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The Design Difference

By Phil Ramsey

Imagine you are about to embark on a new career in your 'dream' industry: holiday and luxury cruises. The choice of industry was a "no-brainer" for you: you have always been attracted to the sea and ships, plus you love to see people enjoying themselves. For as long as you can recall you have known this was the industry for you. One question remains: what role do you want to play within the industry? What particular job will help you to have the biggest impact, ensuring that passengers have a great time?

Faced with this question, some people think "I'd want to be the ship's captain." Others choose "navigator", "entertainment officer" or "chief engineer". While all these are important for a successful cruise there is another role that is typically overlooked and has an even greater impact: that of "ship designer".

The "What role do you want?" question is one that business philosopher Peter Senge has posed to many groups interested in organisational learning. He finds that people seldom think of the "designer" role as critical. Other roles are so much more visible. Yet other roles - including the role of captain - all work within limitations created by the ship's design.

Design

Now think of what this implies for schools or early learning centres. Just as people are drawn to the visible in roles in the example above, people's attention can be captured by roles like "teacher", "manager", "principal", "administrator" and "caretaker". Of course, these roles need to be done: they are crucial for successful operation of a school or centre. But what if no one gives attention to the design of the school or centre as an organisation? What if thinking about design is limited to tinkering with surface-level issues that make only a marginal difference to learning outcomes? What if key aspects of the design are so taken-for-granted no one questions the limitations they impose even though everyone is frustrated to some extent? What if changes to the fundamentals of design are never seriously considered?

Such questions are useful to ponder. When things go wrong, we all tend to blame the actions of people involved rather than question the design within which they had to operate. You may have heard people lament over how people in this or that organisation aren't as competent as those of the past. What can be overlooked is that they are operating in a changed environment while trying to operate within a design that worked in the past but which is now obsolescent.

Thinking about design becomes increasingly important as the demands and challenges on a school or centre increase. You can tolerate a poorly designed chair if you don't have to spend much time sitting in it. A badly designed tool doesn't irritate the home handyman anywhere near as much as it irritates the professional who uses it all the time and needs to consistently produce work of high quality. As educational facilities face an increasingly complex world, leaders need to develop the capacity to step back from what they do and seriously consider issues of design. What is the current design good for? What are its limitations? What aspects of our work don't readily fit within the current design?

Learning vs Execution

Business educator and researcher Amy Edmondson has recently made a valuable observation regarding the design of organisations. Most struggle to deal with increasing complexity because they are designed for execution rather than learning.

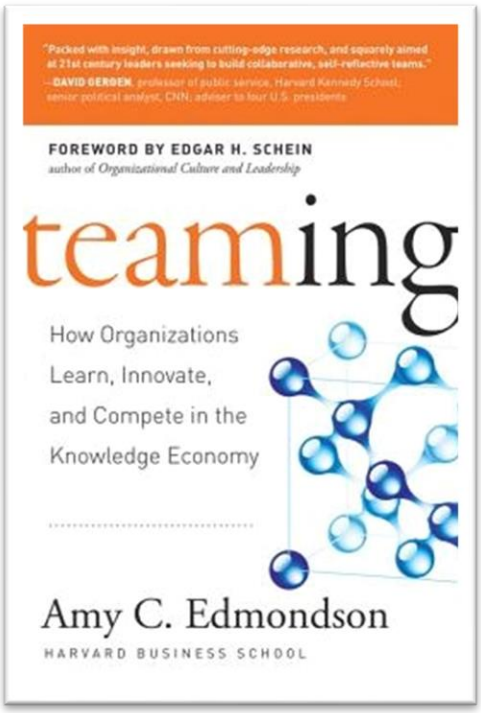
Most of our ideas about how organisations should operate come from a time when work was relatively stable. Once you knew what was required, the challenge was to come up with a good plan and then execute the plan efficiently. Many of the key processes within organisations have been designed to support high quality execution of plans. Selection processes are often geared toward finding people who will happily comply with decisions of managers. Performance appraisals and other measures aim to find out what happened compared to targets and get things back on track if anything has gone wrong.

