

A Tool Kit for Managing Productive Schools

Borrowing lessons learned from successful businesses, the Managing Productive Schools program taps the talents of all members of the education enterprise in its effort to restructure schools.

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To reinvent American schooling, educational leaders must dream of better futures for their students and develop fresh leadership talents in teachers and other educators. No new budget, curriculum, law, instructional strategy, calendar or schedule, union contract, planning system, or organizational structure has within it the power to transform schooling so that every student

succeeds routinely. Only leaders who have visions of new schooling futures for all students will succeed in turning the schooling business upside down, for out of their dreams comes the energy to overhaul outdated education structures, decision-making processes, programs, and traditions.

We need no assistance from outside agencies to dream about better schooling futures; we need only the

courage and the will to imagine. Germany, Russia, and the other countries that have recently reclaimed their own futures illustrate the power of the human will to imagine better communities and nations. However, for visions to become new realities, comprehensive plans will necessarily evolve, and with them opportunities for everyone to participate in the reinvention process.

Corporate America has also faced restructuring challenges as it attempts to better respond to client needs with fewer resources. We can benefit from these stories. Public schools have always been influenced by prevailing theories about business and industrial management, but school leaders are now paying extraordinary attention to



the ideas that are driving corporate America. At the same time, educators themselves are generating their own powerful ideas and practices to help schools be more successful.

Many corporations and schools are turning themselves inside out and upside down in efforts to become more productive. But despite the growing literature base on organizational change, many corporations are still using outmoded and inappropriate practices, and the same is probably true of most schools. They follow many different paths in their search for excellence; some turn into detours or dead ends, others are successful.

Our purpose in this article is to share elements of the literature on organizational transformation and to report what we are learning from training educational leaders in our Managing Productive Schools program. These leaders are knocking down barriers to change and altering the work culture of their schools and districts. But first we will focus briefly on the major themes found in highly successful organizations.

Understanding Successful Enterprises

Kanter (1989) observes that managers in the most productive organizations today see themselves as "synergy czars" who arrange conditions so that workers link with many groups to solve specific problems of the organization. School restructurers must also seek and develop a wide array of ad hoc groups to address emerging problems, for new challenges will continue to surface in the pursuit of new patterns for student success. Developing great districts and schools may well depend on how well leaders orchestrate collaborative planning and empower ad hoc problem solving units to achieve new outcomes.

Customer responsiveness is fast replacing product and program driven orientations as the focus for restructuring activity, notes Peters (1988). Schools and districts are asking: *What do our students and workers need?* and *What must we do differently to respond?* Tom Peters urges every worker to examine more closely the impact of services and products. "If you think it ain't broke, you haven't looked lately," he challenges. Since students are presenting new kinds of challenges every year, educators must invent and adjust continuously, if we care about the futures of students and our communities.

All these efforts to restructure and achieve empowerment, efficacy, transformation, and collaboration are signals that the education enterprise is beginning to face the larger issues of student success for all. To address the social challenges in our schools posed by crack babies, population shifts, economic upheavals, depressed teacher education programs, and declining numbers of teachers entering the teaching work force, school leaders must revitalize the work culture so that everyone has a stake in the outcomes. Teachers who are frontline managers provide fresh perspectives necessary to good planning for restructuring.

How do leaders shift from making all the important decisions to sharing the responsibility and accountability? Our observation is that when the power shifts from a "my" to an "our" orientation, the work culture breaks open and frees the imagination and the talents of many. Teachers are not only willing and eager to participate in reform efforts, they are also becoming leaders in the process. Their classroom work cultures are even beginning to reflect what they are learning about involvement, shared responsibility, and accountability.

A summary of the practices found in productive work cultures follows. When used, this growing knowledge base provides direction for change and gives leaders confidence and courage as they chart new courses.

