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## Planning versus Doing: A Question of Sustainability

It has become clear in recent years that the single overriding characteristic of good leaders is that they bring hope. Yet, September all too often finds principals and vice-principals experiencing a conflict of emotions between the excitement of new beginnings and the trepidation that accompanies the unknown. From where in that spectrum of emotions does hope emanate and, perhaps more importantly, how do we ensure that hope is sustainable? These questions are at the heart of succession planning and sustainability, something you will hear much of in the coming year.

It is widely recognized that for change, improvement and hope to last, school leadership must be sustainable. The Ministry of Education continues its efforts to attract the best candidates to leadership roles and, in this second year of the *Ontario Leadership Strategy*, each board is now mandated to have a succession plan in place. It may be appropriate, however, to heed the words of Douglas Reeves, “Planning is easier than doing.” I would echo that caution in the context of leadership sustainability, which has seemingly been overlooked in many of the latest succession and leadership development initiatives. Andy Hargreaves has recognized for a number of years the importance of understanding and managing the process of leading over time. Although this question of sustainability is inexorably linked to leadership succession, it nevertheless warrants its own attention if we are to successfully transition from planning to doing.

In their article, *The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership*, Hargreaves and Fink conclude that leaders develop sustainability by how they:

- approach, commit to and protect deep learning in their schools;
- sustain themselves and others around them to promote and support that learning;
- are able and encouraged to sustain themselves, so that they can persist with their vision and avoid burning out;
- try to ensure the improvements they bring about last over time, especially after they have gone;
- consider the impact of their leadership on schools around them;
- promote and perpetuate ecological diversity rather than standardized prescription in teaching and learning within their schools; and
- pursue activist engagements with their environments.

However, Hargreaves and Fink also recognize that school leaders do not exist in a vacuum. CPCO is committed to working with the government and school boards to ensure

that succession planning includes consideration for ongoing capacity building.

In this regard, much has changed at CPCO since the last issue of *Principal Connections*, all in an effort to assist with sustaining leadership. The updated CPCO *Professional Learning Catalogue* contains an impressive menu of learning opportunities many of which are designed to be presented in partnership with board leaders. Our new website has been launched with an eye to user friendliness, content management, social networking and e-commerce so that we can better serve our members. The pension board has approved our application to relinquish our designated status in an effort to allow greater flexibility in our central office hiring practices. Conversations continue with government officials in an effort to regulate the bargaining practices outlined in the *Terms and Conditions Guidelines* released last April. We continue the dialogue with our Catholic partners as to the role of principals and vice-principals in preserving and promoting Catholic education.

Working conditions must reflect the need for ongoing professional, personal and spiritual growth. Principals and vice-principals require the time and resources required to plan effectively if we are to create sustainability as learning leaders. To that end, CPCO continues to advocate that principals and vice-principals cannot build the capacity needed to be effective instructional leaders and effective agents of hope if their role continues to focus more and more on administrative responsibilities. Sustainability is further thwarted by succession planning that gives little or no consideration to the length of time that successful leaders should remain in a given school. In what Hargreaves, Moore and Fink call the carousel of leadership succession, they observe that all too often there is a constant cycling of change throughout schools with little lasting improvement.

As Catholic school leaders, our faith journey must also complement our professional path. Adult faith formation is not satisfied by one time annual retreats, but rather speaks to our role in the greater Catholic community and the partnerships needed for our faith to also be sustainable. This too requires careful planning and acknowledgement by those responsible for the development and implementation of system succession plans. To borrow a quote from Fr. Dan Vere whom I reference elsewhere in this issue, “We are called to be Catholic professionals not professional Catholics.”

In the end, hope will come from the doing, not the planning.