

3.2

3.2 ER 25

Chapter 10

Leadership for Sustained School Improvement

Redesigning America's Schools:

A Systems Approach to Improvement

by
Francis M. Duffy
Lynda G. Rogerson
and Charles (Buzz) Blick

© 2000

Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.
Norwood, Massachusetts

There are great untapped reservoirs of human energy and capacity awaiting leaders who can tap them, and societies that deserve them.

—John W. Gardner

Knowledge Work Supervision (KWS) requires competent and confident leadership that is not limited to one person but is required of people at all levels of the school system, from the superintendent to the receptionist, from the teachers to the cafeteria workers. Sustaining school improvement is a task for everyone and it requires multilevel, multidirectional leadership.

Everyone is interconnected in a social-technical system (STS). It is as though each person has hold of a single string that weaves its way throughout the system. The string connects each person to all others, thus creating a vast weblike network of interconnections. In this web, everyone is responsible for the quality and success of innovations and especially for movement toward a school system's vision. In an interdependent system—"we are they." If something needs doing, it is up to individuals and teams to figure out how to get it done. In such a system, people are accountable to the vision, not to some "authority figure." People are also held accountable for their efforts in achieving the district's vision.

3

THE POWER OF VISION

The power of a vision is essential for the ongoing success of any organization because it sets the stage, frames the actions, and directs the energy of the people in the organization. Senge (1990) believed that people must be committed to the vision, not just compliant with it. Commitment releases human potential and energy. Effective leadership develops this commitment and sustains school improvement.

Fullan (1993) articulates the developmental nature of vision building. He says, "under conditions of dynamic complexity one needs a good deal of reflective experience before one can form a plausible vision. Vision always emerges from, more than it precedes, action. Even then it is always provisional. . . . shared vision, which is essential for success, must evolve through the dynamic interaction of organizational members and leaders" (p. 28). Near the end of Phase 4, as the district prepares to recycle to Phase 1, the strategic direction is revisited to prepare for Phase 1. In returning to Phase 1, the school district creates a new vision or recommits to the current one. In this way, the experience of reflecting and acting upon the district's vision, as described by Fullan, is built into the culture of a school system.

LEADERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE WORK SUPERVISION

Leadership for innovation is absolutely critical to the success of KWS. Below, we summarize some important leadership concepts and principles. Mastering these is important for sustaining school improvement.

Creating innovative ideas to redesign work processes, social architecture, and environmental relationships, then implementing and sustaining those ideas, is a tremendous task. This task cannot be undertaken without many leaders all following the same script, which is defined by the school system's strategic direction developed in the Phase 1 Search Conference. Building and maintaining support while facing various challenges, setbacks, and Sisyphean endurance tests that are often part of large-scale change requires consistent, confident, and creative leadership efforts on the part of everyone.

Transformational Leadership

A specific type of leadership is required to create and sustain school district improvement. In the past, leadership was associated with "getting things done" or "leading people somewhere." In KWS, leadership is required to transform three sets of key school system variables: the district's knowledge work processes, its social architecture, and its rela-

tionship with its environment. This kind of leadership is called transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 1992).

KWS requires transformational leaders to motivate followers to work for long-term goals instead of short-term self-interest, and to work toward achievement and self-actualization instead of emotional security (Avolio & Bass, 1988). Transformational leadership is inspirational because it redirects the energies and potential of people to achieve a vision. Transformational leadership taps into the emotional energy of people and provides them with meaning and a sense of personal value. People inspired by a transformational leader no longer "go to work"; instead, they work for a "cause." There is a sense of excitement, adventure, and enthusiasm that emerges as people realize they can do more than they ever thought possible.

Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership factors emerged from Bass's (1985) research. He identified five factors that describe transformational leaders:

- **Charisma**—the ability to instill values, respect, and pride and to articulate a vision.
- **Individual Attention**—paying attention to followers' needs and assigning meaningful projects so followers grow personally.
- **Intellectual Stimulation**—helping followers to rethink rational ways to examine situations and encouraging followers to be creative.
- **Contingent Reward**—informing followers about what must be done to receive the rewards they prefer.
- **Management by Exception**—permitting followers to work on tasks without being interrupted by the leader unless goals are not being accomplished in a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost.

Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991) described the "Four I's of Transformational Leadership": (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual consideration. Bass and Avolio (1993) add depth to these "Four I's." They explain that "[t]ransformational leaders integrate creative insight, persistence and energy, intuition and sensitivity to the needs of others to 'forge the strategy-culture alloy' for their organizations" (p. 113). Each of these "Four I's" is important for KWS.

An essential element of transformational leadership is its focus on vision. Making explicit the core values that support the vision, modeling behaviors and attitudes that reflect those core values, and coaching and facilitating the development of individuals in adopting these core values are important tasks of transformational leadership.

Another fundamental aspect of transformational leadership is an astute understanding of the interconnectedness of all aspects of a school system (as reflected in the "string" metaphor, above). This understanding is a hallmark of systems thinking. Systems thinking is also an essential aspect of organizational learning (Senge, 1990). Transformational leaders who want to change school systems into high-performing organizations of learners must be well versed in the subtleties of systems thinking. Systems thinking helps leaders to see the school system as a whole and to see interrelationships, interdependencies, patterns, and relationships. Leaders also use systems thinking to determine where small changes in the district might result in great improvements.

Transformational leaders also have an informal, personal style with people. They approach their tasks from a collaborative orientation reflected in statements such as "We are in this together, so let's see what we can do to be creative and solution oriented." Transformational leaders see their role as coaching and facilitating rather than as directing or commanding. Building relationships, inspiring creativity and humor, demonstrating optimism, finding solutions, and having dogged persistence are important characteristics of those who want to transform entire school systems into high performing organizations of learners.

Transformational leadership provides the contextual background for four other levels of leadership required for effective KWS. These are: strategic leadership, tactical leadership, team leadership, and self-leadership (see Figure 10-1).

1. Strategic Leadership

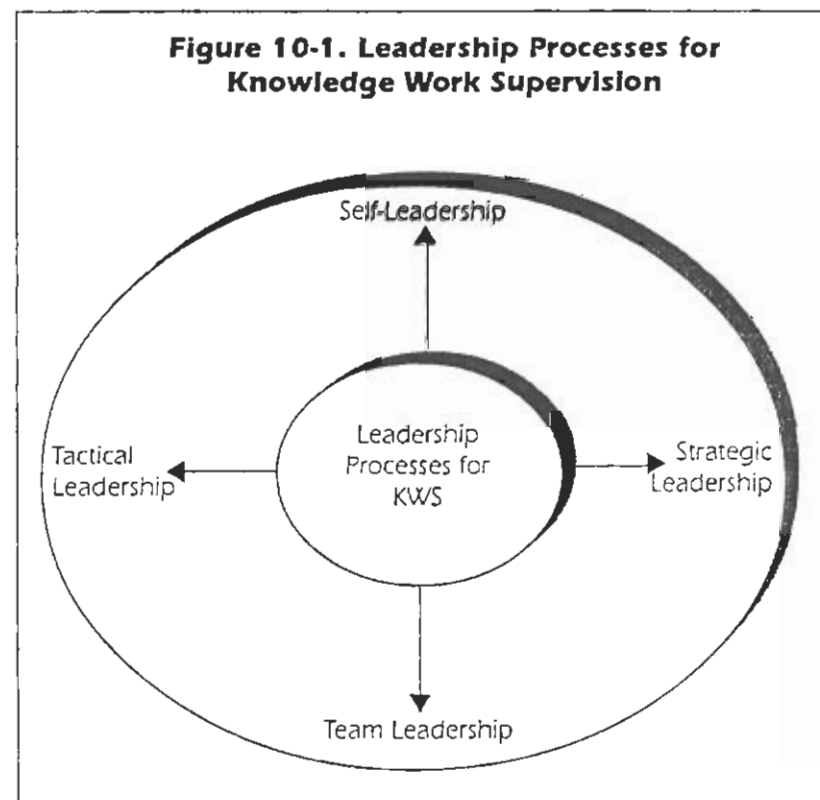
Strategic leadership focuses on the big picture, the vision, the core values, and the strategy for achieving the vision. In KWS, the SLI provides strategic leadership. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) does not replace the superintendent of schools as the CEO of the district but rather collaborates with the superintendent to provide strategic leadership for systemic school improvement.

