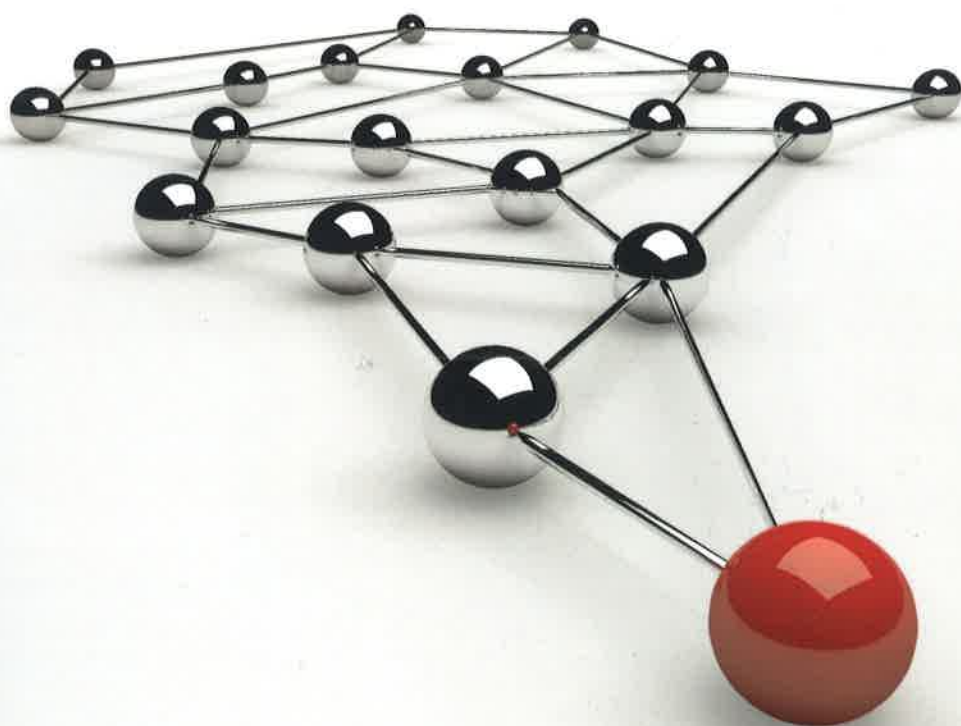


Key Competencies for Whole-System Change

LEADERSHIP



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Knowing You Are Not Alone

CHAPTER

1

As complicated as things are these days in education, the pressures we face as educators pave the path for a radical new way. Some of these pressures arise from the growing realization that the system is wracked with weaknesses; however, positive pressures join these negative pressures and inspire the creation of a new system. This is actually a very good time to be an educational leader, to identify kindred spirits, and to cultivate and mobilize real leaders. Despite this, many high-performing leaders feel alone.

High-performing leaders have forged a path to success that is against the grain and counter to the practices of their colleagues. They have felt the need to keep quiet about what they believe is needed to improve the education process. Such leaders feel they are destined to be alone because the majority of regulators and political leaders will be critical of their practices or, even worse, try to stop them. However, these pioneers are everywhere in the United States and around the world

challenging the status quo in education but often feeling alone in their pursuit. In this book, we show that great leaders are really not alone; they have a network of colleagues who might be described as *below the radar*. Their greatness as leaders can be brought to the surface.

Surprisingly, these below-the-radar groups of leaders actually share common competencies, practices, and traits that make them successful. While they often do not have formal forums to convene and uncover their common practices, they share common ground, creating an extraordinary resource to their profession.

In fact, these great educational leaders share common ground with breakthrough leaders in industry, health care, and the public sector. In this book, we explore some examples from leaders in other professions to help improve the field of educational leadership.

Achieving Simplicity and Focus

Simple can be harder than complex: you have to work hard to get your thinking clear to make something simple. Steve Jobs, cofounder, chairman, and former CEO of Apple, believed that the key to making a difference in the world was through simplicity (Jobs, n.d.).

If our legislators and policy leaders understood the power and elegance of making life easier and simpler for educators, we could move mountains for our schools and districts and, ultimately, for our students.

We must move now to train and support leaders to simplify and focus their attention to fight off distractions. The teachers, principals, and administrators who commit their life work to students deserve an environment that is not mired in the complexity of red tape, regulations, and inane processes for the simplest of issues when all they ever wanted to do was look into a student's eyes, see her potential, and help her realize her dreams.

Educators in the 21st century often do not enjoy their work. They feel blamed for society's problems, and they spend too little time with students and other educators making the dream of education a reality. What has happened with education? Why did it get so cumbersome, complex, and unmanageable? Can we stop new mandates and regulations, or do we have to learn how to cope with this world of education in a new way?

We would like to say there is a simple answer. However, the bureaucracy that education has become has so many contributing factors it would take this whole book to address them. Politicians go in and out of office, each one adding his or her own mark to fixing education with new laws. The departments of education internationally, nationally, and in the states or provinces have their own ever-changing ideas about why education is not working and proposed solutions. Corporations, universities, and a myriad of educational change organizations also add their two cents about solving education's problems. We might even say that educational consultants like us often muddy the waters with our analyses.

We could try forever to unravel who or what is at the root of the problem in education and how to stop it. However, that would defeat the purpose of this book, which is to achieve simplicity and focus.

When we started our quest to help educators simplify and focus, we did so by compiling examples of successful education leaders we knew or had worked with. We were amazed at how many we could identify. Yes, the decades since *A Nation at Risk* was published (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) have taken a toll on educators' energy, but at the same time, a growing number of leaders have had great success. It is these leaders—who have trumped the odds—who give us insight into how to achieve success, even under adverse circumstances. We can take advantage of this growing cadre of real leaders to identify insights and create new networks where good leaders working with other good leaders get even better.

This book tells the stories of how some district and school leaders have stopped the madness of the endless initiatives and mandates—the constant confusion and complexity—and simplified their world for the sake of their staff and students. It is hard work to focus your thinking amid the overload of demands. One must sort through complex, deep issues to make the world of education simple and powerful. We must think deeply about what our vision is for success and determine strategies and actions that we believe will move us to our goals and dreams for the future. Then, we must determine how we will know that our strategies are working and make quick course corrections to stay on track. This may sound complicated and cumbersome, but those who use the principles and strategies we identify in this book will find the way to make a difference.