According to Edmondson, while the world has grown far more unstable and complex, the design of most organisational processes has not changed. A complex world requires that people can learn quickly, yet we don't design for learning. Our organisations are still designed to execute. So while we may hope that people will learn; - and get frustrated that they don't, what we really need to do is re-think the nature of our design. The choice of execution over learning is pervasive, it should be no surprise if every system in the school or centre is geared for execution.

As you ponder the design of your school or centre, don't be surprised if others think you are wasting your time. Chances are, they are so used to judging systems on the quality of execution, a system designed for learning holds little appeal. Don't let that put you off. Your school or centre needs to be designed for the future, not the past.

BOOK REVIEW:
Teaming: How Organisations Learn, Innovate and Compete in the Knowledge Economy

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter – February 2013

Amy Edmondson, lecturer and researcher at Harvard Business School, thinks it is a mistake to limit the word "team" to use as a noun. In her recent book *'Teaming'* she makes it clear we should treat the word "team" as a verb. For instance, you may need to encourage people to operate collaboratively on a project; why not say "We need to team this issue".

There is more to her work than a desire to rewrite the dictionary. As discussed in the lead article, Edmondson is concerned that organisational design has not kept up with increased complexity, and greater effort is needed re-designing organisations of all sorts with an emphasis on learning. According to Edmondson's research, people who are able to 'team' are in a better position to learn and find innovative ways of dealing with unexpected challenges.

In the past, the relative stability of organisations allowed for the slow growth of team capability. Over time, with no particular effort to accelerate the process, people would get to know one another and learn how best to collaborate. When the internal environment is in flux - people coming and going, and changes to who works with whom - everyone needs to be skilled at 'teaming'. In other words, we need to build skills that enable us to form productive relationships fast, so we reduce the delay between forming a new team and performing the tasks required.

For this to happen, leaders need to be able to deal with challenges that undermine collaboration; such things as defensiveness, fear of failure, and groupthink. Edmondson writes an engaging and practical book that provides leaders with workable concepts and techniques based on her research. While written with businesses in mind and as the basis of examples, it has plenty of lessons for educational leaders and teachers.

The Case Against Individual Brilliance

By Phil Ramsey

"A group of intelligent people should be able to come up with a solution!" Can you see anything wrong with this as an idea? Research into how people work together suggests that it doesn't tell the whole story. And, chances are, your own experience will tell you that when smart people get together there isn't always a good outcome.

One thing about that first sentence that might have caused a 'qualm' is use of the word "should". Often 'should' acts as a signpost that all is not right with the world, in the same way that the words "Let me be honest" is a signpost that you are about to be lied to. 'Should' sounds like a parent talking to a child, and often conveys that the speaker is frustrated that things aren't going just the way they want. In this case it signals the need to look deeper at assumptions we often make about how people work together.

Let's assume…

It is tempting to believe that a group of intelligent, motivated individuals who come together with a shared purpose, will be able to achieve that purpose. Usually, we have had experiences where groups do achieve synergy, coming up with solutions that are better than would have been achieved by individuals working alone. So, we know that effective group work is possible, and when we have an important problem to be solved or result to be achieved, we hope it will happen.

It is tempting, though, to assume that synergy can happen by itself. That is, to believe that once we have gone to the effort of bringing the group together the rest will take care of itself. After all, we might assume, smart people can work out how to get on with one another. The temptation is to think that we don't' need to go to further effort to safeguard the process the group goes through, or to train people about how to conduct themselves during group activities.

The reality is that the skills of collaboration do not "just happen". People who are smart - or skilled - in some areas of their professional lives may not have learned how to function effectively in a group. And one reason they may not have learned is that it has always been assumed that lessons in how to collaborate are unnecessary. The assumption becomes a 'Catch-22': because I believe you should be able to work as part of a team, I'm not going to give you any training on how to, and I'll get frustrated by your lack of skill.

