

# THE TRANSFORMATION FROM A COMPLYING SCHOOL TO A LEARNING ORGANIZATION



*Learning organizations are...*

*“organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.”*

Peter Senge

Author, *The Fifth Discipline*

The ultimate goal of continuous school improvement is to create learning organizations that have the ability to develop their capacity to create the results they truly desire. This book is about helping schools become true learning organizations by moving them from focusing solely on gaps, compliance, and being “Adequate,” to becoming learning organizations that create the vision, commitment, and results they want for all their students.

After reading the previous thirteen chapters, you might become overwhelmed with the many things that need to be done to become a continuously improving learning organization. Some schools do not enter into the work of comprehensive data analysis and continuous school improvement because they believe it is “over their heads” and too technical. The work of comprehensive data analysis and continuous school improvement is not just a technical task. In reality, it is more about getting all people on the same page committing to move the system forward, and then doing it. While the tasks may seem difficult, they are doable, and the outcome is surely worth the effort. Let’s review what it takes to become a continuously improving learning organization.

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## BECOMING LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

As stated in Chapter 1, this book is a call to action. It is about inspiring schools and districts to commit to continuous school improvement by providing a framework that will result in improving teaching for every teacher, and learning for every student, in one year, through the comprehensive use of data. It provides a new definition of improvement, away from compliance, toward a commitment to excellence. Inherent in this work are the following non-negotiables:

*Leadership must work to get commitment, which is NOT enlisting, recruiting, or getting staff to buy-in.*

*It is easier to understand why some things have to change when all staff see the data pointing them in a certain direction.*

*A shared vision is the power that drives learning organizations.*

*A continuous school improvement plan shows everyone on staff how to implement the vision, as opposed to just closing a gap for compliance.*

- ◆ *Commit and engage staff throughout the entire process.* Continuous school improvement does not happen from the top-down. Leadership must work to get *commitment*, which is NOT enlisting, recruiting, or getting staff to buy-in. It is leading and encouraging staff to commit to do the best they can for every student. Engaging the staff throughout the process keeps the commitment fresh.
- ◆ *Empower all staff with schoolwide data.* When staff see all the data, they understand why and how they are getting the results they are getting now. They understand linkages, what is working, and what is not working. Collectively, they can see what they need to learn and change to get better results for their students. It is easier to understand why some things have to change when all staff see the data pointing them in a certain direction. It is also easier to move the entire staff in that direction when the data analysis process supports their understanding of the data.
- ◆ *Provide data tools.* It is critical to have the technological capacity and data tools that support the analyses described in this book, so staff can spend their time analyzing the data rather than organizing the data. Empowering staff requires that data are easily accessible, clean and reliable, and the systems are focused on supporting the framework for continuous school improvement.
- ◆ *Create a shared vision.* A shared vision is the power that drives learning organizations. The vision clarifies the strategies and actions that learning organizations propose to do to get their desired results. Shared means that everybody understands the vision in the same way, so it can be implemented in the same way. When staff are a part of the creation of the vision, they will implement it. Leadership must focus on facilitating the vision.
- ◆ *Develop a continuous school improvement plan to implement the vision.* A continuous school improvement plan shows everyone on staff how to implement the vision, as opposed to just closing a gap for compliance.

- ◆ *Create a true shared decision-making structure.* A true shared decision-making structure clarifies and supports everyone's job in implementing and helping everyone else to implement the vision. Clarifying and monitoring roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the vision cements commitment.
- ◆ *Identify change agents to lead and carry out specific improvement tasks.* Some staff members have more interest and talents in data analysis, others in collaborative structures. Find the staff leaders for the work that needs to be done, and let them lead.
- ◆ *Create a collaborative work culture.* Collaborative work is vital to overcoming the status quo. To get improved results for all students, teachers must be able to prescribe and implement immediate improvement. Together, staff can review student, grade, and school level performance data, utilize problem-solving strategies, study program and process implementation, create process flowcharts, and coach each other to ensure implementation to get the results they want for all students.
- ◆ *Support for the improvement process through professional learning and partnerships.* Staff need support to improve teaching and learning for all students. Structures need to be in place so staff can learn new concepts, and tap into parent, community, and business support.
- ◆ *Engage staff in evaluating processes, programs, and the vision to make sure they are making a difference.* By being involved in the evaluation process, on-going reflection becomes the way work is done, and ensures that staff are making the intended difference.