Simplicity is the art and science of thinking, planning, and measuring our actions against the results we need to achieve. It is also about acting and learning as we go along. The best leaders commit to this reflection as a matter of course and relish the learning along the way. Mary Ann Jackman, former superintendent and a regional assistance director for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, states that to focus and simplify the work for underperforming districts, every school has to have a drumbeat. That drumbeat helps schools focus on and choose which initiatives and strategies will provide maximum impact for their desired results. She further explains that leaders should focus on three questions:

1. Is this the right initiative?
2. Is this the right time?
3. Is this the right intensity for implementation?

Mary Ann speaks of one high school that simplified and focused by examining its countless initiatives and decided to follow the drumbeat of vocabulary development and writing across the curriculum, which leveraged results for all subject areas (M. A. Jackman, personal communication, July 18, 2014).

Simplifying takes work, and it includes honoring the work of others and respecting the commitment they bring to the task. Maren Rocca Hunt, executive director of elementary education in Napa Valley Unified School District in California, notes that central office leaders must work as one unit—one cohesive team—and integrate their work to enable principals to do their best work for students (M. Rocca Hunt, personal communication, June 20, 2014).

This book provides our best thinking about how to make your life simple and meaningful as you meet the day-to-day challenges of educating students for our present and future world. A leader must simplify his or her work to allow the focus on results that everyone wants in his or her district or school. Once we decrease all the noise around us, we can focus our thinking and are thus less susceptible to the distractions that derail us from building great schools and districts. We believe that the road to success involves a combination of (1) using the right drivers for system success and (2) developing core competencies for continuous improvement.

Using the Right Drivers for System Success

The global stage of education has added to the complexity of education reform. The continuous pressure to turn around education is an obsession of policymakers. The United States, Australia, and a growing number of countries are trying to drive reform with better standards, assessments, monitoring, intervention, and teacher development. (By themselves, these are the *wrong policy drivers*, as we will address shortly.) Additionally, in some countries, such as the United States, the corporate community is pushing for results. Corporations are putting pressure on our education system to produce results and prepare students for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

By and large policymakers in the United States have misinterpreted the drive for results in the corporate world. There is a belief that improved education results can be achieved through accountability

and compliance. In any successful business, the focus on results is about motivation and incentives, not compliance and accountability. Successful companies have simplified their systems to focus on customer needs and attracting and motivating the best staff. While all companies do have compliance and accountability functions, they are never touted as the key to success. They are designed to prevent problems—not produce results.

The wrong policy drivers have added layers of complexity and difficulty to education. Although the United States has used these strategies to drive initiatives, these requirements are not relevant in countries that have achieved admirable results in education or successful companies that have obtained results for their customers. This book will help you take a cue from these countries to dig through and remove the extra layers that have been added to education and have made your work more difficult.

While process is very important to sustain results, we must decrease the cumbersome processes for involving constituents in the work of schools and districts. Too often, leaders feel the need to set up numerous meetings with a variety of stakeholders. Without a clear plan, these meetings frequently lead to confusion and frustration as the link to action is unclear or nonexistent. While the input from people is important for results and credibility, the assumption that extra meetings will satisfy people who have concerns may not be true. We can, in many situations, gather input quickly and bring people along in supporting a change through the implementation process. Getting positive results is often more important to people than extra meetings that slow down progress. These processes slow down leaders' ability to get to the actions that generate results. What we refer to as *drivers* are policies and strategies that are intended to have a positive impact on performance. In examining whole-system change, which is central to any lasting solution in education, one of us, Fullan (2011) identifies four wrong drivers that have negative or neutral effects on performance, and four corresponding right drivers that make positive differences. The four wrong drivers

are (1) negative accountability, (2) individualistic strategies, (3) technology, and (4) ad hoc policies. The right policy drivers—(1) capacity building, (2) teamwork, (3) pedagogy, and (4) systemic policies—when combined make a difference in system performance in regard to adult and student learning and achievement. Consider the following.

1. **Capacity building, not negative accountability:** A focus on accountability will stifle our ability to create cultures of excellence. We must move to capacity building.
2. **Teamwork, not individualistic strategies:** Group quality, not individual quality, allows the culture to use everyone's talents to obtain sustainable results. If you want to change the group, use the group for change.
3. **Pedagogy, not technology:** Technology is wonderful but only if it changes the way we think of instruction.
4. **Systemic policies, not ad hoc policies:** Fragmentation and constant discreet initiatives will never create sustainable results. The ability to think from a systemic viewpoint with integrated goals and strategies focuses the work of the education community.

Policymakers who are in a hurry to change the system and think they can legislate success use the wrong drivers. There is no evidence that these wrong drivers create sustainable change and improvement. In fact, the evidence is considerable that these policies have adverse effects on the system (Fullan, 2011).

Ironically, what looks like a quick route to success (the wrong drivers) actually slows down achievement. By contrast, the four right drivers work because they develop new capacities and cultures. To change the system, leaders must change the culture. Focusing on culture is a powerful way to establish a successful school district and system. Culture will always trump any initiative and determine whether a new program will work or not. Many educational policymakers think that a new curriculum and evaluation system will

be the key to results. Yes, we need good curriculum standards and ways of assessing them, but we also need more effective pedagogy—how instructional practice can improve on a large scale. Developing pedagogy, or instructional practice, requires changes in school and district culture—the subject of the remaining chapters in this book.

Developing Core Competencies for Continuous Improvement

Our second organizing principle is that great leaders create the conditions for excellence and drive the cultural change needed to be successful. If we focus on the right drivers for cultural change and identify and support leaders who have the competencies to commit their work to these drivers, we will begin to see great schools and great districts globally. In fact, this book illustrates how many great leaders are already creating sustainable improvements. These great leaders can help you in your journey and can become part of your network for success. As Patrick Lencioni (2012) notes in his book *The Advantage*, a healthy organization is a place where leaders learn from one another, identify critical issues, and recover quickly from mistakes. He also lists five areas that are requirements for success and excellence.

