The Challenge of Creating Smart Schools:

Leading Educational Change in Asia

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> Every few hundred years throughout Western history, a sharp transformation has occurred. In a matter of decades, society altogether rearranges itself -- its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later a new world exists. And the people born into that world cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. (Drucker, 1995, p. 75)

This quote captures succinctly the transformational period of change in which East Asia finds itself. While change is an ever-present facet of human evolution, the scope and pace of change in the Asia Pacific since the mid-1980's has accelerated dramatically. Global economic has created a new context for national development throughout the world. Consequently, societies and their social and economic institutions are under pressure to adapt to externally driven change more rapidly than ever before.

Moreover, unlike in past generations, the consequences for not adapting successfully are rapid and severe. The recent economic crisis in Asia is a salient example of what happens when social systems fail to adapt to changes in a globally interdependent economy. Among some of the Asian "dragons and tigers" the gap between the pace of economic development and the development of educational, political and governmental systems grew too large.

This was noted at a recent seminar on social and educational reform in Thailand:

> Mr. Amaret Sila-on and NEC [National Education Commission] secretary-general Rung Kaewdaeng were in complete agreement that Thailand's decline in global competitiveness was mainly due to poor quality of education and graft. The IMD's (International Institute for Management Development) study said Thailand's education system did not live up to global economic challenges compared to that of Singapore. . . . Several [seminar] participants also blamed the drop [in competitiveness] on inefficient public management and a lack of support from the decision-making level, saying despite high potential Thailand will regress further.

Both Hong Kong and Singapore which were able to maintain the pace of development of their social institutions have suffered somewhat less than neighboring nations. Yet, the challenge to adapt to change remains both ever-present and urgent. It has been said that the capacity to learn and change will define successful organizations of the future. If this is the case, then the future has arrived.

From the U.S. to Europe and Asia, policymakers now recognize that education holds a key to national development. The enhanced importance attributed to education also comes with the price of higher expectations and accountability. If Asia's citizens begin to attribute insufficient economic growth to lagging educational development (as in Thailand), the pressure on educators will become even greater.

Although public expectations for education is growing, the education already consumes a large part of government budgets and significant increases are not likely in the near future. Without increased resources, the Education Ministries throughout the region have but one choice in order to improve performance– to make their schools smarter. This means that the schools will need to learn how to work smarter: to produce more by making better use of the human resources already at its disposal. Given the rapid changes taking place in and around schools, making schools smarter will involve becoming more adept at leading change.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of the change process in this era and to explore the role school leaders can play in transforming their educational systems. I begin the paper by exploring issues influencing the adaptation of East Asian schools to change. Then I will briefly examine the types of capacities and knowledge

available to help lead change. The main portion of the paper is devoted to an exploration of the change process. I hypothesize on areas of similarity and difference between leading change in the West and in Asia. I conclude with recommendations for leading change in the region's schools.

The Evolving Context of East Asia's Schools

The global era is challenging traditional ways of living and working throughout the world (Naisbitt, 1997; Ohmae, 1995; Rohwer, 1995). Notably, unlike in prior eras, these arrive (often uninvited) both from outside our national borders and our fields of practice. Drucker has observed that this trend is true for most fields, but suggests that it has special implications for education.

> [I]t is a safe prediction that in the next 50 years, schools
> and universities will change more and more drastically than
> they have since they assumed their present form more than
> 300 years ago, when they reorganized around the printed
> book. What will force these changes is in part new
> technology, such as computers, videos, and telecasts via
> satellite; in part the demands of a knowledge-based society
> in which organized learning must become a lifelong
> process for knowledge workers; and in part new theory
> about how beings learn. (Drucker, 1995, p. 79)

This is especially true in education where both the goals of education and the policies and practices designed to attain them increasingly arrive from abroad.

Globalization of an Educational Ideal

A key change force in this era of globalization has been the expanded information, communication, and transportation network. Nations throughout the region have ready access to global images and trends via the HBO, BBC, CNN and, the Wall Street Journal.