The need for process

Research by Collaboration expert J. Richard Hackman compared the decision-making performance of 4 types of group. One group were subject-matter experts trained in effective group process. Another group were experts who had been given no training. Thirdly, there was a group of non-experts who were trained in group process. And finally, a group of untrained non-experts. The decision the group needed to make was directly related to the area of expertise of the experts.

It was no surprise to the researchers when the untrained non-experts did worst, and the trained experts did best. The big surprise was in who came in the second and third spots. Teams of experts, with no training in how to work together effectively, did only marginally better than teams of untrained non-experts. The non-experts who had been trained to follow good group process out-performed the non-trained experts.

Perhaps you have experienced this pattern: that expert individuals have a great capacity for getting into unproductive arguments with one another, rather than with getting on with performing. So, rather than assuming that as people get smarter it becomes less important to teach them how to collaborate, it is wiser to assume that the smarter - or more expert people become - the more help they need with collaboration and group process when they get together.

Decision-making expert Irving Janis - who coined the phrase 'groupthink'- made a fascinating observation about group process. He relates that in his experience, if you ask people to come up with a list of steps to go through in order to make a good decision, most will come up with something that is reasonable. The trouble is, Janis has also found that when you ask people to actually make a decision they either shortcut good process or don't use any kind of process at all.

When you and your colleagues have got an important decision to make or problem to be solved, don't assume that you can take a shortcut. Make the effort to establish a sound process for how you will work together, and follow the process with determination.

Effective Group Process

By Phil Ramsey

The leading article discussed the need for sound group process when making decisions. One of the essential elements of good process is the principle: *have everyone in the group talking about the same thing at the same time.*

While this may sound obvious and straightforward, it can be difficult to achieve. It goes against the tendency we all have, to talk about what we want to talk about. It requires people in the group to exercise self-control - waiting for the right time to say what is on their mind - in order to keep the group process healthy. Let's consider the principle in some more depth.

Psychologist have observed that one of the key differences between individuals is the preference for convergence and divergence. Some people are naturally convergent thinkers: they like to look at a list of options and narrow it down to which option is best. Operating in this way is a natural expression of how they function; it feels as natural as breathing. Other people are divergent thinkers: they have a natural tendency to think expansively, looking for a wider range of options to consider.

Do you need people to be divergent or convergent when a group is making a decision? The answer, of course, is both. You need to be able to generate a range of perspectives and options (divergence), then you need to focus in on which one is best (convergence). Then you need to generate ideas on how to implement what you have decided (divergence), then turn those ideas into a realistic plan (convergence).

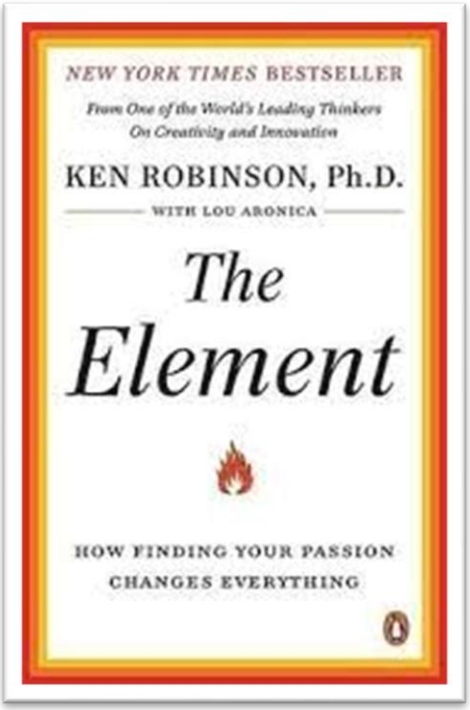
People who are convergent thinkers are capable of thinking divergently: it just doesn't come as naturally for them as it does for others. The same is true for divergent thinkers: they can be convergent when they need to be, though it may take some effort.