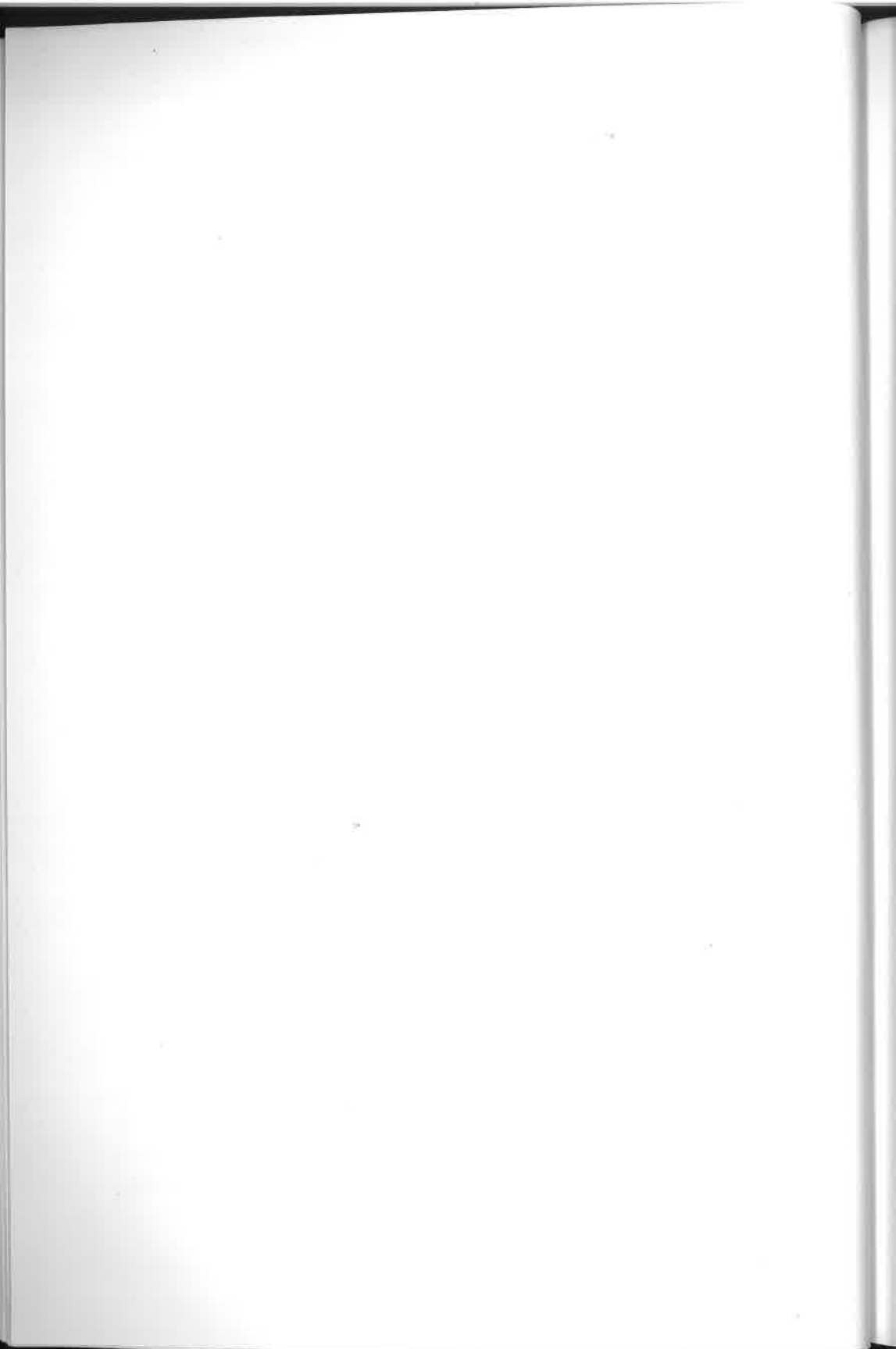
1. Minimal politics
2. Minimal confusion
3. High morale
4. High productivity
5. Low turnover of talented leaders

We must use the right drivers to create the conditions for success and for preventing the formation of a culture that impedes excellence. This work begins with hiring the right leaders who have the competencies for creating healthy organizations that obtain sustainable results.

In this book we focus on seven core competencies originally developed by Lyle based on his research with over 600 leaders nationally and a subsequent study with 200 principals (Kirtman, 2014). In effect, the seven competencies integrate well with the four key right drivers: capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, and systemic actions.

Moving Forward

You are not alone. Now is the time to reach forward, learn from, and connect with other leaders. The solution lies in achieving greater focus and in developing the core competencies that maximize implementation and continuous learning. In the next two chapters, we delve into the seven core leadership competencies. First, we name them and their subcomponents, and provide brief examples of what they look like in action. In chapter 3, we provide four vignettes that show the seven competencies combined in action.



Understanding the Seven Leadership Competencies

CHAPTER

2

Consider the following: the health care industry used to focus on hospital reform. Then, the world of health care became complex, and the focus on individual hospitals as the vehicle for serving the complex needs of patients became limiting. Now, the health care world focuses on health care systems and networks of care. The same shift is imperative for education. Creating education networks and systems will break the paradigm of individuality that exists in education so that we can face challenges together and meet our goals, whether we are talking about districts with five schools or five hundred. Whether we are small or large, we must build partnerships with our community, state, nation, and even the world to serve students' multiple needs and prepare them for the global economy.

While this shift seems complicated, it can become simple if we hire the right leaders

to create and maintain our education systems. These leaders must be able to direct the attention of the district toward sustainable improvement, which involves both managing distractions and setting clear organizational direction. Daniel Goleman (2013) defines attention as focusing on yourself, focusing on others, and focusing on the wider world. He further states that you need all three to be successful. Every leader needs to cultivate this triad of awareness, in abundance and in the proper balance, because a failure to focus inward leaves you rudderless, a failure to focus on others renders you clueless, and a failure to focus outward may leave you blindsided.