The continuous school improvement framework provided in this book helps staff do all these things to create a desirable learning organization and stay on course. To continuously improve a school, staff must agree on what they want students to know and be able to do, want the same outcomes, share the same vision, determine how they are going to get to where they want to be, and know that they got there, together. Then, as spelled out in the *Plan–Implement–Evaluate–Improve Cycle*, they must adjust, and start again to do things even better the next time. The framework, along with the tools in the chapters and appendices, are intended to guide and support staff in bringing together the technical elements with the facilitation necessary for effective staff engagement.

The framework also helps staff look at the whole organization and get away from focusing on gaps only. The completion of the elements of the continuous school improvement framework is *the* way to get student learning for every student, in every grade level, and in every subject area. When this work is thorough, a school will transform into a true learning organization and can step away from a narrow focus on compliance only. When staff can see the whole system, they are able to understand what they can do to get better results across the board and not just focus

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*Collaborative work is vital to overcoming the status quo.*

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on one subject or subgroup at a time. Schools and school districts/boards are bound by government politics regarding the reduction of gaps between specific subgroups. If the staff look at the whole organization and get all students to learn, the rest will follow and the gaps will disappear.

## LOGIC IN THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

What I am asking you to do in this book is very logical. I am asking you to pay attention to the results your school is getting now, understand how and why you are getting these results, and adjust your processes to get better results for your students. I want you to reflect on the big picture and how the parts lead to the whole, and then to be intentional about creating a learning organization that will make a difference for *all* of your students.

A logic model is a tool to clarify and graphically display what your learning organization plans to do and what it hopes to accomplish, given its context. This tool is useful for planning, implementation, and for evaluation.

Logic models provide us with the opportunity to see the whole learning organization and the components that make up that big picture. They enable us to improve all aspects of the learning organization, and ultimately, produce the results we want. They are a way to pull everything together—to get a systems view. A logic model shows how we “do” school and why.

Putting together a logic model for a learning organization requires:

- ◆ clarification of the results we want to get for all students (*short and long-term outcomes*);
- ◆ listing the *inputs* that must be taken into consideration for staff to create the processes to achieve the desired outcomes; and
- ◆ the adaptation and implementation of programs, processes, and procedures (*processes*) to achieve those *outcomes*, given whom we have as students, staff, parents, and community (*inputs*).

The logic model is an ideal structure for reflecting on linkages. If you do not know the impact of your current processes, take the time to study those results. One of the greatest benefits in using a logic model is to enable a review of the big picture to determine how you can improve the results your school is getting for *all* students. If you are not getting the results you expect or anticipated, you must understand how to change the processes to create the results you want for *all* students.

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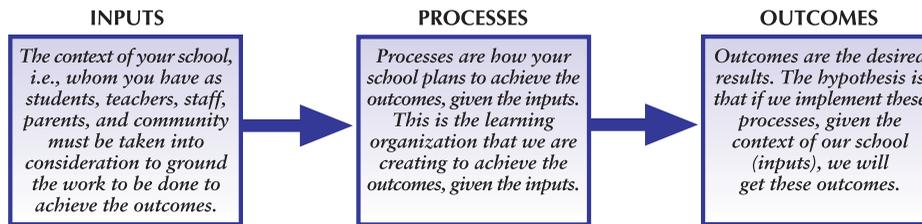


Figure 14.1 shows a logic model for a typical school. On the left side are the *inputs* that spell out the context of the school. In the middle are the *processes* that create the results. On the right side are the short-term and long-term *outcomes*. This is how to read the reasoning within the logic model.

The following steps indicate how to create a logic model for your learning organization. It might be fitting for you to start with the example logic model in Figure 14.1 and adapt it to fit your data.

### Creating the Logic Model of Your Learning Organization

**Step 1. Assemble a Team to Create a Logic Model.** You will want the team to consist of individuals familiar with all aspects of the learning organization and the school data, and who are committed to achieving the outcomes.