Group process tends to go bad when people are thinking individually rather than collectively. The group may need to generate ideas, but a couple of convergent thinkers keep wanting to edit or critique the ideas that others are sharing. Or the group may have reached the stage where it needs to choose between options, and one or two divergent thinkers keep suggesting new options. In each of those scenarios, individuals responded to their own preference rather than the need of the group at that time.

When a group is out of harmony - each person following their own preferences, even when it means blocking one another - differences are maddening. When a group operates in harmony - everyone being divergent together, then everyone being convergent together - people with different preferences appreciate the contributions that others make. They value the differences that others bring to the table.

BOOK REVIEW:
The Element

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter - May 2013

You will be familiar with the phrase, to "be in your element". Creativity expert Ken Robinson takes this idea and explores and expands on it to help people realise their unique potential and what they have to contribute to their communities and organisations. He uses the term 'Element' to refer to the intersection of what we love to do and what we are good at doing.

When people find and operate within their element, they have the potential to do great things. But as his very readable book shows, this isn't so easy. The book is filled with fascinating stories of people who stumbled around, feeling awkward as they tried to do what they thought they should, until finally finding their 'Element'. In part, standardised approaches to education confuse our thinking.

In what way? When speaking to groups, Robinson often asks individuals to rate their intelligence with score between 1 and 10. He usually gets a range of scores in any group. What surprises him is how few people refuse to do the exercise. Most people seem to think it is a legitimate request, and that their intelligence can be summarised with a one dimensional score. Perhaps the score people give themselves is a rough average of the kind of grades they received during schooling: over time I began to think of myself as a 'B'-kind-of-student, which translates to about a 7 out of 10. Thinking in this way naturally limits what we consider possible for ourselves.

According to Robinson, rather than asking 'How intelligent am I?' it is healthier and more in line with research into intelligence to ask 'How am I intelligent?' Intelligence, he says, is like a fingerprint: we each have our unique combination of gifts and talents, and we have the marvellous opportunity in life to explore what this is, and the element in which we can flourish.

Throughout the book Robinson discusses how we can find our 'Element', including finding our 'tribe': the people we feel most connected to because of shared interests; and taking advantage of mentors who challenge us to view ourselves in new ways. The book is both fascinating and inspiring in the way it challenges us to live lives of passion and capability.

Seriously Professional

By Phil Ramsey

Many people and groups talk about 'professionalism' and hold it up as an ideal. At the same time we regularly hear complaints about those who have not acted "professionally" in some undertaking. It is clearly a term that many people find compelling: some would say that it is a driving force behind improvements to practice. At the same time it can be quite ambiguous, with plenty of room for disagreement or confusion. What are some of the defining aspects of professionalism, and what significance do these have for educators?

The term 'professional' is closely associated with concepts of community. A professional is someone recognised as belonging to a community of people who share a common practice. There is a community of professional educators. But what differentiates them from all the non-professional educators: parents teach their children, and some are highly skilled, yet we don't think of them as professionals just because they are involved in the education process.

The idea of a professional community is really useful. Professional educators - as opposed to gifted amateurs - realise that belonging to the community involves meeting agreed standards when it comes to practice. Professionals accept that actions they personally take - which either meet or fall short of the standards - contribute to the reputation of the profession as a whole.

Further, professionals see the need for learning and development. The community acts as a driver for learning. On the one hand, people in a professional community test out various practices to see if they belong. The community acts as a repository of knowledge about what does and doesn't work, and members of the community feel the need to (1) use this knowledge, and (2) add to it. Non-professionals are free to be more whimsical about what they do.

And professionals feel a sense of responsibility to their profession: they freely choose to work in accord with the high standards of their profession, even when they could get away with less. They choose to be serious about their practice.