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In fact, the same news reports, movies, advertisements, sporting events, and soap operas beam into homes in Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and San Francisco. Japanese futurist Kenichi Ohmae contends that developments in information technology have combined with more fluid national boundaries to create a new context for all organizations:

> [T]hese developments have changed what customers everywhere can know about the way other people live, about the products and services available to them, and about the relative value such offerings provide. . . Indeed consumers around the world are beginning to develop similar cultural expectations about what they ought to be able to buy as well as about what it is they want to buy. (1995, pp. 28-29)

An unanticipated consequence of this information revolution is that consumers now define the meaning of *quality education* globally, rather than locally or even nationally. Concerns over national competitiveness now shape education policy decisions made from Ottawa to Taiwan. Increasingly, policymakers (and parents) throughout the Asia Pacific region view a quality education in similar terms.

As Moses Cheng, member of a Hong Kong taskforce on education, has observed: "Young people must have a global perspective. . . They need to have high personal integrity, strong language ability, be computer literate, able to think independently, and be creative" (1998, p. 24).

This statement of Hong Kong's educational aims is notable in several respects. First, essentially the same statement of aims could be found in Sydney, London, New York, or Bangkok. Second, this is an expanded and ambitious agenda for educational systems that are under criticism globally. Third, it is an agenda that will require substantial change in the capacities of the people who comprise the educational system as well as in its

organization and practices. How can Asia's educational leaders adapt the current system

to meet these ambitious goals?

Management scholar Peter Drucker has identified education as a priority area for

social innovation and specific domains of education as targets for change: "We will have

to think through education – its purpose, its values, its content. We will have to learn to

define the quality of education, the productivity of education, to measure both and to

manage both" (1995, p. 270). This quote aptly captures the current challenge Asia's

educators today and is apparent in virtually all of the policy reforms underway.

Developing a Knowledge Base for Leading Change in Asia's Schools

 Complaining about the need to change is a favorite pass-time of educators

throughout the world. Educators love to complain that they are inundated with changes,

most of they never asked for. At the same time, they also love to complain that nothing

ever changes" As we shall see, there is truth to both perspectives.

This is indeed an age of contradictions. Societies throughout the Asia Pacific region

are straining to accommodate new values, norms and standards of practice emanating

from the global culture. At the same time, resistance to change has never been greater. As

O'Toole has noted:

> In all instances in modern society, change is exceptional.
> When it comes about, it does so primarily as a response to
> outside forces. . . In no case does it come readily. . . A
> world in which change is the rule would be characterized by
> chaos, leading to social collapse. Therefore, a society must
> have one foot permanently on the brake; it must have a
> predisposition to tradition and conservatism. (1995, p. 253)

This begins to explain *why* resistance is greatest when facing a seemingly irresistible tide of change. Too much change too quickly causes confusion and the breakdown of individuals, organizations and societies. In the extreme case, an individual loses his/her capacity to function effectively, an organization will grind to a halt or fail to survive, and a society can become extinct.

This perspective also suggests that resistance to change – the traditional bane of organizational leaders – is not wholly negative. Rather, it emphasizes the positive side of resistance, the aspect that helps maintain equilibrium within systems. This represents a paradigm shift in change management. Today instead of viewing resistance simply as something to be overcome, effective change leaders view it as a source of information as to what needs to be re-balanced in the organizational system.

Take the implementation of school-based management in Hong Kong as an example. Anecdotal reports from principals suggest that they view teachers as the primary source of resistance to change. Discuss this change with teachers and they suggest that principals represent the major obstacle to overcome. We can conclude that the biggest source of source of resistance to change is "us", not "them", and that this resistance to change is a natural part of the change process. It is something leaders must learn to work with; it not something to sweep under the rug, to bludgeon into submission via one's authority, or even to overcome through argument.

Thus, even with the introduction of massive political and economic changes in East Asia over the past decade, counter-balancing mechanisms that resist rapid change maintain cultural integrity and continuity. As the futurist Kenichi Ohmae has observed: "The contents of kitchens and closets may change, but the core mechanisms by which

cultures maintain their identity and socialize their young remain untouched" (1995, p. 30). Cultural change seldom proceeds as rapidly as changes in the surface features of society. This observation is especially salient for school leaders.

Schools -- along with the family and religious organizations -- represent one of the primary social institutions responsible for cultural transmission. Throughout the world schools remain bastions of conservatism, not centers of social experimentation. Tyack and Hansot (1982) referred to the schoolhouse as the community's "museum of virtue." Schools are guardians of the culture's most cherished values and traditions.