Productive Work Cultures

Cultural conditions. The effect of organizational culture on restructuring efforts is somewhat of a new concept. We know that culture is so powerful a force in organizations that it either stimulates or represses competent performance (Kanter 1983). Culture is more than climate (how people feel about the organization); culture relates to patterns, symbols, traditions, and histories. Culture is a social and psychological force that stimulates the direction and quality of work in an organization. We found four culture conditions for organizational success in our review of the current management best-sellers: (1) "stretch" goals and symbols, (2) sharing and networking, (3) rewards and recognition, and (4) empowerment opportunity (Snyder 1988a).

Organizations that have "stretch goals" tend to produce more, for specific symbols that relate to goals tend to keep people focused. Sharing across groups and networking across organizations enable workers to link quickly with new information, resources, and opportunities for shaping development efforts. Reward and recognition programs at all levels of schooling are replacing the old "gotcha" systems. Leaders in the best organizations understand the power of recognition and celebration for continued high levels of performance. Empowerment is perhaps the strongest worker motivator today, as workers create new paths to solve problems. The opportunity to participate and use personal talents may be the most

important variable in developing human resources for the tough restructuring tasks ahead. And principals are learning that 50 talented and empowered people working together are far more likely to reinvent responsive schooling mechanisms than a few talented administrators.

Principals are learning how to "let go" more and to share the decision-making responsibilities for such tasks as budget, schedules, and staff development programs.

Organizational planning. Productive managers involve everyone in the goal decision-making process. The most powerful goals are those that relate to visions and dreams, for they provide energy for action. After they identify the group's goals, productive managers "chunk out" work to many permanent and ad hoc groups that work in a variety of collaborative arrangements. In the best organizations, individuals are held accountable for their selected contributions to group efforts. A recent trend is for permanent teams to manage themselves by bargaining for certain outcomes and being held accountable for results. The opportunity to demonstrate team talents stimulates new norms of performance. The intensity of management's commitment to the organization's goals (doing everything

it takes) separates the best from the ordinary organizations.

Personnel development. The best staff development programs are linked to the goals of the organization. They are planned by those who have a stake in the outcomes. Stakeholders seek trainers from within the organization, across the district, and from outside agencies. People tend to reach out everywhere to learn new ideas, skills, and models. Today, districts are devoting considerable energy to sharpening teachers' and administrators' skills for shared planning, decision making, and problem solving, and to building the collective will to produce schooling "miracles." With so many traditions in question today, and everyone's need for new skills for job success, developmental coaching is fast becoming an organic way of life in the best schools and districts.

Program development. Those who continuously search for better programs and structures for students are piloting new programs. The notion of trying out new ideas with students in a variety of cooperative arrangements is replacing the frontal teaching model. Some promising new twists to cooperative learning are found in goal-driven classrooms: different kinds of work are delegated to groups of students who work under the direction of trained student facilitators and the teacher-as-manager. Productive classrooms are beginning to resemble productive organizations: students accomplish goal-driven work in multiple group structures.

Organizational assessment. Quality control is receiving renewed attention today as educators come to understand the power of data-based decision-making systems. Educators are now studying the effects of Deming's (1986) quality control concepts in Japan and America. As restructuring

efforts evolve, quality control systems that focus on outcomes are likely to profoundly alter the ways in which schools and districts function. In productive enterprises, feedback and numerous forms of data guide adjustments to plans, as people work toward goals. The only assessment system that appears to have the power to influence outcomes is a goal-driven system. When goal-related data is used for evaluation purposes, organizations learn from their mistakes and successes and then build new comprehensive plans. A somewhat surprising dimension of assessment found in the literature is celebration. Celebrating accomplishments tends to reinforce goals; it "pumps people up" for the next round of restructuring tasks.

Our work with educational leaders shows that schools are using the above dimensions from productive work cultures to design new forms of schooling. Over the past several years, we have trained thousands of educators in the United States and internationally.