Professionalism in Teaching

Of course, not everyone in a teaching community demonstrates this kind of professionalism. Some decide to "play" at teaching rather than "practice" it. They give up on professional learning or refuse to compare themselves to professional standards. In some ways the field of education is one in which it is difficult to maintain a professional mindset.

In our work in schools and centres, over the years we have noticed that teachers can be reluctant to engage in reflective professional conversations about their practice with other professionals. There is something about teaching that seems to encourage defensiveness and caution where you might normally expect openness and a learning orientation. Why do leaders have to work so hard to encourage "open to learning conversations"? It seems that teachers will readily shift from talking about their own practice - even where there is rich material for learning about their teaching practice - to engage in discussion of what the students/children have done.

Perhaps it is due to the fact that teaching and learning is a relationship-based activity. Teachers may sense that talking about how they engage in the practice of teaching is really a case of exposing how they contribute to the health, or otherwise, of relationships. And, perhaps even more than in other people related occupations, teachers will be aware that they make plenty of relationship-based mistakes. It can feel easier to operate as a diligent solo practitioner, keeping thoughts to yourself, rather than open yourself up to scrutiny by others.

Whatever the reason, education seems to demand real discipline from those who want to be professionals. Teachers have to decide to be serious professionals. If you want to take a seriously professional approach to education, what can you do?

Professional Journals

Many professions have adopted the use of journals as a means of encouraging professional learning and a basis for knowledge sharing. Perhaps you have experienced the value of putting words on paper as a way of forcing yourself to be reflective and to clearly articulate aspects of your practice. Where day-to-day life encourages fast, reactive thinking that deals with whatever issue is demanding attention, writing in a journal encourages slow, careful thought that considers deeper issues. And seeing the words on the page - or the screen - allows us to consider what we have written and craft our thoughts in ways that generate greater meaning. At InterLEAD, we have made journaling an integral part of our InterLEAD Connector™ system because we recognise the potential it has to spark learning.

But is the act of writing in a journal enough to turn someone into a serious professional? No; rather, it depends on whether the person concerned takes a serious, professional approach to keeping the journal. What would that involve? That's a question we will consider in the article "The Professional Journal" that follows in this newsletter.

The Professional Journal

By Phil Ramsey

Recently we have been confronted with misconceptions around professional reflection and inquiry amongst educators. When conversations turn to reflection and inquiry many teachers share how they already reflect "all the time". So we have added a third word to our vocabulary: Journaling. Where reflection is passive and cognitive journaling requires cognition and action. Journaling is a vital professional practice. Commitment to journal is a key distinction between a teacher who is a serious professional and one who might be 'playing' at teaching. You can probably sense that we feel strongly about the value of journaling. But what is involved in keeping a professional journal?

Over the years a range of people, including Kurt Lewin, David Kolb and Otto Scharmer, have proposed cycles of action research or learning. These suggest that learning is at its most effective when it involves a virtuous cycle of steps, sequenced so that one cycle of learning provides impetus for another. You are probably well aware of this work and may even have a preferred cycle. It seems reasonable that the journals of professional educators would give evidence of an effective 'learning cycle' at work.

Imagine a journal based upon Lewin's model of Plan – Act - Evaluate. For any given line of inquiry in the journal, what would you expect to see? Perhaps there would be initial entries that explore the nature and purpose of the inquiry, and plans for first steps the teacher intends to take (Plan). Journal entries that follow would involve descriptions of the actions taken, and the results achieved (Act). Some entries might reconsider the plans, others might describe adjusted actions. Then there would be entries that evaluate what has been achieved, what has been learned, and the new questions that have arisen which will need to be considered in future efforts (Evaluate). Then we might see entries to do with a new cycle of planning, aimed at addressing the adjusted direction the inquiry has taken (Plan).