Kirtman's (2014) seven competencies (referred to in the previous chapter) are based on his data from several leadership self-assessments (DiSC, Myers-Briggs, and Workplace Personality Inventory [WPI]) and his observations of leaders in action for over thirty years. The seven competencies delineate the traits, characteristics, values, and behaviors of leaders who can focus on their own improvement, build capacity in others, and focus outwardly on the future trends in education. The seven competencies are as follows.

1. Challenges the status quo
2. Builds trust through clear communication and expectations
3. Creates a commonly owned plan for success
4. Focuses on team over self
5. Has a high sense of urgency for change and sustainable results in improving student achievement
6. Has a commitment to continuous improvement for self and organization
7. Builds external networks and partnerships

Figure 2.1 outlines the traits of each competency.

1.	Challenges the Status Quo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Delegates compliance tasks to other staff b. Challenges common practices and traditions if they are blocking improvements c. Is willing to take risks d. Looks for innovations to get results e. Does not let rules and regulations block results and slow down action
2.	Builds Trust Through Clear Communication and Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is direct and honest about performance expectations b. Follows through with actions on all commitments c. Makes sure there is a clear understanding based on written and verbal communication d. Is comfortable dealing with conflict
3.	Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Creates written plans with input of stakeholders b. Ensures that people buy into the plan c. Monitors implementation of the plan d. Adjusts the plan based on new data and communicates changes clearly e. Develops clear measurement for each goal in the plan f. Creates short- and long-term plans

continued →

Figure 2.1: Kirtman's seven competencies for school leadership.

4.	Focuses on Team Over Self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Hires the best people for the team b. Commits to the ongoing development of a high-performance leadership team c. Builds a team environment d. Seeks critical feedback e. Empowers staff to make decisions and get results f. Supports the professional development of all staff
5.	Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is able to move initiatives ahead quickly b. Can be very decisive c. Uses instructional data to support needed change d. Builds systemic strategies to ensure sustainability of change e. Sets a clear direction for the organization f. Is able to deal with and manage change effectively
6.	Has a Commitment to Continuous Improvement for Self and Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Has a high sense of curiosity for new ways to get results b. Changes current practices for himself or herself and others willingly c. Listens to all team members to change practices to obtain results d. Takes responsibility for his or her own actions—no excuses e. Uses strong self-management and self-reflection skills

7.	Builds External Networks and Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Sees his or her role as a leader in a broad manner that extends outside the work environment and community wallsb. Understands his or her role as being a part of a variety of external networks for change and improvementc. Has a strong ability to engage people inside and outside the school setting in two-way partnershipsd. Uses technology to expand and manage a network of resource people
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Although the seven competencies are numbered, leaders' development of them and their application is *not* a linear process. There are circumstances that require the simultaneous application of more than one competency. There are other situations that warrant certain competencies move up to the forefront to obtain desired results.

For example, challenging the status quo is the first competency. This is intentional to emphasize that districts need to find effective methods to make the change process faster. Students' needs in the 21st century global society demand greater urgency of response. Too often the change process is too slow and gets mired in excessive process in an attempt to make all constituencies comfortable and supportive of the change. This does not mean that the new leader would challenge the existing culture the first week on the job, which would be a fast boot out the door. A new leader does need to enter his or her new culture and listen and learn rather than drive change immediately. However, challenging the status quo needs to be integrated into any entry process.

Building and sustaining success is not a linear process. The ability to know when to push and pull is key to all leaders' success. Knowing how to read the tea leaves when moving change forward and pulling back to ensure key people are on board are skills leaders

can develop. Effective leaders focus on their audience. They have the ability to know when they have challenged people to begin to think differently about a problem but know when they need to pull back and let people think and own the change. This is a behavior we often see in great leaders. This is why the team aspect is so important. Every leader needs a team of leaders who can be open and honest in their feedback on when to push and when to pull. The additional perspective that a strong leadership team can provide to a principal can be extremely helpful. For example, additional information concerning which teachers need more of a push on challenging their assumptions about student learning or when it is time to pull back when the faculty is feeling overly criticized is invaluable to a principal. Each team member brings different skills and perspectives that, if used well, can provide a leader the intelligence to make the right decisions and effectively move forward to results for student achievement. Matt Geary, superintendent of the Manchester School District (Connecticut), is a master at reading the tea leaves. He is very clear about the urgency of results for students now but through his commitment to leadership development for his administrators is always taking the temperature of how people are managing the change process. He might not pull back for long, but he does realize that it takes time for people to integrate change into their practice (M. Geary, personal communication, September 12, 2014).

Now, we will explore each competency in detail.

Competency One: Challenges the Status Quo

In assessing leaders' competencies, Lyle (Kirtman, 2014) found that most leaders were highly compliant to state, federal, and local mandates and practices. Interestingly, this was *not* the case for the most effective leaders. High-performing leaders were not rule followers and not overly compliant. This did not mean that high-performing leaders broke any laws. It does mean, however, that the best leaders focus on results first and put less personal effort into

ensuring that rules and compliance tasks are followed. They usually delegate the more transactional compliance tasks to others and have good systems to make sure the compliance work is completed. One way of describing it is that they are prepared to get a grade of C on compliance as long as they get an A on learning. Their priorities are to spend more time on developing other leaders and the group, creating a compelling vision for the school, and enhancing parent involvement than on completing compliance tasks.

Challenging common practices and traditions that block progress is also part of this competency. A leader must be able to respect traditions and community norms but also challenge their validity in a 21st century environment. If the norms are having a negative impact on student achievement results, leaders must challenge them respectfully.

Risk taking is another aspect of the first competency. Everyone has a different risk tolerance. We do not want to take risks with students' safety. However, trying a new practice for discipline that may engage a student in learning may be more effective than enforcing a rule or punishment. It is important that leaders keep student learning in the forefront of their minds at all times. The most effective leaders do not ask for permission, although they communicate often with their supervisor about their intended plans and seek counsel on how to be successful. This provides an opportunity for the supervisor to slow them down or help them change direction if necessary. This also allows leaders to keep moving if their supervisor does not engage in the issue in a timely manner. The trust that can build through this healthy partnership allows leaders to feel free to move ahead with their vision.

