

A Broad View of Leadership Development

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This document provides a brief introduction to the broad view of distributed leadership that forms the background for leadership development within any particular group. It is not intended to elaborate on the ideas it presents but rather to show how they are related in order to bring coherence to BCELC initiatives, and to provide a starting point for curriculum development.

Leadership is an Act of Influence

Leadership is universally acknowledged to be a critical component of successful organizations and communities. Despite its importance it remains enigmatic, but there are some emerging areas of broad agreement. One is that leadership is an act of influence based more on personal credibility than authority. Consequently, leadership is not the exclusive domain of designated leaders who occupy positions of authority, and arguably not even predominantly so. Rather it is an act defined by the nature and quality of relationship between people that transcends specific roles and permeates organizations and communities.

This discussion treats leadership as *an act of influence involving reciprocal relationships through which members of an organization or community construct common meanings, build capacity and enhance their ability to achieve shared goals.*¹ Every member of an organization or community has a responsibility to provide, and opportunity to participate in, collaborative leadership acts and relationships.

Every member of an organization or community has a responsibility to provide, and opportunity to participate in, leadership.

Leadership viewed in this way does not deny the reality of power and authority, but it takes a different approach to organizational and community life. The leadership approach is grounded in an ethic of care, based on informed insight and enacted through trusting personal relationships that are mutually influential. Ideally, authority and influence create a constructive synergy despite their contrasting natures.

Both authority and influence are more effective when exercised with foresight, initiative, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skill and communicative flair but these enabling characteristics do not themselves constitute leadership.

The leadership approach to life and its roles and tasks fits naturally with a community view that humanizes organizational theory and practice. It encourages decentralized approaches to decision-making and even assumes the possibility of self-organizing groups that operate in some situations in the absence of a formal structure of authority, though not accidentally and certainly not without care and attention. Generally, both organizations and communities find it beneficial

¹ This definition is based on Rost (1991) and Lambert (1995). Rost conducted an extensive review of the literature on leadership in all fields and proposed that it should be defined as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.” Lambert considered ecological models for schools and concluded that educational leadership “involves the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose of schooling.”

to have a formal division of responsibilities, clearly defined roles and a system of standardized procedures; that is, an effective and efficient bureaucracy.²

Organizations Also Require Authority

The bureaucratic and community aspects of organizations are equally valid and important. The bureaucratic aspect operates through positional authority within a hierarchy of formal roles, whereas the community aspect operates through a network of relationships, some of which are evident and some of which are not. Bureaucratic hierarchy and communal networks have different premises and dynamics, but they both require commitment, skill and integrity to be effective and can be generously constructive or selfishly destructive. They are the necessary and inescapable yin and yang of organizations.³ In distinguishing between bureaucracy and community we must appreciate that they are connected by *and*, not *or*. They are co-existent, mutually infused and interdependent realities.

Bureaucracy and community are the necessary and inescapable yin and yang of organizational life.

The bureaucratic aspect of administration is management, which relies primarily on rational analysis to design methods for accomplishing tasks effectively and efficiently. It then employs positional authority to ensure compliance with role descriptions in order to implement this strategic plan. The community aspect of administration is leadership, which is also rational but relies primarily on relationships to create and sustain human networks united by a common purpose. It employs personal influence to strengthen commitment to shared values in order to fulfil that common purpose. Managerial competence and leadership influence are enriched by each other. Neither is sufficient by itself.

Although the relationship between management and leadership is complementary, it is asymmetric. Whereas everyone in an organization has both opportunity and responsibility to exercise leadership within their circle of influence, management authority is unevenly distributed.

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All managers should strive to be leaders, but leaders need not necessarily strive to be managers. Managers can delegate authority in order to enable others to act on their behalf, but leaders cannot assign their influence to others because they themselves have received it as a gift.

In public schools, leadership can, and should, be exercised by parents, students, teachers, support staff, administrators, trustees and provincial politicians. Each has an important role to play in building and sustaining the reciprocal relationships through which employees and members of the larger school community construct common meanings, build capacity and enhance their ability to achieve the shared goals of public education.

² Bureaucracy is at times taken to be a negative term implying mindless behaviour and crushing hierarchy. This is unfortunate and certainly not intended in this case. Any organizational structure can be implemented poorly or even abused, but bureaucracy can be a logical, ethical and highly effective approach to working together.

³ Yin and Yang are, respectively, the feminine and masculine elements in Chinese metaphysics. Although they are opposites, they are the complementary parts of a whole and represent a dualism rather than a polarity.

