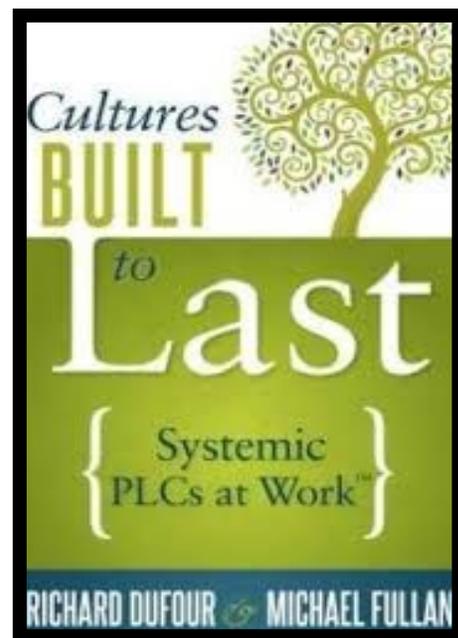


PLCs are about people, practices and processes—they are NOT a program. They are a change in culture. (pg.16)

Richard DuFour and Michael Fullan team up to help leaders move their PLCs to the next level and create large scale educational change.

They present a roadmap for going BIG with PLCs. Making PLCs systemic means people throughout the system have to learn to act in new ways . Together their contributions and collective efforts will make our schools better places for both student and adult learning.



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- Has worked in public school system as teacher, principal and superintendent for 34 years
- Was principal and superintendent of Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Illinois which is a recognized and celebrated school for it’s “exemplar of best practices” in education
- Has written more than 20 books, videos and numerous professional articles
- Consults with school districts and departments worldwide as a leading authority on Professional Learning Communities at Work™





Michael Fullan, PhD

- Is recognized as an international authority on education reform with many of his ideas being used worldwide
- Was Dean at University of Toronto
- Served as special advisor to Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario for 9 years
- Michael is involved in training , consulting and evaluating change projects around the world
- He received the Order of Canada in 2012
- Michael’s work is based on the “moral purpose” of education and how it can bring major improvements
- He has written many best sellers
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Both Rick and Michael can be contacted for professional development at pd@solution-tree.com

The Challenge of Cultural Change

Structural changes like rules, policies and practices can be mandated but cultural change or “the way we do things around here” are often deeply rooted behaviors, habits, beliefs and assumptions that are more difficult to change.

PLCs are a process of lasting cultural transformation

Leaders must recognize the need for whole-school reform and a need for cultural change

There are several challenges to make this cultural change difficult:

- They create conflict
- Require significant changes to practices that have been around for over 100 years
- It is multi-faceted and can’t just focus on one aspect of the organization needing change
- Must find out what works and what doesn’t through a process of trial and error: there is no formula to follow
- Continuous improvement means you never “arrive” (it never ends)



Why We Need Systemic PLCs

PLCs as cultural change can be exciting for people because results can be seen quickly. This creates an energy that draws people in. This “**systemness**” lives in the hearts and minds of the people working together for the betterment of the entire system and is a defining characteristic of the culture. A focused collaboration within schools, districts and the state or province will change the culture of the entire system ...if it is implemented well.

PLCs:

- Improve the overall performance of schools
- Improve engagement of students
- Improve job satisfaction of educators

“System” means multiple schools and communities that are tied together within a single authority

Changing culture in systemic ways is at the heart of any successful large scale education reform. (pg. 4)

Clarity Precedes Competence

We must begin with **clarity** about what it means to be a PLC and what the PLC process involves. There are 6 characteristics of high performing PLCs:

Six Characteristics of High Performing PLCs

1. Shared Mission (purpose), vision (clear direction), values (collective commitments, and goals (indicators, timelines, and targets), which are all focused on student learning
2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
4. Action orientation or “learning by doing”
5. A commitment to continuous improvement
6. A results orientation

The clearer you get , the more you seek skills to make progress; the more skilled you get, the clearer you and others become regarding the principles of the process- a virtuous circle. (pg. 20)

At the CORE of the PLC Process are
3 BIG IDEAS
to Guide Us...



