CHAPTER 1

BUILD IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

Design, communicate, build, and lead the work with a deep understanding of and commitment to how change happens over time.

KEY PRACTICE

Nourish Change for a Long Life

Think about any significant school change you have been a part of. Essentially, the change was "triggered" by some decision that improvement was needed. Communication followed to the folks who would be directly involved in the change, and then the change was kicked off. They learned as much as they could about it, and after a certain period of time—when it was felt people were ready—the leaders began expecting

the change to begin being practiced. Sometimes, as people were getting comfortable with the mechanics of the change, problems began to pop up. People may have become disenchanted with the change and even lobbied for the removal of it. If responses to the troubles were timely, transparent, and focused, with luck the change became a part of the practice and things eventually improved both for teachers and for students.

This description is an example of a large-scale attempted change in our schools. It would take a considerable amount of time for our change example to succeed. This example was a happy story, ending in success and permanence. It highlights a leader and teachers who rolled up their sleeves and invested in the work for the long haul. We want all of our school changes to take root and have long and prosperous lives. It may seem odd to think of any important change as having a "lifespan," but essentially that is what we have learned from change leaders over the past 40 years. Huberman and Miles (1984) and Fullan (2007) have documented that change develops in evolving cycles over time. Schools and districts are often involved in multiple initiatives at once—and the fact is that every big change project at school is different and carries its own set of contexts and variables. Because of these differences, leaders cannot lead each initiative in the same way. In addition, the relative "age" of the innovation should influence what the leader notices and how she or he supports the change with the people around her or him. The encouragers and motivators for people will differ and evolve over the life of the change (Fullan, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

In our previous successful example, there was a period of learning about the change, there was time spent on implementing the mechanics of the change, and there was a period when the work was about deepening the change in consistency and quality so it would become permanent and have lasting positive impact. This became the life span of the change, and the life span has an infancy period, a maturing period, and an older, wiser period of reflection and stability. If the school leader is to build change to last, he or she must not

Figure 1.1   The Life Span of School Change
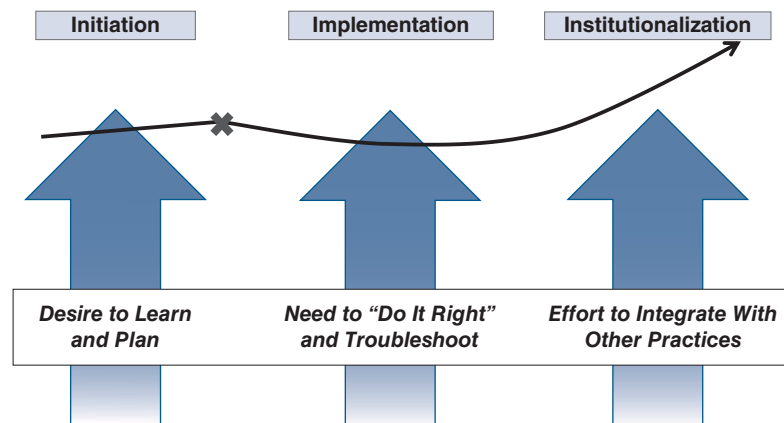
only know about the life span of change but also how to lead and manage it according to the age of the change at that moment. The infancy, maturing period, and the older stage of stability can be illustrated in three interconnected phases. Using Fullan's (2007) description of these life span phases, consider Figure 1.1, which graphically represents these change phases.

Figure 1.1 is a simple representation of the life of any change at the district or school level. We all keep our fingers crossed that the innovations we are leading become part of the fabric of the schools as they mature, grow, and become more impactful over time. The curved bold arrow in Figure 1.1 represents the years of development and evolution of the change. For instance, the graphic could illustrate a large-scale change from the beginning (the start of our bold arrow moving from left to right) to a point when the change was embedded into practice in a meaningful way (the point of the arrow). The whole illustrated process will more than likely take a number of years to become institutionalized. During those years of work, the needs and concerns of people doing the work will transform from (a) wanting to learn about the change to (b) trying out the change and troubleshooting in order to do it well, to (c) an attempt to integrate the change with other changes in the person's repertoire.

In Figure 1.1, you will also notice an "x" on the bold line, somewhere between initiation and beginning implementation. This identifies the beginning of the "implementation dip" (Fullan, 2001) and it's when people start having trouble making the change work. More detail about the implementation dip is found in the implementation section of this chapter.

