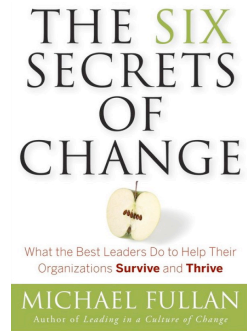


The Six Secrets of Change – *What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive*

by Michael Fullan



Fullan's Six Secrets are not hidden elements of change that only he understands and generously reveals to an eager audience, rather they are logical ingredients most of us realize are necessary if growth and improvement are to occur and be sustained. He brings the secrets together in a "pack" to form a "Theory of Action" that can guide a leader's effort to nurture the organization and fuel growth. In fact, I am not so sure this is really a book about change at all; the second half of the title – "*What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive*" – is really the story he tells. May this summary provoke your thinking, cause you to take at least one purposeful action on behalf of teachers and students, and inspire your continued development as a leader. Enjoy!! *Melissa Hunt*

Have Theory Will Travel - The Six Secrets and a Theory of Action

Theories, per Fullan, are a way of organizing ideas to make sense of the world. A theory of action helps explain actual situations of success and, when used deliberately, should result in similar success in most cases. "Good leaders are thoughtful managers who use their theory of action (such as the six secrets) to govern what they do while being open to surprises or new data that direct further action."

Fullan challenges us to understand his six secrets as principles of a "Theory of Action." They form a philosophy or belief system to ground leadership actions and behaviors that help our organizations travel to a better state of being and functioning. You will read about each secret separately. Yet, you will quickly see the interconnectedness of these secrets and how they are collectively more powerful.

- Love Your Employees • Connect Peers with Purpose • Capacity Building Prevails
- Learning is the Work • Transparency Rules • Systems Learn •

***Secret One - Love Your Employees**

It may sound a bit smaltzy but Fullan really uses the word "love" and intentionally so. He says, "I won't change the wording of the secret – loving and investing in our employees in relation to a high-quality purpose is the bedrock of success." So, how does this fit with the notion that all our leadership decisions should be predicated upon what is best for the student? He really argues that we must value the employee (the teachers) as much as the customer (children and parents). He quotes a recent study of the world's top school systems: "***the quality of the educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.***"

Ironically, he points to our own San Diego Unified School District as an example of a failure to recognize the importance of Secret One. He says that while Superintendent Alan Bersin and his Deputy, Anthony Alvarado, were in a moral hurry to make a positive impact on student achievement, and put many promising practices in place, they, in Fullan's words, "never figured out how to love their employees as much as their customers."

In another example, Fullan shares the story of the 1999 National Superintendent of the Year who, just one year later, resigned. An external research team found that despite strong programs and a commitment to change, "teachers and principals express fatigue and feel unappreciated."

Fullan shares his experience in Canada where a policy based on a strong commitment to respect for the teaching profession and investment in teacher development, with an equal focus on results, has been followed. In recent years, the percentage of teachers leaving in the first three years of their career has dropped from between 22 and 33 percent to 7.5 percent. The percent of teachers retiring at the first opportunity has also declined. While these may be indirect measures of the success Canada's more "pro-teacher" policies and behaviors, they indicate the overall healthier state of their system. Finally, Fullan indicates the proof is really in student achievement, which has shown steady growth in literacy and numeracy.

In addition to examining educational examples, Fullan turns to the private sector to make a case for Secret One. Years of research with millions of employees document the power of three factors in motivating employees – fair treatment, enabling achievement, and camaraderie.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the entire book is Fullan's summary of research by Rejendra Sisodia, et al., published in the book, **Firms of Endearment**. Sisodia found that FoEs (firms of endearment) endear themselves to stakeholders (customers, employees, investors, partners and society). Through a four-stage research process, Sisodia's team sought nominations of companies that met their "humanistic performance" criterion – that is, they looked for companies that paid equal attention to customers, employees, investors, partners and society. The research found a collection of 28 companies (you'll recognize names like Toyota, BMW, IKEA, Jetblue and Starbucks, to name a few) that "***involve everyone in the company in meaningful pursuits that transcend the bottom line.***" The results of these companies were astounding: "Over a ten-year horizon, FoEs outperformed the "Good to Great" (Jim Collins) companies – 1,026 percent return versus 331 percent (a 3-to-1 ratio). " Among the qualities of these high performing organizations: lead with credibility, use conflicts to build relationships, hire and retain for relational competence, bridge the work-family divide, measure performance broadly, make unions your partners.