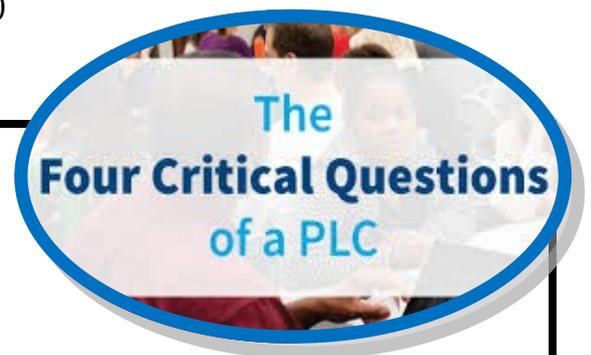
- **A relentless focus on learning for all students:** ensuring that all of our students learning at high levels is our purpose so educators must be continually learning in order to embrace and commit to this challenge. Schools must examine their policies, practices and procedures in order to know that they align and enforce high levels of learning for ALL students.
- **A collaborative culture and collective effort to support student and adult learning:** we cannot ensure this high level of learning by working in isolation. A collaborative culture must be built where teams can be interdependent and have a collective responsibility of working together in a culture of learning from and with each other.
- **A results orientation to improve practice and drive continuous improvement:** in order to know whether all students are learning we must gather evidence and continually monitor student learning. This evidence must be used to provide the necessary supports to students to ensure continual improvement.

(pg. 14-15)

Ask these critical questions to help go deeper in the “learning together” process and focus the learning of ALL students:

1. What is it we want our students to learn?
What knowledge, skills and dispositions do we expect them to acquire as a result of this course, grade level and unit of instruction?
2. How will we know if each student is learning each of the skills, concepts, and dispositions that we have deemed most essential?
3. How will we respond when some of our students do not learn? What process will we put in place to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, precise, diagnostic, directive, and systematic?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

(pg. 15)





YOU ARE the System... you can substitute the word principal, union president, department chair, team leader, or teacher for the term “system leader”...

Systemness-is the degree to which people identify and are committed to an entity larger than themselves-it is not about letting others work to get the system right so that you will be better off. It is about everyone doing their part in 2 ways:

- 1 Be as good as you can be during individual and collaborative work
- 2 Be aware that everyone needs to make a contribution to improving the larger system

Members of a PLC ARE the system individuals seek to create. There should be no clear distinction between the system and the individual.

Choosing the **right drivers will lead to progress.



The coherence making process is **critical** to whole-system reform.

Creating Coherence and Clarity

Whole system reform is about collective **coherence**. Leaders need to cultivate a **shared mindset** among all of the people in the system. This mindset is more important than policies and plans.



A **driver** is a policy intended to have a positive impact on a particular domain. Choosing the right **drivers** are crucial to the reform process.

(Fullan, 2013) identifies 4 wrong and right drivers

WRONG DRIVERS

- Accountability
- Human capital (the talent of individuals)
- Technology
- Fragmented strategies

RIGHT DRIVERS

- Capacity building
- Social Capital (the quality of the group)
- Instruction
- Systemness



FOSTERING A SHARED-MINDSET FOR MAKING PLCs SYSTEMIC

PLCs are a shift in culture. Teachers must collaborate in order to meet the needs of all students not just “their own” students.

Achieving collective coherence, or what we are going to focus on together, is the key.

Here are 4 strategies leaders can use to build coherence:

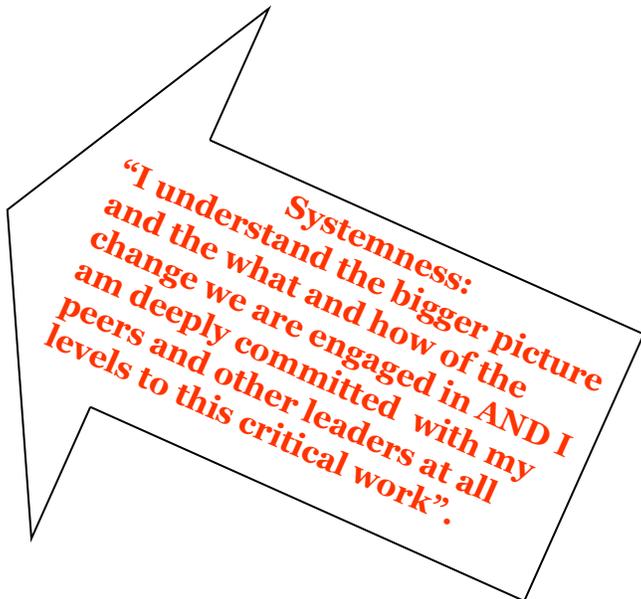
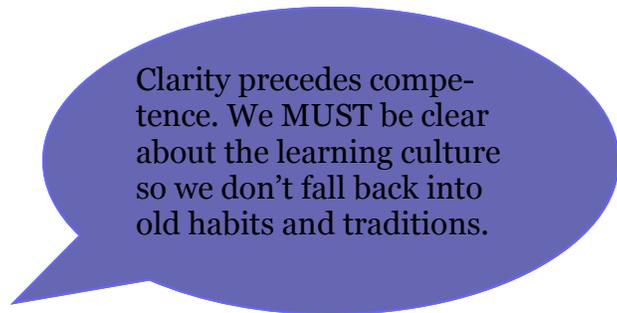
1. **Focus on a small number of ambitious goals**
2. **Make instruction and student achievement the daily agenda**
3. **Organize continuous capacity building around that agenda**
4. **Cultivate a sense of systemness on the part of all**