It isn't earth-shattering to know that change has a life span and that people often experience issues when they try to make the change work. Just because we know these facts doesn't mean we lead according to it. Most of the changes we champion have very short lives in schools. Most of them never grow to maturity—the changes are abandoned long before they can really take hold—usually because the changes may be hard and cause some concerns and issues as they struggle to hold on to their lives.

This kind of short-term, failed change leadership must stop. Leaders must in fact lead, on a daily basis, with knowledge of the cycles of change and the determination to manage the changes according to the relative maturity of the change. This view of "change-related leadership" is both respectful to the people doing the work as well as more efficient and fluid, because the leader is pivoting according to the factors influencing the change.

Lead With a Deep Knowledge of Each Phase of Long-Term Change

If we are to lead on a daily basis with this change-related knowledge, we need detailed information and an operational understanding about

the three phases. While these phases are often described and illustrated as three separate ones, it is important to remember that they overlap in practice. Each phase embraces not only leader actions but also participant actions, which combine to illustrate growth of the innovation and continuing evolution of practice.

Initiation Is Where We Establish the Why and What. Every long-term, important change has a birth or beginning. The impetus for the innovation can occur from the central office, the single decision from a school leader. It may occur after a long period of study, data analysis, and contemplation by one or multiple parties. Even though the beginning of a long-term improvement can feel exciting and hopeful, we must pay attention to this phase and allow it to develop fully.

When it becomes clear that "change is in the wind," people will want to have unrestrained access to information about the change so they can get a sense of a general, predictable understanding of the change with which they will be connected. Frequent and consistent communication between the leaders and his or her coworkers is critical during this early stage (Fullan, 2007). Other factors of equal importance relate to the scope of the change, pertinent time lines, and initial expectations for all involved. Attention to all of these variables, combined with a sense of clarity and transparency, tend to give people comfort—even if they know the innovation will require major adjustments in the way they work, they will probably be comforted by the wealth of knowledge and structure around the innovation.

Many of the questions from people will focus on "Why are we doing this?" and "What is this change, exactly?" Having a vision for the innovation—in other words, some clarity about what is being attempted to achieve and why we are doing it—is critical to people early on. I have learned, however, that if the vision for the change is developed or established too early in the life span of the change, there may not be enough understanding of the innovation to create clarity and comfort about the anticipated improvement. In other words, if the vision is struck too early in the process, it may actually alarm people and overwhelm them instead of providing the assurance and focus that people need. John P. Kotter (2012) warns against the vision being so lengthy or complicated that it loses its ability to energize and compel the work, leading instead to confusion or alienation. The big, elaborate, dense vision "neither rallied [people] together nor inspired change. In fact, they may have had just the opposite effect" (Kotter, 2012, p. 8). I am in favor of a compromise between the dense, lengthy, overwhelming vision that Kotter warns about and the kind of

vision that is so short and vague that it could fit on a bumper sticker and gives no clear picture of what the organization is going to try to achieve. In other words, having a vision that is lengthy enough to really paint a "word picture" of what is trying to be achieved seems to be the guidance that people need. Any more than that, however, may overwhelm, madden, and actually fracture the culture. The vision should walk the fine line, then, between long and overwhelming and a catchy phrase. One should be able to read the vision and have a really clear sense of *what* this school is trying to achieve—what the future will look like.

Even though there may be widespread excitement and anticipation about the change, resistance can, in fact, appear very early in this very beginning. You might think that initiation is too early for people to formulate an opinion and develop negative communication and actions around it. Let's not be naïve. It can happen, even at the very beginning of the work. The January 1969 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*'s article titled "How to Deal with Resistance to Change" (Lawrence, 1969) detailed the kind of resistance that might appear at, what seems to the leader, illogical times. During initiation, people may already make the decision (with little understanding of the innovation) that they are incapable of making the kinds of measurable modifications in their practices that the innovation appears to demand (Lawrence, 1969). Lawrence named this a technical fear. A technical fear is real and valid to the person who is afraid of what will be demanded of him or her. Good leaders anticipate these fears and understand them so they will not be alarmed when they hear them being expressed. Chapter 2 will take a deep dive into initiation, how to lead and manage it, and what to do about issues that pop up during this early stage.

