



GO FOURTH. LEARN.
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THE GO FOURTH LEARN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Equipping Leaders To Thrive In An Era of Rapid Change

V 1.0

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Preface: Leading Transformation

Today's educational landscape demands transformational leaders who can navigate complexity, build sustainable learning organizations, and create lasting positive change for all students. The traditional industrial model of education, with its emphasis on standardization and compliance, is no longer sufficient to develop the creative, collaborative, and critical thinkers that our world needs.

This leadership development framework centers on four essential competencies that research and practice have identified as critical for educational transformation. Drawing from the work of educational innovators including W. Edwards Deming, Richard DuFour, Sir Ken Robinson, and Will Richardson, along with insights from progressive educational institutions, this framework provides school leaders with the specific capabilities needed to transform educational systems.

As a companion document to the Go Fourth Learn whitepaper - Leading Schools In An Age Of Accelerations, this framework focuses on the skills and dispositions needed to bring forth the ideas and directions outlined in the paper.

The urgency for this type of leadership has never been greater. Schools must evolve from institutions focused on sorting and selecting students to dynamic learning communities that develop every student's potential. This transformation requires leaders who can think systemically, sustain organizational learning, lead complex change, create collaborative cultures, and maintain an unwavering focus on student learning outcomes.

Contents

Core Beliefs and Theory of Action	2
The Foundation: Who You Are And What You Do	3
Framework Overview	4
The Two-Point Rubric	5
Competency 1: Deep Systems Thinking Capabilities	6
Competency 2: Sustaining Learning Organizations	7
Competency 3: Leading Transformational Change	8
Competency 4: Focus on Learning, Growth, and Well Being	9
Implementation Guidelines	10
Conclusion	11
About the Author	12
The Go Fourth Learn Project	13
References	14

Core Beliefs and Theory of Action

The Go Fourth Learn Leadership Development Framework is built around a set of core beliefs and a theory of action that sets the foundation for the work of school leaders:

GFL Core Beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership is about creating positive systems-level change, not just managing existing structures.• All students can achieve at high levels with the right supports and opportunities.• Schools must function as learning organizations where growth and innovation are continuous.• Leaders must develop both technical and adaptive leadership capacities.• Transformational change requires collective effort guided by shared vision and a relentless focus on learning.

GFL Theory of Action	
If we develop school leaders who: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Possess deep systems thinking capabilities.• Build and sustain learning organizations.• Lead transformational change processes.• Focus relentlessly on learning, growth, and well-being.	Then we will create schools that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuously improve outcomes for all students.• Close opportunity and achievement gaps.• Adapt and innovate to meet future needs.• Sustain positive change over time.• Function as true learning organizations.

The Foundation: Who You Are And What You Do

In a school setting, successfully taking on the work of transformation requires the leader to be focused on cultural change. To be effective in doing the work and taking on the challenges we face in today's schools, the leader needs to be introspectively focused on the critical relationship between "who you are" and "what you do".

"Who you are" can be understood in two important ways :

- **Personal intelligence and self-awareness** - Effective leaders understand the need to lead themselves before others. There is an old saying that you cannot help others until you can help yourself. The work of school leadership, and especially transformational leadership in schools, can be stressful and never-ending. To be effective, the leader needs to establish proper boundaries and attend to their own wellness needs consistently over time; this is not selfish but essential. Another essential characteristic of the transformational leader is growth mindset. In this context, having a growth mindset means that the leader is consistent in actively seeking feedback and looking to understand criticisms and concerns regarding their own leadership and impact on those they lead. Finally, the transformational leader values innovation and has a strong desire to improve things, test theories, and create new ways of working. This must be a personal commitment as transformation can be difficult and at times daunting - "fake it until you make it" is not the proper mindset when leading systemic change.
- **Social Intelligence and awareness of those around you.** - A Transformational leader needs to develop a high Emotional Quotient to effectively be the servant leader that they need to be when leading change initiatives. Change of almost any nature induces stress and anxiety in most people. Being aware of the needs of others and adjusting to those needs in sincere ways reduces demotivation. Taking time to build community through recognition of individual contributions and taking time to celebrate wins (even small ones) as a community builds collective commitment to the cause. Understanding where people need to grow and positively responding to those needs with training and capacity building reduces anxiety while positively supporting and encouraging the growth of the team at all levels of the organization.