Thus, public rhetoric of policymakers to the contrary, schools have never operated at the front-edge of social change. Organizationally, schools are designed to maintain and honor the past, not lead the way into the future. Schools do not change easily simply because that is not what societies want for their youth. Consequently, societal changes only filter through to the schoolhouse once they have been deemed safe and necessary. This facet of school reform is borne out by experience over the past several decades and is just as true in Taiwan or Hong Kong as in Manila, Sydney or Dallas.

Conceptualizing Change Strategies for Schools: East and West

Given this rapidly changing educational context, I conclude that learning to lead change represents one of the central challenges facing Asia's educational leaders. School leaders must understand the demands and opportunities of the global context and be able to articulate these to their constituents. Yet leaders must also recognize that even in the midst of rapid global change, the people who inhabit their organizations and communities are still subject to the influence of traditional norms, values and customs of their traditional culture.

Asia's organizational leaders are operating at the confluence of rapidly converging streams of change and tradition. Consequently, they must have dual capacities. They must be able to employ their understanding of local norms in concert with new managerial and educational practices.

While the demand for such leadership skills is clear, the knowledge base that might underlie effective change leadership in Asia is not. Managers working in North American and European schools have recourse to a relatively well-developed knowledge base concerning change management (e.g., Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1992, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987; Kotter, 1996; O'Toole, 1995; Rogers, 1971; Senge, 1990). While this knowledge base remains limited in its prescriptive ability, at the level of principles and strategy it provides useful aids to Western school leaders.

Unfortunately, the empirically-tested knowledge base in Asian nations is less extensive. Thus, local school leaders tend either to be guided by the traditions of the system's culture, or they struggle to employ management theories developed abroad. Neither approach is highly satisfactory.

During a period of rapid change, the practices that were successful in the prior era do not guarantee success in the emerging context (Drucker, 1995). They may even prove counterproductive! This was apparent in the United States during the early 1990's when school-based management was in the full throes of implementation. Many principals accustomed to a unitary form of decision-making found it difficult to make the transition to working in teams with teachers and parents. Some highly successful veteran principals chose to retire rather than adjust their leadership styles to the demands of the new context..

Theory also has its limitations. Most popular management theories – learning organizations, situational leadership, school-based management -- originated in Western societies and are predicated the normative assumptions of those cultures (Cheng, 1995). While there is no reason to reject these theories outright, it does make sense to subject them to cultural analysis and empirical verification (e.g., see Cheng, 1996). That becomes the task we begin here with respect to leading change.

Assumptions about Change from Research and Experience in "Western" Schools

Figure One presents a graphic illustration of the change process as conceptualized in Western societies. At the beginning of the change process, there is little information available about the change, often just rumors. Even at the point at which a complex innovation is adopted for trial or full implementation, nothing has really "changed". People are not yet informed, committed to the change, or prepared to implement it. Nothing has changed!

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Change is a process, not an event. Thus, the first assumption that we make about *the change process is that it is a process, not an event*. It is in effect a journey from a state of knowing little or nothing about the innovation to a state of having the commitment and skills to use it in practice. As indicated in the graphic, the journey is anything but a smooth upward flight from the status of a group of staff novices to that of skilled and committed users. Indeed, the path is full of hills to be surmounted, valleys of frustration, as well as successes to be celebrated.

Change takes place in individuals before it takes place in organizations. Although it is common to refer to a school that has adopted an innovation (e.g., IT – information technology) as "an IT school" this is inaccurate. In reality, until the individuals who comprise the organization have adopted the practices inherent in the innovation the school is *not* an "IT school." Thus, our language reveals our often unstated assumptions about change. In this case, it suggests the typical situation in which the official adoption of an innovation is often treated as synonymous with implementation. This is at least as prevalent in Asia as in Western societies.

The process of change involves a gradual growth in both skills and feelings. This assumptions takes note of the observation that change is process in which the development of technical and knowledge is intertwined with the development of feelings of confidence and commitment. Teachers who agree to learn how to use IT in their teaching do not go to sleep one night as novice users of IT and wake up the next day as expert users. Typically at the beginning users of an innovation lack confidence and are likely to express considerable anxiety about the innovation and its implementation. Change is a long and slow journey that involves learning and change.