The SLT is also the primary "vision keeper." In this role, members of the SLT ask questions such as "Who are we as a school district?" "Where are we going?" and "What do we need to do to get there?" This team frequently monitors the external environment, the school system's culture, and the morale of people in the school system to determine what needs to be done to achieve the district's vision more effectively.

Nicholls (1999) described two important tasks of strategic leadership: path finding and culture building. The vision is directly related to path finding. Culture building, which supports the vision, depends upon the quality and articulation of the core values. Leaders engage in these path-finding and culture-building tasks so their school system can move

toward higher levels of performance. When strategic leadership is functioning properly, "[t]here is a unity of purpose throughout the [school system] in accord with a clear and widely understood vision. This environment nurtures total commitment from all employees. Rewards go beyond benefits and salaries to the belief 'we are family' and 'we do excellent work'" (Scholtes, 1992, Section 1, p. 12).

Figure 10-1. Leadership Processes for Knowledge Work Supervision



The SLT also aligns school district policies, procedures, and reward systems with the newly created organizational culture of participation and collaboration. The SLT removes obstacles, creates metaphors to facilitate organizational learning, finds and distributes resources, and models appropriate behaviors to encourage others to do the same. They are practiced systems thinkers and diligently apply themselves to anticipate problems, challenge assumptions that could hinder progress, and explore the effects of policies and procedures.

2. Team Leadership Building Design Teams

Each KWS team provides leadership that responds to the issues, opportunities, and concerns upon which each team focuses. Each team's mission must be aligned with the goals of the buildings, the clusters, and the strategic direction of the entire school system.

The KWS teams reframe the everyday problems and challenges of the workplace. For example, they consider other ways of perceiving certain "symptoms" in the teaching and learning process; they explore curricular and instructional issues from broad perspectives; and they search for ways to balance the long-term and the short-term needs of the school district, students, and classroom teachers. The teams also explore various aspects of the school system's work process and social architecture to identify what's happening in lower grade levels that might flow "downstream" to affect upper grade levels. The KWS teams must also decide when to take action to correct any problems they identify or to seize any opportunities that present themselves.

3. Tactical Leadership

Tactical leadership focuses on daily leadership tasks to keep teams focused and productive. The Knowledge Work Coordinator is the primary tactical leader, as he or she guides the KWS process on a daily basis. KWS team leaders also provide tactical leadership in concert with the Knowledge Work Coordinator. Scholtes (1992) describes the tactical leadership role:

The team leader is the person who manages the team: calling and facilitating meetings, handling or assigning administrative details, orchestrating all team activities, and overseeing preparations for reports and presentations. The team leader should be interested in solving the problems that prompted this project and be reasonably good at working with individuals and groups. Ultimately, it is the leader's responsibility to create and maintain channels that enable team members to do their work. (Section 3, p. 8)

It is important to note that the Knowledge Work Coordinator does not have unilateral responsibility to resolve issues that arise during KWS. Rather, this coordinator has the responsibility to ask the teams to address certain issues as they arise, to facilitate team members in a search for solutions, and to realign or adjust their activities to support the vision and strategic direction of the school system.