"What you do" as a transformational leader is best summed up in clearly understanding that the purpose of the role is to work on the system rather than work as part of the system. One way to think about the work from this perspective is through the idea of systems intelligence:

- **Systems intelligence** - A leader with a high level of systems intelligence will have a detailed understanding of how the organization functions, how things get done, and how the relationships between departments and other segments of the organization relate to and support one another. Systems intelligence goes deeper than a relationship with a

Department Head or Team Leader. A transformational leader will take the time to understand the day-to-day work that is taking place for the department or team and then work with the Department Head or Team Leader to make systems improvements and break down barriers with other departments or teams to ensure that the whole school or organization is pulling in the same direction to actualize the transformational change objectives that have been identified. In developing systems intelligence, it is important to map processes, share those processes as transparently as possible, and work with interconnected teams and departments with fidelity to established action plans to achieve the desired changes.

Framework Overview

This framework consists of four integrated competency areas that work together to develop the leadership skills and dispositions needed to build schools as high-functioning learning organizations.

1. **Deep Systems Thinking Capabilities** - The ability to understand complex interconnections and identify high-leverage intervention points.
2. **Sustaining Learning Organizations** - Creating and maintaining cultures of continuous learning and improvement.
3. **Leading Transformational Change** - Managing complex change processes that transform educational practice.
4. **Relentless Focus on Student Learning** - Maintaining unwavering commitment to improving learning outcomes for all students.

The framework recognizes that these competencies are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, requiring integrated development rather than treating them as separate skills.

The Two-Point Rubric

This leadership development framework employs a two-point rubric designed to emphasize growth and development as an ongoing journey rather than a fixed destination. Unlike traditional four-point rubrics that rank and compare performance across a continuum, this approach focuses on mastery and continuous improvement, creating conditions more conducive to meaningful feedback and professional growth.

The framework uses two simple yet powerful designations:

- **Plus (+)** - areas that highlight current strengths or significant growth.
- **Delta (▲)** - areas that identify focused opportunities for improvement and development.

This binary system eliminates the judgmental nature of traditional rating scales, removing the tendency to rank or compare leaders against arbitrary performance levels. Instead, the tool encourages reflective dialogue about what leaders are doing well and where they can direct their energy for maximum impact.

Best practices for using this rubric involve collaborative conversations between leaders and their coaches, mentors, or supervisors to identify specific next steps and actionable growth targets. The feedback process should center on seeking input that encourages risk-taking, experimentation, and continuous learning rather than evaluation for accountability purposes. By focusing on strengths to leverage and areas to develop, this approach fosters a growth mindset that supports leaders in their ongoing professional journey.

The simplicity of the two-point system allows for more nuanced, descriptive feedback that helps leaders understand not just what to improve, but how to move forward in their development.

Competency 1: Deep Systems Thinking Capabilities

From a systems perspective, schools are networks of interdependent people, departments, and divisions that rely on effective leadership to prevent internal competition and ensure cooperation toward a common aim, much like an orchestra under a skilled conductor. Leaders must understand that the efforts of various divisions are not additive—one department achieving its goals in isolation can actually harm another department and the overall system.

Effective leaders focus on improving systems rather than "fixing" individuals. Leaders must also understand variation—recognizing that there will always be natural fluctuation in performance and avoiding the costly mistake of reacting to common causes of variation as if they were special causes requiring intervention.

Finally, leaders must appreciate the psychology of learning—recognizing that people have different abilities and inclinations, and that good leadership nurtures intrinsic motivation while removing barriers to success.