Research on staff development and adult learning confirms that even attendance at a high quality workshop represents only a small portion of the investment needed to learn a new skills and bring it into practice (Fullan, 1992). Moreover, as the graphic suggests, at the point of initial implementation of new practice, learners typically make mistakes. Things may get worse before they better. Both corrective feedback and moral support are needed to reemerge from the valley of mistakes into which *virtually all new learners will go.*

Individual members of a social system will each react differently to the same change. Responses to the same innovation will depend upon personalities, prior experience with the innovation and contextual factors. So within the change process, a school has many individuals taking personal journeys from the status of novices towards that of mastery. This assumptions has implications for change strategy as it implies that change is more likely to happen when leaders find ways of meeting individual needs. This assumption contrasts sharply with common practice in which the group is treated as if everyone had the same needs at each point in the change process.

People will implement change more effectively if they understand why they are undertaking a new policy or innovation and are committed to it. As suggested by the graphic, *change is a learning process.* Embedded in this view is the belief that people learn more effectively when they have a higher level of commitment to implementing the new practice. When commitment is high there is more enthusiasm for learning. There is more energy available to overcome the inevitable setbacks. There is also more knowledge available for problem-solving as commitment also implies understanding the reasons behind the innovation.

There are institutional components that support the capacity of individual learning. Institutional factors that impinge on the successful implementation of change are apparent throughout the change process. They begin with articulating the need and rationale for change, clarifying the vision and process for change, providing resources and opportunities for shared learning, creating structures that foster mutual support and learning from individual experiences, celebrating staff success, and making revisions to policies and structures that inhibit successful long-term implementation (Fullan, 1992;

Hall & Hord, 1987). These institutional factors frame an important roles for leaders in the change process.

Note that these assumptions have been empirically tested in Western societies (e.g., Evans, 19996; Fullan, 1992, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987). As broad assumptions they have been found to be applicable to educational change efforts in the US, Europe and Australia. Starting with these assumptions, I now ask, "How and why might the local context of Asian nations influence the nature of the change process?" This question is salient to understanding the nature of the leadership role in fostering change Asia's schools.

In viewing the graphic, we can separate the change process into three general stages: adoption, implementation and institutionalization. I will examine issues salient to the change process in Asia in terms of these three stages. The discussion will focus on general principles and strategies rather than tactics (e.g., how to work with individuals who resist change).

Impact of culture at the adoption stage. At the adoption stage there are clear differences between "typical" Western systems and Asia (recognizing that there are no "typical" Western or Asian systems per se). At the adoption stage in Western schools, leaders place a premium on informing people of the nature of the change, articulating a vision and process, and gaining the interest and commitment of the participants. The rationale for this approach emerges directly from the assumptions stated above. Western societies assume that an enthusiastic, informed and committed participant will be a more effective learner and leader in the change process.

This is the stage in the change process in which there are the greatest differences between Eastern and Western change strategies. Numerous discussions with Asian school leaders suggest much less concern over creating interest and building commitment among staff prior to proceeding with learning how to implement an innovation. The tradition of top-down change operates from a different assumption.

In the Asian schools, participants assume that orders from above are orders for all concerned. When, for example, communicating the decision that IT will be implemented, principals treat it as a *fait accompli*. Their bosses already made the decision, so why expend a lot of energy informing and interesting the staff? Thus, there is a tendency among the principals to simply communicate the decision and proceed on to the practicalities of implementation. This results in what has been termed a "compliance culture" at all levels of the system (F. Law, personal communication, May 1999).

By way of example, let me relate an incident that occurred a few years ago at a workshop on managing change that was held in Thailand. During the workshop a participant approached me during the break. He was a veteran school principal and wished to share his perspective on leading change in Thai schools. He said:

> "Excuse me, I think your workshop is very interesting, but I believe you need to know that leading change in our schools is not at all like what it appears to be in the USA. We don't need to spend a lot time talking to our staff and explaining why and how we are implementing some change and dealing with all of these individuals and their special needs. Here it is very easy to make change. We just tell our teachers, 'Do it.'" When I asked about their response, he said. "Well, of course, they do it. They have no choice." (J. Rattanaporn, September 1995, personal communication)

During the intervening years, I have had many opportunities to observe change in Thai schools. I have come to the conclusion -- widely shared throughout Thai society --

that very little changes in Thai schools! What does change, changes excruciatingly slowly. This apparent contradiction between the principal's *assumptions* and *strategy* to managing change (also widely shared) reflects assumptions embedded in Thai culture. I believe that to some extent these are also shared in other Asian countries.