Secret” question for school leaders: ***How are you honoring your employees, supporting their emotional and intellectual commitment to student learning and enhancing relationship building?***

***Secret Two – Connect Peers with Purpose**

Fullan sprinkles his discussion of the secrets with consideration of the loose-tight leadership dilemma: *how does an organization balance tight policies and procedures (leadership from the top) with loose, less structured interactions to nurture creativity and spontaneity (leadership from within)?* His Secret Two, purposeful peer interaction, is the key to an optimal organization that is simultaneously tight and loose.

Fullan’s six secrets really define a learning organization ala Peter Senge, Shirley Hord and Richard Dufour. Purposeful peer interaction, he says, works effectively under three conditions: 1) when the larger values of the organization and those of individuals and groups mesh; 2) when information and knowledge about effective practices are widely and openly shared; and 3) when monitoring mechanisms are in place to detect and address ineffective actions while also identifying and consolidating effective practices. Sound familiar? He makes a strong case for PLC. And, like so many before him, he cautions, “The use of peer interaction as social and intellectual glue has its roots within collaborative organizations, *but it is much more than mere collaboration.*”

Fullan draws on his experience in Canada to exemplify his secrets. The Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership has brought together 23 districts that work together for the improvement of all. “Bad” competition (you fail, I win) has been replaced by a “good” competition (how do we all get better, but I still want to improve as much as I can – friendly competition). The work of these districts is purposeful and characterized by high-capacity knowledge and skills. They are joining forces to learn what works best.

The role of the leader in Secret Two is critical. “Leaders have to provide direction, create conditions for effective peer interaction, and intervene along the way when things are not working as well as they could.” The goal of the leader is to create a “we-we commitment.” As leaders invest in employees, the employees’ commitment to their work increases, as they collaborate more deeply around substantive issues, the collective commitment strengthens.

Fullan makes a point toward the end of Secret Two that might easily be missed: the importance of creating an organization-wide environment that fosters and nurtures connecting peers with purpose. He shares research on individuals characterized as “high-PRO” or prosocial– those who scored high on social support, self-esteem, and planning for the future. These individuals have high esteem and strong resilience. Being high-PRO is hugely beneficial – “but only if you are in the bosom of a high-PRO social environment.” If prosocial people find themselves in a negative environment

– it won't take long for them to withdraw their services and themselves. Most of us can recall an upbeat, can-do teacher who was overwhelmed by the "establishment" that loved the status quo and would fight to protect it.

Once again, here's where leadership is critical. We must act to create prosocial environments populated by prosocial individuals. Fullan's advice: "You should stand for high purpose, hire talented individuals along those lines, create mechanisms for purposeful peer interactions with a focus on results, and stay involved without micromanaging." Fullan has great faith in the employees he loves: "Let the secrets do the work of monitoring: when peers interact with purpose, they provide their own built-in accountability, which does not require close monitoring but does benefit from the participation of the leader." Essentially, as people come to trust one another and their work, their sense of efficacy increases and they hold each other accountable for doing the right thing. So, we end Secret Two where we began: a balance of loose-tight leadership.



"Secret" questions for school leaders: ***How are you fostering purposeful peer interactions that create deeper bonds to the work and among colleagues? How are you implementing a balance between outside monitoring and internal efficacy among peers?***

***Secret Three – Capacity Building Prevails**

Fullan looks to leadership to unlock Secret Three. "One of the ways not to develop capacity is through criticism, punitive consequences, or what I more comprehensively call *judgmentalism*." Judgmentalism, as defined by Fullan, is not just perceiving something as ineffective, but doing so in a pejorative and negative way. His advice to leaders: *Don't roll your eyes when you see practice that is less than effective by your standards. Instead, be focused on improvement in the face of ineffective performance rather than labeling or categorizing weaknesses.*

Feeling fear or stigmatized will not motivate change. Insults and good-natured advice, in most cases, do little to bring about greater awareness and more productive behavior.

Pfeffer and Sutton identified five barriers to reducing the "knowing-doing gap." Fear is on the list. They maintain "fear prevents acting on knowledge." Organizations that were weak on generating and using knowledge had an atmosphere of fear and distrust. "When people fear for their jobs, their futures, or even their self-esteem, it is unlikely they will fear someone enough to do anything but what they have done in the past." Tenure may indeed reduce the likelihood of termination, but teachers may fear a loss of status among peers, self-esteem, preferred assignments, and other aspects of their jobs. Such fear tends to cause people to focus on themselves, retreat from others and concentrate on the short term.