Competency 1: Deep Systems Thinking Capabilities			
Dimension	Indicators	Plus (+)	Delta (▲)
Appreciation for Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understands and applies Deming's 14 points to guide work as a leader. -Recognizes school as a network of interdependent components. -Prevents internal competition that damages the overall system. -Fosters collaboration across departments toward a common aim. -Understands that optimizing parts doesn't optimize the whole. -Views challenges through a systems lens rather than individual blame. 		
Understanding Variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Distinguishes between common causes and special causes. -Avoids tampering with systems experiencing normal variation. -Focuses on improving systems rather than ranking individuals. -Uses data to understand patterns while accounting for natural variation. -Resists overreacting to short-term performance fluctuations. 		
Theory-Based Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Makes predictions based on tested theories rather than assumptions. -Builds knowledge through comparison of prediction with observation. -Uses structured improvement cycles (Plan-Do-Study-Act) for learning. -Distinguishes between information and true knowledge. -Challenges assumptions and tests cause-and-effect relationships 		
Leverage Point Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognizes that small changes in key areas impact on the whole. -Identifies structural versus programmatic solutions. -Has constancy of purpose toward improvement of the instructional core. -Removes barriers that prevent progress and innovation. -Eliminates practices that create fear and inhibit collaboration. 		
Integration and Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Aligns all organizational elements toward student learning. -Collaborates with feeder schools and partner organizations. -Breaks down silos between departments and grade levels. -Creates coherent systems rather than fragmented programs. -Manages interdependencies effectively across the organization. 		

Competency 2: Sustaining Learning Organizations

Learning organizations are characterized by a shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, and the development of personal mastery. Schools that function as high-performing learning organizations continually examine and question the mental models and core assumptions about teaching and learning that underpin the daily work of students and teachers.

In educational contexts, learning organizations move beyond individual teacher improvement to collective responsibility for student learning. This requires leaders who can create cultures where adults continuously examine their practices, learn from one another, and adapt their approaches based on evidence of student learning.

Sustaining learning organizations requires more than establishing collaborative structures—it demands ongoing attention to the conditions that enable continuous learning. Leaders must foster psychological safety, provide time and resources for collaboration, develop clear protocols for examining practice, and ensure that learning translates into improved outcomes for students.

Competency 2: Sustaining Learning Organizations			
Dimension	Indicators	Plus (+)	Delta (▲)
Culture of Continuous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Models learning orientation and intellectual humility. -Creates psychological safety for risk-taking and experimentation. -Celebrates learning from both successes and failures. -Encourages questioning of assumptions and practices. -Builds shared commitment to ongoing improvement. 		
Collaborative Growth Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishes effective team structures and protocols. -Provides protected time for collaborative inquiry. -Facilitates meaningful examination of teaching and learning. -Creates systems for sharing knowledge across the organization. -Builds collective responsibility for student outcomes. 		
Sharing Knowledge & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Documents and preserves organizational learning. -Creates mechanisms for transferring knowledge. -Builds on prior learning rather than starting over. -Connects internal learning with external research. -Scales effective practices throughout the organization. 		
Culture of Experimentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourages creative problem-solving and innovation. -Supports pilot programs and controlled experimentation. -Provides resources and support for trying new approaches. -Creates processes for evaluating and scaling innovations. -Uses the 70/20/10 rule to balance innovation with proven practices. 		
Organizational Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Builds systems that survive leadership transitions. -Embeds learning into organizational structures and processes. -Creates feedback loops for continuous improvement. -Maintains focus on core mission and values while adapting methods. -Develops organizational resilience and capacity for change. 		

Competency 3: Leading Transformational Change

Transformational change is particularly challenging because it often requires people to abandon familiar practices and embrace new ways of thinking and working. This creates natural resistance that leaders must skillfully navigate while maintaining momentum toward the desired future state.

Effective change leadership requires understanding the difference between technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges have known solutions that can be implemented through training and resources. Adaptive challenges require people to change their beliefs, values, and behaviors—a much more complex process that requires different leadership approaches.

Leaders must also understand that sustainable change happens through people, not to people. This requires building change readiness, involving stakeholders in the change process, and providing ongoing support as people navigate the transition from their current state to the future state.