Implementation Is Where the Rubber Meets the Road. We say we have moved into implementation when we feel that we have learned enough about the innovation and have the structures in place to support individuals as they begin using the practices, materials, or program. Remember that during initiation, there is an emphasis on gaining knowledge about the innovation. This beginning knowledge, while critical, may be a bit shallow, because any training cannot replicate how the innovation will be in each person's classroom. Therefore, during early implementation, people will be trying to use the innovation based on what they learned during beginning training. In other words, they will attempt to use their own understanding of the innovation in a way that "seems right" to them (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015).

During this early trial and error, individual experimentation is a good thing—it is the desirable behavior from people implementing their own versions of the change. As a college professor once told me, "Teachers do not adopt a new change; instead, they try to adapt the change to their practices" (G. Ponder, personal communication, fall 1993). During the early part of implementation, leaders have to continue to help people understand what changed, and what deep, sophisticated practice looks like so they can continue to compare it to their personal adaptation of the change. One of the dangers during implementation is that people will just rely on their own adapted interpretation of the innovation without the ability to compare their version with the intended version. If leaders neglect to model the intended sophistication and depth of the practice, individual teachers may grow content with their version of the change and begin to believe that unsophisticated practice is the innovation.

Even if the purpose of the innovation has been firmly established during initiation, it may begin to be lost in the day-to-day maze of demands on teachers. To prevent this, effective leaders will continue to stress the purpose of the change. This communication will help motivate participants so they can deepen the practices and begin to get results from their students. Deepening the practices to get results involves this internal cycle of individual trial, error, and adjustments in small ways. We must notice small attempts at integrating (adapting) the new practices into the person's repertoire of how he or she accomplishes work. When people make small changes and see results in their classroom contexts, they are more likely to continue the work and make additional efforts, because they have seen the payoff and have experienced little damage from these small actions. What people begin to believe about their ability to implement the innovation actually makes a difference in their personal motivation and personal achievement. The extent to which teachers develop competence with and confidence in their changing practices and see benefits to their students will alter the adults' behavior in positive ways (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

I don't know about you, but even the most effective implementation will not go perfectly. Resistance *will* almost assuredly appear during the implementation phase. To be honest, a certain amount of resistance during this phase actually makes sense. At first, during initiation, there is excitement about the innovation (even if it's dreaded, there is a certain energy about the possibilities of the change). People have had training on what the innovation is, and they know why it is needed.

> What people begin to believe about their ability to implement the innovation actually makes a difference in their personal motivation and personal achievement.

They are attempting to think through how they will incorporate it in their classroom practices. As they make their initial efforts, they will encounter unanticipated hurdles or issues. Those issues could include (a) an awareness that their materials to support the innovation are inadequate; (b) they are experiencing classroom management difficulties because of new processes, arrangements, or procedures; or (c) they cannot seem to "get it all done" now within their time constraints because of the addition of the new practice. (Obviously, there is a myriad of other reasons people may experience difficulty during beginning implementation.) The range of troubles may aggregate into a general unhappiness about the innovation and a vocalized reluctance to continue the new practices. Commonly called the "implementation dip" (Fullan, 2007), this loss of enthusiasm actually signals both good and bad news to the leader. Look back in this chapter at Figure 1.1 to see a graphic illustration of the implementation dip (note the "x"). The good news about experiencing this lag in enthusiasm and performance is that people are generally trying the innovation out in their own classroom contexts. The bad news is that they are having a bit of trouble with it. This may be hard for you to buy, but from my own experiences, I can tell you that I had always preferred that my teachers were trying the innovation and having trouble with it than not attempting to try it at all!

As teachers are trying out the innovation, the leader is met with yet another challenge. If the beginning implementation issues leading to this enthusiasm "dip" are not addressed and adequately resolved for people, they may indeed abandon the innovation and go back to their former practices—and be quite satisfied with maintaining the status quo—which is what the schools are trying to alter. We will again take a deeper dive into implementation, see how resistance may look at this time in the change, and consider specific actions to lead implementation in chapter 3.

Institutionalization Is When the Change Becomes Part of Our Daily Wardrobe. I like to call institutionalization the phase of the work when people aren't calling "it" anything specific anymore. In other words, during implementation, when people are trying to get sophisticated practices under their belts, they still say "we are doing differentiation" or "we are implementing a new reading program" or "we are working to embed writing into all of our standard subjects." When nearing institutionalization, it seems that people don't often refer to it by name, because they have been working with the

> The "implementation dip" actually signals both good and bad news to the leader.

innovation so long and incorporating it into their own practices that the innovation has become a part of the fabric of the way the schools work. Another way to look at institutionalization is that people have turned the innovative improvements into refined routines, so ingrained into the fabric of the schools that they would outlast the presence of the leader (Sergiovanni, 1992).

