

**Partners in Learning**  
**Learning to Lead Change: Building System Capacity**  
**Leadership for Change Library**

**School Reform from the Inside Out**  
**Richard Elmore**  
**Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003**  
**277 pages**

Strictly speaking, this book is not about leadership, but it has so many fundamental insights that it is a must for leaders. Elmore bases his book on the conclusion that despite a half a century of reform in which countless waves of changes have been made in organizational and managerial structures and practices, instructional content and pedagogy in the classroom remain remarkably stable. The instructional core of teaching remains largely unaffected.

Elmore is especially strong in redefining accountability. He argues that no external accountability scheme can be effective in the absence of internal-to-the-school accountability. He shows that the latter goes missing in most schools, but then provides clear case studies that demonstrate what internal accountability looks like and how it functions. Such schools align individual responsibility of teachers with collective expectations of the group as they pursue data-driven instruction. As schools develop their internal accountability they proactively respond to the external accountability system including accepting and internalizing it; rejecting it and developing defenses against it; or incorporating those elements of the system that the schools deem relevant. The interaction of individual responsibility, group expectation, and accountability to themselves and the system constitutes effective accountability.

Elmore radically redefines leadership and above all the development of new leaders, which he bases on five principles:

1. The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance
2. Instructional improvement requires continuous learning
3. Learning requires modeling
4. The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the dictates of the institution
5. The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity

Elmore provides us with two additional powerful concepts — learning in context and capacity building. Learning in context is learning that is embedded in the day-to-day culture of focusing on continuous improvement. Reminiscent of another book in our top 20 (*The Knowing-Doing Gap*), Elmore says that improvement is more a function of learning to do the right things in the setting in which you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work.

A second key concept is capacity defined as the resources, knowledge and skill that the teachers bring to the instructional core, and the ability the organizational surroundings — the school and the larger institutional environment — to enhance and support the resources, knowledge and skill of the teacher and the student.

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## **School Reform from the Inside Out**

**Richard Elmore**

New capacities, says Elmore, are needed all round. State departments of education need the capacity to select, implement and monitor sound measures of performance; schools need support in developing internal coherence and instructional capacity; schools and districts need help in creating reasonable, diverse ways of assessing student learning, and teachers need support in acquiring the knowledge and skill required to reach large numbers of students with more demanding content.

Elmore calls for a wholesale change in the incentive system of schools: incentives, working conditions and especially leadership at all levels of the system which result in more focus, more sustained effort, greater attention to the core processes of instruction, and more discipline in holding the policy agenda steady while providing the resources, support and accountability framework for teachers and students to respond.

### ***Why We Like This Book***

In a word, it is so damned incisive. Time and again Elmore gets it right. He gets to the heart of the problem, explicates it clearly and concisely, and points productively to the direction and nature of the changes that will be required. Nobody writes with more analytical power than Elmore. This book is refreshing and daunting at the same time. We realize how very long the road to reform will be.



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