Competency 3: Leading Transformational Change			
Dimension	Indicators	Plus (+)	Delta (▲)
Readiness & Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Creates urgency for change without creating panic.-Develops compelling vision of the desired future state.-Builds a coalition of supporters and champions.-Communicates the why behind change initiatives.-Addresses resistance with empathy and persistence.		
Adaptive Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Distinguishes between technical and adaptive challenges.-Manages the emotional aspects of change effectively.-Provides appropriate support during transition periods-Maintains focus on core mission during turbulent times.-Balances pressure for change with support for people		
Gathering Momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Creates detailed implementation plans with clear milestones.-Monitors progress and adjusts strategies as needed.-Celebrates early wins to build momentum.-Maintains consistent focus over extended periods of time.-Removes barriers and provides necessary resources.		
Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Involves stakeholders in planning and implementing change.-Consistently and positively addresses the “4 Frictions”.-Listens to concerns and adjusts approaches accordingly.-Builds capacity for others to lead change initiatives.-Creates multiple channels for feedback and input.		
Institutionalizing Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Embeds changes into organizational structures and processes.- Aligns policies, procedures, and resource allocation.- Develops systems to sustain change over time.- Builds capability for ongoing adaptation and improvement.- Creates accountability mechanisms for continued progress.		

Competency 4: Focus on Learning, Growth, and Well Being

A relentless focus on student learning represents the ultimate purpose of educational leadership. This focus must be both broad and deep—broad in terms of encompassing all aspects of student development (academic, social, emotional, physical) and deep in terms of understanding how learning actually occurs and what conditions enable it. Leaders must understand learning theory, effective instructional practices, and assessment strategies while also attending to the systemic factors that influence learning outcomes.

The "relentless" aspect of this competency emphasizes that this focus cannot waver regardless of external pressures, resource constraints, or other competing priorities. Every decision, every initiative, and every resource allocation must be evaluated in terms of its impact on student learning.

This competency requires leaders to be both learning leaders and instructional leaders. They must understand the technical aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment while also creating the organizational conditions that enable effective teaching and learning to flourish.

Competency 4: Relentless Focus on Student Learning, Growth, and Well-Being			
Dimension	Indicators	Plus (+)	Delta (▲)
Growth-Oriented Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Communicates that intellectual abilities are not fixed traits. -Integrates neuroplasticity concepts systematically across all programs. -Eliminates practices based on the notion of fixed intelligence. -Formally celebrates process and challenge-oriented achievements. -Understands that grades predict grades, and curiosity predicts success. 		
Process Focused Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implements assessments emphasizing formative feedback and mastery. -Focuses learning on skill development over content acquisition. -Celebrates practices that focus on effort and persisting through difficulty. -Promotes collaborative learning experiences as essential. -Facilitates inquiry-based learning as a foundational approach. -Prioritizes questioning over answer-seeking in instructional design. -implements flexible pacing that allows students to progress as individuals. -Facilitates connection of learning to real-world problem-solving. 		
Principles of Universal Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensures multiple engagement pathways for all learners. -Provides multiple ways for students to show learning growth. -Creates executive function supports that build student agency. -Establishes self-regulation skills as learnable for all. -Monitors accessibility, supports while maintaining high expectations. 		
Mistake Positive Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensures appropriately challenging tasks are the norm for all students. -Builds reflection into learning experiences for adults and students. -Implements productive struggle as a fundamental approach. -Develops a culture where students feel safe with struggle and confusion. 		
Adult Mindset Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensures continual growth and innovation in programs and methods -Regularly examines underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. -Helps teachers examine assumptions about intelligence and ability. -Monitors mindset, beliefs, and school culture indicators over time. -Integrates growth orientation into staff hiring, evaluation, and support. 		

Implementation Guidelines

Assessment and Development Planning

Successful implementation of this development framework begins with a comprehensive assessment of current leadership capacity across all four competency areas. Leaders should use the competency indicators to conduct honest self-assessment, gather 360-degree feedback from stakeholders, and identify priority areas for growth.

Development planning should be integrated across competencies rather than treating them as separate skills. For example, a leader working on systems thinking might simultaneously focus on learning organization development and change leadership since these competencies reinforce each other.

