

Preface

The purpose of this book is to help school leaders and teacher-leaders to use structural dynamics to improve teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. We decided to write this book because we believe a single school leader alone cannot increase school capacity to serve all learners using traditional planning and management strategies. With an understanding of structural dynamics, leaders can help to keep their schools from oscillating between the structural conflicts that divert them from where they want to go.

This book is for practicing and aspiring school leaders and teacher-leaders who want to create schools that are effective for all students. There is no doubt that during the past several decades, the context surrounding schools has become significantly more complex. Initially, school districts were more concerned with monitoring inputs and the cosmetics of the school plant and classrooms. With an increasing complexity and dissatisfaction with many aspects of schooling, school districts began to monitor educational processes, including such things as lesson plans, classroom management, and the completion of required school accreditation and self-studies. This internal monitoring was largely activity-oriented, with little attention paid to student results. This has evolved now to federal and state governments monitoring schools from the outside by measuring student performance using normative assessments.

The current era of accountability has clearly created a need for the school principal to acquire new knowledge, skills, and

dispositions and to assume new roles and responsibilities. Principals need to expand their focus to include not only school management but also instructional leadership, which includes knowing how to create schools that produce success for all students. This requires them to understand the purpose of their leadership and how that affects their everyday work with staff, students, and families. They must establish a moral purpose, with guiding principles to direct and focus their work. They also need to work with the school community, create a democratic community, and build instruction program coherence in their school. This is complex work, and it requires not only commitment and ongoing learning but also a planning strategy to know how to put these structures in place.

The design strategy at the foundation of our work is driven by Robert Fritz's theory of structural dynamics and his concepts of structural tension and structural conflict, outlined in his book *The Path of Least Resistance for Managers* (1999). We chose this design strategy because it allows us to create what matters, has an outcome orientation, and is dynamic. It starts with creating what matters to a school community, providing an opportunity to bring into being, for example, personalized learning for all students. What you want to create is translated into measurable end results. This outcome orientation is fundamental to the current context of school accountability. It's dynamic in that school teams can continuously assess the tension between desired end results and the status quo. It allows school leaders to adjust to and accommodate the changes happening weekly in their schools. Finally, structural conflict is an equally important concept to consider because it helps us examine what structures are preventing movement toward our desired end results.

This book is organized into three distinct but interrelated segments. The first section contains the stories of three leaders, their faculty, and community members providing a running context for the book. In Chapter 1, we outline the context, action, and motivation to change that we found in three schools. We selected these three stories because they are examples of schools in transformation that have achieved excellent results. In the remaining chapters of the book, we return to the stories to illustrate the principles of structural dynamics and the essential elements emphasized in each chapter.

In the second section, composed of Chapters 2 and 3, we introduce Fritz's (1999) foundational principles of structural dynamics. We offer key definitions and illustrations to help explain the concepts of *structural tension* and *structural conflict* as applied in organizations—and especially in schools. We explain why your schools oscillate and experience structural conflict, and we offer a model for advancing toward your goals.

In the third section, Chapters 4–7, we bring together what we believe to be the four key elements required to move schools forward: moral purpose and principles, community building, instructional program coherence, and leadership. We offer illustrations of those principles and elements in action through the stories of our leaders in their schools. We attempt to show how the principles of structural dynamics interplay both with these important transformative elements and within our stories.

The leaders you encounter in this book are drawn from the teaching staff and community of parents in each of these schools. Together, they transformed their schools into more personalized and communal settings that made everyone count and be accountable for student learning. Their results demonstrate their success. Our hope is that you come to know how to use Robert Fritz's concepts and our application of his work to yours. Good luck.