

Organization, Market and Community as Strategies for Change: What Works Best for Deep Changes in Schools

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How one approaches changing a school or an educational system depends, fundamentally, on one's views about what kinds of places schools really are or should be. In this chapter, Tom Sergiovanni describes three dominant perspectives on schooling and the change strategies that spring from them – schools as bureaucratic organizations, schools as market systems, and schools as communities.

In each of these models, Sergiovanni describes how different forces of change can be used to leverage change in schools – bureaucratic forces of rules, requirements, procedures and outcomes; personal forces of leadership and personality; market forces of choice and competition; professional forces of self-set standards, codes of conduct and norms of service; cultural forces of values and relationships; and democratic forces of contracts and commitments to the common good.

Sergiovanni then charts how these forms and forces of schooling play themselves out in different patterns of reform – evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each. In the end, he argues, “deep changes in schools, may well require that the basic metaphor for the school itself be changed from formal organization or market to community”.

Organization, market and community are three strategies now being advocated by different reformers to leverage change in schools. The strategy preferred is a function of the reformer's theory for the school and the reformer's view of human nature. Different theories and views have different strengths. Organization and market are effective for bringing about efficient change in school structures over the short term. Community is effective for bringing about deep change in the operational core of the schools. Deep change involves changes in fundamental relationships, in understandings of subject matter, pedagogy and how students learn, in teachers' skills, in teaching behavior, and in student performance. Though many changes have taken place in school structures and arrangements, few can be considered as deep changes (see for example Newmann, Marks and Gamoran, 1995; Marks, Seashore, & Louis, 1995; Elmore, Peterson & McCarthey, 1995; and Elmore, 1995).

In accounting for the intractable nature of existing patterns of teaching and learning, Quartz (1995) proposes that schools are characterized by a “dominant culture of stabilizing reform” that aims to refine existing teaching practice but not to allow radical changes to occur (p. 240). Stability and change, it appears, co-exist because of the tendency of stability to absorb changes without altering underlying forms and assumptions. This tendency is reminiscent of Mannheim's (1940) observation that human beings and their institutions have a tendency to understand

new things in terms of existing categories; and, of March and Simon's (1958) principle of uncertainty absorption which explains the predisposition of organizations to understand new things in old ways.

The tendency for schools to remain stable is attributed to a network of assumptions, beliefs, regularities and traditions that comprise norms which define, and then provide, meaning for teachers. These collective meanings help teachers make sense of their existing practices, affirm their sense of purpose, and help them to rationally accept the social situations they experience in schools. At root, then, changes in relationships, teaching practice and student learning involve changes in school culture. But before school culture can change, meanings that are both collectively and individually held must change. Perhaps things would be different if it were possible to move instantly from one set of meanings to another. The period in between causes the difficulty. Changing a culture requires that people, both individually and collectively, move from something familiar and important into an empty space. And then once they are in this empty space, to build a new set of meanings – a new set of norms, a new cultural order to fill it up. Deep change, in other words, requires the reconstructing of existing individual and collective mindscapes of practice. Mindscapes are implicit mental frames through which the reality of schooling and our place in it are envisioned.

SCHOOLS AS ORGANIZATIONS, MARKETS OR COMMUNITIES?

Perspectives on how to bring about change in schools are a function of the way change agents understand the nature of schools as organized entities and a function of the way change agents understand human nature itself. This section examines the first of these understandings noting that differences between these understandings lead to different kinds of policies, strategies and practices in educational change. Some of these policies, strategies and practices are more effective in bringing about deep change than others. Successful change it is argued, will result from approaches to change that match the unique cultural requirements of schools and match the unique operational requirements for new teaching and learning.

What are the images of schools that shape the way different change agents think about change? Most change agents view schools as formal organizations that share characteristics and features with other formal organizations. This view of organizations qua organizations allows for easy transfer to the school of assumptions and practices from the generic world of formal organizations. Thus, strategies for change (along with strategies for leadership, motivation, organization and accountability) that work well in formal organizations found in the corporate world and in other sectors of our society are generally assumed to apply to the school (Sergiovanni, 1996). This assumption accounts for why corporate restructuring images of downsizing, standards setting and accountability play such a large role in school reform efforts and why images from other sectors of our society (the worlds of civic, social and familial enterprises for example) are often overlooked.