4. Self-Leadership

Self-leadership is a process of personal growth, self-development, stretching, learning, and exploring beyond the confines of one's "com-

fort zone." It requires taking risks, challenging assumptions, re-forming perceptions, and changing personal beliefs. It also requires individuals to become well acquainted with themselves. In a world that rewards "busy-ness," social activities, and productivity, it is often difficult for people, especially smart ones, to take time for personal reflection.

Self-leadership is truly self-initiated learning. The individual who devotes time and energy to self-development will constantly learn about the way that he or she interacts with the environment, with workplace situations, with other people, and in response to personal needs, dreams, and goals. Confidence, commitment, risk taking, creativity, and communication are enhanced when people engage in self-development activities.

Self-leadership is an evolutionary process. It unfolds over time as people test themselves in new situations, such as team environments and learning organizations. Those who engage in self-leadership processes are more likely to be self-starters. They also understand the concept of personal accountability.

One of the important outcomes of self-leadership is the release of "previous dependency on superior authority" (Manz & Sims, 1995, p. 218.). Manz and Sims stress the importance of "guided participation" in developing personal strategies for success (p. 219). Thus, for these authors, self-leadership rests on developing confidence and realistic, yet challenging, personal and professional goals.

LEADERSHIP STAGES FOR KNOWLEDGE WORK SUPERVISION

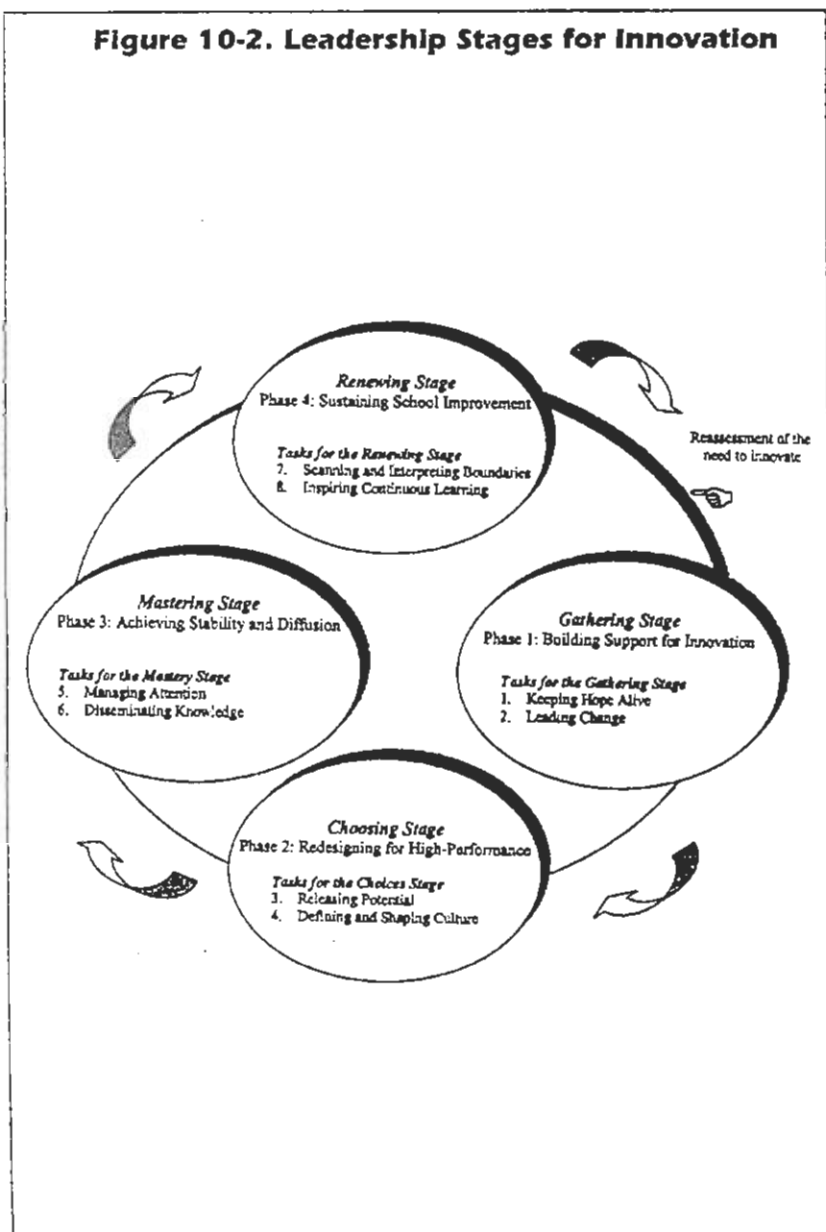
Within the four types of leadership described above, there are four leadership stages that contribute to the overall effectiveness of KWS, and each of the four stages has two key leadership tasks. The four stages parallel the KWS phases. The Gathering Stage correlates with Phase 1, the Choosing Stage with Phase 2, the Mastering Stage with Phase 3, and the Renewing Stage with Phase 4. These are shown in Figure 10-2 and described below in more detail.