When people work together and collaborate in bigger circles they begin to identify with each other and the bigger organization.

Systemness can be thought of as the **social glue** that helps people commit to the work.

(Page 30)

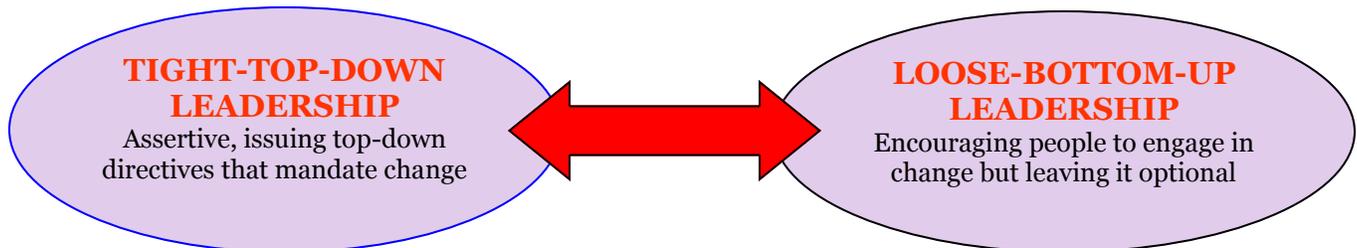


**PLCs play a crucial role in whole-system, sustainable reform when a shared-mindset or embedded coherence is developed. Whole system changes can only happen through wide-spread leadership and collective efforts...
Everyone in the system can
“TALK THE WALK”**



Top Down OR Bottom Up?

The Too-Tight/Too Loose Dilemma



In order to facilitate the process of cultural change leaders must find the right **balance** of both styles of leadership. Direction, coordination or accountability for teachers help to guide their **collective capacity** so that all of our students can learn at higher levels. While teachers need a certain degree of **autonomy** systems must be balanced in order to develop consistency with their purpose, priorities and strategies.

People may “game the system” rather than improve it if the tight-top down approach of “change or else” fails. (Page 37)



Pink (2011) as cited in DuFour & Fullan (2013) warns of the danger of **carrots and sticks approach** which motivates change through rewards and punishments. This form of tight- top-down leadership does not create change, build coherence or clarity it simply can lead to unethical behaviors and short term thinking as opposed to the desired continuous improvement model.



Building a culture that is both **loose and tight** simultaneously means that the system creates some tight priorities or non-negotiables that **EVERYONE** at **EVERY LEVEL** must follow. This can be empowering and allow for some creativity and some discretion about how to pursue the priorities. Ongoing **purposeful interactions** are the answer to maintaining coherence.



Interdependence is the key to this whole-system reform. Leaders must “foster degrees of autonomy but not isolation” in order to achieve the goal of every school being engaged in raising the bar and closing the gap. (Page 39)

What is Tight?

Successful districts exhibit interdependence –vertical and horizontal ongoing interactions that happen inside and outside of schools. This purposeful interaction creates shared coherence. (Page 40)



Principals can ensure they are building a central shared knowledge throughout their systems about their “non-negotiables” and allow people to be part of the **on-going, two-way conversations**. Engaging their teams in these “loose” elements allow for individual schools to increase their **site-based autonomy** and build ownership which through time becomes long-lasting and organic.

Conditions for Non-Negotiables Include:

- A collaborative team creates the structure of the school – **educators will not work in isolation**

THE TEAM WILL:

- Implement curriculum, unit by unit ensuring that all students access the same knowledge, skills and concepts no matter what teacher they are assigned
- Use common, team-developed balanced assessments that include ongoing formative assessments that monitor student learning
- Meet needs of individual students through examination of evidence and build upon the strengths and address weaknesses of teachers and develop strategies for improving the team’s collective capacity for student learning in those identified areas

THE SCHOOL MUST:

- Create a plan to support individual students that are not achieving in a timely, directive, precise and systematic way- ****students must be identified specifically by name and need so that the intervention happens**
- Interact with other schools so that “system” change happens through the interactive learning



Building the capacity of educators to meet the challenges they face requires a servant-leader mindset. A sink-or-swim philosophy does not build capacity; too many people drown.