There is a tendency for leaders in Asia to treat change as an *event*. After the announcement that a change will be adopted, the change is complete. As noted, this assumption emerges from a centralized bureaucratic, system culture. Thus, this principal's own supervisors typically take a similar view of change.

This "do it" strategy of leading change is quite common in Asian organizations. It is consistent not only with the norms of highly centralized Asian institutional systems, but also with the norms of Asian cultures. As Hofstede (1980, 1991) found in his research, Asian societies are characterized by high "power distance" relationships within the social system. This means that lower status persons naturally defer to those of higher status in terms of formal authority and age. Moreover they accept such differences in power as a normal feature of social relations. Social interactions are shaped accordingly.

This differs dramatically from the US, Australia or England where power distance in social relations is relatively low. In these societies, people expect much greater equality in social relations regardless of age and formal status. These culturally-related differences in the social system carry over to the workplace and to leading change.

Thus, in the example given above, when the Thai principal tells his staff to "do it" he gets a very different reaction from that of an American principal. An American principal's staff would typically respond with the question, "Why?" This doesn't imply disagreement. Rather it implies the staff's expectation that they have a right to know why

they are expected to do something, that they should have a voice in the decision, and that they will be able to "do it" better if they know why they are doing it. This reflects the low "power distance" relations that predominate within American culture.

A similar assumption is underlies reforms such as school-based management which seek to gain staff commitment and input in order to more successfully introduce change into the system. In fact, without the development of such a norm, it is difficult see how SBM could succeed other than at a symbolic level. However, there is no question that for a teacher to ask one's principal, "Why?" runs against the traditional cultural norms of Asia and the educational systems. The same normative environment shapes teacher – student relations in the classroom where it is so difficult to break away from teacher-centered instruction and get students to ask "Why?"

Even 20 years ago it made sense for a few smart decision-makers at the top of the Education Ministries to make system-wide decisions and pass these along through the principals to the schools. Three factors make this an impractical approach to leading change today. First, the pace of change today is too rapid for a few smart decision-makers to keep up. As Gary Hamel, a pioneer of reengineering has observed: "If anything, it's at the top of the organization that people are most blind. One of the challenges I find in many companies is that top management is learning slower than the world is changing. So we have to look to others for that creative spark. It is difficult to predict where it will arise" (Hamel, 1998, p. 35). Increasingly, scholars believe that this "spark" must be generated by people at levels other than the top. This forms part of the rationale for reforms such as SBM.

Second, both the school staffs and the population of Asia at-large is more highly educated today than 20 years ago. They have more resources in terms of knowledge and skills to contribute. There is no question that schools (throughout the world) are not fully tapping staff resources.

In a situation where the education budget is not likely to grow significantly in the near future, Asia 's leaders must make better use of the human resources they already have available. It is not likely that the schools can ask the staffs to work longer hours, so they must find ways to work smarter, not harder. This means engaging more of the energy and skills of staff and the community through different strategies.

Finally, contrary to tradition, the Asian community at-large has *begun* to develop an expectation that they *should* have a voice in governance. Citizen participation has risen throughout the society and this carries over to schools. Asia's citizens from the Philippines and Thailand to Malaysia and Hong Kong are increasingly aware that their economic future depends on the capacity of schools to produce graduates with the capacities needed for a global economy. To the degree that they see this connection, their own stake in schooling rises.

These trends point to slow but discernable changes in the underlying culture of Asian society. As one Hong Kong principal commented at a recent workshop, "You need to know that Hong Kong people are starting to ask, "Why?' as well. While the adoption of change in Asian schools has not traditionally emphasized broad involvement, it will increasingly require skills that generate involvement and create interest among those who will implement reform.

Thus, one difference between leading change from East to West concerns the initial stage of introducing the change. In Asian cultures it should be much easier to introduce the change than in the West. Staff expect decisions to be made at levels above them, and there has traditionally been relatively input expected from teachers or parents. This suggests that there will be less *overt* resistance to change at the outset in Asia than in the West.