Stage 1: Gathering

Getting KWS off the ground and gaining support for innovation is a challenging leadership task. Activities designed to gain support begin prior to launching KWS and continue during Phase 1. Without broad and deep support from influential members of the school system and the community, there is little chance that innovation will begin, never mind survive. This support must be powerful and continuous. This means that administrators, teachers, parents, students, legislators, and

other education professionals need to look for ways to solve the puzzles that arise, rearrange the pieces of "puzzling" situations, experiment with new approaches, and work at continuous improvement.

Figure 10-2. Leadership Stages for Innovation



Leadership Task No. 1: Keeping Hope Alive

The primary leadership task for the Gathering Stage is to keep hope alive. Gardner (1969) first used this notion to convey the importance of the encouragement aspect of the leader's role. Moving into new territory, embarking on a great journey, or finding ourselves in a seemingly endless wilderness of change requires a continual reminder of a vision or end result. The primary task that Moses had with his Israelite wanderers was to keep their sights and hearts on the "land of milk and honey" so that they wouldn't get discouraged by the hardships and endlessness of the desert trek. In the television series *Wagon Train*, Ward Bond, as the wagon master, continuously helped his would-be settlers keep their focus on the Willamette Valley or other lush and green destinations. He had his scout go out in search of encouraging signs: water, resting places, landmarks, and so on. These were efforts to keep hope alive.

As vision keepers, leaders must have a clear sense of their school system's vision. They must describe and transmit that vision, along with a clear sense of mission, every step of the way toward higher levels of performance. It is important to note that the leaders don't define the vision; rather, they inspire individuals to create the vision.

Leaders must also embody a sense of service. This means that the leaders should see themselves as providing a service rather than receiving power and status for their efforts. In a culture of participation and collaboration, servant leadership as described by Greenleaf (1973) is a required correlate of transformational leadership. Effective leaders are constantly attending to the needs of their followers (Gardner, 1990).

Leadership Task No. 2: Leading Change

Kotter (1996) describes eight errors made by change leaders. While describing these errors he reminds readers of an important lesson about change: It is important not to skip steps in the change process because that brings about the illusion of speed, but it actually slows down the process in the long run and often results in failed organizational improvement efforts.

Kotter converts these eight errors into positive statements describing what change leaders can do to increase the effectiveness of their organizational improvement efforts. We relate these guidelines to the KWS phases.

1. **Create a sense of urgency.** People need to have a reason to change. Kotter recommends that leaders identify a rallying point around which people can coalesce. This sense of urgency is created prior to beginning KWS.

2. **Create a powerful, guiding coalition.** In the KWS model, the SLT is the guiding coalition. It is powerful because it is staffed with the super-

intendent, one or two of his or her trusted subordinates, influential building administrators and teachers chosen by their colleagues to serve on this team, and others. The SLT is formed during Phase 1 of KWS.