Being innovative is also part of challenging the status quo. Too often people say, "We have tried that approach before, and it did not work." Others might say that the innovation will create confusion and upset people. Innovation is a key to results for districts. We must try new approaches to reaching our students, gaining community support, and engaging our staff. Yes, innovation may not

always be received positively in more conservative cultures. However, if traditions are valued and innovation is thoughtfully introduced, the results can be extraordinary.

Leaders must have the courage to challenge a district's or school's assumptions and traditions. Most school systems state that they want to prepare students for the 21st century, but they do not take the corresponding actions to test and make these changes. They often play it safe and avoid upsetting people, or worse, they end up hiring a high-profile leader who tries to blow up the status quo and create top-down change. In such cases, the message to a new leader coming in to the underperforming system is to get results now, while the system's culture is defensive and seems to take the stance of let's see who leaves first. The fear of change or job loss creates an antagonistic culture clash between change and preservation that usually results in the leader leaving in a short time with the battle scars remaining throughout the district. The leader may have achieved some short-term results, but he or she has not changed the culture to enable long-term success. Then, the school board or the superintendent hires a new leader to ease tensions and calm the waters. Change now takes a backseat, and the status quo prevails.

We will show how leaders have challenged the status quo and norms of the system and community to allow them to lead without fear. This, of course, means removing the shackles of accountability that the federal and state government use to restrict leaders from creating exciting cultures of innovation. The special skill set to challenge norms and gain support from the same people who feel they are charged with protecting and preserving those norms is essential for cultural change.

For example, one high-performing principal, Cate Cullinane, challenged her district's protocol for suspension. This middle school principal went against convention and showed courage and commitment by not suspending students for an early offense that she believed was not minor. She thought it was time to stop suspending students over and over again. She believed her work was not to

suspend students but rather create a learning environment to engage students in self-management behavior. She also knew she needed parents to be her partners in this work on self-management.

When a student had a behavior issue, she met with the parents, explaining her goal and commitment to the teaching and learning process. Instead of suspending the student, she requested the parent work closely with her on educating and disciplining his or her child. The result was a dramatic decrease in suspensions in her school, while other principals continued to have increases. Additionally, the test scores went up, including the students who would have been suspended. Cate's experience showed that the vast majority of parents appreciate being informed that their child's behavior is disruptive to his or her education or steals the education of others in the class. She found that a phone call to a parent after the third time a child had been asked to leave the class prompted the parent to ask, "Why was I not called about this the first time?" Word spread quickly to students that parents will be called immediately when a problem occurs. Cate also spends time with students and parents on their goals for the future, which becomes motivating for the joint focus on education and decreases the negative behavior (C. Cullinane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).

Competency Two: Builds Trust Through Clear Communication and Expectations

Trust is a core factor in cultural change. Trust, of course, has to be earned—it can't just be obtained by leaders who say, "Please trust me." Our rule of thumb for developing trust is to "name it, model it, and monitor it." Trust is also enhanced when the leader builds a talented effective team. In his research, Lyle (Kirtman, 2014) defines *trust* in two ways. First, some leaders define it as whether they can count on a person to fulfill his or her commitments. Thus, reliability and efficacy are key indicators. The other definition that many leaders use is whether they can trust the person to not betray them or speak behind their back and do harm to their reputation.

As leaders, sometimes we can get lost in trying to establish trust with many groups that we have little time to work on our goals. In other words, trust and action go hand in hand. Kirtman (2014) found that effective leaders score high on a “sense of urgency for change.” If a leader is clear in what she is saying and consistent in her actions, trust seems to thrive.

Another key area for trust building relates to clarity of performance expectations for staff *before* actions are required. If a leader is direct with his staff about what he expects from them to be successful, the trust seems to build and sustain over time. Trust is also built by fulfilling commitments and meeting deadlines. If a leader follows through, his staff can count on him, which ultimately builds trust.

Written and verbal communication directly affects trust. If one’s spoken or written words are inconsistent or vague, mistrust can develop. For example, email is designed to enhance communication, but it can often be unclear and can create mistrust. Person-to-person communication is often critical to building trust with email used as follow-up for documentation and deadlines.

Finally, a leader’s ability to deal with conflict is very important to building trust. If a leader avoids conflict or hopes it will get better on its own, the conflict can erode trust. If the leader deals with conflict head on, he or she can rectify the situation before it affects trust. In fact, if handled well, conflict can increase trust.

Following is an example of how communicating and setting clear expectations can simplify the complex concept of trust. Lyle acted as a coach for a suburban district principal who was a very caring and sensitive man. He believed in his faculty and cared deeply for students. His school was mired in mediocrity. When asked what one change or intervention he believed would start edging his school to excellence, he responded immediately about how he supported teachers. As a coach, Lyle was supportive, but in a direct manner he asked, “Support is fine, but is it leading to improved student achievement?” The principal struggled with the question. He was stuck in the inertia of passive support—not willing or able to take

action that would simultaneously challenge the status quo and provide teachers with more demanding and clearer expectations and associated actions.

This principal was reticent to give his opinion because he was afraid that his teachers would be upset. Eventually, the principal, with confidence, said that increasing student engagement would be a key factor for success. He was then asked about how he would tell his faculty that he believed student engagement was critical for success. The principal fell back to his previous approach and stated that over the year he would have conversations with faculty and try to find opportunities to coach staff on increasing their engagement with students. Lyle responded again with clarity and passion. Using the competency of building trust through clear communication and expectations, he challenged the principal to decrease his fear of losing relationships and to start the year by presenting in his opening speech the importance of increasing student engagement.

The principal took Lyle's coaching advice and started the school year with a clear expectation that teachers would engage students. His worry that the faculty would be upset turned out to be completely unwarranted. The principal used his strength of being supportive and caring to convey that he would help each faculty member improve his or her skills in student engagement.

