

SPR03230

Framing leadership in Queensland Catholic schools

Gayle Spry and Patrick Duignan, Australian Catholic University

Framing leadership in Queensland Catholic schools

Abstract

This paper outlines progress in a research project that aims to develop a framework for leadership in Queensland Catholic schools. This project is an initiative of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and is conducted by Catholic Education Leadership, a Flagship of Australian Catholic University. The need for a framework for leadership was identified as a consequence of on-going dialogue and research effort regarding leadership succession. It is thought that such a framework would establish the expectations of leadership in Qld Catholic Education and also guide individuals and employing authorities in job design, career planning and professional development.

Introduction

For some time, educational policy makers, within Queensland Catholic Education, have found it increasingly difficult to fill key positions in school administration. As a consequence, they have advocated the need to develop leadership succession strategies to ensure an on-going supply of well-qualified and highly motivated principals, deputy principals and assistant principals. In 2003, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) approved a number of focussed research projects to address this issue. This paper provides an account of one of these research projects, namely, the development of a framework for leadership in Queensland Catholic schools.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research project is informed by a number of conceptual frameworks including leadership development, shared leadership and Catholic social doctrine.

Leadership Development

In the debate on whether leaders are born or made, this project comes down on the side of 'making' leadership by developing leadership capabilities through a formal program of performance management and development. This position is in line with the release of *Enterprising Nation – Report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills (The Karpin Report)* by the Federal government in 1995. This report and subsequent research by the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) and Monash University (Sarros, Gray & Densten, 2001) placed the spotlight on leadership and management development in Australia and raised awareness of the relationship between leadership capabilities and organisational performance.

As a way forward, it is now recommended that command-and-control models of performance management and development be replaced with more collaborative approaches (Onsman, 2003, p.1). Such approaches establish clear expectations and understandings about the jobs to be done and involve on-going conversation in partnership between an employee and his or her

immediate supervisor. This is a cyclical process involving several components including performance planning, on-going performance communication, data gathering, observation and documentation, performance evaluation, and performance diagnosis and formal and informal learning opportunities. Reaching an agreement in respect to the dimensions and capabilities of a role is a prerequisite for this activity.

Shared Leadership

In the context of a postindustrial world, the theory and practice of leadership has continued to evolve with recent scholarship advancing leadership by “heart and soul” (Barker, 2002). Leadership is now understood to be an influencing relationship, a collaborative process that supports a community of believers pursuing a transformational cause. At the same time, conclusions from a recent research study of the challenges faced by contemporary leaders of service organisations (Duignan et al., 2003) indicate that leadership challenges are complex, multidimensional, even contradictory, thereby creating uncertainty and confusion for many leaders. To address this issue, there is a need for an important shift in the meaning, perspective and scope (depth and breadth) of leadership in contemporary organisations in order to build a “culture of shared leadership”, that promotes, nurtures and supports leaders and leadership throughout the organisation.

This shift in understanding of leadership has impacted upon the evolution of educational leadership. Traditionally, school-based leadership has been centred on the role of principal (Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). This centrist perspective of principalship has served schools in stable times but has become problematic in an era of rapid societal change, and subsequent educational reform, restructuring and renewal. Within this changing context, principals report increased stress and loss of job satisfaction and leadership succession has become a concern (Collard, 2003; Scott, 2003). Moreover, it seems foolish to ignore the potential of teachers to contribute to school renewal given that “many teachers possess capabilities, talents and formal credentials more sophisticated than ever before” (Crowther, et. al, 2002, p.3). Recognising these concerns, researchers in the field advocate the need for a significant shift in the depth and breadth of school leadership (Crowther, et. al, 2002). Their aim is to build an organisational culture that promotes, nurtures and supports shared leadership throughout the organisation. Such a school culture exhibits three essentially characteristics, namely, mutuality, sense of interdependence and allowance for individual agency.

However, research has found that a perspective on shared leadership is not well accepted, understood or appreciated, by a majority of those who study and practice leadership and management in service organisations, such as educational systems and schools (Duignan, et.al, 2003b). Building a culture of shared leadership would require a modification of mindsets, attitudes, practices and preparation for leaders and leadership. It seems that the starting point for this approach to leadership formation is to create a framework within which every member of the organisation, no matter what

area or level, is treated as a 'leader' and has a leadership career path that is identified, recognised and supported by the organisation.