3. Develop and recognize the power of a vision and a strategy. Vision and strategy evolve from the Phase 1 Search Conference. It becomes the task of the leaders to articulate this vision clearly to people throughout the school system and the community. In addition, the change strategy, in this case KWS, needs to be clearly articulated.

4. Communicate the new vision. Kotter argues that there can never be too much communication about the vision and the strategy. Every channel of communication must be engaged, including face-to-face, written, video, other visual, and electronic communications. Kotter, however, suggests that people underestimate the time needed to communicate the vision by a factor of ten. He also emphasizes the importance of the adage to "walk your talk." He says, "Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with the verbal communication" (p. 10). Communicating about the vision occurs throughout all four phases of KWS.

5. Remove obstacles (systems or people) that act as barriers to the new vision. "Whenever smart and well-intentioned people avoid confronting obstacles, they dis-empower employees and undermine change" (p. 10). People in leadership roles must learn how to identify and evaluate the nature of the obstacles that prevent progress toward the vision. Obstacles to innovation are removed continually throughout the life of a school system.

6. Generate short-term wins. Celebrating success is very important. During times of change, some people make the mistake of postponing celebrations until everything is finished. The problem with innovations is that "finished" is a relative term. By celebrating little milestones, people generate the energy and enthusiasm needed to continue onto more challenging milestones. Short-term wins are created during Phases 2 and 3 of KWS.

7. Consolidate gains and produce more change. Kotter warned against declaring victory too soon. People will lose their edge and stop pushing toward the vision if victory is declared before the entire redesign process is completed. Gains are consolidated and used as a springboard for further innovation. This consolidation occurs during Phase 3.

8. Anchor changes firmly into the corporate culture. Leaders must understand the powerful role that organizational culture plays in inhibiting or enhancing opportunities for innovation and change. In addition, leaders must have the ability and the courage to reconstruct and redirect organizational culture in ways that support desired changes. Anchoring occurs during Phase 4.

Stage 2: Choosing

With increased confidence and competence, people also increase their readiness to explore new ways of working. In KWS this exploration occurs during Phase 2. Redesigning a school system's work processes, social architecture, and its environmental relationships creates many choices. "Choosing" involves not only what to change inside a school system but also decisions regarding work attitudes and behavior. Each K-12 cluster must consider choices appropriate to its design and functioning. Each individual school needs to consider choices directed to finding solutions that make teaching and learning more effective in that building. Each Community of Practice should explore solutions to issues or topics that it chooses to address. Each person must choose behaviors and attitudes that facilitate the accomplishment of critical job tasks. There are many choices to be made.

Leadership Task No. 3: Releasing Potential

An acorn has the potential to become an oak tree. A caterpillar has the potential to become a butterfly. Students and teachers have the potential to become self-directed, lifelong learners. A traditional school system has the potential to become a dazzling community of learners characterized by participation and collaboration. Each potential must be unlocked, channeled, and nurtured by making appropriate and effective choices.

Potential means the capacity to become. There are many obstacles in complex school systems that hinder or prevent achievement of potential. Structural and procedural barriers become fences that funnel people and teams down the path of least resistance where genuine, long-lasting change rarely occurs. More often it is the road that must be hewn out of the dense forest of habit or blasted through the granite of tradition that leads to significant change and improvement.

To release potential, leaders must ensure that the work of individuals and teams actually supports the vision and the core values of the school system. Accomplishing this requires the application of seven principles described by Walter (1995):

- Know each person as an individual.
- Understand what each person values as a reward or expects in terms of recognition.
- Model equity and apply fairness.
- Learn what motivates and frustrates each member of the team.
- Encourage and develop both internal locus of control and self-efficacy.
- Repeatedly clarify and articulate the vision and the core values.