If you are a school or centre leader, reviewing the journal of a teacher, and you are both serious about professional learning, how could you use this understanding of journaling? Perhaps you could take a series of steps: (1) reviewing the Plan—Act—Evaluate cycle, and how it contributes to professional learning; (2) have the teacher review their journal, placing a P, A or E alongside each entry to indicate which phase of the cycle is best represented; (3) review the pattern that emerges, considering what it tells you about learning and journaling to date, and (4) decide on next steps that could improve the quality of the journaling process.

Of course, you can apply this process to reviewing your own journal as well. You can also adjust the process to fit an alternative learning cycle that you or the teacher prefers. As long as you are using a model that is acceptable to the teaching profession, you will have shown you are serious about professionalism when it comes to use of a journal.

Feed Forward Coaching

By Phil Ramsey

For years, those working in the field of leadership have described feedback as the “breakfast of champions”; yet many find the process of giving or receiving feedback daunting to contemplate and painful to experience. Leadership expert Marshall Goldsmith has suggested an alternative to 'feedback': an approach that provides a powerful way to lift personal performance that is typically enjoyable for all involved.

Here’s how it goes:

1. Start by deciding on an area in which you would like to develop; in other words, chose a goal you would like to work on

2. Then, have a conversation with someone who knows you. Tell them about your goal (“I’ve decided I want to work on …”)

3. Then, invite the person to make suggestions on actions you could take (“Any ideas on what I could do?”)

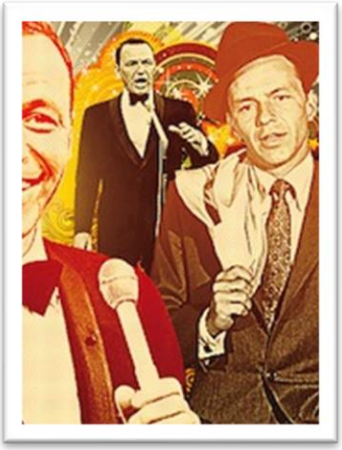
4. Then listen

In effect, you are inviting your colleague to provide you with coaching. If you regularly engage in Feed Forward Coaching - perhaps two or three times per month - you’ll be amazed at the results. By asking, you set yourself up for dialogue: you show yourself to be vulnerable and open to the views of your colleague. That builds your relationship, at the same time as creating a powerful opportunity for learning. The process consistently generates ideas for action that you won’t have thought of, reflecting a perspective that you may never have considered.

At the first attempt this might seem to involve a high degree of risk, and call on you to act with courage. Try it out; you may be surprised at how well it works.

Leading Like Sinatra

By Phil Ramsey



How you approach leadership development - and how you organise your school or centre to arrange leadership development - is shaped by your assumptions about what leadership is and what it takes for a leader to be effective. Yet these assumptions are usually left in the back of our minds rather than made explicit, let alone challenged.

An example of this is the "Being - Doing" assumption. Some people assume that leadership is about being a leader; developing inner character and qualities that make it possible to form healthy, productive and sustainable relationships. Others are naturally drawn to the view that leadership is about doing things that make a difference, and that inner qualities make little difference until there is some action.

While some people argue for "Do" and others for "Be", at InterLEAD we endorse Sinatra leadership: "Do—Be—Do—Be—Do". This is an old joke, and we realise that some readers may need to google 'Sinatra' (or ask a grandparent to explain!). Still, it expresses an important principle: leadership is complex and there is value in exploring both the 'inner' and 'outer' elements involved if we want to really make a difference.

Leadership is fundamentally a relationship between leader and followers, and healthy relationships are needed in order to produce the results that our schools need. The inner side of leadership - developing the qualities that enable one to be a leader - focuses attention on the inputs that a leader brings to relationships. People want to be in relationships with leaders who have character and integrity they can trust.

To qualify as 'leadership' though, a quality relationship has to produce something. The doing aspect of leadership focuses on the actions that leaders and followers take together in order to produce fundamental change that is important to them all. A quality relationship that produces nothing might as well be called 'friendship'. And leadership theorists generally agree that to qualify 'leadership' action really needs to produce significant, fundamental changes that represent the shared purposes of those involved.