Releasing Talent: The Restructuring Challenge

We have implemented our 25-day Managing Productive Schools (MPS) leadership training program in Florida, Minnesota, and Virginia. The MPS Training Program (Snyder and Anderson 1986, Snyder 1988b) assumes that schools can and must transform learning and working patterns if more students are to succeed. The major task in restructuring is cooperative problem solving that centers around the questions: *Which students need our collective attention next? What do we need to change to respond better to their needs?*

In Florida, more than 700 administrators across the state are demon-

strating the power of the knowledge base on managing productive enterprises. Pasco County has trained all of its 150 school-based administrators as well as 50 district-level supervisors and directors. In addition, principals are training groups of teacher leaders in the skills of shared decision making. Principals are even working in schools from other districts to share their new knowledge, skills, stories, and outcomes. As a result of MPS training, many principals and district leaders have become trainers in statewide five-day School Enhancement Institutes (sponsored by the Florida Department of Education for all school districts). The effects of changing school work cultures on school performance is becoming noticeable throughout Florida.

Hillsborough County has created a partnership with GTE to develop school-based decision-making capacities. The MPS knowledge base and skills provide the foundation for training efforts, which are led by directors and principals who are MPS trainers. As they share new knowledge and skills with other school leadership teams, their own stories add power to others' hopes for success on the restructuring journey. A common language is emerging as educators tackle schooling challenges in networks across schools and districts.

In Minnesota, the Department of Education sponsored MPS trainers to work with hundreds of superintendents and principals in a 25-day training program. In Virginia, 20 principals and supervisors are being trained as MPS trainers. Already they are providing additional training and consultation to district client groups and sharing their talents and stories of success with area and regional Phi Delta Kappa chapters.

MPS schools seem to function

differently from traditional schools — as staffs gain confidence with involvement activities, they continue to tackle more difficult challenges. Success breeds success as staffs become more responsive over time to student needs. We notice that schools evolve their own visions of success for all students, and consequently shift their school goals from a climate and communications focus to bolder goals, such as "eliminating failure as a practice and condition." They make progress toward these bold goals one step at a time, as issues unfold.

Schools are dealing with school-wide problems in a systemic way, by analyzing multiple sources of data before confronting big problems. We notice that piecemeal and linear approaches to problem solving are waning as schools begin to examine and identify next-steps for the school as a unit. By focusing on the whole school and sharing responsibility, schools are beginning to invent new organizational structures for working and learning, and new programs that focus on needs rather than on programs.

Principals are learning how to "let go" more and to share the decision-making responsibilities for such tasks as budget, schedules, and staff development programs. Staffs are developing the courage and the will to ask tougher questions, such as: *What will it take to keep high school students in school?* or *How can we prevent student failure and dropout?* In response to these challenges, principals and teachers are working to establish common goals and staff development programs, as well as new instructional programs that bridge schools.

Principals often say they feel more joy in their jobs, and even a sense of relief from sharing power and respon-

sibility with other staff members. Central office supervisors are beginning to develop networks of teachers who can bring their programs to local schools. Supervisors more often manage resources (rather than function as the resource) and stimulate creativity and invention. Principals find themselves inventing creative ways to pump up their staffs to keep the energy high for the challenges ahead.

Many feel they are developing new capacities to "think big" and to use their knowledge base and skills to form new partnerships across schools, communities, and districts. And they are making more productive use of the rich resources found in central offices, state departments of education, colleges of education, and professional organizations. What seems to be evolving are broad-based communities of learners who are willing virtually to "walk through walls" together.

Creating New World Orders

We all need to feel optimistic about our chances for success. Reinventing schools requires that we be willing and able to shed outdated traditions and together become creators of new world orders. The future of school-based restructuring and accountability may rest on four conditions: a vision of success for all students, plans shaped by school partners, a work culture that nurtures and expects development and success, and staff empowerment and commitment to provide the energy system for success. We have systematically addressed these cultural conditions in our work in Florida, Minnesota, and Virginia.

The next decade will offer many new challenges and dreams. We will be as successful as we know how to be. If schooling transformation for all student populations is our goal, then

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we owe it to the leaders and managers of our schools to provide the latest knowledge and skills for leading productive enterprises. The ideas provided here might be thought of as a cognitive "tool kit" for the era of transformation. Today's leaders must be able to enhance the school's problem-solving capacity and empower groups of teachers and others to address pressing educational needs. This is the restructuring challenge: our accountability for how well we prepare students to succeed and contribute to the growth of our communities. We are investing in our future. □

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