The school collectively focused on his clear expectation, and test scores subsequently increased. It is not always this straightforward, but here we have a leader, with assistance from a persistent coach, who took the chance of challenging the status quo and developing trust and supporting high expectations. A reticent principal, whose teachers actually wanted to move in this direction, was rewarded when he took the chance to act in a focused manner.

Competency Three: Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success

Leaders who can analyze complex data and situations and think, plan, and act systemically are successful in education. As state and federal initiatives and directives add new plans every year and fragment our schools and districts, leaders who are successful in simplifying and consolidating their plans are better able to advance their goals.

One of the key lessons from Michael's *motion leadership* work (leadership that moves individuals and leaders forward) is "beware of fat plans" (Fullan, 2010, p. 24). There seems to be a tendency on the part of leaders to create great-looking, comprehensive plans that end up on a shelf. Better to develop short plans (two or three pages) that are inspiring, "sticky," action oriented, and alive for implementers. Skinny, focused plans are *sticky* because they are close and connected to day-to-day actions. One guideline for leaders is to remember that ultimately implementation plans are for the implementers, not the planners.

We will show how successful leaders have taken multiple complex plans for technology, parent involvement, student achievement, accreditation, special education, and many more areas and created one- to two-page plans for success. Though short, these plans can meet all the requirements and mandates to map the road to success.

Fragmentation from overly complex plans creates extra, unnecessary work that ties up the same people in attending countless meetings and drafting and editing endless documents to implement high-leverage goals and strategies for success. People do need to have something in writing to look at and refer to as they navigate the waters of constant change. The plan needs to be clear and easy to update as conditions change. We must be able to easily monitor success to determine the need for course corrections. If the measurements are too cumbersome to allow for quick assessment, the change will be too little and too late to make a difference. Later, we review the process of strategic planning and identify the aspects that allow for fast results—simple,

skinny planning documents are more effective than elaborate ones that look great on paper but do not work in reality. Often the time and effort of a strategic plan exhaust a school and system, preventing educators from learning from implementation. It is important to shorten the process up front and lengthen the interactive effort of learning from implementation.

Technology can be a key driver in strategic planning. However, when treated as a separate initiative, technology loses its impact for change through a lack of integration into the teaching and learning process, thus being a negative driver; however, when pedagogy is linked to results, technology can accelerate learning. In Fullan's (2013) book *Stratosphere*, he shows that the typical approach to adding technology is to purchase it without much thought given to how it will be used to further learning. In his follow-up work on new pedagogies for deep learning, he provides several examples with respect to how pedagogy becomes the foundation for which technology is the accelerator for deep learning (see especially the video on Park Manor at www.michaelfullan.ca).

One principal in an urban environment with a large population of at-risk students was heading into a school year on a state-improvement plan. In addition, each district initiative required a plan and a technology plan. The stack of plans was almost ten inches high when put on a table. No one could speak about what was in the plans because they were so unmanageable.

With the help of a coach, the principal learned about the benefits of adopting the one- to two-page skinny plan approach to decrease the paper and develop a laser focus for improving student achievement. The team then developed a two-page plan complete with the principal's clear expectations. In many states, the focus on improvement is directed at a complicated evaluation process for performance of teachers and administrators. As Fullan (2014) shows, such procedures lead principals down a path of micromanagement that is as ineffective as it is unwanted by teachers and principals alike. These monitoring documents are often hundreds of pages with more than thirty rubrics

for improvement. If an administrator tried to implement these plans as stated, he or she would have little time to ever meet with teachers and coach them for improved instruction.

The streamlined approach became the subject of continual discussions with faculty, the central office, and the community. Each key meeting involved updating the plan, celebrating successes, and refocusing priorities that were beginning to drift.

The school is no longer designated as underperforming, and the district is adopting its planning process. Now, school staff can tell you what the plan says and what it means to them in terms of their role and contributions. Skinny plans include:

1. A clear vision, mission, context, or description of what problem needs to be solved
2. High-level strategies and initiatives for major impact on student achievement
3. Reference to other plans that might be required by the state or federal government
4. Key timelines for high-level action

Competency Four: Focuses on Team Over Self

This competency connects strongly to two drivers for system success: (1) capacity building and (2) teamwork. Thus, this team-building competency is a high-leverage aspect of cultural change.

Ultimately, a leader is only successful if he has built leadership capacity in his school and district. A team is a group of leaders with a common purpose and set of goals who work to implement them to completion and to achieve results. According to Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith (1993), "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 111).

Unfortunately, many leaders do not realize that they cannot just put a group of people together and call it a team. It takes hard work to build a highly effective team that helps the leader build a results-oriented culture. In addition, leaders must be able to self-reflect and become voracious learners about their own strengths and areas for growth. A leader's vulnerability and openness for honest feedback are crucial for true team development and capacity building. We review tools and practices necessary for leaders to sustain their learning journey using real-life examples and reflections.

A high-performing leader hires the best people and never settles for second best. Many leaders panic and put warm bodies in key roles when no great candidates have emerged. These leaders always look back and say, "I wish I did not settle," because a poor performer drags down a team's results and is hard to remove. It is better to keep looking for the best person and fill the position on an interim basis.

Teams are not static. Every time a new person joins, the team dynamics change. The best teams constantly work on their development and improvement. A leader must be secure in his or her confidence and ability to lead and be willing to hear critical feedback and support the team even if he or she would do things differently. The leader needs to focus on outcomes and results—not on how the work is done. Empowering people to work together and seek guidance from one another will achieve better results than top-down leadership.

Often leaders claim they know what their teammates think of them and how they are perceived. We have found that most leaders are wrong about their perception and underestimate the subtleties that exist in forming teams that can derail success. In this book, you will hear about leaders who have strong moral imperatives and self-awareness that guide them every day and allow them to stay steady when they feel attacked or when their self-confidence begins to erode. Laura Schwalm, former superintendent of Garden Grove School District in Anaheim, California, who we will meet later, represents a superb example of having a strong moral compass that she

combines with an equally strong action bend to fulfill the district's mission.