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Doctrine is discernible in a body of official Church teachings on the social order, in its economic and political dimensions. From an educational perspective, this teaching is also found in key Vatican documents on the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997).

Within this body of doctrine, three Christian social principles emerge as critical organisational principles contributing to social development (Alford & Naughton, 2001, pp. 72-80). The principle of "subsidiarity" posits that responsibility should always be accompanied by commensurate authority, so that people at higher levels of administration or management neither absorb nor supplant the work or responsibility of those at the lower levels. A second principle, "solidarity", refers directly to working for the Common Good and presupposes "patterns of cooperation" within an organisation (p.77). A third principle of "giving priority to labour over capital" enjoins management not to treat human beings as means or instruments for the achievement of economic ends (p.78).

Together, these principles serve to nurture a "community of work" and assure that managerial decisions can belong as much to the category of moral leadership as well as technical expertise (p.79). In addition, when all three social principles are applied to work in the context of a "vocation of management" they take on a dimension of spiritual leadership. "Our work, like our worship is a public witness to our vocation" (p.79).

Research Questions

In the light of the project's aims and its conceptual frameworks, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How significant is a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools?
2. What are the key components of a framework for leadership of Qld Catholic schools?
3. What are the dimensions of leadership in Qld Catholic schools?
4. What are the capabilities of leadership in Qld Catholic schools?
5. What is the relationship between the dimensions and capabilities within a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools?

Research Paradigm

This project is informed by "constructivism", a distinctive research paradigm with its own ontological, epistemological and methodological claims (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp.111-112). From an ontological perspective, "constructivism's relativism...assumes multiple, apprehendable, and somewhat conflicting

social realities that are the products of human intellects, but that may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated". From an epistemological perspective it accepts "transactional/objectivist assumption that sees knowledge as created in interaction among the investigator and the respondents". Constructivism also relies on "a hermeneutic/dialectical methodology" aimed at understanding and reconstruction of previously held problematic constructions. The purpose here is to produce more informed and sophisticated reconstructions of human experience.

Within this research paradigm, this project engages an interpretive theoretical framework of "symbolic interactionism" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The central principle of symbolic interactionism is that we can understand what is going on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world. To this end, two modes of inquiry are used; "exploration" and "inspection" (Charon, 2001, p.209). An exploration enables the researcher to become acquainted with an area of social life and to develop some focus of interest. Inspection is the second step and involves isolating important elements within the situation and describing the situation in relation to those elements. Inspection also involves forming descriptive statements about that element in that situation, then applying that to other interaction situations.

The Design of the Project

This project involves five phases:

Phase 1: Towards Draft 1.

Before the empirical phases on the project commenced, the Research Team developed an initial draft of the framework document. This developmental activity involved a literature review that focussed on empirical research and scholarly writing in respect to leadership, educational leadership and Catholic schools. Draft 1 identified the dimensions and capabilities of leadership for Qld Catholic schools as well as a diagram depicting the relationship between these components.

Phase 2: Towards Draft 2.

This phase involved consultation with 9 'experts' representatives from Catholic schools and Catholic education offices throughout Queensland. These representatives were asked to reflect on draft 1 of the framework document and provide feedback leading to Draft 2 of the framework document.

Phase 3: Towards Draft 3.

Draft 2 of the framework document was presented at a series of meetings with Principals from Brisbane Catholic Education schools and Qld Christian Brothers Colleges. Focus Groups followed these presentations and data from these group interviews contributed to the development of Draft 3 of the framework document.

Phase 4: Validating or testing Draft 3.

This phase was designed to test or validate Draft 3 of the framework document. This phase involved an electronic focus group with customised, interactive website being created for purpose. All Principals, Deputy Principals, Assistant Principals, Board Chairs and School Supervisors throughout Queensland Catholic Education were invited to register to go on line and 142 of these role holders joined the discussion. The website was live for 7 days with the discussion on each day focussing on a different capability of educational leadership. Discussion themes were constantly monitored and the themes and concepts were captured by the researchers in daily reports, discussion topics, questions posed, and in the selection of cartoons.

Phase 5: Framework Presentation.

This phase involves the presentation, in graphical and narrative form, a framework for leadership in Qld catholic schools. It is also envisaged that in their final report the Research Team will provide examples of practical applications of the framework document.

