

## **Succession Planning & Management and Leadership Sustainability Through Professional Learning Communities**

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### **Leadership Sustainability**

“When the singer’s gone, let the song go on.” *All I Know*, Art Garfunkel (Webb)

Leadership development for the purpose of ensuring leadership sustainability is the *critical element* in dealing with the cultural changes of professional learning communities.

Changes in leadership typically result in changes in direction for schools and districts. As leaders depart, so do the improvement initiatives that they fostered.

It is not the discontinuity (of leadership) per se that is the problem in sustaining improvement but rather the discontinuity of direction.

(Fullan, 2005)

Established learning communities are more likely to be disrupted or discontinued when a new leader steps into the principalship. Internal focus on the leadership sustainability can certainly counter this discontinuity of direction.

(Fullan, 2005)

The continuity of direction that results from internal leadership development can preserve the core of a school or district’s culture and allow it to stand strong against the buffeting winds of change despite new leaders taking over the helm.

Leadership must be focused on “WE-dership” not “ME-dership”.

Schools and districts that do not put into place processes and structures that allow them to stay the course amidst changes in the individual leader are more likely to expose themselves to external change agents who could dismantle what is current practice. Internal leadership development can inoculate these organizations against any possible attack on their culture.

*Continuity* of quality of leadership matters more than the quality of leadership.

(Collins and Porras, 2002)

The best thinking in leadership has established that no single individual has the necessary skill and authority to bring about sustainable change in an organization.  
(Collins, 2001; Kouzes and Posner, 1996; Kotter, 1996)

Guiding coalitions are effectively assembled teams of the right people who trust each other and work toward a common goal. This coalition will have *the capacity to make needed change happen despite all the forces of inertia. Without a powerful guiding coalition, change stalls and carnage grows.*

(Kotter, 1996)

If distribution of leadership responsibilities is done properly, leadership then becomes *the art of getting things done through other people.* Delegation, communication, and control/monitoring then become essential principal competencies.

Barriers to leadership sustainability through PLCs include:

-lack of support from superintendents and school boards
-lack of support and personal involvement of the building principal
-dependence on individual leaders, and not upon leadership teams, to carry the torch of leadership for an entire schools
-creating poorly designed guiding coalitions to develop and lead the cultural change
-not providing individual teacher leaders the experiences and activities they need to practice their leadership skills

To sustain the cultural changes of professional learning communities, a leadership development framework must include a process that provides for *lateral and vertical capacity building.*

(Fullan, 2005)

Instructional leaders have a moral obligation to ensure that our schools contribute to the sustainability of leadership in the profession. The best vehicle to carry out this moral imperative exists in the constructs of professional learning communities.

We are morally obligated to pass the torch of leadership that was once passed to us.

When you pass the torch of leadership, first make sure it's lit.

## Six Essential Strategies to Promote Leadership Sustainability

1. Create a formal leadership development plan
2. Develop a succession plan with a management component
3. Create a framework that provides for *lateral* and *vertical* capacity building
4. Develop collaborative leadership team/guiding coalitions which support and promote distributed accountability
5. Put teachers into collaborative teams/professional learning communities(PLCs) and appoint one teacher as leader of each team
6. Make leadership development a specific essential job function on all administrative/supervisory job descriptions

(W. B. Hall, 2007)

### **Professional Learning Communities**

The evidence is clear and convincing: PLC concepts are the future for improving schools and school districts. Through properly developed PLCs, school leadership teams and guiding coalitions can make significant improvement in student achievement and leadership development.

As educational leaders, we have heard there are no Silver Bullets; or if such bullets do exist, they certainly do not work, are too costly, or are too impractical. I maintain a few Silver Bullets do exist. The problem has always been that we simply have never had a gun capable of firing any of them. Educational leaders at the building and district levels do have the closest thing to a real Silver Bullet available to them to address the leadership development and leadership sustainability crisis that looms over them. Here is the best news of all – there very well may be a gun big enough and powerful enough to fire that bullet whether it be called succession planning and management, leadership sustainability, or distributed accountability. That gun comes in the form of professional learning communities.

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities.

(DuFour and Eaker, 1998)

One advantage to establishing and maintaining professional learning communities is to develop leadership capacity in the school environment where administrators are viewed as *leaders of leaders* and where teachers are viewed as *transformational leaders*.