Combining Authority and Influence Requires Adaptive Learning

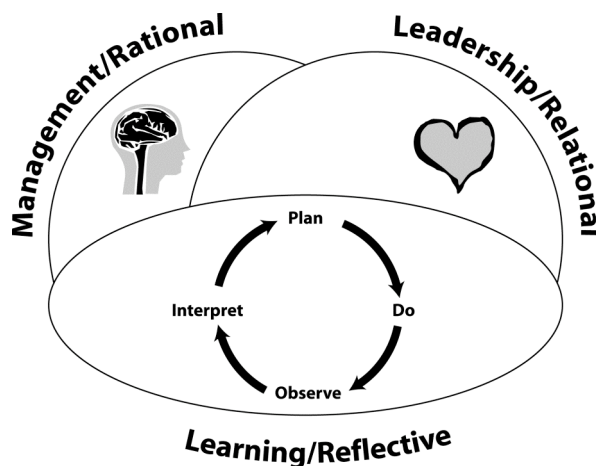
Meaning making and capacity building are fundamental acts of learning that often go beyond acquisition of knowledge and elaboration of skills to require reconsideration of assumptions and reframing of conceptual lenses. Personal mental models are at the root of behaviour because they condition what is perceived and also how it is interpreted. The adaptive learning of new mental models is challenging because it involves both unlearning and relearning, the former being the more difficult and sometimes distressing (Heifetz 1994). Thus, adaptive learning often requires stimulation and support. Leaders stimulate adaptive learning by asking necessary and evocative questions, and support it by being sincerely engaged participants who model commitment to community values and purposes as they learn with and from others.

Those with positional authority often have the most opportunity to both stimulate and support adaptive learning. Thus, paradoxically, while administrators are given positional authority to enable them to uphold the bureaucracy, they are consequently also often the ones most able to elicit change in both the structure of the organization and the behaviour of its members. This frequently involves dilemmas in which two valued ends conflict or cannot be simultaneously fully satisfied. Sometimes this is a matter of insufficient resources—for example, budgeting and timetabling—and sometimes it is more fundamental—for example, balancing justice and compassion when dealing with a staff or student situation. Dealing with such dilemmas—which are distinguished from problems by the fact that they cannot be resolved unambiguously—requires insight that can only be gained through ongoing reflection *on*, and reflection *in*, practice.

Administrators Must Learn to Manage and Lead Simultaneously

A professional education program can certainly prepare someone to begin the role, but it must be seen as a foundation for the subsequent experiential learning through which greater insight and effectiveness may develop, not a completed process in itself. Preservice preparation and inservice development for administrators can be thought of in terms of management (the rational aspects of the role), leadership (the relational aspects of the role), and learning (the reflective aspects of the role). Consider, for example, a school principal.

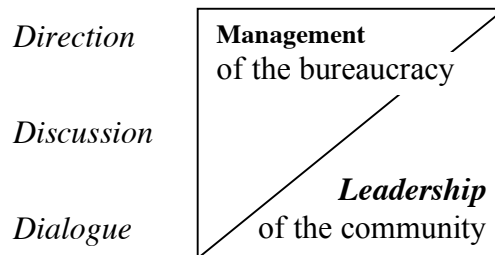
The *management* aspects of the principal's role are the technical and legal duties related to the hierarchical structure of the school system. In large measure, these tasks focus on compliance with legislation, policies, or role descriptions. They also involve the stewardship of resources and the creation of processes and structures that are necessary, although not sufficient, to enable the school to achieve its goals. When assessing the principal's management, the underlying worldview is mechanistic, the focus is on competence, and the operative question is, *Does s/he tend to the infrastructure of the school and the internal and external processes required to sustain it in an efficient and effective manner?*



The *leadership* aspect of a principal’s role involves more art than science. It relates to the community served by the bureaucratic infrastructure and is effected more through influence than authority. Leadership fosters not merely compliance but meaningful commitment to the school system and its mission. It relates to the deeper meanings and higher callings of the school beyond the more utilitarian duties and tasks that sustain the bureaucratic mechanisms that support those purposes. When assessing the principal’s leadership, the underlying worldview is organic, the focus is on character, and the operative question is, *Does s/he articulate the school’s values and purpose effectively and treat other people in a manner that is consistent with those values, builds commitment to that purpose and fosters individual initiative in support of it?*

Management is not in any way inferior to leadership because it provides an essential foundation of order and efficiency without which higher purposes are difficult to achieve. However, there is a sense in which leadership should occupy the foreground of our intention and management should occupy the background.⁴ When planning our holidays, the destination takes precedence over the vehicle even though the vehicle is essential. This is the reason that the leadership circle is seen to lie on top of the management circle in the diagram above.

Frequently, there is a tension between these two essential dimensions of the principal’s role—between the rational and the relational aspects of the work, between bureaucracy and community, between authority and influence, between ensuring compliance and inviting commitment, and between sustaining organizational structures and changing them. Some of the most subtle, but important, learning that is required in order to be effective in the role is the ability to deal simultaneously with these often contradictory aspects. It is not sufficient that there be a situational balance of management and leadership—a little management today and a little leadership tomorrow, or leadership when one can find some time after the management duties are done. There must be a fusion of these two elements in all actions, a healthy combination of direction, discussion and dialogue in each conversation. Coming to understand the challenge of infusing management with leadership, to give words to the feelings and dilemmas that it creates, and to deal with it in an increasingly metacognitive fashion enables an administrator not only to deal with the dilemmas but also to share his or her experience with others and learn from theirs.