Rich Development

What does this mean for leadership development? It seems obvious to us that serious leadership development needs to reflect the rich, complex nature of leadership itself. It cannot be thought of as a one-off event. Rather it is an on-going process of growth that addresses both Being and Doing. Leadership philosopher Peter Kostenbaum indicated this when he said that leadership development is the process of "becoming fully human".

When you think about it, a view like this can be quite a frustration for anyone aspiring to leadership. There is always plenty more to do; areas of life or relationships that have yet to be meaningfully addressed. This is reflected in the way some followers think of leadership. According to researcher Joseph Rost, many people, when asked to describe what leadership is, think about their current boss and describe what he or she isn't doing. It is as if they reason, "If she was really a leader she'd be doing this already, and my life would be so much better."

Leadership development has to deal with this tension also: people's expectations of leadership - including the leader's own - keep growing, so it can feel that they are never quite complete. The process of leadership development needs to prompt leaders to continue to develop while helping them acknowledge what they have already accomplished. Without catering for both, development will either encourage leaders to stagnate or to burnout in frustration.

For some time InterLEAD has been working with schools and centres in the area of development. We've developed the InterLEAD Connector™ system as a tool that can be used to make teacher and administration staff development coherent and manageable for everyone. Educators have been challenging us to come up with something similar in the area of leadership; a system that can provide leaders with rich data on their practices and relationships and prompt them to give sustained attention to improvement in this vital area.

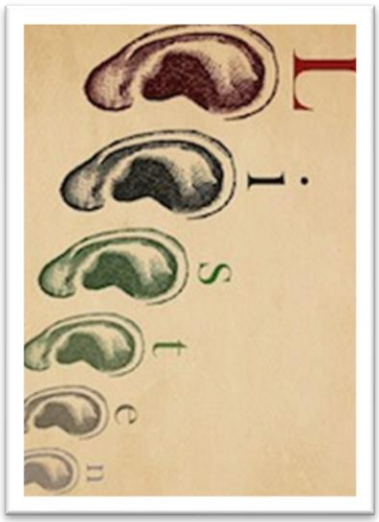
We are happy to announce that we have developed a new product, the Leadership Reflector™. It is an online system of leadership appraisal that we believe incorporates many of the design features that have made InterLEAD Connector™ a success, and which honours the complexity of leadership.

In brief, Leadership Reflector™ can act as part of a systematic appraisal for school leaders. We have designed it guided by the Kiwi Leadership Framework (KLF), a detailed model of leadership that is tailored to the New Zealand education context. Where the KLF gives a broad outline of areas in which leaders can act, we have set out to translate these into specific practices based on sound conceptual models.

By using Leadership Reflector™ as a tool to make the KLF practical and actionable, we are designing a system that leaders can use to make their appraisal and development both compliant and meaningful. Further, the depth of the KLF model will allow principals to take a "Sinatra" approach to their leadership development over the long term.

The Challenge Of Listening

By Phil Ramsey



Leaders at all levels of education need to make serious decisions that affect the lives of people. Leaders often want to consult with those who will be affected, and sometimes they are legally obliged to engage in consultation. But, as evidenced by the difficulty the Ministry of Education's has experienced in recent times, getting consultation right is no easy thing. If people feel they have not been truly listened to, consultation can leave people feeling more disgruntled than if nothing had been done.

It is easy to blame individuals when consultation doesn't work: to put it down to an individual's lack of good intention, or to arrogance that prevents real listening. These simple explanations are appealing because they allow us to reassure ourselves, "That wouldn't happen to me." Many leaders, though, have found that their own efforts to consult - and to assure people that they really are listening - are not routinely successful. Rather, getting it right is a challenge that involves careful thought, good design and a determined effort to practice good listening.

