

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

Change Forces with a Vengeance
Michael Fullan
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112 pages

Change Forces with a Vengeance (CFWAV) is the third book in the chaos theory trilogy (now called complexity theory). The first two books focused on understanding the real complexity of educational reform in action. This book pushes even deeper by providing new insights and lessons of change concerning moral purpose and tri-level reform (reform at the school, district, and system levels). It takes up the daunting question of how systems can be changed for the better. The book addresses questions of large-scale reform and the conditions necessary for sustainability. It discusses the policy levers that are needed and identifies a set of policies that will maximize impact and the new role for leaders.

The book begins by discussing *New Horizons*. Horizons refer to the scale, scope, and intellectual depth of reforms. Horizon #1 reforms are about the first level of accomplishment related to large-scale reform efforts that have a *systemness* quality and cites examples from England and the U.S. that set out to alter the system while improving literacy and numeracy for the vast majority of students in the system. CFWAV argues that there are richer horizons in our sights. The ultimate horizons (Horizon #2 reforms transform) have to do with deeper transformation and sustainability where we see collective informed professional judgment flourishing. This requires capturing the deep moral purpose and commitment of all teachers.

Fullan summarizes the core concepts of complexity theory (non-linearity, unpredictability, interaction, the edge of chaos, social attractors, butterfly effects, and a complex adaptive system) and identifies *eight lessons for complex change* "that operate in interaction providing internal checks and balances" (these are congruent with the previous two sets in *Change Forces* and *Change Forces the Sequel*):

- Lesson 1: Give up the idea that the pace of change will slow down
- Lesson 2: Coherence making is a never-ending proposition and is everyone's responsibility
- Lesson 3: Changing context is the focus
- Lesson 4: Premature clarity is a dangerous thing
- Lesson 5: The public's thirst for transparency is irreversible
- Lesson 6: You can't get large-scale reform through bottom-up strategies — but beware of the trap
- Lesson 7: Mobilize the social attractors — moral purpose, quality relationships, quality knowledge
- Lesson 8: Charismatic leadership is negatively associated with sustainability

CFWAV also introduces the concept of *tri-level reform* and argues that educational transformation will require changes at school, district, and the state levels simultaneously. The book proposes that we dramatically intensify interaction within schools, across schools within districts, across districts, and between districts and the state. Each level has two responsibilities: working hard at increasing interaction within their level, and working hard at increasing exchanges across the levels.

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Michael Fullan

In outlining guidelines for leaders at the school level, Fullan advocates the creation of professional learning communities where there are strategies focused on developing the capacities of all teachers. Professional learning communities build confidence and competence internally, and work in collaboration with parents and the community. The goal is to create space for high social interaction that converts information into knowledge. He suggests that creating a culture of sharing must be a two-way street where every individual is seeking and sharing knowledge on a continuous basis.

The challenge for districts is to serve as a coherence-maker in linking schools and state policies. Fullan observes that while we have some examples of early success, districts have much to learn and change in order to provide an integrated and supportive context for individual schools. He reviews the successes and challenges experienced by several districts in the U.S., and summarizes lessons we are learning about the district's role in tri-level reform. At this point, he asserts that districts appear to be the weak agents in the reform triage. He proposes that districts need to be proactive in using state policy to leverage and integrate their reform initiatives.

Policy reform (at the state level) is also an essential part of the success equation. Three interrelated sets of needed education policies are identified. One set involves policies related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; the second set is related to the individual development of teachers and administrators; and the third set (the "hidden killer" of educational transformation) is addressing the working conditions of teachers. CFWAV outlines the hard work involved in "altering the system" which is crucial for reaching Horizon #2 transformation.

Sustainability involves transforming the system in a way that conditions and capacity for continuous improvement become built-in within and across the tri-levels of reform; this requires a new nature of leadership. The new role for leaders at all levels is to be highly effective within their level, *and* in interactions with other levels. Breakthrough leaders are strong on two components: "holding people accountable" and "coaching and developing others." The book concludes by suggesting five interrelated themes that will help lead us into the future of transformational and sustainable reform:

- Opportunity and depth of learning
- Policies for individual development
- Learning in context and systemness
- Leadership succession and leadership at many levels, and
- Improving the teaching profession

CFWAV encourages us ("under the right conditions the characteristics of effective leadership can be learned") and challenges us ("It is going to require hard work over many years") to engage in system reform. The message is compelling and motivating — complexity theory made practical.