To date phases 1-4 have been completed with the final presentation of the framework document to come.

Data Analysis

Two strategies were used for data analysis:

- ?? A more *a priori*, research-generated approach in which coding domains and sub-codes identified in previous studies and through the study's literature review are tested.
- ?? An emergent, 'grounded' approach in which a thematic analysis of the responses is undertaken without reference to any externally imposed coding framework.

In applying these strategies, data collected were first coded thematically and tested against a draft framework document based on scholarly writing. The adequacy of the draft framework document was then reviewed and further refined.

Discussion of results

In this section, the data collected and analyzed, in the various phases of the project, are outlined and subjected to an overall analysis against the project's research questions. It should be noted that the data generated by the project are particularly rich and only significant results will be discussed in this paper.

1. How significant is a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools?

Throughout this project there has been strong support at all levels for the development of leadership framework. Participants in this project saw the usefulness the proposed framework document and noted its significance in leadership development. The Research Team soon came to the conclusion

that this was an idea 'whose time had come'. In particular, participants were able to identify several practical examples of how a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools would be used. To support this claim, the Research Team has noted that although the final framework document is yet to be presented to the project's sponsors, a number of follow-up initiatives have already been planned. These initiatives include a trial mentoring program for potential principals, a role description for teachers as leaders in Catholic schools, and a professional development program for newly appointed principals. From a researcher's perspective, these initiatives provide a catalytic validity to the project.

It should, however, be noted, that throughout the project, there have been warnings about trying to identify the complexity of school leadership within such a framework. There were fears that this project may lose sight of the values (eg justice) that should inform leadership in Catholic schools. Here there was suspicion that the framework would be used as a weapon of "control"; "Are we in danger of developing just another reductionist/ rationalist/ power-over model?"

2. What are the key components of a framework for leadership of Qld Catholic schools?

To date, the key components of a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools have been identified in terms of leadership dimensions and leadership capabilities. At the outset of this project, the Research Team turned to various leadership frameworks developed within Australia. Here we found that documents that focus on leadership 'outcomes' and adopt a competency-based model (Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council, 2000). Typically, this approach identifies key result areas for the leadership role, with each of these being further divided into a set of competencies and possibly performance indicators.

The literature review, however, found significant criticism of this competency-based model. Critics (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Osman, 2003) question the possibility of fragmenting leadership into key result areas, competencies and performance indicators. They object to generic checklists that separate the performance from the context within which it occurs. Finally, they point to difficulties associated with making performance judgements and leadership development when checklists of performance indicators encourage black and white judgements of performance and do not allow for estimating skill level on a continuum of development or progression.

Overwhelmingly participants' responses in this project supported these concerns. Participants, in this project, saw competency-based models as being too narrow and simplistic; "there is no one formula for leadership". Leadership is just too "dynamic", "situational" and "unpredictable" to be highly specified in this way. Fragmentation of their role into key result areas, competencies and performance indicators would be "artificial". There were also concerns that such checklists added to the expectations of principalship

and other administrative roles. In addition, there were concerns that important aspects of leadership performance would be ignored because they were just too hard to specify and measure. As a way forward, participants recommended that the framework document identify broad descriptions of leadership responsibilities (“dimensions”) and the knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualities (“capabilities”) that were needed to be successful.

A review of the management literature confirmed these directions. Here, the Research Team found a movement moving away from describing the dimensions of work in terms of “Key Result Areas” (Osman, 2003, p.54) and encouragement for describing leadership in terms of “spheres of influence” rather than a “span of control” (Napolitano & Henderson, 1998, p.3).

The Research Team also found a growing body of research and writing in respect to leadership capabilities. A “capability” is defined as:

...an all round human quality, an *integration* of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding *used appropriately and effectively* – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to *new and changing* circumstances” (Stephenson, 2000, p. 2).

By the end of phase 3 of the project, the Research Team had rejected a competency-based model accepted the arguments in favour of a framework identifying capabilities within broad dimensions of leadership. In coming to this decision we were impressed by the claim that:

Competency is about delivering the present based on past performance; capability is about imaging the future and bringing it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for (usually other people’s) purpose; capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself. (Stephenson, 2000, p. 4)

A capabilities-based model seemed appropriate to a project intent on producing a leadership framework in support of leadership learning and development and ensuring leadership succession within Qld Catholic education. We noted with interest that a research team, commissioned by the Department of Education in NSW for a similar project, had come to the same conclusion (Scott, 2003).