The change that you have been championing, then, will either become embedded into practice or be discarded because of uneven or faulty implementation efforts. Often, we become impatient to "move on" to another big innovation and simply assume that because they have been working on the current innovation for some time, surely it will take hold. This is not the case. Even if implementation has gone well, issues have been worked out, and there is the culture and the structure to institutionalize the practice, there is still work to do. Competing innovations or issues must be directly addressed. Results have to be assessed. Teachers will continue to be reminded of the purpose of the innovation, supported for their continued efforts, and given opportunities for teachers to work together to make the practices even better.

You might think that if you have gotten this far and are stabilizing the innovation into regular practice, issues of resistance are just distant memories. Resistance may, though, appear during this mature phase of the innovation and surprise even the savviest leaders. Even if you have worked on implementation for years and feel really strongly that it has gone well, if people are met with other competing demands and cannot seem to figure out how to resolve the competition, they may vocalize frustration and abandon the innovation in favor of the new one. Even at this phase of change, the layering of innovations can seem to people like that constant change blender referred to in our introductory chapter. Thus, the leader must do what he or she can to affirm the vision, remind people of the benefits they are seeing, and remove obstacles or roadblocks to continued, better practice. In addition, the leader must ensure that the evolving culture of the school is supportive of these new, heightened practices. While John Kotter addresses institutionalization and culture in the business world, his words are relevant to us. "When the new practices made in a transformation effort are not compatible with the relevant cultures, they will always be subject to regression. Changes in a work group, a division, or an entire company can come undone, even after years of efforts, because the new approaches haven't been anchored firmly in group norms and values" (Kotter, 2012, p. 157). Figure 1.2 illustrates these phases in another way (Fullan, 2007; Kotter, 2012; Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015).

**Figure 1.2** Phases of Change Implications for Leaders

CHANGE PHASE	NECESSARY ELEMENTS	GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS
Initiation	- Systematic examination of information signaling the need for a change - Clear establishment of a clear urgency for the change - Development of a vision to guide the change (late during Initiation) - Training to elevate knowledge level of the change - Adequate resources to get started	- Sources of information might include student performance information, informal conversations, or district directive. - A vision will tie the work to the urgency, and yet a vision established at the very beginning of the work may not be well-developed enough until people have a better sense of what the work will mean. - Professional learning in the form of training is often advised to guarantee a certain level of knowledge among the change participants.
Implementation	- Clear responsibilities for orchestration and troubleshooting - A focus on short-term "wins" to reward effort - Champions for the change at the school level - Job-embedded professional learning to support individual and collective efforts - Resource adjustment to acknowledge an awareness of how the change is progressing - Vision adjustment to continue focus - Plans to measure progress and remove obstacles	- While the district may initiate the change, in reality it cannot implement the change. Implementation is the school's responsibility and ownership must be transferred and felt. - There must be a mix of pressure (heat) and support (light). - Early implementers and champions should be rewarded in some way (more resources, extra time to plan, load reduction, more flexibility, etc.). - Leaders must be seen as understanding the change and capable of leading informal conversations with teachers about the progress they are making (non-evaluative). - Early on, measures of progress may not include student performance data but instead, teacher data, attitudes, efforts to implement, and what teachers are learning.
Institutionalization	- Integration of change into the school's usual practice - Elimination of competing practices - Links to other change efforts to communicate the unity of purposes - Widespread and refined use of the change - A school-based network of local practitioners and experts for continued access - Measurements of success using a variety of teacher and student indicators	- An indication of whether or not the change has been integrated may be that people are not referring to the change as "something they have to do." - Professional learning continues to be important at this phase but at the school level. - There is a perceived adjustment of practices to absorb and accommodate the change. - When the change has been institutionalized, many of the observed efforts of practice are at a sophisticated, refined level, yielding consistent results with students.

A deep knowledge of how to lead according to the age of the change is vital to leaders; just as important is a belief that the relationships that we cultivate will help propel the work into more lasting impact.

