NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
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WHAT GOES INTO THE MAKING OF CHANGE LEADER? A PROBE IN THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

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> *To set the tone of change culture, we need paradigm shifters and idea champions*
>
> *(Fullan, 1993)*

The world of school is changing and so is the role of a Principal. The mounting pressures from parents, community, system administrators and other stakeholders to deliver quality education have led to criticism in public and media discourses. In the effort to make schools better, the principals are constantly on a treadmill. No longer can they afford to resort to conventional roles. Along with ascribed roles, they are also performing expected roles, by extending their boundaries to a wider and larger networking and partnerships, to make the school vibrant and innovative. Their success in a given school is highly dependent on the catalyst role they play in generating novel ideas and sustaining the change efforts, both internally and externally. The school principal, as a dynamic leader, is endowed with the capability of bringing school-based transformation by taking small initiatives for bringing internal efficiency within the school (Diwan, 2000).

Realizing Change leadership: The four pathways

There is a greater realization today that the schools must change, transform and improve in order to cater to the educational needs of all the stakeholders. This calls for moving from traditional models of ascribed roles of a principal to a redefined role that can be conceptualised in four ways for bringing change in the school system:

1) From School Principalship to Leadership

Two important factors that make school principal a leader are (i) vision and (ii) team formation for goal attainment. Bennis (1990) states that "All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that tasks people to a new place and the ability to translate that vision into reality".

2) From Leadership to Academic Leadership

To ensure academic improvement, the school principal as leader brings in a model of good practice in teaching by forming teaching teams or becoming a member of the Professional Learning Community (PLC). A PLC promotes teacher leadership, which is an initiative taken to bring in change towards improving the school processes. The principal also emerges as an academic supervisor, mentoring and coaching teachers.

3) Transformative to Transformational Leadership

Transformative leadership is seen as a change at the personal level, refers to understanding of leadership more at the individual level: who you are (Qualities), what one knows (Situation) and what one does (Functional). Transformational leadership is more like bringing change in the real school-world challenges and linking one developmental experience to another.

4) Broader Leadership Practices to Contextual Leadership

The notion, one style fits all no more holds relevance in the present times. Context differs

in terms of size, location, human, physical and financial resources. Lingam, Lingam and Raghuwaiya (2014) demonstrate that every school leader faces a unique set of challenges which are more contextual in nature. They must therefore be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the type of leadership required to lead a school towards overall improvement. Chalking out strategies closer to contexts enable school leaders to prepare a realistic plan for meeting aspirations of parents and community and transforming the school system in diverse challenging contexts.

What do change leaders do?

In these competitive times, it has become imperative for a school to transform, to strive for becoming a Centre of Excellence. It is equally important for a principal to articulate the need for change. Change leadership is all about becoming receptive to the signals of change, preparing accordingly and opening new vistas within possible means (Harris and Young, 2000). This happens only when a principal realizes that no change can happen in a school until teams are formed, built on trust and confidence and made to believe that change is necessary.

The change leader instead of adapting to the demands of situation has the capacity to alter situations by empowering others to take decisions for the school and sustain the culture of change. This involves moving strategically through consultations with team members. Studies have indicated, strengthening interpersonal relationships, not only inside but also outside the school is the key to bring school-based transformation. Barth (1991) suggests that strengthening interpersonal relations and collegial conversations focus more upon what is occurring in the school and, in particular, what needs to be done to improve the quality of education. Diwan (2000) contends, strengthening interpersonal relations can bring second order changes in the school

that become more or less enduring and are not dependent on school funds. One of the trait of a change leader is to become an academic leader, create an environment conducive to learning, and externally form professional learning teams within the geographical area to draw expertise of subject specialists, professionals to guide, mentor and provide all possible opportunities for learning to teachers and students. Stephan Gerhard Huber and Daniel Muijs (2010) stated that effective leadership by the school principal helps create conditions wherein teachers can be made to become 'optimally effective,' which in turn results in higher levels of pupil performance. The impact could be indirect and modest, but greater influence is exerted by the school principal.

Change Leaders recognize school transformation as focus of attention

As a change leader, the principal introduces changes that matter the most in a given school situation. They provide leadership by fostering an environment for change by critically analysing the current situation, exploring possibilities, identifying the potentials of staff members and students, creating learning opportunities for each of them, and finally working on what eventually counts.

All the efforts of a change leader centre round improving the school. The process begins from building a consensus on school-based vision, team building, creating an environment of shared responsibilities, motivating the team towards goal attainment, setting a desired target in a stipulated time frame, promoting a positive work culture, providing directions and keeping the energy and change momentum at every stage of school transformation.

The manner in which principal leaders make simple changes to the way a school operates in totality makes a huge difference to the culture

and environment of the school (Lassey, 1998). Fullan (2002) argues most change is structural and superficial until culture is transformed by changing the perceptions, values of people and the manner in which team members work together.

The role of a principal gets restricted if confined to compliance and adherence to rules and regulations. A principal leader is sensitive to the needs of individuals and organization, and the change leader in particular, constantly works around creating enabling conditions for institutional growth and development, makes professional and personal needs of every teacher and staff compatible with organizational needs to ensure that both grow together simultaneously.

What matters the most in the making of a Change Leader?

Source: A Conceptual Framework of the development of the Principal as a change agent (Acton , 2021)

For change leaders, it is crucial to have an understanding of the change process and thus acquiring the skills to work on institutional and system reforms. Acton (2021) demonstrates on how a principal develops the skills to become an effective change agent. As shown in the figure, professional learning methods are instrumental in helping the principals to learn the skills of an

agent of change. Huber (2011) contemplates three factors vital for a principal for traversing pathways to change leadership:

(i) Professional development

(ii) Networking with trusted colleagues and

(iii) On the job experience

Concluding Statements

A change leader is proactive in anticipating change, accepting, adapting and implementing the change process. As leader in action, fosters, initiates, spearheads a well-defined course of action in order to bring a paradigm shift in the school system. Lastly, a change leader prepares and empowers prospective leaders, in the pipeline, to carry the baton of change agenda to next generation leadership.

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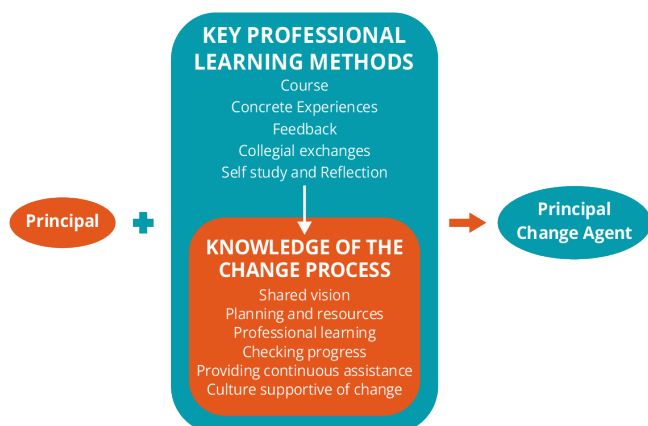
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