Learning Experiences and Support Systems

The framework should guide the design of varied learning experiences for leaders, including:

- **Cohort-based Learning:** Bringing leaders together to learn from each other and build professional networks.
- **Individual Coaching:** Providing personalized support for competency development and leadership challenges.
- **Action Learning Projects:** Applying new capabilities to real organizational challenges with built-in reflection and feedback.
- **Mentoring Relationships:** Pairing developing leaders with accomplished practitioners.
- **Professional Learning Networks:** Creating ongoing opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.

Support systems must include executive sponsorship, skilled coaching and mentoring, aligned organizational systems, and removal of barriers to growth.

Conclusion

This framework provides a comprehensive foundation for developing transformational school leaders equipped with the four essential competencies needed for educational transformation.

The ultimate goal is to develop leaders who can move schools from industrial-model institutions focused on standardization and efficiency to learning organizations that develop creative, collaborative, critically thinking citizens prepared to tackle complex, real-world challenges while maintaining strong character and a sense of purpose.

Success requires sustained commitment to leadership development at all levels—from aspiring leaders to veterans. When fully implemented, this framework can help create a pipeline of leaders equipped to transform schools into high-performing learning organizations that serve all students effectively.

The competencies and indicators should be regularly reviewed and updated based on evolving needs and evidence of effectiveness. Leadership development is itself a learning process that requires continuous improvement and adaptation to changing contexts and challenges.

Most importantly, this framework recognizes that developing these four essential competencies is not just about building individual capacity—it's about creating the conditions for collective leadership and organizational learning that can sustain positive change over time. The future of education depends on our ability to develop leaders who possess these critical capabilities and can use them in the service of all students.

About the Author



Dr. Steven Lyng is an educational consultant and thought leader specializing in Systems Thinking approaches to school transformation. With over two decades of experience in education, including roles as a Teacher, Principal, Upper School Head, Assistant Head of School, and Head of School, Dr. Lyng brings a wealth of practical knowledge to his work in educational innovation.

Dr. Lyng works with school districts, independent schools, and educational organizations to build leadership capacity and implement transformative change initiatives. His approach emphasizes collaborative problem-solving, data-driven decision-making, and the development of learning organizations that can continually adapt to meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing world.

Dr. Lyng is passionate about helping educational leaders navigate the complexities of change and build schools that truly prepare students for success in the modern world. Through his consulting services, workshops, and speaking engagements, he provides valuable insights and practical strategies for creating more engaging, relevant, and effective learning environments. For more information on Dr. Lyng's consulting services or to book a workshop for your school or district, please visit gofourthlearn.com or email steven.j.lyng@gmail.com

The Go Fourth Learn Project

Equipping Leaders to Thrive in an Era of Rapid Change

The Go Fourth Learn Project, founded by Dr. Steven Lyng in 2023, is an innovative educational initiative that seeks to redefine the landscape of education for the next generation of students. At its core, the project embraces three fundamental elements reflected in its name:

- **"Go"** represents an action-oriented approach driven by the urgent need to transform high school education.
- **"Fourth"** acknowledges the present context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its technological impacts on society.
- **"Learn"** embodies the innate human desire for growth and learning that educators strive to nurture.

Central to the project's philosophy is the concept of the "Lead Learner," a leadership style that emphasizes continuous growth and development. Through this lens, the Go Fourth Learn Project works to develop educational leaders as systems thinkers who can create dynamic, engaging learning environments where curiosity, creativity, and collaboration flourish.

The Go Fourth Learn Project focuses on building school leadership capacity that addresses relevance gaps in school curriculum and fosters innovative learning cultures that respond to the rapidly changing demands of modern society.

The project's guiding principle that "what matters is that each student visualizes and actualizes their own life" reflects its recognition that success in today's world follows no set formula. By equipping educators with essential tools and strategies, the Go Fourth Learn Project aims to build a community where educators are inspired to innovate and students are empowered to excel in ways that align with their individual paths and potentials.

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Note: This framework is a companion document to the GFL Whitepaper - Leading Schools In An Age Of Accelerations. Works cited below are from the original document.

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