Fullan shares a trick question posed in one of Pfeffer's books: If you entered a hospital and had a choice of two wards, would you choose Ward A or Ward B? Ward A has ten times the number of reported errors as Ward B. But on closer inspection it turns out that Ward B actually has more errors and, because it operates in a climate of fear, covers them up and fails to acknowledge them. If you don't learn from failure, you fail to learn. Forgive and remember, says Pfeffer.

Capacity building, not judgmentalism, is the key. Creating a Six Secrets based culture, will generate an organic pressure to grow through change. When peers interact purposefully, their expectations of one other create positive pressure to accomplish goals important to the group.

Fullan spends a good number of pages focusing on the importance of hiring and cultivating talented people. He argues on behalf of looking for good people capable of working with other good people to get even better. One CEO put it this way: "They know they can get better; they want to learn from the best. We look for people who light up when they are around other talented people."

The reality for most school leaders is that we do not always hire our team, but take on an existing team hired by others. So, the leader's role as capacity builder is all the more important. Pfeffer says, ***"Talent isn't fixed – unless you believe it is. In fact, talent depends on people's motivation and experiences: talent depends on how a person is managed or led."***

As I write this, I recall an administrator from the SDCOE training program who wrote in his evaluation something like, "When I return to my school I am going to be kinder to my teachers. I am going to see what is possible in them instead of what they are not." Perhaps there is a secret here, too!



"Secret" questions for school leaders: ***"How are you creating opportunities for peers to connect with purpose and build their capacity in order to increase student learning?" "How do you ensure teachers feel risk taking is necessary and safe?" "How can you be more aware of your overt and covert communication patterns that may cause teachers to feel insecure about their status?"***

***Secret Four – Learning Is The Work**

The work of teaching and learning requires a high level of precision – how to use the most effective practices to meet the needs of students as they are learning – and a balance between consistency and innovation. Becoming better is an endless pursuit in the teaching profession.

I must say I love Fullan's choice of heroes to model his theories. He points to Abraham Lincoln's ability to hold fast to his belief in abolition while embracing opponents. Then, in just a span of two pages he draws attention to one of Tiger

Wood's motto: "Relentless consistency, 50 percent; willingness to change, 50 percent," and summarizes the work of Boston surgeon Atul Gawande.

You'll find Gawande's book **Better-A Surgeon's Notes on Performance** and his *New Yorker Magazine* article, "**The Bell Curve**" referenced on my AB430 Blog. Fullan discusses the first chapter of Gawande's book regarding the practice of washing hands to control the spread of infectious disease in hospitals. In order to close the "knowing-doing gap" with respect to washing hands in one hospital, it took consistent education, convenience of hand-washing facilities, and frequent random spot checks to monitor and improve performance. Yes, all this for something as seemingly simple as washing one's hands regularly.

The solution really was the pursuit of consistency and innovation grounded in the work at hand. Gawande gives his definition of Learning Is The Work: "To make a science of performance, to investigate and to improve how well they use the knowledge and technologies we already have at hand, the doctors told me of simple, almost banal changes that produced enormous improvements."

So, how do you achieve consistency and innovation? Answer: **organized learning in context**. Another way of saying deeply implemented "PLC." When an organization is all about the science of performance, it nails down common practices that work so that you can get consistent results; at the same time, they are freeing up energy for working on innovative practices that get even greater results.

Organizing common practices means that we identify key aspects of the work and take special care to ensure that everyone does those tasks well using the best methods of doing so. This implies a greater level of standardization. For example, a common instructional practice done by every teacher might be to clearly identify the learning objective of a lesson in language understood by students so that each student can personalize what they are going to learn, what they are going to be able to do with that learning and why that is relevant or important to them. A staff could agree upon a method for doing this and then everyone does this within minor variations. Think of it as the equivalent of hand washing! Fullan would say this is **precision** not **prescription**.

Other elements of instruction, effective methods for checking for understanding, grading practices, use of assessment to gauge and measure achievement, and list goes on, must be explored by teachers in the context of student learning to determine and share effective practices. Here again, there will be a level of consistency and innovation. **The point is, teachers are learning to improve their performance by connecting with their peers in the setting in which they work as a routine practice.**

Fullan frequently refers to the management practices of Toyota as a model example of the six secrets "Theory of Action." In Toyota's world: "Instead of workers leaving work to learn, learning is the job. " The most important job of any manager is to

teach workers how to become more effective. Internal trainers and supervisors coach workers through on the job training by learning new skills and applying them in their daily work. Together, coach and worker, observe skilled workers, apply the learning and generate feedback. The job itself is the subject of the learning. The manager is a teacher first.