A leader needs to distribute the leadership, not just delegate tasks. For example, a principal can ask his or her assistant principal to lead the implementation of a goal on improving morale. A superintendent might delegate to a staff member the researching of what private schools in the community offer that may be competing with the district. If a leader builds a team that is truly effective, the team can function whether or not the principal is in the school. The leader can then focus on providing professional development to the team and to each individual staff member to improve his or her leadership skills.

The following story about a Midwestern superintendent in the months before 9/11 demonstrates the power of a team. The district had a management team (not a true leadership team). Each school and department reported on its work at management team meetings. The team received assignments and had very little collaboration unless the superintendent required it. The superintendent wanted to change this dynamic and create an interdependent team that acted from a system perspective, rather than a passive, silo-based perspective.

The superintendent began by establishing a new leadership team for the district. This change in nomenclature was only step one. Team members learned to examine themselves as leaders and to be direct and honest with each other for the betterment of the system. They learned to work together to help each member be successful. The superintendent began the process by being vulnerable and discussing his strengths and weaknesses and modeling a process of using leadership assessments to open up the discussion for each team member. The members of the team became more forthcoming in talking about their areas of strength and improvement based on leadership assessments and past evaluations.

On September 11, 2001, the superintendent was three hours away from the district. He immediately drove to the district to begin meeting with his team and planning a strategy for dealing with all the complexities it would face that day. When he arrived, he was

shocked. The team members had all come together and met immediately after 9 a.m. and proceeded to develop a plan of action. They were well into the implementation of their plan when he walked in. No one waited; the team knew what it had to do and never hesitated. The superintendent was apprised of the plan, and he joined the team's effort. Sometimes you don't know the impact you are having until you see it in action.

Competency Five: Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement

Leaders who think systemically are often courageous and know how to create a results-oriented environment. Such leaders possess a sense of urgency for student results. This urgency is not reactive and crisis oriented; rather, it is strategic and purposeful to prepare students to be successful in their work and life. In education, adults often have trouble with fast change, but urgency is important. The world is changing so fast for our students. Education should not slow down change but rather enrich the change process.

Urgency means moving key initiatives forward quickly without too much process. Too many initiatives can overwhelm staff and create confusion and withdrawal. However, if the initiative is strategic, well thought out, and guided by the seven competencies in action, it can move ahead quickly.

Leaders practicing the fifth competency must be decisive. A leader who is too consensus oriented tries to please everyone, and the process can paralyze him or her. A strong leader can be decisive and move ahead quickly but adjust his or her strategies based on new data if the desired results are not reached. Moreover, the leader who has established a culture around the seven competencies will find that staff have also developed a strong sense of urgency for making progress.

The use of instructional data is critical to establishing a sense of urgency. However, sustainable change comes from creating a team-oriented learning environment where data are analyzed and used to determine needed change. If data are used to confront people on their poor or ineffective practice, it can create a blaming culture that will not result in sustainable change. If staff feel defensive, they will withdraw and miss opportunities to learn and change to meet student needs. Therefore, data must be used carefully to indicate areas for improvement, but must be delivered in a way that is motivating for change, not punitive and critical.

Change must be systemic. Change in one classroom or one school does not usually result in cohesive strategies for system change. If a new program is funded by a grant for a short period without developing a continual source of support, the program will die from lack of funding. Many districts have lost high-impact programs because of a lack of sustainable funding.

Too often, leaders successfully create a sense of urgency but do not know how to lead and manage the change process. The art and science of managing change is critical for leaders. Change is not a one-size-fits-all process. Leaders must also understand and support staff members' personal transitions. Each person deals with change individually. The new change could represent a loss of past practice to one person while another person sees the change as a welcomed opportunity.

For example, one high school principal was new to a relatively high-performing school where the faculty did not have a contract and were constantly in conflict and fighting each new innovation meant to prepare students for the 21st century. The school had no plan for change. Why did they need to change, staff wondered, when they were already among the best?

The leadership team was asked what it planned to do to move the school ahead and create a new culture of excellence and teamwork. The team responded that it would study the culture for the year and write a report to determine the approach for the next school year.

Instead, Lyle, the consultant, charged with helping the team create a sense of urgency, asked team members to decrease the process to one hour—perhaps a bit of an overstatement for dramatic effect. The principal and team were shocked. They worried that they were being fired and that the superintendent hired the consultant to drive them out. The consultant assured them that he was not there to fire them but to support them in their change initiatives. He pointed out that their long timeline and process would actually decrease their chance of success.

He believed this team could be successful and that its commitment to its students and families was admirable. He provided his assessment of the culture, pointing out the pervasive lack of leadership to achieve results and that team members were the ones who needed to turn the culture around. They listened intently and agreed with the assessment, acknowledging that they wanted to lead the change but needed support and help. The consultant, excited about the team's remarkable lack of defensiveness and admirable commitment to results, said he would be there to help.

The plan for action began. The team met twice a week, even during vacation for one month. The team then met with Lyle and the principal to review their work. The team proposed a restructuring of the leadership positions for the school. They created a position of academic affairs to gain focus on student achievement and determined that this may require hiring a new person. They were also focused on a new structure for discipline and realized that this would require a separate planning effort for the team. The discipline in the school was divided between three people and lacked a coherent strategy. They believed the new structure would allow the team to move initiatives forward faster. They realized that they needed to change more quickly rather than study the issues of discipline over the year, which was creating a reactive environment. The instructional data showed that while the school was successful, there were pockets of low performance and a schoolwide focus on instruction would improve all students' performance. The change needed to be comprehensive and not just

focus on the source of stress or discipline. The new structure would set a new direction for the school of one school, not three houses. The team also realized that change is difficult and they would have to let go of the students they felt ownership for in their house. Instead, they had to think schoolwide and help all students achieve.

Sustainable change is an ongoing process and involves many more people in administration, the central office, and within the faculty. In fact, parents and community members, and finally the students themselves, need to be part of the new culture's design. Additionally, the change process can be remarkably faster than we think, *if* leaders exhibit the seven competencies. We will return to this key point later on.

