

Book Review:

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

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The Six Secrets of Change describes lessons that seem simple. However, often leaders find them difficult to grasp. Michael Fullan strives to provide real-life examples of these secrets through organizational practices. He exemplifies organizational behaviors in which implementation has been successful and where attempts have failed. Using examples, Fullan offers a blueprint that organizational leaders can use to guide their action towards effective and long lasting changes that ultimately will improve organizational culture and efficiency.

Michael Fullan is a well-known, prolific author of literature about change. He has served as the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto and, currently, he serves as a consultant in many major education initiatives around the world. This book, like much of his work, is based on research drawn from public and private businesses and educational organizations. Fullan dedicates significant space in the book's introduction to the idea of having a theory to guide the creation of organizational change rather than relying on a hard and fast plan. In fact, Fullan takes the opportunity to remind us that a theory should make sense of the real world and should be tested. Moreover, a good theory should be applicable across sectors of public and private organizations. By focusing on this concept, Fullan lets the reader know that the ideas presented in his book are not pieces of advice to be implemented immediately. Instead, they should be studied diligently and then considered as a foundation for successful change before creating an action plan.

Fullan refers to his six secrets of change as a "theory of action" (p. 8). The theory of the six secrets can be used to create action plans to stimulate appropriate and effective organizational change. The six secrets are heavily nuanced. Perhaps this is why Fullan calls them secrets, because their meaning can be missed if leaders fail to look deeply into the underlying theory. Each of Fullan's six secrets of change relates to the others in important ways. They rely on each other in order to create effective and efficient organizations. Because the secrets are interrelated, each is discussed in its own chapter. In this review the secrets are discussed separately although common themes connect them. As the secrets are discussed, the first author shares examples from her own work in the public school system in order to illustrate situations where the secrets have

been applied. The limitations to these secrets and some cautions against their misapplication will also be presented.

Secret One: Love Your Employees

Secret One is advice that appears simple and reasonable and almost seems unnecessary. Ostensibly, it would already be at the forefront of every organizational leader's mind. However, this secret is not often implemented as intended by Fullan. There may be a consensus that the customer or the student should be the focus of all activities in the organization. Unfortunately, this may occur at the expense of employees' fulfillment and happiness. Fullan indicates that there should be a symbiotic relationship between the two groups and that the relationship with the employee should not be sacrificed for the happiness of the customer. He contends that all of the stakeholders in an organization should be recognized as vital and be considered as equally important. Secret One helps leaders identify strategies that will motivate employees to find meaning while also pursuing the goals of the organization.

The education initiatives that many state governments have implemented to improve student achievement is a relevant example of Secret One. The underlying premise of these initiatives is that all children will be successful; it is assumed that teachers will do everything necessary to help students achieve success. As illustrated in the United States' "No Child Left Behind Act," the dogged focus on the success of the customers (students) comes at the expense of the satisfaction of the employees (teachers). Fullan agrees, and argues, that stances for educational reform that claim to focus on the children first are misleading and incomplete because the quality of the educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. By sharing this example, Fullan emphasizes that the customer-first attitude only works if the needs of the employees are met at the same time.

As a public school teacher, the first author has observed what occurs when there is too much focus on the needs and successes of the students and not enough focus on teachers' needs. A certain amount of unhappiness and resentment becomes apparent. Fullan explains that you can make people be loyal in behavior, but not in attitude. By ensuring that employees are motivated and fulfilled while completing the work of the organization, a leader can instill loyalty in attitude necessary to make an organization efficient and effective. By making this secret the foundation of his book, Fullan confirms the statement that is echoed by many successful leaders: If you don't have a fulfilled and happy workforce, then you won't be able to achieve the results that you desire for your organization.

