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School Change and Development

The Influence of a Reflective Practitioner

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ABSTRACT

The forces of change are a reality of today's world. The broad reality of change is impacting on every organisation including schools. Pressures for change will attempt to change the organisation in a particular way. More than often in a process of change there will be an input of an enormous amount of human energy and physical resources that results in change that in effect does not lead to improvement. Therefore, whilst the pressure for change is strong and inevitable, the question remains: How can we ensure that responses to change from managers and teachers within the organisation will lead to school improvement?

The study substantiates the importance of the individual acting in role and learning within a context. The individual, in a leadership role, deals with the reality of change that is part of the routine tasks of the organisation. This study argues that only attention to the individual will bring about long lasting change. People change themselves and people change organisations. Therefore, a model for the learning and development of an individual is described. This model establishes the components of the individual in the action process. These components are described as the public knowledge, personal practical knowledge, the world view of the self-researcher and reflected practice. Learning is from action through reflected practice.

The context is significant as the actions of the individual can only be viewed in context. The context of this study is a long standing stable educational organisation that has withstood and managed pressures for change. The nature of the organisation and the difficulties of changing culture are established. Models for implementing successful organisational change are discussed and the complexities of such a process are established. The elements of change are isolated. The role played and best practices by leaders in a cultural change process are determined. Effective change is measured as second order change, that is, changing beliefs, relationships and techniques related to effective practice.

Qualitative research of self in action and the perception of others of that action provide data that inform practice. This self-study reveals the impact that a leader-as-researcher study can have on self development and improvement within context. The research follows the self-researcher as a curriculum leader in action over a period of three years. The self-researcher's action in context is also reflected on by feedback from an individual interview and from focus groups' perceptions on

the self-researcher's influence and practice. The learnings from this process as reflective practice are related as data and reflected in changed practice. The self-researcher's theories-in-use are examined and made known.

The main findings of the research study reveal the complexity of changing organisational culture. In particular the elements of the resilience of long standing organisational cultures to change are highlighted. The findings illustrate that first order change is achievable through well-planned and implemented action by a functional leader using a collaborative style. However, second order change in this context resisted the self-researcher's change processes even though they were well designed and managed. The findings indicate that achieving second order change that requires a change in an individual's belief systems and an individual's world view that may never be achievable. Leaders may be transformational for those who share the leader's vision for change, however for others change in practices and process can occur but it will not bring a change in people. The impact that this has then on managing a change process indicates that leaders need to be excellent managers. They need to employ a variety of styles and have the courage to follow their vision for change. They need to persist over time and use whatever opportunities arise to move the organisation forward to learn and grow in a process of change.

The other major findings relate to self development through reflective practice. The action learning process uses a model of professional development called leader-as-researcher. The findings indicate that the model used by the self-researcher in the process of change is a powerful tool for self-learning, action and development.

CHAPTER 1

SCHOOL CHANGE, DEVELOPMENT AND THE INDIVIDUAL

INTRODUCTION

We live in a rapidly changing world, and everyone is affected by this change. Without deliberately setting out to change anything, change will occur. This broader reality of change is impacting on every organisation, including schools. The future is unknowable as systems struggle to cope with change forces and effectively respond to these forces. This is the world, in which we live and work, and the secret of growth and development is learning how to contend with the forces of change - turning positive forces to our advantage, while blunting negative ones (Fullan 1993:vii).

In education the meaning of change is broad and often not well defined. Frequently, time and energy are spent on implementing a top down `desired change based on a new theory, new idea, which at best has the impact of being first order change (Milstein 1980). Hence reference to change in the literature often relates to deliberate structured change that has been designed to change the organisation in a particular way and so respond to perceived needs for change. However, the reality for managers and teachers in today's schools is dealing with day to day issues. Change has become a daily event in their lives. The question remains, how do we ensure those responses to change within the organisation will lead to school improvement?

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the research, which is documented in this thesis, is to study the action of a reflective individual entering a school organisation. This contextual study provides a glimpse of the individual, the self-researcher, in action as a school curriculum administrator. The study is an attempt to reveal the impact that the self-researcher has on other individuals within the organisation, and the reflexive subsequent impact on self. The author, the self-researcher, relates perceptions of her experiences in action learning over a period of three years. She illustrates how, through working with people, designed action based on principles of practice, centring beliefs and values

can make a difference to individuals in the organisation. This learning develops an organisation that can deal with change as a daily event and can lead to school improvement.

THE FIELD OF ACTION

The college the self-researcher entered is located in the Australian State of Queensland. It is a long established, inner city Catholic single sex college catering for students from years¹ 5 to 12. In Queensland, schooling is structurally organised on a coeducational primary - secondary basis. The primary years include years 1 to 7, while the secondary years cover years 8 to 12. There is a limited number of K (1) to 12 schools. In the private sector some of these general structures change. In this sector there exists a number of single sex schools with pupils from years 5 to 12. These schools often subdivide into "mini-schools", for example, junior school for years 5 to 7 students; middle school for years 8 to 10 and senior school for year 11 and 12 students. The school the self-researcher entered has the latter structure.

Apart from broad guidelines concerning compulsory education requirements (for example, school age, equity and justice issues), the private school organisation is accountable to either its own 'system' and, or, to its own community. Teachers in both the public and private systems in Queensland are required to be registered with the Board of Teacher Registration. Teachers' working conditions operate under an Industrial Award and a system of site-based enterprise bargaining agreements. Within the award, provision is made for conditions of people in promoted positions. These are called positions of added responsibility (PARs). Also in the agreement are positions of Advanced Skilled Teachers known as AST (QATIS 1993; QTU 1990).

Private schools have operated in an external environment that has experienced pressure for change from a National Government as well as from a State Government level. Government policy has imposed changes in both structures and curriculum in the public school system, allowing the private sector to choose to comply or to find its own way. In the case of curriculum the imposition on the private sector to implement change has been limited to a narrow range of curricula, namely that related to the senior years (years 11 and 12). These requirements exist so that each student exiting year 12 can apply for entry into a tertiary institution. The qualifications for entry are prescribed by State Government legislation that is implemented by a Statutory Authority called the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies.

¹ The term year refers to the years of schooling. Students in Queensland enter school at grade or year 1 and finish at the end of grade or year 12.