Competency Six: Has a Commitment to Continuous Improvement for Self and Organization

The focus of the states and federal government on compliance, evaluation, and negative accountability creates cultures of caution and fear. Successful leaders embrace learning and improvement for themselves and their staff. When we are committed to continuous learning, we see that 21st century evaluation systems are cumbersome, punitive, restrictive, and limiting. More is accomplished in continuous learning environments than in environments based on fear and failure.

If a leader understands that the journey to great leadership is constant and never fully obtained, he or she tends to be a high performer. The principal who feels she has learned to be a great leader from her education or experience and does not continue the learning process often slips back to lower performance. Great leaders must be curious about what they can learn from others to always get better at their craft. They must be open to change even if they have been successful in the past with tried-and-true practices. Building an environment of continuous improvement requires a lot of listening. Extroverts are

often excellent communicators and successful in reaching a range of constituents about their message and vision. However, if one talks too much or otherwise dominates and does not listen and really hear what others are saying or thinking, he or she will miss opportunities to learn as well as fail to develop key leaders in the school or district.

Leaders who are always striving to improve take responsibility for their actions and do not use excuses for mistakes or lack of results. If a leader believes that an excuse will relieve him of responsibility for results, he has taken the first step to failure. There are a range of challenges and barriers that great leaders face that can derail anyone. However, the best leaders find new ways to get results and never let any problem derail their success.

Finally, the high-performing, continuously improving leader is very strong at self-management. This leader does not triple-book meetings, arrive late to appointments, miss deadlines, or make promises she cannot meet. These leaders are always improving their skills in tracking projects, setting priorities, and getting results and are often ahead of deadlines. These leaders may need to have a strong assistant or team to support them on self-management, but they never abdicate personal responsibility to others.

Modern industries want students who are open to learning and experimenting and not fearful of failure. Despite this, in schools, we create evaluation systems based on a culture of fear. If we have leaders who are cautious and reticent to embrace the fast-changing world, then staff will face the same anxiety. Great leaders who embrace continuous learning still implement the required evaluation systems; however, they transform evaluation from a rating process that supports fear of failure to a goal-setting endeavor with dialogue that creates innovative processes for growth and development.

When an urban district bought into the concept of continuous improvement, staff were faced with changing demographics and the dramatic increase of at-risk populations. They were quite innovative but lacked focus and clarity. The number of administrators decreased in the district as resources diminished, and the leadership

team felt overwhelmed and exhausted. Sound familiar? The district had a traditional evaluation process that was very compliant and not motivating to faculty and administrators. They struggled with providing direct feedback to people due to a previous culture of interest-based bargaining and collaboration. They had created a culture where direct feedback on performance was considered uncaring and insensitive and damaging to relationships.

Led by the superintendent and some of his key administrators, the district set out to change the culture to one of continuous improvement. Each administrator examined him- or herself as a leader and reflected on how he or she could improve. Administrators were then trained and coached to provide direct feedback to each other and to be honest about problems and concerns. No more behind-the-scenes conversations about problems!

They overcame their fear that honesty would damage their collaborative culture. The district's culture is now becoming much more direct and honest, and its previous commitment to collaboration has not only survived but flourished. Schools' innovations are now more focused, and they're addressing problems inhibiting results with a sense of urgency. Previous meetings were positive on the surface, but there was an undercurrent of frustration and a lack of focus. Meetings have now become places where continuous improvement and honesty rule.

Competency Seven: Builds External Networks and Partnerships

This final competency involves reaching out to form partnerships, access new ideas, and jointly solve problems with others. In this book, our best leaders will show how they find time to build their own networks of support. Technology and social networking can empower us, but too many educators fear them as vehicles for conflict and blame. A leader's ability to see the world as his or her network of support is a defining competency for today and in the

future. You will hear how educators who are great leaders create true, expansive learning networks.

Partnerships that are a two-way street, built on a foundation of mutual respect, and focused on addressing specific problems create a push-and-pull dynamic that produces results. A principal is not just the school's leader; he or she is also a part of a district group of principals and the network of principals in the state, country, and world. Forming networks of colleagues and contacts in education and other fields is a key to success for great leaders.

A leader must know how to give and receive help from colleagues to feed and grow a support network. The days of only engaging people who can help you have long passed. We must be willing and able to help others fully develop two-way partnerships. To help people in our network, we must understand others' goals and needs and their organizations in order to help them meet their goals. This two-way relationship creates sustainable support, not just one-time assistance with a problem.

We must be able to get out of our office, school, district, and state or province to learn from others we might not think can offer us anything relevant for our work. You will be surprised to find out that the opportunities and resources are unlimited.

Most educators feel they have no time or do not know how to build networks and expand their leadership to building education systems. In this book, you will learn how to increase your resources by partnering with colleges, universities, community groups, private-sector businesses, and professionals. You will also learn how to help your partners achieve success instead of just asking them to help you. If leaders know how to build other leaders' networks, they will reap more benefits for their districts, schools, and students.

One superintendent in the southeast United States lived and breathed partnerships and created broad networks in her office and through the district. She built a culture of excellence and customer service that could be a model for any district. She never started a

sentence on a new collaboration externally with the public or private sector with the word *no*. This superintendent was focused and strategic about how the partnerships would fit into her plans for improving student achievement. Therefore, the intensity and timing of the external relations ebbed and flowed based on needs and resources. The community faced dramatic financial cuts based on the politics of its state. This superintendent didn't let any problem stop her plan. She took a step back when the impact came but then immediately mobilized her support network. She went to her partners and asked them to help keep the district afloat. The community responded with support for the district. She did not have to cut one teacher or stop any key initiative that was critical to its desired results. Then, in a year, resources improved, and she could keep her base network and add new resources to enhance the district's strategies for success.

Seven Dynamic, Interactive Competencies

In this chapter, we have framed the leader's work in relation to the seven competencies derived from Lyle's study (Kirtman, 2014) of highly effective leaders. We have also provided brief examples from leaders with whom we have worked. Before proceeding to direct advice for leaders in chapters 4 and onward, we want to reinforce the dynamic, interactive nature of the competencies by examining in more detail actual examples in action in the next chapter.