(Page 51)

The Loose-Tight System in Action: Guidelines to Help Schools and Districts Get on the Right Track

Leadership teams must...

- Work together to build **shared-knowledge** and **deep understanding** among principals and teachers about the rationale for the initiative and how the new standards are different than ones from the past
- Help educators to unpack or translate the standards or outcomes into a **guaranteed implemented curriculum** in every classroom
- Continually monitor the progress of the initiative and its impact on student and adult learning
- Develop the capacity of staff to implement the new curriculum through **reciprocal accountability** and have a positive impact on student learning
- Build **ongoing adult learning** into the process and create a culture that allows learning to occur between educators and schools both inside and outside of the system
- **Recognize and celebrate incremental progress** so that momentum is sustained

(Page 48)

Building Shared Knowledge and Deep Understanding

- Leaders must ensure that people throughout the system understand the reasons behind the initiatives and why it is important
- Engaging in dialogue not monologue and creating two-way discussions throughout the change process

Creating a Guaranteed Implemented Curriculum

- Use a collaborative process to work discover the essential knowledge and skills to be taught
- Create the curriculum framework for all schools through deep analysis that allows for consistent interpretation and implementation

Monitoring Progress at the School Site

- Establish a process to monitor whether or not students are learning by creating benchmark assessments
- Identify areas of the curriculum where students are struggling across the district, individual schools and teams that are having difficulty and need support and schools that can serve as models to others

Supporting Improvement Through Reciprocal Accountability

- Leaders must identify and remove the obstacles that are stopping people from making progress
- Ongoing communication is necessary in order to understand what the obstacles are
- Two-way communication throughout the change process with all members of the system is crucial
- Addressing a variety of questions together throughout the process works to create reciprocal accountability

Building Ongoing Adult Learning Into the System

- This process of working together to gather evidence of student learning and develop strategies to improve gives leaders the tools to change their practice
- Irrefutable evidence of student learning works to help identify and resolve problem areas. Poor results are difficult to ignore if others in the system are achieving
- Educators must use the evidence and results to inform and improve individual and collective practice
- Positive peer pressure and collaborative competition work to im-

prove their teaching and professional practice

- Transparency needs to be fostered to be about openness about both results and the practices that led to the results
- Trust **MUST** exist among the teams and the leaders so that mutual allegiance and collaborative competition work to push people to push themselves and each other in a mindset of :

***We can do better than last year; our school can help kids achieve at higher levels than those schools: that's the power of systemic PLCs**

Celebrating Incremental Success

- The culture of continuous improvement must be balanced by a culture that is committed to identifying and celebrating small wins throughout the journey
- Incremental progress needs to be noted and honored

Professional Learning Communities
Focus on learning-not only for students, but also for the adults who serve them

(page 54)

Sustaining the Improvement Process



One of the most challenging parts of the change process is how to sustain it. Sustaining improvement requires developing many leaders at all levels who are learning from each other in a focused manner.

Leaders must create:

- Coherence and clarity
- Widespread commitment to both long-term goals and short-term action
- A collaborative culture and collective responsibility for achieving goals
- Lots of leaders to sustain reform
- A relentless focus on continuous improvement
- Recognition and celebration of short-term wins
- Engagement in continuous improvement and focused innovation
- Resolute leadership: maintain focus and determination

Sustaining an improvement process demands that leaders do more than hope for short-term wins. They must plan for short-term wins. (Page 76)

The commitment to continuous improvement needs to become “the way we do things around here”.

High performing systems operate under 3 key concepts that become the conceptual framework to guide day to day decisions and enhance coherence:

1. To improve our schools, we must improve the technical core of teaching and learning
2. To improve teaching and learning, we must continually develop the collective capacity of people throughout the system to support high quality instruction in every classroom, every day
3. To improve instruction and support student learning, we must use evidence of student learning to inform professional practice and to ensure that students who struggle will receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, diagnostic, precise, directive, and systematic. (page 65)

A Collaborative Culture and Collective Responsibility for Achieving Goals:

Creating collaborative teams at all levels of the system or “using the group to change the group” is what transforms cultures from isolated to collaborative.