3. What are the dimensions of leadership in Qld Catholic schools?

The initial and subsequent drafts of the framework document identified a multi-dimensional understanding of leadership. In particular, six dimensions were identified within this project; inner leadership, interpersonal leadership, organisational leadership, educative leadership, community leadership and faith leadership (Table 1).

Here the Research Team took into account significant research on leadership behaviour (eg. Kouzes & Posner, 1995) and contemporary writing on leadership that highlights the importance of inner or “Self Leadership” and interpersonal or “People Leadership” as well as “organisational leadership” (Napolitano & Henderson”, 1998). We were also influenced by work on “authentic leadership” (Duignan, 2002) and community and cultural leadership (Sergiovanni, 2000). Beyond this body of secular thought, the Research Team also reviewed key documents and commentaries relevant to Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). In this work we found a requirement for faith leaders in Catholic schools.

Table 1: Dimensions of leadership in Qld Catholic schools.

Inner Leadership

Inner leadership requires individuals to focus on their personal development to achieve personal integration, thus enhancing their ability to serve the school community and the wider society.

Interpersonal Leadership

Interpersonal leadership focuses on the employment, deployment and development of staff and volunteers within Catholic schools. There is a strong commitment to genuine human development, based on one’s personal values and a respect for the whole person within community.

Organisational Leadership

Organisational leadership focuses on various aspects of management at school level with a view to ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. Organisational leadership is associated with identifying strategic direction, developing policy and practice, resource management and accountability to the school community and external authorities.

Educative Leadership

Educative leadership play a critical role in the teaching and learning process by helping teachers and other members of the school community to uncover meaning in what they do, while investing in them the capacity to bring about curriculum change, improve and transform what they do.

Community Leadership

Community leadership focuses on achieving solidarity or patterns of cooperation, expresses human interdependence and is the means to achieve common ends. Here, leadership is about nurturing positive interpersonal relations, as well as facilitating social development and establishing the school as a gospel community.

Faith Leadership

Faith leadership focuses on sharing the Catholic faith with the intention of influencing and enriching the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community. This dimension of leadership provides educational opportunities for members of the school community to encounter the Catholic faith, to experience its gift and to enhance life decisions in response to it.

4. What are the capabilities of leadership in Qld Catholic schools?

Following a review of the literature, in phase 1 of the project, draft 1 of the framework document identified three key leadership capabilities - personal, relational, professional capabilities. In phases 2 and phase 3, participants generally agreed with this account but added 'missional' or vocational capabilities to the set. These categories (Table 2) were validated in the phase 4 (electronic focus group) and data collected, in this phase, helped to refine the descriptors for each capability.

Table 2: Capabilities for leadership in Qld Catholic schools.

PERSONAL CAPABILITIES

- ?? Develops self-knowledge
- ?? Displays imagination and personal vision
- ?? Shows optimism and confidence
- ?? Exemplifies honesty and integrity
- ?? Demonstrates courage and resilience
- ?? Seeks spirituality

RELATIONAL CAPABILITES

- ?? Demonstrates emotional maturity
- ?? Projects empathy
- ?? Displays a trusting disposition
- ?? Cultivates productive working relationships
- ?? Communicates with influence
- ?? Engages positive politics

PROFESSIONAL CAPABILITIES

- ?? Demonstrates contextual awareness and responsiveness
- ?? Displays curriculum and pedagogical know-how
- ?? Inspires a communal purpose and vision

- ?? Engages strategic thinking
- ?? Employs sound management
- ?? Enlarges the capacity for change.

MISSION CAPABILITIES

- ?? Commits to a personal journey of faith
- ?? Develops scriptural and theological understanding
- ?? Shares a faith perspectives with others
- ?? Gives witness to Gospel values, particularly social justice
- ?? Cultivates the school's Catholic identity
- ?? Builds relationships with the local church communities and agencies

5. What is the relationship between the dimensions and capabilities within a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools?