Lead With a "People-Sensitive Mindset" of How the Change Efforts Will Play Out

As we lead over the long haul, we invariably see areas for growth and change. Most often, the catalyst for change is to address an achievement gap or some kind of deficiency in the school. We feel the pressure to change things quickly, and in an attempt to find the solution, we frequently seek some program or quick solution to "apply" to the problem. We feel that if we just find the right "fix" to our issue, things can change quickly and for the better. The danger with this kind of thinking is that it may encourage us to drift toward the more "scientific" or "technical" approach to leading. This view of leading focuses on the incremental analysis of specific issues—the result of which is often the loss of the big picture in what makes an organization like a school work. The scientific/technical approach relies on the positioning of programs, mandates, and resources without paying much attention to the realization that no particular program, mandate, or resource will work long term unless the people implementing such remedies are not only committed to the work but have continued to acquire the skills necessary for implementation success. In other words, we search for the solution but forget that the people with whom we work will be the ones implementing it!

Over the years, I have come to the hard realization that we often unintentionally ignore the very people who are expected to do real, hard work. They deserve better. They deserve empathy, time, consideration, and freedom to take risks and make adjustments. I strongly believe that leaders can (and must) really have it all—strategic, operational actions to improve things *and* deep, meaningful, collaborative relationships with the people doing the work. But there is a caution. "Working *with* teachers instead of *on* them involves a series of flexible [leader] efforts to develop and support their intrinsic motivation for personal learning and development" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015, p. 39). So, working with teachers while maintaining a focus and the pressure for action becomes the formula for sustaining the innovation until it has an impact on not only those teachers but also students in their care. Leaders do not have to choose to be a hard-driving technical leader or a soft, relationship-rich leader. It is not one or the other. It is both. See Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 The Leader's Simultaneous Approach
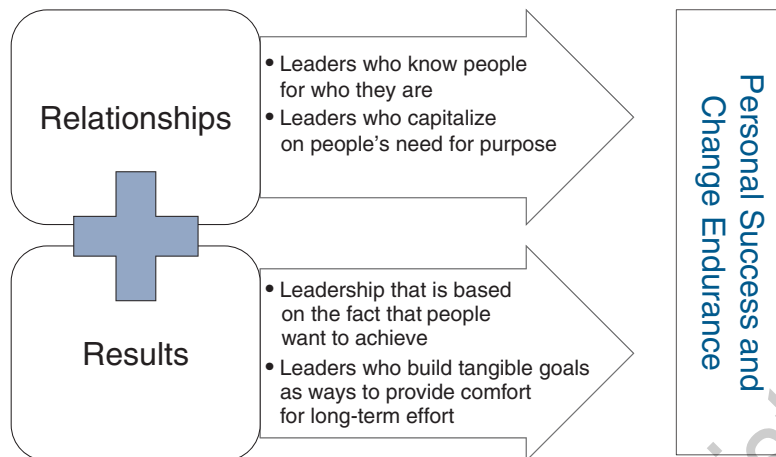
The work of effective leaders is a constant balance of pressure and support, or "heat" and "light." It is obvious that people will respond in different ways to this combination of heat and light. Their responses will manifest behaviors differently over the life span of the innovation (Fullan, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1984). In addition, individuals will respond to the innovation both emotionally and behaviorally as they begin to understand the change, get deeper into it, feel personal struggles, and work to ensure its lasting continuation (Hall & Hord, 2001). Therefore, we can't lead with both relationships and results in mind unless we know what these two concepts look like at each phase of long-term change.

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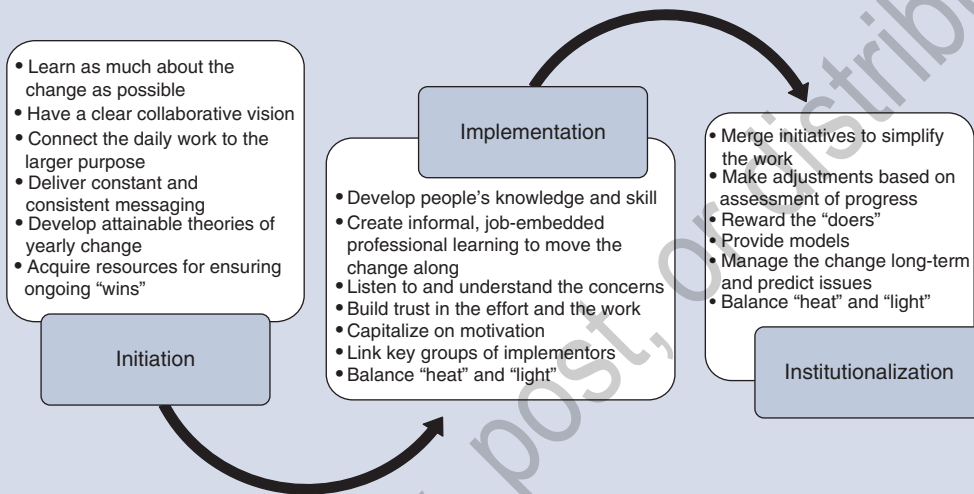
Take a Moment