**Step 2. Determine Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes.** Schools are pretty clear about their outcomes for K-12. Often, however, they have never listed them all before. The short-term and long-term outcomes listed in the example are a starting place. Review these and add to the outcomes.

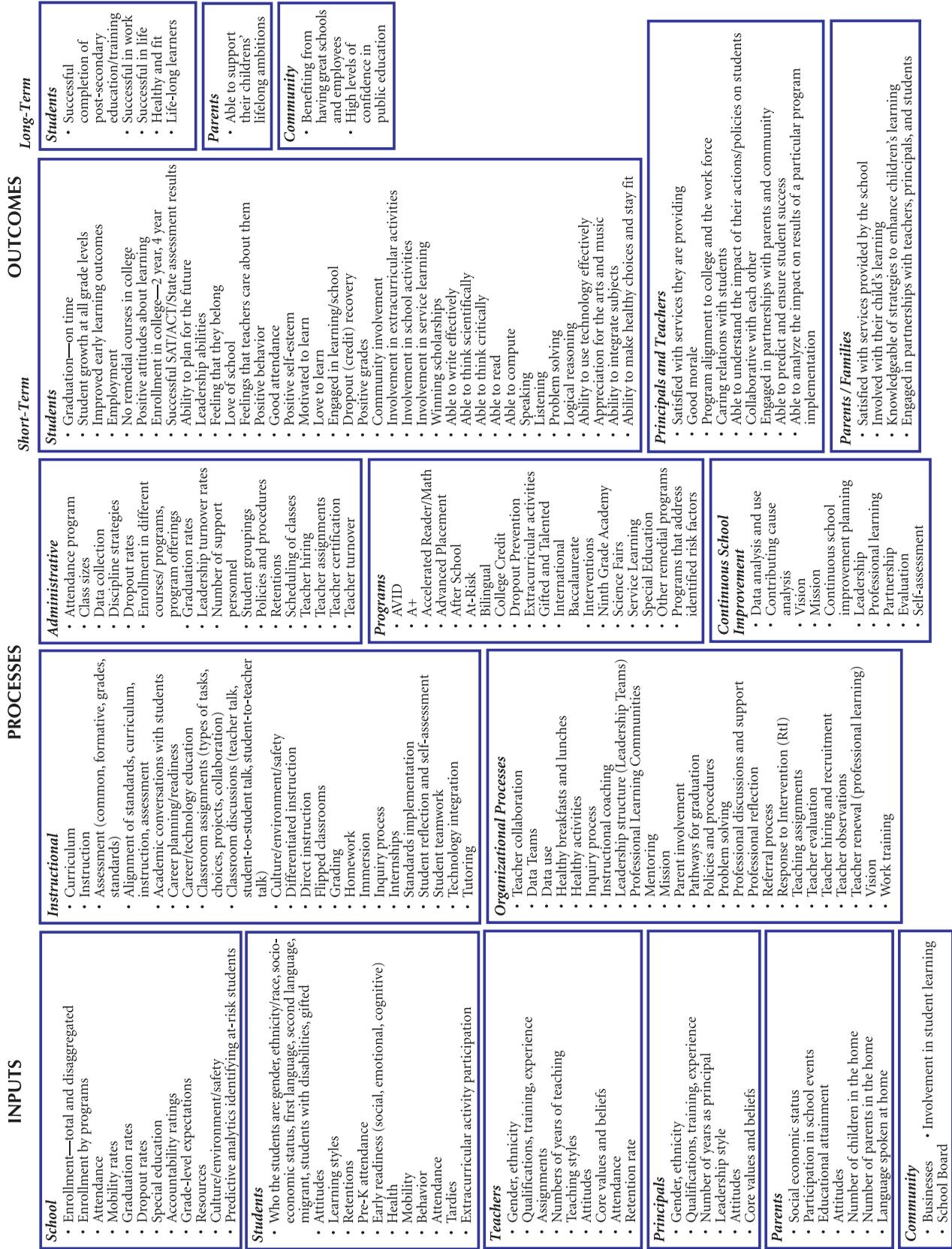
It is important to know where your school is with respect to your desired outcomes, so processes can be adjusted, given the inputs. Your work with the multiple measures of data (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) should help you uncover the answer to the question, “how are we doing with respect to these outcomes?”