Leaders who want their people to do their best work must create a culture of learning every day that they are on the job. Says Fullan, "If people are not learning in the specific context in which their work is being done, they are inevitably learning superficially. Deep learning that is embedded in the culture of the workplace is the essence of Secret Four."

Aida Walqui, renowned for her work with English Language Learners, recently spoke in the county and shared a comment from a superintendent she met in New York that stuck with me. The superintendent said his goal was for every conversation teachers had on a campus to be so substantive that it was professional development. *Hmm....something we all might aspire to make a reality on our campuses.*



"Secret" questions for school leaders: *"What actions will you take in the next month to better imbed deep learning for yourself and your teachers into the workday and workplace? Consider one aspect of your work you where you would like to improve performance, generate a plan to focus learning on that element. How can the learning be tracked and measured? How can it be applied and monitored with feedback and reflection? When you select one aspect of your performance as a school leader, or work with a single grade level or department, you can begin to bring the Six Secret alive.*

***Secret Five – Transparency Rules**

When Fullan talks transparency he means that we measure ourselves and are open about what we are doing. "Transparency," he says, "concerns assessing, communicating, and acting on data pertaining to the what, how, and outcomes of change efforts."

He cautions that transparency transcends the notion of "What gets measured gets done." This sort of thinking, he maintains, can lead to "gotcha" management and fear of punishment. Remember his stance on judgmentalism! Instead, he suggests, "Measurements should be guides helping to direct behavior but not so powerful that they substitute for the judgment and wisdom that is so necessary to acquire knowledge and turn it into action."

Transparency is about openness about results. We all know that data can be misused. So, we must be clear about how data is being gathered and used, and mindful of how feedback is generated and delivered. We must work to develop

cultures in which it is normal to recognize problems and work together to solve them when they occur.

Secret Five is really all about focus and targets. By calling for measurements that focus on selected outcomes (increased use of content specific vocabulary in written assignments) and specific actions (more opportunities for structured student-to-student interaction using content specific vocabulary), you begin to put Secret Five into practice. Data walks involving teachers visiting classrooms looking for evidence of the focus or target is a great place to begin to develop *Transparency that Rules!*



“Secret” questions for school leaders: ***What are some what you might be transparent in measuring a goal you hold as a leader? What is the focus of your school’s improvement efforts? How is the impact of those efforts being measured? Are all those involved aware and contributing to collecting the data? How is the data being reviewed, shared and discussed?***

***Secret Six – Systems Learn**

A key reason that organizations do not sustain learning is that they focus on individual leaders. Leaders come and go, undo and redo the actions of the previous leadership. This results in a perpetual carousel where organizations move up and down in performance.

So, how do systems learn and sustain performance? Rather than looking to one person to show them the way, they focus on developing many leaders in the school/district to work in concert and enhance continuity. They build the capacity of leaders to approach complexity with humility and faith that effectiveness can be maximized under any circumstances. Systems learn when the organization is confident in the face of complexity and open to new ideas.

The qualities set out below are those we want to foster in all levels of leaderships.

- Leaders need to act as if they are in control, project confidence, and talk about the future, even while recognizing and acknowledging the organizational realities and their own limitations.
- Leaders need to maintain an attitude of wisdom and a healthy dose of modesty.
- Effective leaders must learn when and how to get out of the way, and let others make contributions.
- Leaders need to be able to take credit and some blame.
- Leaders need to be specific about the few things that matter most and keep repeating them.

•Leaders need to practice “integrative thinking” or the ability to face constructively the tension of opposing ideas and, instead of choosing one at the expense of the other, generate a creative resolution in the form of a new idea that contains elements of the opposing ideas but is superior to each. (Can you imagine how well we would equip students to meet the demands of a global economy if we could teach integrative thinking?)



“Secret” Reflection – *Take moment and let these leadership attributes wash over you. Where are you in your development? What might your worst critic or your most beloved fan say? How are you helping to develop these capacities in the leaders around you?*

Fullan leaves us by advising that the best way to keep the secrets is to share them. If you practice these secrets, you are modeling them for others and developing more leaders who understand and use them. Once you have a culture of leaders at all levels operating in this way, they reinforce each other as they go. By assembling these secrets into your own Theory of Action you inspire effective action from others. You contribute significantly to the welfare of others and make yourself happier in the process. In our work as educators, this means enhancing the capacity of our organizations to enrich the learning of our students and propel them toward higher levels of achievement. That, my friends, is how we change the world. Enjoy the journey!