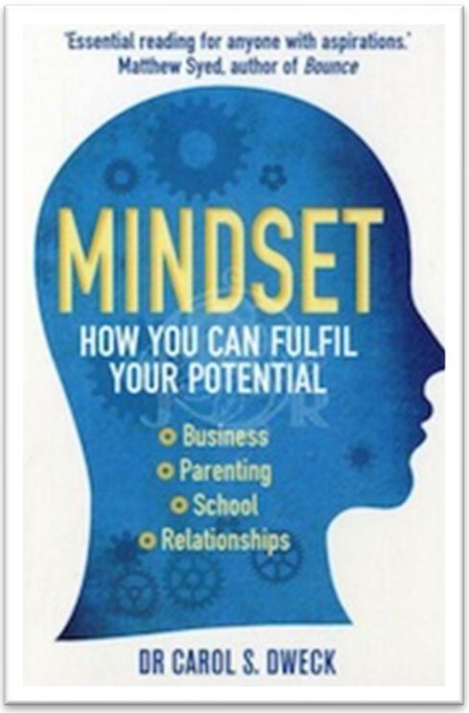
Adam Kahane, an expert on conversation with experience facilitating consultation in some of the world's most heated disputes, says that most of us don't realise what poor listeners we really are. According to Kahane, our default way of talking is to "tell" and our default way of listening is "not listening". These default settings are, in part, the result of immersion in a culture that values winning debates and being the expert over finding new ways to think about the challenges that we face.

When will be the next time you need to consult others about a serious decision you need to make? How are you organising or designing the consultation? What patterns of conversation have caused frustration during previous efforts at consultation? Why do these patterns arise, and what will stop them from doing so again? What question will really engage people? What changes to my practise do I need to make in order to listen effectively?

These kinds of questions can prompt you into over-turning some tired assumptions about how consultation has to happen. Without careful thought to the design of conversations, people - both you and others - will quickly default into established patterns of talk that don't deliver the outcomes you want. Challenge yourself to re-think how you design the setting for consultation marked by real listening.

BOOK REVIEW:
Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter - November 2013

Getting to the root causes of things provides powerful insights into how to make real change. Carol Dweck's book Mindset achieves this in the area of learning. Like us, you have probably come upon a range of learning-related issues over the years, realised that it is important to make a difference, yet felt frustrated that a solution didn't present itself. Dweck explains how the mindset a person has shapes the way they approach life and its challenges, and why some people get stuck in unhealthy patterns of resisting change, responding defensively, and avoiding feedback.

Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, contrasts two mindsets. The "fixed mindset" is one where people think that what they are - their intelligence, personality, abilities, relationships and so on - are pretty much stable; that, it doesn't matter what you do, these are not going to change. The "growth mindset" is where a person believes that all these things can be improved with work; that, with effort and learning, they can bring about the changes they really want.

The reasoning in the book and the examples she gives make a compelling case. The fixed mindset, which we can see all around us (and usually within us too), gives rise to the need to prove yourself special, to give up on things that are difficult, to distort reality when it comes to self-assessment, and many other actions that hinder learning. When we try to make change to behaviour without addressing the underlying mindset, it is hard to make any substantial progress.

The good news is that Dweck has years of experience helping people to change from a fixed to a growth mindset. The lessons she has learned are important for everyone. We all need to put in effort and to learn if we are to achieve our goals, and this comes naturally from a growth mindset. What she has to say is especially important for parents, teachers and leaders who, by their actions and feedback, can shape the mindsets of others. Sadly, with the best of intentions, we can easily develop habits of interacting with others in ways that encourage them to retreat into a fixed mindset.

Many of the examples used in the book are from education, where mindsets and learning are at the heart of what gets achieved. Dweck is, herself, an outstanding teacher, and gives great, practical advice on how to improve the quality and impact of your teaching. This is a book that can have a profound effect on your teaching and leadership practice.