As professional educators, your challenge is to determine how you are going to get better results. With collective and shared knowledge, you determine how to put together your school—curriculum, instruction, assessment, environment, processes, procedures, and programs—given your inputs. This is where the school processes come in, but not until the inputs are taken into consideration.

#### CREATING THE LOGIC MODEL OF YOUR LEARNING ORGANIZATION

1. *Assemble a team to create a logic model.*
2. *Determine short-term and long-term outcomes.*
3. *Layout the inputs.*
4. *List high-quality processes and programs to create the results you want.*
5. *Review the big picture.*
6. *Revise the parts.*

Figure 14.1 ~ EXAMPLE SCHOOL LOGIC MODEL



**Step 3. *Layout the Inputs.*** Using the data inventories located in Appendix B that follow the information provided in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, list the data that must be considered as your school adapts its programs, processes, and procedures to meet the needs of all students. The example school logic model inputs are a good start.

The Logic Model can look overwhelming, even before we think about looking at all the data implied within it. However, if a school is working on continuous school improvement, it has much of the data work done already. Inputs describe where we are now and are documented in the learning organization's data profile. The update of the results of the data profile becomes the outcomes. For example, student attendance is an input that we would also want to see improved, as an outcome.

**Step 4. *List High-Quality Processes and Programs to Create the Results You Want.*** Following the work outlined in Chapter 6, you will have a list of school processes; i.e., programs, processes, and procedures that your school is using right now. Hopefully, you will also have an assessment of the impact of each of these programs, processes, and procedures so only those that are impacting students positively will be used. List those processes, procedures, and programs that your staff believe everyone should be implementing, and then make sure the implementation is occurring. The school processes data inventory, the school vision, leadership structures, and partnerships will help you spell out the processes.

**Step 5. *Review the Big Picture.*** To improve thinking about how to get better results, it is important to review the whole system that the logic model helps us see. Engage staff in this review. Ask and answer questions like, *Will the processes get the results we want, given the inputs?*, *Are we doing the right things for all of our students?*, and *Is this our best theory of change?* If not, we must change the processes that create the results.

**Step 6. *Revise the Parts***

Given the review in step 5, the analyses of processes, procedures, and programs completed in previous chapters and current and past results, adjust your logic model in the best way you can to get better outcomes.

## BENEFITS OF CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND BECOMING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

*The most important benefit of continuous school improvement is that through this hard work, a school can become a true learning organization committed to continuous improvement.*

*Imagine not continuously improving.... If you are not creating a learning organization that is continuously improving, you are not doing enough for your students.*

The benefits of continuous school improvement are many. The most important benefit is that through this hard work, a school can become a true learning organization committed to continuous improvement. More specifically:

1. We are able to clarify who our students are.
2. We understand how we are getting our results, and how to get better results for our students.
3. We have cleaned up the system to work as effectively and efficiently as possible.
4. We do business in a manner that will allow all students to achieve success.
5. We have created a vision that is truly shared and to which all staff are committed.
6. We are able to clarify roles and responsibilities and the work we do.
7. We implement common strategies with integrity and fidelity.
8. We implement structures that get all staff working together and that make a difference.
9. We collaboratively improve teaching and learning through the ongoing use of data.
10. We truly understand if what we are doing is making a difference.
11. We are focused on the creation of a true learning organization.

With this, learning organizations are able to ensure increased learning for every student, in every grade level, in every subject area, and with every student group.

Imagine not continuously improving.... If you are not creating a learning organization that is continuously improving, you are not doing enough for your students.

## HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?

*The work of continuous school improvement is ongoing and should be a continuous part of every school year.*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is a learning organization?
2. How does the Logic Model help with the understanding of continuous school improvement?
3. How does the continuous school improvement framework help a school become a true learning organization?
4. What are the benefits of doing the hard work of continuous school improvement?

### APPLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

1. Reflect with your staff members on their progress in becoming a true learning organization.
2. Review the Logic Model presented in this chapter. Adjust it to reflect the data from your school. How will this Logic Model help your school become a learning organization?
3. How has the continuous school improvement framework helped your school become a learning organization?
4. What have been the benefits of your school engaging in continuous school improvement?
5. What specific strategies can you put in place to help all staff members move from compliance to commitment of the school vision?