- **Connect all actions, projects, and strategies to the vision.**

The nature of these principles is a reminder that transformational leadership is a personal style of leadership. In fact, transformational leadership won't work in an organizational culture that treats people impersonally. In a high-performance work environment, a learning environment, or a culture that embodies the process of transformation, the personal touch works. Equity and fairness in traditional organizations are designed around the principle that everyone should be treated the same (a basic tenet of egalitarianism), but this amounts to treating people impersonally and thus without regard for their individual needs, interests, abilities, goals, and values.

Releasing potential is also influenced by other leadership actions, specifically by practicing flexibility, patience, and persistence, and by helping people to overcome feelings of learned helplessness.

Flexibility, patience, and persistence. Cutting a path through the wilderness of change requires leaders to be flexible, patient, and persistent in helping people achieve the district's vision through systemic redesign. With the vision and the core values as a compass, individuals and teams who are redesigning their school system must be willing to learn and model appropriate attitudes and behaviors that support systemic improvement.

Behavioral models of leadership (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fiedler, 1967; Hershey & Blanchard, 1988; Likert, 1961; Stodgill & Coons, 1957; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1957) address the need for leaders to apply structure or allow autonomy, depending upon the readiness, competence, or commitment of followers. However, the notion of designated leaders making these kinds of decisions is incompatible with the organizational culture created through KWS—a culture of participation and collaboration.

Even though autonomy, decision making and creative freedom are built into the KWS teams, a school district cannot and must not throw control and order out the window. "The result would be complete anarchy, total chaos, and too much disorder—as people would be working at cross-purposes with each other. There would be no sense of alignment or social cohesiveness" (Purser & Cabana, 1998, p. 37). Thus, as the level of autonomy and creativity is raised, the level of control and order must also be raised to prevent the system from spinning out of control. The requisite control and order, however, doesn't come from the old hierarchical, authoritarian command-and-control paradigm; instead, it comes from the development of working partnerships and trust within a school system.

Overcoming learned helplessness. Overcoming organizationally induced helplessness (McGrath, 1994) is essential for releasing potential

in individuals and teams. Organizationally induced helplessness evolves as individuals learn that their ideas are not valued and that they have little or no control over events and decisions affecting them. This helplessness is manifested in their inability and unwillingness to initiate action, participate in efforts to empower people, and failure to exercise personal power. Helplessness can also be the motivation behind efforts to sabotage school improvement efforts because the helpless have a cynical belief that there is no future for the improvements.

Kankus and Cavalier (1995) describe two simple but powerful methods for reducing feelings of helplessness. First, they suggested that people be encouraged to identify areas of their work that they do have control over and then identify things that they would like to change. McGrath (1994) also suggests that continuous reinforcement and encouragement will help people to overcome feelings of helplessness.

To increase the potency of KWS, it is important for leaders to address organizationally induced helplessness. Hoy (1998) states that "unless people believe they can make a difference through their actions, there is little incentive to act" (p. 153). This behavior is based in the concept of self-efficacy described by Bandura (1997). Hoy outlined four of Bandura's broad categories and related them to the development of self-efficacy. These four categories also form the basis for creating learned optimism (Seligman, 1990). The categories are personal attainment, vicarious experience, receiving encouragement or feedback, and the energized emotional and physiological states brought about by anxiety and excitement. Hoy, Bandura, and Seligman all believe that helplessness is a learned behavior and can thus be unlearned.

Leadership Task No. 4: Defining and Shaping Culture

The transformation of a school system's culture is essential to the redesign of an entire school system. Schein (1985) describes the creation and management of culture as the only important thing leaders do. Culture provides the context for everything that happens inside a school district. Bass (1985) concurs with this assertion when he says that "transformational leaders change their culture by first understanding it and then realigning the organizational culture with a new vision and a revision of its shared assumptions, values, and norms" (p. 112).

Along with articulating the district's vision, leaders assist faculty and staff in the identification of those beliefs and assumptions that are most important to them as members of the district. Shared values are the basis of a learning community. They bind people together and provide the foundation for decision making and for aligning people to the vision (McDonald & Gandz, 1992).