This chapter has highlighted the long-term phases of change, critical to leaders' knowledge and actions. The science and practice of leading initiation, implementation, and institutionalization have been with us for many years. The question that must be asked is this: why, then, do so many efforts fail? The problem seems to be that many leaders, in spite of their understanding of how changes happen over time, do not *act* on or use what they know. To put it another way, "a commitment to these ideas is only a partial victory" (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). If leaders continue to lead in opposition to what we know about long-term change, they stand the chance of seeing and feeling substantial resistance to valid efforts to improve. Therefore, the first critical skill for leaders is to commit to the concepts undergirding long-term change and lead, on a daily basis, according to that understanding.

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We will delve into each of these phases of the life of your change in the subsequent chapters. Five key leadership actions—establishing the purpose, listening to concerns, establishing trust, designing powerful professional learning, ensuring short-term successes—will be embedded in each chapter devoted to the particular phase. These five concepts weave together a blueprint for each of us that I call an "architecture." The architecture is useful when we are orchestrating the necessary improvements in our schools and is represented in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4   Change Architecture

Initiation
- Learn as much about the change as possible
- Have a clear collaborative vision
- Connect the daily work to the larger purpose
- Deliver constant and consistent messaging
- Develop attainable theories of yearly change
- Acquire resources for ensuring ongoing "wins"

Implementation
- Develop people's knowledge and skill
- Create informal, job-embedded professional learning to move the change along
- Listen to and understand the concerns
- Build trust in the effort and the work
- Capitalize on motivation
- Link key groups of implementors
- Balance "heat" and "light"

Institutionalization
- Merge initiatives to simplify the work
- Make adjustments based on assessment of progress
- Reward the "doers"
- Provide models
- Manage the change long-term and predict issues
- Balance "heat" and "light"

Source: Bossidy & Charan, 2009: Farina & Kotch, 2014; Fullan, 2007; Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015

We will not only explore resistance in each phase of change but also in a separate chapter, along with separate chapters on critical topics in our architecture shown in Figure 1.4.

At this point, let's learn about two dramatically different school districts—Kingsport City Schools in Kingsport, a small city in the far northeast part of Tennessee, and the Ashton Unified School District, a large urban school district in the northwest part of the country. We will see the ways leaders in those districts not only prepared for big changes in their schools but also how they approached looming problems and attempted to resolve them or eliminate them before they were met with consistent resistance. The leaders in these districts were not perfect, but they were devoted to leading and managing the change in a relationship-rich, sequential, and understandable way. In some ways, both sets of district leaders were highly successful; and in other ways, they were not. All of the leaders from the two districts gave me permission to use their actual district names and their individual names. The Kingsport City Schools district, therefore, really exists as do the three leaders who will describe the change they sought, and no

names have been changed for this publication. At the time of publication, however, it was decided to anonymize the names of the district now referred to as "Ashton Unified School District" and the four Ashton Unified leaders who were interviewed. This district did not enjoy the luxury of seeing their efforts work smoothly toward institutionalization. The disguising of names was done out of respect for the hardworking district leaders so there was a degree of protection from any negative reactions anyone might have from reading about their struggles. What you should understand, however, is that these two case studies were very real; and you will read about their long-term change efforts in unvarnished, transparent documentation of actions, successes, and dismays. We will look at their highs and their lows, and their experiences will give us opportunities to reflect on why both may have happened. We will certainly benefit from these insights.

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR TWO SCHOOL DISTRICTS ATTEMPTING CHANGE

The leaders of our two districts, Kingsport City Schools, in northeast Tennessee, and the Ashton Unified School District, in the northwest part of the country, were eager to implement important changes. As we study these two example districts, we will learn (a) their context and (b) the change they sought. At the end of each chapter on initiation, implementation, and institutionalization, you will see how the leaders of each district planned for and handled that phase.