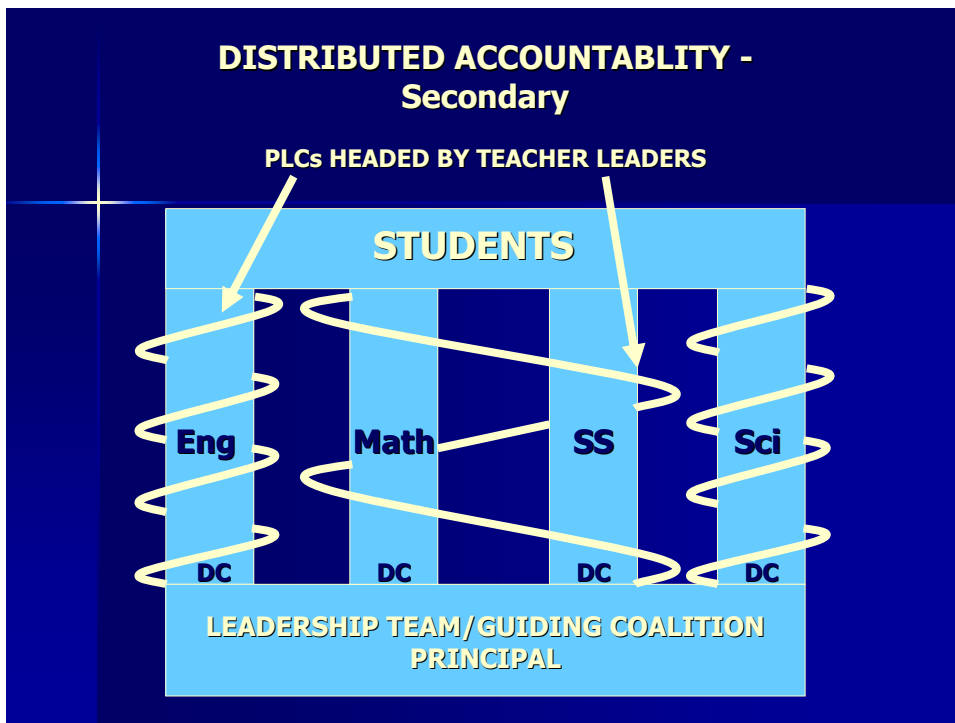
(Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002)

If members of PLCs hope to weather the storms of internal and external changes that swirl about them, leadership development must be a *purposeful, planned, and formal* component of their culture.

Leadership development is a natural outgrowth, a subset of the PLC culture.

Professional learning communities must lay the foundation for developing leaders and leadership capacity as a means to create a critical mass who will continue the focus on school improvement regardless of who the individual leader may be.

If PLCs are to endure changes in the principalship, there must be a focus on developing collaborative leadership teams or guiding coalitions.



(W. B. Hall, 2008)

In their analysis of 35 years of research on school leadership, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) concluded that effective leadership is characterized by a leadership team rather than an individual. They also concluded that a strong leadership team is the natural outgrowth of a “*purposeful community*”.

It is only through collaborative teaming that all individuals along the leadership experience continuum, from novice to expert, can realize their potential and contribute in significant ways according to their unique abilities.

Through properly designed and implemented professional learning communities, *leading and learning occur at the same time and in the same place.*

The principals who lead professional learning communities become *broadcasters*. They have the individual responsibility of being the “keepers of the focus” and providing leadership opportunities to those with talents, gifts, and potential to lead.

(Schmoker, 1999)

Through their day-to-day work in professional development communities, *teacher leaders* will gain real-world field experiences and develop applicable skills.

### **Succession Planning and Management**

If your district has no succession plan, that IS your succession plan.

If you have a succession planning model in place, it’s probably the *Roads Scholar Model*. While driving to work, you think, “Gosh, if Helen leaves us, maybe Dan...um Kris...hmm Cassie...uh Philip...Jennifer perhaps...?”

Without a succession plan, school districts could be:

- One promotion...
  - One retirement...
  - One demotion...
  - One health-related incident ...
  - One winning lottery ticket...
- ...away from disaster

Having a poorly developed succession plan may possibly be better than having no plan at all.

Succession planning allows the momentum and inertia of existing *leadership* to continue long after the current *leader* is gone.

One of the most significant factors affecting the life of a school and sustainability of its improvement efforts is leadership succession.

(Hargreaves)

Succession planning is a means of identifying critical management positions starting at manager and supervisor and extending up to the highest position in the organization.

(Rothwell, 2001)