- Being part of a team means working together so people must be strategically placed into meaningful teams. A shared responsibility to improve instructional practices and student learning emerges
- Providing time for collaboration is one of the best resources for continual improvement cultures
- Establishing clarity about the FOCUS of the collective work (page 67-69)



For a list of questions to guide a collective focus on the right work go to:

allthingsplc.info/pdf/tools/CriticalIssuesForTeamConsideration.pdf



When an organization has created widespread ownership of the change process and developed the leadership potential of its members, people throughout the organization take collective responsibility for preserving its culture. (page 72)

Lots of Leaders to Sustain Reform

When leadership transitions happen effective organizations have left behind leaders that can sustain and build upon the success. They are prepared to help the organization and its people grow and adapt to changes and commitment to continuous improvement

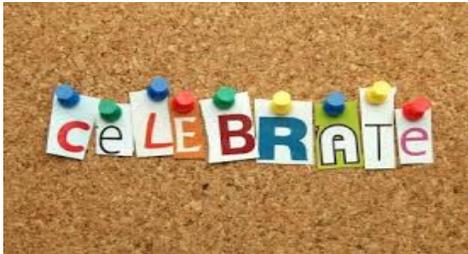
Leaders at all levels create the conditions-structures, support, systems and culture that allow others to succeed at what they are being asked to do.

Everyone’s work is designed to improve the capacity and performance of someone else.

Today’s leaders must take deliberate steps to nurture the development of people throughout the organization to serve as tomorrow’s leaders. (Page 71)



Recognition and Celebration of Short-Term Wins



Successful systems proactively create, identify and celebrate small wins which provide many benefits such as:

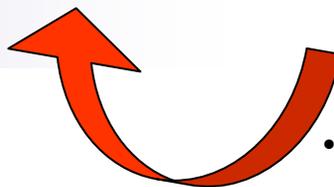
- Breaking long-range goals into doable tasks—building **momentum** with each step forward
- Building self-confidence self-efficacy and hope
-nothing succeeds like success
- Moving people from compliance to commitment—“fence sitters” are given momentum from the results and changes that are happening
- Conveying admiration and appreciation— we all have a fundamental need to be appreciated and recognized for our efforts

(Pages 74-77)



Today more than ever teachers are needing encouragement and expressions of appreciation due to increased demands and expectations.

What really makes a system stick is when large numbers of people at all levels identify and commit to the larger system. (page 77)



Signs of Systemness:

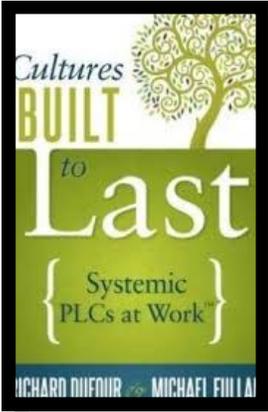
- When people understand that their actions connect with the actions of others
- When there is a common language that creates a shared mindset
- When there is an understanding of what is working and why
- When groups of people can walk the talk and talk the walk



professional development
collaborative culture
effective instruction
consistent curriculum

People realize that there is a system at work and that they and others ARE the system

Richard DuFour and Michael Fullan have created a roadmap to go big with PLCs. Through a change in culture or the “how we do things around here” sustainable, successful changes to teaching and learning can happen which can improve student learning like no other reform has.



PLCs are a systemic process involving people, practices and processes NOT a program that create changes to school cultures and systems. Through the continuous improvement process members become the system and create an identity that works to sustain the growth and changes in both student and adult learning.

Systemness occurs when all members of the organization come together under common vision, goals and collaborate and plan to meet the needs of all members of the school community. Through coherence, clarity and common language our students, our school, our data becomes the shared mindset or “talk to walk” throughout the system. We are the system.

A collaborative and collective effort supports the learning and works to become the foundation for monitoring evidence of student learning and informing professional practices.

We cannot work in isolation anymore. We can achieve coherence through the power of systemic PLCs and move into the future of education with a process that will help us meet the demands of today’s education system. What are we waiting for? Thank you Richard DuFour and Michael Fullan for showing us the way.

Questions for Reflection...

1. How can we ensure “systemness” while working to achieve our individual school and division goals?
2. How leaders be creative when planning for PLC collaborative time in their buildings?
3. In what ways can we support people that are taking longer to become active members in the “system”?
4. How have you celebrated “short term” and “long term” successes in your schools and/or divisions?
5. We constantly hear that kids are different, our classrooms are not like they used to be, we have more on our plates today than ever before. What steps help to make PLCs sustainable and not just the newest fad or band wagon initiative?

Reference:

DuFour, R., & Fullan, M. (2013). *Cultures built to last: Systemic PLCs at work™*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