The principal's command to "do it" carries both formal and informal authority within the institutional culture. Teachers will typically remain quiet if they disagree or are unsure. Principals often interpret this quiet acceptance as support and proceed accordingly. Regardless, in Asia it is possible and common to proceed directly from announcement of the change to its implementation.

However, note that the passive acceptance of orders to implement the innovation is neither a guarantee of support nor a predictor of success. While many teachers will attempt to put the new policy or innovation into practice, Figure One indicates that there are many obstacles to implementation of a complex innovation. Although use of a new record-keeping system for attendance will probably proceed smoothly, implementation of IT in the classrooms may not.

Thus, the fact that the Asian principal has a staff that is more likely to *comply* with his/her request can also become a handicap in practice. A staff that simply complies with the order to implement IT or SBM may not take the time to understand the rationale for the innovation. Many of them will be likely ill-prepared for whole-hearted implementation of the innovation.

Thus, the principal who accepts silent assent as support may be making his/her first mistake. The absence of overt resistance to change at the outset may mean that change leaders do not obtain all of the information they need. By failing to take the time to identify problems, articulate the need, vision and rationale, and to build genuine support among the staff, the principal unwittingly nurtures the illusion of successful adoption. In doing so, the principal may be laying a weak foundation for actual implementation of the change.

Impact of culture on the implementation stage. Schoolhouses are graveyards holding the remains of partially implemented educational innovations. As suggested above, many never make it beyond the adoption stage. This was the case in the United States in the 1960s when new math and science curricula were implemented. Some years later when researchers studied the impact of the new curricula the results were disappointing. When other researchers went back to the study schools, they found that in many cases the curricula had never been fully implemented (Hall & Hord, 1987).

During the implementation stage, staff move from knowing about the innovation to learning how to use it. Then they begin to apply it in practice. This is the stage where both individual and collective learning is of paramount importance.

This requires attention and coordination from the leader(s) of the change process. Learning at workshops, discussing the innovation with colleagues, trying it out in practice, getting feedback on initial efforts at implementation, and trying it again all comprise typical activities during this stage of the change process. During this stage learning with one's colleagues is a key facet of the change process. As indicated in Figure One, this is the stage in which innovations are most likely to fail.

Obviously, if a principal's change strategy does not go beyond telling the staff to "do it" most staff will never get beyond this stage. In our research on leading change in Thailand, we asked principals to identify successful change strategies. One veteran noted: "To bring about change teachers must know that it is the supreme law of the land. Then as the administrator you must apply the pressure to them constantly" (Hallinger, Chantarapanya, Sriboonma, & Kantamara, 1999). This response suggests that the strategy of telling teachers to "do it" is not a complete strategy even within the traditional culture.

Although perhaps somewhat overstated, the Supreme Law strategy is actually quite consistent with general norms of Asian culture. It reflects the tendency to give great weight to formal authority (i.e., high power distance) and to accept top-down commandments. However, implicit in this strategy is the limitation of constant application of pressure. This principal was essentially saying, "If they know it's the law of the land they will comply with it, at least as long as they know I am watching or until it has been ticked off on the checklist." Once those conditions are no longer met, the behavior will return to the prior state.

In practice, principals typically arrange for the training of at least some of their teachers. In fact, workshops represent the major component of most principals' change strategy. Unfortunately, these workshops are often attended by staff who may not fully understand why they are attending the workshop. Or they may understand the reason, but lack commitment and enthusiasm.

Moreover, even training is not sufficient by itself to bring about change in practice (Fullan, 1992). As Figure One suggests, successful implementation of complex innovations requires skillful support of the group and the individuals who comprise it.

Learning the new skills that lead to change entails an iterative process of training, coaching, feedback and support.

Thus, during the implementation stage the change process may be quite similar between Asian and Western cultures. Since it is at this stage that the staff learn the new skills, there is really no way to short-cut the change process. Having made this statement, there are likely to be differences in *how* an Asian principal works to create commitment and support for implementation.

It is generally accepted that within Asian cultures there is a greater focus on the group as opposed to the individual. Thus, for example, Hofstede (1980, 1991) also found that the US, Australia and England differ from East Asian cultures on his theoretical dimension of communitarian vs. individualism. In East Asian cultures the group is the primary unit of change, while in these Western societies it is the individual West (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars. 1997). Thus at the level of a specific change strategy, we would likely see differences in *how* a leader provided support and used the social network of the staff during the implementation process.

