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# Authors' Note

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## *The Time Is Now!*

**H**ow do you turn overload and fragmentation into focus and coherence? This is what this book is about.

We have been involved in developing coherence for student learning in districts and systems (provinces/states) since 1988. We have helped practitioners do this, but more than that, they have helped us understand the details. This work—bringing about system change within reasonably short timelines—has become increasingly clear. It is difficult to do but not overwhelming. And once you get the knack of it, the process of change moves more quickly and deeply (see Fullan, in press).

Part of the subtitle of the book is “right drivers in action.” In 2011, one of us, Fullan, wrote a policy paper titled “Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform” (2011a). The wrong drivers were external accountability, individualism, technology, and ad hoc policies. The corresponding right drivers were capacity building with a focus on results, collaboration, pedagogy, and systemness (coordinated policies).

The wrong drivers paper immediately hit a responsive chord especially at the middle (district and regions) and school levels. Many leaders embraced the distinction and were quick to denounce the wrong driver tendencies of policy makers. But our “drivers paper” was not a plan of action (if you like, it was better at describing what not to do than it was at figuring out what actually to do). Thus, *Coherence* represents going into action with the right drivers as the foundation.

The Coherence Framework has four components: focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability. Separate chapters delve deeply into each of the components. We will also show how the four elements intersect to form a dynamic

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whole and how leadership at all levels is essential for integrating the core ideas. The action framework we have developed aligns to the original four right drivers as follows:

Original Right Drivers	Right Drivers in Action
Systemness	Focusing Direction
Collaboration	Cultivating Collaborative Cultures
Pedagogy	Deepening Learning
Capacity Building for Results	Securing Accountability

- *Focusing direction* is systemness (the need to integrate what the system is doing).
- *Cultivating collaborative cultures* oversees individualism by producing strong groups and strong individuals.
- *Deepening learning*, which is founded on new pedagogical partnerships, is the driver for better outcomes using technology as the accelerator.
- Capacity for results is based on developing skills and competencies within the group that, in turn, serves as a basis for being self-responsible and accountable to the outside. The road to *securing accountability* is through developing capacity within the group that, in turn, interfaces with the external accountability system.

At the center of the framework is leadership. Leaders must find the right combination of these four components to meet the varying needs of their context. One last clarifying point is this: We don't have capacity building as a separate component in the Coherence Framework because particular capacities are contained and necessary within each of the four components. Leadership, thus, infuses capacity building into all levels and work of the system as it combines the four components.

The audience for this book includes leaders at all levels of the education system—school and community, district and region, and state level. For those at the school and district/regional levels, you can take action using the Coherence Framework directly. State-level people have a double agenda: use the framework in your own actions but also create the infrastructure of policy, budget, and partnerships at the middle and local levels

for “whole system improvement” to flourish. Our approach is a win-win proposition, but it has to be deliberately fostered by many leaders working individually and collectively.

The term *simplicity* captures what we do. We take a complicated matter, identify the smallest number of key factors or domains (typically four to six), and work together with practitioners to become clear about and to master the factors in actions. The simple part is the small number of key domains; the complex part is making the ideas gel or cohere with all participants, given the politics, pressures, and personalities involved. The good news is that it works. It is doable and as such is catching on. Wallowing in confusion is not all that enjoyable. Our alternative is much more satisfying. Most people would rather be challenged by change and helped to progress than be mired in frustration. Best of all, this work tackles “whole systems” and uses the group to change the group. People know they are engaged in something beyond their narrow role. It is human nature to rise to a larger call *if* the problems are serious enough and *if* there is a way forward where they can play a role with others. Coherence making is the pathway that does this.

You will see in this book how Garden Grove Unified School District overcame the challenge of high poverty, with over 80 percent English-language learners (ELLs) to become one of the highest-performing districts in the state of California. You will witness how the province of Ontario took a stagnant school system of 5,000 schools and 72 districts and transformed it into one of the highest-performing systems in the world. You will find out how a highly diverse urban school district, York Region District School Board, with some 200 schools declared literacy—the ability of children to read by the end of grade 1 and to read well by grade 3—priority number one and then proceeded to make it a reality in less than a decade. And you will see how principal James Bond (no, not *that* James Bond) and his teachers at Park Manor Senior Public School formed a strong base of pedagogy and then used digital to accelerate learning, moving to high proficiency in writing from 42 percent of the students to 83 percent achieving at those levels.

All of these systems, and others we cite, used “coherence making strategies” as the route to success. They focused direction, employed collaborative capacity building, went deep in pedagogy, and secured

internal group-based accountability across the whole system. The researcher John Hattie (2015) has added further confirmation to our conclusions in his report *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*. His conclusion represents a powerful endorsement of our findings: “the greatest influence on student progression in learning is having highly expert, inspired and passionate teachers and school leaders working together to maximize the effect of their teaching on all students in their care” (p. 2).

Our book is a story of how regular school systems can achieve remarkable and lasting success by focusing on the right things and staying with them. For the first time, these strategies are accessible to all. Our intent in this book is to make coherence making an understandable and valuable resource for leaders who want to make a lasting difference.