Kingsport City Schools	Ashton Unified School District
Location: Kingsport, Tennessee	Location: Northwest United States
Enrollment: 7,426	Enrollment: 48,500
81% White; 11% African American; 5% Hispanic; 2% Asian or Pacific Islander; 1% Native American	41% White; 16.9% Asian or Pacific Islander; 15.7% Biracial or multiracial; 11.6% Hispanic; 8.8% Native American; 4.9% African American
38% Economically Disadvantaged	43% Economically Disadvantaged
11 Schools	63 Elementary Schools

As you can see, Kingsport City Schools and the Ashton Unified School District are dramatically different from each other in multiple ways. The leaders of each district attempted a major change in their schools and tried to design their actions to align with what they knew about long-term change. The actions described throughout the next few chapters will illustrate what worked for them and what didn't work as each set of leaders sought to deepen instructional practices with their teachers

and achieve greater achievement with all of their students. The following detail will help you understand a little more about each district and the goal of the changes for each.

Kingsport City Schools

Kingsport City Schools is a small rural district in the northeast corner of Tennessee. While it enjoys a long reputation for academic excellence, there is a consistently noticeable gap in achievement between White students and students of other demographic categories. The 11 school principals historically have been champions of independent thinking and resist the push to standardize their practices across all 11 schools. Fiercely independent, those principals *do* work together on a regular basis and accomplish much; however, they strongly believe that each of their schools is unique and deserves leadership that builds from the unique culture there.

At least 10 years ago, the district employed instructional coaches in the district to work with all schools and all levels and subject areas. These were teachers on special contracts who primarily worked with teachers to improve instruction. At that time, the decision of "which teachers should I work with?" was made by district officials. The charge to the instructional coaches was to focus almost solely on the teachers in buildings who were *least* instructionally successful.

This method of assigning instructional coaches to the neediest teachers continued for several years. Over time, however, district officials and principals began to realize that these targeted teachers were not making improvements as quickly as desired; they also noticed a prevailing sense among all of the other teachers in buildings to avoid instructional coaches because the assignment of a coach to a teacher meant that you were "in trouble." It became very apparent to district decision makers that the role of the instructional coach needed to be reviewed and changed.

In 2016, I was asked to contract with Kingsport and rethink the role of the instructional coach. The director at that time wanted a complete overhaul; in fact, he wanted to virtually erase the vision of the previous instructional coaching program and replace it with something more effective—and he wanted this from the "ground up." His vision was to then initiate the new coaching system and to work to effectively institutionalize the new coaching version for years to come.

The Ashton Unified School District

The Ashton Unified School District is a large, mostly urban district in the northwest part of the country. The district is organized into loose "areas,"

with directors supervising the principals in those areas and assisting principals in making decisions for area improvement. Teacher instruction and student achievement in the district has historically been uneven and spotty. Some schools enjoy focused principals and committed staff members who realize consistently high student achievement. Some schools, however, are described by district leaders as less focused. These schools do not achieve consistently effective achievement with their students.

The diversity of the school district is high and in marked contrast to the diversity in the Kingsport City Schools. Because of the diverse nature of students and their experiences and the inconsistent and variable achievement, a decision was made in 2015 to study and purchase a new reading program for the elementary grades K–5. The thinking, according to district leaders, was that there was a huge need to provide consistently effective instruction to all of the diverse students, raising the floor for achievement and creating a common teaching language among all 63 elementary schools in the "science of reading." Materials were purchased to launch the change, and plans were made to provide professional learning for people about the new program.

New materials were purchased for all of the participating grades, and the decision was made to only initiate and implement the materials in the K–2 classes during the first year. The district leaders' theory was to allow a "phase in" of the change. During the second year of work, leaders would continue their support of the K–2 teachers while initiating the change with the grades 3–5 teachers. So, prior to the K–2 first year of initiation, there was widespread voluntary training for those teachers participating in the change, led by consultants of the company providing the materials. The training appeared to be effective based on simple measures and, in fact, there was a certain energy and enthusiasm for the new materials as expressed by teachers.

Initiation and beginning implementation were not smooth across the district, and I was asked by the Ashton Unified School District to begin consulting with them in late 2018 as a result of a bargaining contract between the Ashton Unified School District and the local teacher union affiliated with the National Educational Association (NEA). The purpose of my ongoing facilitation contract between Ashton and the local NEA was to provide an "outside voice" and support in resolving the multiple implementation issues and the widespread dissatisfaction that stemmed from the reading program change.

In the next chapters, we will follow these two districts as they initiate and implement their desired changes.