panic, disaster; on the other, exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvements, energizing. For better or for worse, change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key.

Changing Culture

Changing culture—the focus of this book—is one of the hardest things that humankind faces. And if you don't change and adapt you become obsolete or extinct. Let's start with the

father of the study of organizational culture, Edgar Schein (2010, 4th edition). Schein's formal definition of culture is:

The culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared assumptions as it solves its problems of external adaptations and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18)

For example: "We protect each other against external criticism" would be one such example. Or "We share our best ideas with each other" would be another culture at work.

How do you know when it is time to change the culture? Some indicators would seem to be: Members are dissatisfied, disengaged, and stressed out. Or customers or clients look for alternatives to your institution. Apparently, it takes a great deal of unhappiness to take the steps to change. Some organizations or schools have been persistently unhappy but have taken little action to change the situation. Inertia seems to have a life of its own. Then when change is attempted, there appears to be many more ways to fail than to succeed. Schein says that one of the biggest mistakes that leaders make is to propose a "change in culture" without being clear or specific (p. 312). Leadership often gets the solution (and the way to go about it) wrong. When Dan Goleman (2000, pp. 82–83) studied leadership styles, he found two that had negative impact on the organization:

- Coercive—the leader demands compliance ("Do as I tell you").
- Pacesetter—sets high standards ("Do as I do, now").

With the coercive style, people resent and resist; with pacesetters, people get overwhelmed and burn out. Toxic cultures ensue and either the leader or large numbers of employees leave. The pacesetter seems positive but only at first. Goleman found:

The leader [pacesetter] sets extremely high performance standards and exemplifies them her/himself. S/He is obsessive about doing things better and faster, and s/he asks the same of everyone around him. S/He quickly pinpoints poor performers and demands more from them. If they don't rise to the occasion, s/he replaces them with people who can. You would think such an approach would improve results, but it doesn't. In fact, the pacesetting style destroys climate. Many employees feel overwhelmed by the pacesetter's demands for excellence, and their morale drops—guidelines for working may be clear in the leader's head, but s/he does not state them clearly; s/he expects people to know what to do. (p. 86)

The pacesetter often ends up being a “Lone Ranger,” as Superintendent Negroni from Springfield, Massachusetts, put it when he reflected on his experience (and on his eventual change to lead learner). During the first three years of Negroni's superintendency, his overall goal was “to change this inbred system”:

Intent on the ends, I operated as Lone Ranger. I didn't try to build relationships with the teachers' union or with the board. Instead, I worked around them. Most of the time, I felt that I was way out in front of them. I would change things on my own. (quoted in Senge et al., 2000, p. 426)

For all the changes he pushed through, Negroni says, “These were three brutal years for us. I was running so fast and making so many changes that I was getting tired. People around me were even more sick and tired” (pp. 426–427). Eventually, through reflective practice and feedback, Negroni moved to transforming the district into a “learning in-situation” proposition. Anticipating some of the themes we take up in subsequent chapters Negroni explains:

Our most critical role at the central office is to support learning about learning, especially among principals—who will then do the same among teachers in their schools. At the beginning of the year, three or four central office administrators and I conducted forty-six school visits in forty-six days, with the principals of each school alongside us. Then the administrators and all forty-six principals met together to summarize what we had seen. This is one of a series of walk-throughs that principals do during the course of a school year—with me, with other central office administrators, and with each other. The sequence includes a monthly “grand round,” when every principal in the district goes with me and the eight academic directors, to spend the day in one school. We break up into subgroups for hour-and-a-half visits, then come back and (still in subgroups) discuss what we saw. Then a representative from each subgroup makes a presentation to all of the principals. (quoted in Senge et al., 2000, p. 431)

So, this book is not about super leaders. Charismatic leaders inadvertently often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement followed by

frustrated or despondent dependency. Superhuman leaders also do us another disservice: They are role models who can never be emulated. Deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the very few who appear to be extraordinary.

I need to define the nature and goal of this book, leading in a culture of change. It has two purposes. One is most organizations do not change, or at least do not change in time. My first goal is to get organizations to a point where their “change capacity” is at least at a level that meets Schein’s basic definition: “deals with external adaptation and internal integration.” This is everyday coping with the environment and corresponding integration. If organizations do this, that will indeed be engaged in steady change. Note that this definition does not mean that organizations take on whatever change comes along—that would be the pacesetter. There always needs to be selectivity to determine what is good for us and our clients according to our moral purpose (Chapter 2).

The second purpose is to get to the point where organizations proactively challenge the status quo. With all the challenges facing the world—and the world is increasingly troubled—we need greater proactivity about the future. Leaders in a culture of change cultivate a larger worldview.

I have never been fond of distinguishing between leadership and management. They overlap, and you need both qualities. But here is one difference that it makes sense to highlight: Leadership is needed for problems that do not have easy answers. The big problems of the day are complex, rife with paradoxes and dilemmas. For these problems there are no once-and-for-all answers. Yet we expect our leaders to provide solutions. We place leaders in untenable positions (or,

alternatively, our system produces leaders who try to carry the day with populist, one-sided solutions that are as clear as they are oversimplified). Homer-Dixon (2000, p. 15) makes a similar observation:

We demand that [leaders] solve, or at least manage, a multitude of interconnected problems that can develop into crises without warning; we require them to navigate an increasingly turbulent reality that is, in key aspects, literally incomprehensible to the human mind; we buffet them on every side with bolder, more powerful special interests that challenge every innovative policy idea; we sub-merge them in often unhelpful and distracting information; and we force them to decide and act at an ever faster pace.

Heifetz (1994) accuses us of looking for the wrong kind of leadership when the going gets tough:

in a crisis... we call for someone with answers, decision, strength, and a map of the future, someone who knows where we ought to be going—in short someone who can make hard problems simple... Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways. (p. 21)

An alternative image of leadership, argues Heifetz (1994, p. 15), is one of “mobilizing people to tackle tough problems.” Leadership, then, is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them