Pressure and support are key factors that influence change implementation, but especially at this stage. Asia's school leaders are advantaged here in several respects. First, because of the high power distance in social relations, administrative expectations and standards carry a lot of weight with staff. When used judiciously and in combination with strategies that meet the other needs of staff, administrative expectations can help staff to persist through the change process. Since the group is a key factor within the local culture, *peer pressure* is likely to be even more important to generating support for change in Asia than in the West (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars. 1997).

The group is also a source of technical and emotional *support* during a period of change. It is the group that helps individuals make sense of the innovation in Asia. So group forums for learning together seem even more appropriate here than in the Western nations. In addition, Asian cultures seem to naturally pay more attention to providing "moral support" to members of the group than in the West. This facet of Asian culture would have particular salience during the implementation stage since here is where staff will encounter the "implementation dip" (Fullan, 1992). These are the valleys of frustration common to this phase of change implementation.

Impact of culture at the institutionalization stage. Research on educational change in the West suggests that complex innovations take from three to five years or more to implement in a school (Evans, 1996; Hall & Hord, 1987). When system-wide change is the goal, the timeframe is likely to be even longer. Experience suggests that this is the case in Asia as well. For example, in Hong Kong school-based management has been in the process of implementation for eight years. While it is easy to start the process of change via a system mandate, widespread skillful implementation takes much longer.

It is at the institutionalization stage that processes are set in motion to "make the innovation stick" – to make it a permanent part of the organization. This is the period when gains in knowledge of implementing the innovation or policy are put to use. Policies or work processes may change in order to make the environment more friendly to the innovation. Or the innovation itself may undergo adaptation in order to make it more appropriate to the local setting. Thus, it is often the case that a curriculum or computer software program will need to undergo revision. While logically, it seems these

adaptation would happen at the start of the change process, it is not until staff have had experience with the innovation that they know just what and how to change it.

Asian educational leaders are advantaged at this stage since, once again, staff expect and attend more obediently to policy directives. However, once again this strength can turn into a disadvantage if not used skillfully. The fact that it is easier to mandate change at the policy level in Asia does not mean that the process can take a short-cut! Policy change must be used in concert with strategies that build commitment and staff capacities to implement the change.

<u>Leading Change in Asia's Schools:</u>

<u>Conclusions and Recommendations</u>

This goal of this review of educational change in East Asia was to clarify and illustrate the nature of challenges facing those who will lead the region's schools into the next century. The analysis was conducted from the high ground, rather than from the streets of the city. An analysis of change tactics awaits additional data collected for this purpose. The purpose of this paper was to highlight patterns in the change process, rather than to recommend specific change strategies. Nonetheless, this analysis does suggest some general conclusions and recommendations that could prove useful in formulating change strategies for Asia's school leaders.

<u>Conclusions</u>

This analysis suggests that there are both similarities and differences between leading change in schools in Asia and those in Western nations. As noted in the first sections of this paper, Asia's education and social cultures are undergoing change. Many

of these changes are similar to those encountered by educational systems throughout the world. It is at level of implementing the new policies and practices that the largest differences are found. This analysis suggests the following conclusions.

1. The pace and scope of change in Asia has been rapid and far-reaching over the past decade. Most significant changes have and will come from outside-in

2. The goals of Asia's educational systems are evolving and now match those of the "global educational ideal" as found throughout the world. These goals are ambitious and represent a major shift away from past educational aims.

3. .In many cases reforms in policy and practice intended to meet the region's evolving goals are not well aligned to the local educational culture. This adds greater complexity to the challenges of policy articulation and successful implementation of new practices.

4. These goals and related policy reforms are ambitious, complex, simultaneous and encompass all major sub-systems of the Education Ministries: management, governance and decision-making, curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning. These fact that these changes in the educational system mirror social, political and cultural changes in the society of Asia society at-large reinforces the importance of developing stronger linkages between the schools and society. The mission of Singapore's schools: "Thinking schools, a learning society" seems equally applicable here.

5. To some extent leaders are "flying blind" without extensive guidance from theory or practice. A significant challenge remains in codifying both an indigenous knowledge base of "what works" in Asia's evolving educational

culture. It also remains to systematically assess how knowledge from outside of East Asia can inform the development of practices that will meet the region's evolving educational goals and educational culture.