Administrative competence is open-ended and therefore endlessly emergent. Sometimes the learning is ‘technical’ and sometimes it is ‘adaptive.’

The *learning* component of the model acknowledges that administrative competence is open-ended and therefore endlessly emergent. Sometimes the learning is ‘technical’—that is, the deepening of understandings and expansion of skills within a familiar conceptual framework that helps one to solve problems more

⁴ Sergiovanni (2000, ix) refers to Habermas’ theories to make this same assertion. “School character flourishes when the lifeworld is the generative force for determining the systemsworld. And school character erodes when the systemsworld is the generative force for determining the lifeworld.”

effectively—and sometimes it is ‘adaptive’—that is, reframing mental models in a way that allows one to move into new realms of understanding and thus to live unresolvable dilemmas with greater wisdom and grace. When assessing the principal’s learning, the focus is on inquiry and the operative question is, *Does s/he behave in a thoughtful manner, treating each experience as an opportunity to learn, and demonstrating the willingness and ability to seek and use feedback to continuously improve management and leadership understandings and skills?*

Dilemmas are a Fact of Life in Organizations

Not only administrators face dilemmas. Everyone within the educational system is part of both a rational bureaucracy and a moral community. Value conflicts arise throughout the system, not only because of the ubiquitous tension between authority and influence but also as a result of the ambiguity of educational goals (i.e., “to enable all learners” to be “personally fulfilled and publicly useful”⁵), the diversity of the community, the expectation that education will be both an individual and a social good, and the challenge of developing consensus about what is “good.”

The ability to deal constructively with dilemmas in a principled but flexible way may be the most critical foundation of leadership capacity.

Those who would lead from any position must learn to deal constructively with the endemic dilemmas resulting from this context. In fact, the ability to live these dilemmas in a principled but flexible manner and to learn from them, and thus to help others to do so as well, may be the most critical foundation of leadership capacity.

There are, of course, many other determinants. Leaders in all roles benefit from a wide range of general and mission-related knowledge, skills and attitudes. In fact, the more personal resources they have the better they are able to contribute to the reciprocal relationships through which members of their organization or community construct common meanings, build capacity and enhance their ability to achieve shared goals.

Leadership Development Programs Must Be Transformative

Many of the competencies that leaders require can be developed with considerable confidence through well-designed programs but some are more elusive. As with all things, both nature and nurture have their impact, but beyond that caveat it should be noted that leadership requires wisdom, a quality that is hard won and slow to emerge. Leadership development programs are most liable to evoke it through case study and/or problem based methodologies in preservice and, since wisdom is constantly emergent, they should include job-embedded inservice as well. In both preservice and inservice, programs that provide safety and support through an intact cohort group can be expected to be most effective for leadership development.

Leadership development programs for those in all roles should examine the fact that they appropriately and necessarily work within boundaries. There is a time to protest barriers or

Leaders need to understand the limitations of their circle of influence and the reality and validity of external constraints arising from governance, economics, politics and other legitimate external factors.

⁵ Extracted from the preamble to the Public School Act in British Columbia.

unfair conditions in order to change them, but it is generally necessary for leaders to be able to understand the limitations of their circle of influence and to accept the reality and the validity of constraints arising from governance, economics, politics and other legitimate external factors. It is also important for leaders to understand the limits to their responsibility and to know their personal limitations of understanding, ability and energy.

Leadership Requires a Fusion of Idealism and Realism

The purpose of such discussions in leadership development programs is not to discourage or constrain aspirations, but rather to contribute to an informed fusion of idealism and realism that promotes the individual's mental and emotional well being, and enables a productive focus of attention and energy. Such discussions would benefit from foundation studies in philosophy, ethics, political science, sociology and education based on the thought of those who have considered similar issues over the ages as well as more contemporary theorists. These studies should be related to actual personal experience and not abstracted as an academic exercise.

Distributed Leadership is the Ideal

Beyond discrete leadership development programs, an organizational culture that expects and embraces distributed leadership will, in largely unseen ways, both elicit and develop potential that might otherwise remain latent or be only partially expressed. The cumulative effect of the distributed leadership of individuals in such an organization may well be more contextually grounded, resilient and influential than the designated leadership, no matter how inspired that may be. Truly effective leadership creates more independent leaders and thus extends beyond its own direct influence. Leadership development programs should, therefore, examine how culture arises, functions and changes so that leaders in all roles will understand how it affects them and how they can contribute to it.

Leadership Requires Ongoing Reflection and Learning

The preceding is intended to provide a broad view of distributed leadership as a background for leadership development programs designed for particular groups. In addition to helping shape the programs, the concepts within the paper should be presented and critiqued in such programs to assist participants in developing a personal theory of their own and others' leadership that will empower their ongoing reflection and learning.

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