Secret Two: Connect Peers with a Purpose

Fullan's second secret addresses the need for peers to be connected to one another, not just by department or because they are all part of the same organization, but through a common thread as exemplified by the pursuit of organizational goals. The most important portion of this chapter is the idea of positive, purposeful peer interaction. According to Fullan, peers are "more effective than random individuals at work and more effective than managerial groups at the top working in isolation to develop strategic plans" (p. 46-47). Fullan calls purposeful peer interaction the we-we solution. In this collaborative work environment, the leader acts as a facilitator by connecting peers in meaningful working relationships because they are focused on the common goals of the

organization. The goal of this interaction is not for individuals to outperform one another, but to work as groups to outperform themselves. By including this message, Fullan stresses that an effective and efficient organization has a highly positive atmosphere when peer interaction is seen as vital to its success.

Connecting peers with a purpose means that the individuals rally around a higher purpose. The goals of the organization have meaning for individuals as well as the collective group. Additionally, connecting peers in purposeful interaction allows knowledge to flow easily through the organization. When a leader promotes positive, purposeful peer interaction, he or she creates an atmosphere that supports and cultivates collaboration between peers. The leader facilitates action with a clear direction for the organization while validating and encouraging the input of the employees in order to connect the entire organization with a similar purpose and set of goals. Fullan describes these concepts through practical examples and cites research to support the idea. However, it is difficult to understand what the role of the leader is without careful consideration of what connecting peers in positive interaction might be.

This secret can be put to use immediately in public schools. Often a version of this secret exists and can be witnessed by the efforts of school leaders who seek to create collaboration between colleagues in order to advance student achievement. However, the goals of the school are also important in connecting peers with a purpose. Often these attempts at collaboration encourage what Fullan refers to as “bad” competition. Individuals compete against individuals and reflect on past performance to beat them. This is why this chapter is not titled collaboration. It seems likely that Fullan chose the title because collaboration between individuals is not enough. People in an organization must be connected through a common purpose, around the goals of the organization, with a clear sense of direction about how to build their individual and collective capacities to ensure organizational success.

Secret Three: Capacity Building Prevails

Secret Three introduces the idea that employees are more valuable and feel more useful if their capacity to perform job functions is increased rather than simply teaching them small sets of essential skills. Early on in this chapter, Fullan cautions his reader against becoming judgmental and using punitive measures and criticism to develop capacity in people. Although he warns leaders to avoid criticism, it is important that they do not shy away from it so much that they avoid pointing out what is effective and ineffective. While leaders must point out what works and what does not, it must be delivered in a way that does not promote negativity or groupthink. The idea of positive, purposeful peer interaction must always remain in the back of the leaders' mind. As the discussion of building capacity continues, a common thread begins to appear, involving the idea that highly purposeful collaboration between peers is essential to continuous progress and organizational learning.

Building capacity in people allows leaders to become facilitators. When people are involved in continuous learning and building their capacity to perform the functions of their jobs, leaders can worry less about management. They can act more like coaches and mentors. Although Fullan does not specifically mention coaching or mentoring, this secret seems to allude to them. Coaching and mentoring leads to building purposeful alliances that promote collaboration and cooperation (Hudson, 1999). The first author has seen coaching and mentoring used in school

organizations as a means to share practices to further the goals of the organization. By building capacity among its members, leaders show that they trust the level of knowledge and commitment of their employees. According to Steele (2008) trust between the leadership and the other members is one of the most important relationships that can occur. Fullan does not directly address this idea in this work. However, much of what he discusses rests on the basic notion of trust in the knowledge, commitment, and willingness that all the members of an organization will work in this way. By allowing employees to take risks in response to positive pressure, organizational leaders can build capacity in individuals and the collective group in an efficient and effective manner.

Secret Four: Learning is the Work

According to Fullan, being committed to learning while completing the work of the organization is vital to building the capacity of the employees. Learning related to the work and goals of the institution should be embedded in the context of the work. He explains why professional development is a contradiction to this secret. Often it takes place outside of the classroom environment, outside the context of teachers' work, so there is little opportunity to immediately apply what is learned and to reflect on the lessons. Moreover, most of the learning that occurs is superficial because it is divorced from the reality of teacher work. Fullan's solution to this issue is to make learning the work. This means that the organization's work promotes constant inquiry into practice and identifies strategies that might produce appropriate results. Learning in isolation does not assist in building capacity, nor does it assist in showing employees how the learning relates to the goals and work of the organization. This chapter contains some of the most important ideas in the book.

