

Lead The Charge To Change



**Veema
Paper**

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Education in England is undergoing huge structural upheaval. With local authorities side-lined as more schools become academies, and parent governors increasingly disenfranchised (*White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere, Department of Education, 2016*), the fragmentation of the system is already having a chaotic impact on school placement planning.

On top of this, the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention is unprecedented. In particular, there is the challenge of attracting effective educational leaders at all levels.

Given such an environment, is it a good time to be a school leader?

Having direct experience in the education system our automatic and resounding response at Veema is — **YES** and this is why.

Effective leadership, properly developed, drives change and improves school standards, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning (*Burnham and Harris, 2015*).

Great leaders instil and communicate a clear vision, ethos and culture — exactly what's needed right now. Bambrick and Peiser see culture as a super-lever and mention this as the second most important lever in their recent book *'Leverage Leadership', 2012*.

So to me, now is exactly the right time to be preparing for leadership and building the skills you need to be effective in that role. To use a financial analogy, you will be investing at the bottom of the market and thinking long-term.

In fact, education leadership should perhaps borrow further from the world of business and investment.

Take for instance the change leadership ideas of John P. Kotter, Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership at the Harvard Business School.

Kotter says that leaders (the senior team) set a new direction or vision for a community, then spearhead that change, while managers (more junior colleagues) control or direct the people and resources needed to put those principles or values into operation.

In his 1996 publication *'Leading Change'*, and later in *'The Heart of Change'* (Kotter & Cohen, 2012), Kotter presented an eight-stage process for achieving transformational change that I believe will resonate to some degree with the experiences of every educational leader.

1. Encourage an increasing sense of urgency and momentum. If you identify and discuss both crises and opportunities, you will reduce the complacency, fear and anger that prevents change from happening.
2. Create a 'guiding team' with the power and capacity to lead the charge, who can engender the trust and emotional commitment needed to develop an ethos of team working.
3. Establish the right vision and develop bold empowering strategies to help direct team efforts.
4. Communicate for 'buy-in'. To facilitate the change process, the guiding team should constantly communicate the new vision and strategies to stakeholders, and themselves exhibit the behaviours necessary for change to occur.
5. Empower action by removing barriers that block the vision and strategies from being embraced. We have all faced crises in departments, faculties or other internal school organisations and felt the fear and anger that hold us back.

6. Create short-term wins so as to defuse cynicism and scepticism. When success becomes visible it can be celebrated, helping to build momentum.
7. Don't let up. Create wave after wave of change until the vision becomes reality. Help stakeholders through the difficult parts of transformation, such as emotional barriers, whilst ensuring that the guiding team does not suffer from burn-out.
8. Make change stick. The guiding team must use professional development and promotion to ensure that the new norms of behaviour become embedded in the reshaped organisational culture.

Can Kotter's eight-stage process model survive the move from a business to an educational environment? Having successfully used Kotter's ideas on change leadership on a number of occasions, we strongly believe they do. For instance, middle managers in schools looking to build their guiding team may well need to 'communicate for buy-in' by 'selling' the vision to 'influencers' in the senior management team who can become essential and powerful allies.

However, tempting though it may be to try to fast-track this process, rush and you will not allocate enough time or the right resources to it, and the change you long for will be short lived or may even fail to appear altogether (Gerver, 2014).

Kotter himself warns against trying to short-cut his process: "Successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight stages... skipping even a single step or getting too far ahead without a solid base almost always creates problems" (Kotter, 1996).

So, enact only stages five, six and seven and you will fail to establish the solid base necessary to build transformation. Omit step eight and change won't be sustainable.

For those wanting to gain a more detailed understanding of Kotter's work, in 'Our Iceberg is Melting' (Kotter & Rathberger, 2006) he develops his thinking in a fable about penguins who, having lived comfortably on a long-established iceberg, slowly realise they have a problem that needs urgent attention and follow the eight-step model to solve it.

The changes working their way through the educational eco-system mean that if school leaders are to capitalise on the greater autonomy they will now enjoy in developing their organisations, they must have the courage to take risks.

When whole school transformation tends to be played for high stakes, creating a platform for embedding change in your school is crucial. In doing this, fortune favours the brave, and it's time to lead the charge.

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References:

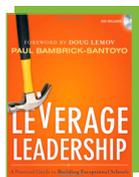
- Bambrick-Santoyo, P. & Peiser, B. (2012). *"Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools"*. Jossey Bass.
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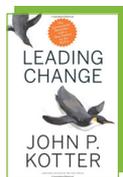
Food For Thought



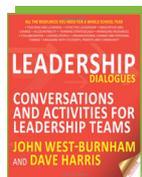
Additional Reading:



Leverage Leadership:
A Practical Guide to Building
Exceptional Schools
Paul Bambrick-Santoyo
& Brett Peiser



Leading Change
John P. Kotter



Leadership Dialogues:
Conversations and Activities
for Leadership Teams
John West-Burnham
& Dave Harris

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