To date the data constantly reminds us that separating out the various leadership dimensions of spheres of influence is quite artificial. Most of the activities commonly associated with leadership may be classified under several, if not all, the dimensions in the framework. Likewise, the various capabilities are also interrelated. Despite these limitations, there is general agreement that personal, relational, professional and missional capabilities are at the heart of leadership in Qld Catholic schools. Efficacy within the various leadership dimensions is dependent upon the leader's ability to integrate these various leadership capabilities. As a consequence, leadership development requires a deliberative effort to build these capabilities in the context of these leadership dimensions.

This project is on-going and the Research Team are currently addressing the problem of how to graphically illustrate the relationship between the leadership dimensions and capabilities within the framework. However, depicting this relationship has proved challenging. So far, participants have rejected several draft versions, as being far too "rigid", "inflexible" and "fragmented". As a consequence, the Research Team continues in its quest to develop a more dynamic and holistic version.

CONCLUSIONS

This research project follows a concern for leadership succession in Qld Catholic education. It aims to develop a framework for leadership in Qld Catholic schools, which, in turn, could be used as a platform for leadership development within this educational system. This project is informed by a number of conceptual frameworks including leadership development, shared leadership and Catholic social doctrine. The design of this project is situated within a research paradigm of constructivism on the understanding that knowledge is created in interaction between the investigator and the respondents.

To date, this research has found that::

- ?? There is strong support for the development of a framework for leadership in Queensland Catholic schools. It is expected that this framework will play a significant role in leadership development.
- ?? Leadership dimensions and leadership capabilities are the key components of a leadership framework, when the purpose of this document is to support leadership development and ensure leadership succession.
- ?? Leadership dimensions are best described as spheres of influence and capabilities refer to an integrated understanding of knowledge, skills and personal qualities.
- ?? There are six key leadership dimensions; inner leadership, interpersonal leadership, organisational leadership, educative leadership, community leadership and faith leadership.
- ?? There are four key leadership capabilities; personal, relational, professional and missional.
- ?? Efficacy within the various leadership dimensions is dependent upon the leader's ability to integrate these various leadership capabilities.
- ?? Leadership development requires a deliberative effort to build these capabilities in the context of these leadership dimensions.

This project is currently in progress with an anticipated completion date in February in 2004. Contact Dr Gayle Spry at g.spry@mcauley.acu.edu.au for further information.

Bibliography:

- Alford, H. & Naughton, M. (2001). *Managing as if faith mattered; Christian social principles in the modern organization*. Notre dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council, (2000). <http://www.apapdc.edu.au>
- Barker, C. (2002). *The heart and soul of leadership*. AIM management series. Sydney: McGraw Hill.
- Charon, J. (2001). *Symbolic interactionism: an introduction, an interpretation and an integration*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Collard, J. (2003). Principal wellbeing in complex times. *International studies in educational administration*. 31(1), 2-14.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. (1997). *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium*. Strathfield: St Pauls.

- Crowther, F., Kaagen, S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002): *Developing teacher leaders: how teacher leadership enhances school success*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Duignan, P. (2002). Formation of authentic educational leaders for Catholic schools, in Duncan, D. J. and Riley, D. (Eds.), *Leadership in Catholic education: Hope for the future*. (pp. 172-183). Melbourne: Harper Collins.
- Duignan, P. (2003). *SOLR Project: Contemporary challenges and implications for leaders in frontline service organizations*, Sydney: Flagship, ACU National.
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln. *Handbook of qualitative research*. (pp.105-117) Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kaplan, R. & Norton, D. (1996). *Balanced scorecard: translating strategy into action*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Karpin, D. (1995). *Enterprising nation: renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century : report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills*. Canberra: Australian Govt. Pub. Service.
- Napolitano, C. & Henderson, L. (1998). *The leadership odyssey: a self-development guide to new skills for new times*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Posner, B. & Kouzes, J. (1995). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sarros, J., Gray, J., & Densten, J. (2001). *Leadership and organizational culture*. AIM-Monash University Leadership Report, 2001.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership: creating culture, community and personal meaning in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stephenson, J. (2000). Corporate capability: implications for the style and direction of work-based learning. Working Paper 99-14, University Technology Sydney, Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training.
- Onsman, H. (2003). *The uncertain art of management. AIM management series*. Sydney: McGraw Hill.
- Scott, G. (2003). *Learning principals: leadership capabilities and learning research in NSW*. A report prepared for the NSW Department of Education and Training.