Ensuring that continuous learning embedded in the work of the organization allows leaders to build capacity in employees, and promotes purposeful peer interaction. Promoting a constant cycle of reflection while working, and learning while doing the work of the organization shows employees how newly learned strategies and ideas relate to their work. This practice helps leaders utilize resources and time appropriately so that they can build capacity and promote purposeful peer interaction while still maintaining the momentum of the organization's work.

Secret Five: Transparency Rules

Transparency is the fifth secret of his book. Fullan (1993) explains that inquiry is necessary for forming and reforming personal purposes. Thus, inquiry can be likened to the definition of transparency – a clear and continuous display of results and clear and continuous access to what is being done to get the results. Fullan cautions leaders that the transparency of results and practice should not be used punitively. Publicizing results and practices should be used as a system from which to learn about effective and ineffective practices. This information should be shared in order to create “positive pressure” (p. 14). Positive pressure is fair and reasonable, it is actionable, it points to solutions and it is inescapable because it uses good, solid data to evaluate successes and search for solutions.

Transparency refers to making multiple pieces of information available to certain stakeholders in order to spur others to increase productivity. At times, this process has actually created competition in order to get better results. One example in the public schools is the posting

of Adequate Yearly Progress data related to the No Child Left Behind legislation. Fullan uses this example as one of what effective transparency is NOT. Fullan does not support these types of efforts at transparency because they ignore the processes and practices that might be in place in order to achieve the desired results. More than anything else, the references to transparency refer to not only making the results available but also, more importantly, the practices that led to those results. These practices can lead to a culture with constant and consistent learning that promotes the goals of the organization. Transparency in practice can make the daily implementation of the change much less threatening to individuals (Steele, 2008).

Secret Six: Systems Learn

Fullan's first five secrets lay the foundation for a successful organization. When they are all put into practice, then the system can, and often does, learn. The system is able to learn from itself. This means that the leaders guide employees through a system of inquiry where people are valued. They are invested in thorough learning and development activities that focus on interaction while completing the work of the organization in an area of positive pressure. When employees are the center of the organization, and they are connected to their peers through a common purpose with consistent and frequent opportunities to examine their practices and results, there is no option except for the organization to learn from itself. Knowledge and commitment should be constantly cultivated in order for the system to continue to move forward by learning.

The cycle of continuous learning is the final component of *The Six Secrets of Change*. The idea that systems learn from each other requires that reflection take place about all the secrets of change. This stage of reflection is when leaders and other organizational members stop and look at their process of learning, and work and evaluate the success of the procedures and policies in order to continuously improve performance. The point is that the organization learns from itself; it does not pit itself against other groups. Instead it looks inside at its own issues and successes in order to improve and perform the work as best it can.

Conclusion

Many of the instances where the six secrets have been applied successfully have been those within cultures of positive, purposeful peer interaction that also hold a general concern for all stakeholders' contributions to the results of the organization. Applying the six secrets to change the makeup and productivity of the organization might require a total change in culture. A change in culture can be difficult to achieve but as Fullan explains it might be necessary. This type of cultural change must take place not only from the top down, but also from the bottom up. In many of the examples that Fullan shares, the practice of using the six secrets has been engrained in the organization. Organizations that have employed these six secrets effectively have a certain culture already in place.

In addition to the culture that surrounds the six secrets, Fullan intends that these secrets work in concert with one another. It is possible that leaders who read this book may misconstrue its meaning. Each of the secrets is as important as the other. However they can all be used as a theory to guide action. Albeit, this book is not designed as a plan for creating change, it can be considered a recipe for building cultural productivity and efficiency. Fullan cautions readers

against taking these secrets at just face value. The secrets should be studied at length in organizations where they have been effectively employed to discover the nuances that make the secrets successful.

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