6. Differences in leading change in Asia when compared with England or the U.S. can be traced to the institutional structures and the societal cultures. The mix of highly bureaucratic organizations and features of the social culture have created a tradition of top-down change implementation. This permeates all aspects of the educational system from decision-making patterns to classroom teaching.

7. The tradition of top-down change implementation has created a compliance-oriented educational culture that does not make the full use of the human resources within the system. The normative practices associated with change implementation tend to short-cut important steps in the change process that develop an understanding of the policy or innovation, create interest, and generate commitment to change.

8. Effective leadership of change in Asia's schools should build on the strengths of the traditional system while expanding leaders' repertoire of strategies. These should include those designed to build whole-hearted and knowledgeable commitment to change. The goal must be to build "smart schools" whose participants – students, teachers, administrators, parents – are thinking about and able to create their desired future (Senge, 1990).

Recommendations

These conclusions frame my recommendations for educational leaders and leadership development in Asia. These recommendations remain broadly consistent with the change assumptions outlined earlier. They assume that change is a learning process that entails significant investment of energy and time and that it is both an individual and collective process. They also assume, however, that successful change leadership also entails being able to work within the norms of the local culture.

1. *Place a high priority on research and development in the domain of leadership development.* The local universities must provide intellectual leadership by identifying, examining, refining, and extending the knowledge base salient to local school leaders. Wholesale importation of training curricula from abroad will only be useful to the extent that the curricula are tested and localized. A training curriculum should encompass both indigenous knowledge as well as knowledge from abroad adapted to successful practice in the Asian context. This research and development effort should be undertaken by a consortium of institutions in order to create the most coherent effort.

2. *Approach the task of creating a leadership curriculum with full awareness of the limitations of knowledge gathered from within and without.* In this era of great change, even a clear understanding best practice derived from schools of 10 years ago will only provide partial insight into successful strategies for today and tomorrow. Similarly, practices borrowed from abroad should be approached with caution and employed in the light of Asia's own practical wisdom. This is a long-term project and leaders should expect that the

knowledge base will change over time as the local system of education continues to evolve. That is, "what works" will not be a static description of leadership practices.

3. *Develop change strategies that provide a clear vision from the top and that are likely to build knowledge, interest and commitment among staff at all levels.* An important role for senior leaders in the system entails modeling the practices and relationships they wish to develop through the system. The current effort to involve external stakeholders in developing the aims of educational is an excellent example of modeling.

4. *Systems leaders should use the leverage afforded by the traditional authority of the bureaucracy to create and maintain high expectations and standards for change, but use it judiciously.* At the start of the change process and throughout, institutional goals, expectations and policies will provide the context for successful change in policies and practices. Keep a clear sense of the scope and limitations of this role.

5. *At the adoption stage, principals should not let the staff's traditional deference to authority lull them into believing they have developed interest and commitment to change.* Much of the hard work in the initial stage of the change process entails skillfully accessing the social networks and groups so important to Asian organizations. Taking the time to address people's needs at the outset of the change produce can reduce resistance later on and foster more successful learning and change. Paradoxically, leaders may need to bring resistance to the surface before they can learn from it!

6. *At all levels of the system, but especially in the schools, create group forums in which staff (and students and parents) can discuss and making meaning of proposed changes.* During the implementation stage, use the social network of the school to create a network of learners. Continue to employ groups throughout the change process as a means of providing both technical and moral support for staff in their efforts to learn and change.

I will close this paper with a quote from Milbrey McLaughlin, an astute observer of change in schools for the past 30 years. Professor McLaughlin summarized a central lesson from the change literature by noting:

> You can't mandate what matters to people, but what you mandate
> does matter. (1990, p. 13)

This captures what I believe to be the greatest challenge of leading change Asian schools today. It recognizes that the system level leaders will continue to play an important role in creating Asia's schools of the future by establishing a general vision and through judicious selection of means for getting there. It also recognizes something that is only beginning to be accepted as a truth in Asia: that to obtain the full commitment of people and to tap their potential for learning and change you must reach into their hearts. This facet of the evolving relationship between principals and its teachers is no different than the relationship being sought between teachers and pupils. Empower a community of learners and you will develop a community of leaders.

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