

INFLUENCING THEORY AND PRACTICE - LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

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Australian Association for Research in Education, Adelaide Conference,

30 November - 4 December, 1998.

Ref: MCG98348

Abstract

Towards 2000 much has been written about the influence of leadership for effective performance. Leadership has been spelt out for principals and for those holding leadership roles. This study is a further advancement of a pilot study conducted in 1998 which gained the perceptions of educational leaders in regard to what assists them in times of change and in empowering others to change. To the fore in the presentation will be discussion of a change model based on the philosophy of leaders, some regarding acknowledgement of best theory and practice, and, concern for the value of critical theory and analysis, as well as appreciation of what has been achieved by many leaders in schools. Listening to others stories is acknowledged as a vital means of influencing practice and setting directions in theory for practice. The research reports on the views of leaders holding both primary and secondary positions in education.

Leadership action has been spelt out for those holding positions of responsibility in schools. Principals must ensure their schools are open systems willing to address the demands of the wider society (Hanson, 1996). They must be adaptable and focus on a future of building an equitable and sustainable society. Such change influences the structures of schools, the tasks performed, the use of technology and the people who are educating (Hanson, 1996:287). While accepting the previously mentioned directions, the specific education which students need for the future, in many cases, is unknown. This is indeed a challenge for any leaders trying to determine the shared vision. What principals do know is that their level of accountability, to whatever source, whether federal and state governments, parents and students as clients, and the wider community, calls for strong commitment. It indeed also calls for the ability to work with change, with pressure and sometimes within unrealistic timeframes with limited resources.

Principals have been confronted by "the policies and discourse of reform" (Blackmore, Bigum, Hodgens, Laskey, 1996:199). One significant emphasis has been the promotion of communities of practice (199) -learning communities. This emphasis highlights dealing with the knowledge explosion, the pace of change, the primacy of people problems and personal fulfillment. It also deals with process oriented education and the idea of completing education at any age or finite period; and education for social interaction and responsibility (Combs, 1991:20-25) while at the same time accepting the reality that "we can never again

hope to design a curriculum to be required of everyone (Combs, 1991:22). The challenge of changing the school emphasis to that of a learning community comes at a time when, "despite all the changes to do with the organisation of schools of the last few years, they have changed little in how they promote learning" (Mortimore, 1996:254). Mortimer (1996:256), however, is able to identify effective schools as those with a learning culture, high expectations about staff and students, a shared vision and one set of goals, teamwork, and recognition of rights and responsibilities. Blackmore et al (1996:200) reveal responses of principals "where they were in the position of always reacting to imposed change from above due to the deluge of faxes with incredibly short timelines demanding action - which they handled." If this is so the promotion of learning communities wherein principals, staffs and students grow in learning, becomes a real challenge. It takes time to learn, to reflect and then to advance in the learning process. This time cannot be replaced by hassled application to other externally, imposed duties which might detract from the core business of teaching and learning.

The messages for leaders stress "the importance of work reorganisation and training" which can so readily take on the face of "competitiveness rather than social integration (Brewer, 1995:96) which is essential in schools. Competitiveness in an unhealthy form is not compatible with education. Regardless of the pressure to do otherwise, principals seem to accept the challenge to make alive, responsible and informed contributions to the changing, educational scene for which they are ultimately responsible. Principals have tried to keep student welfare to the fore in making decisions. This has not always been the emphasis of forced reform from external forces.

The challenge for change lies not only within the realms of principals, but also at the heart of teachers' work. Teachers are at the coalface, with the task of inspiring students to grow within their capabilities as individuals and citizens of their nation. Many teachers have commented, "What I do in my classroom is no longer valued" (Blackmore et al. 1996, 202). Such words can be the reality; also a reflection of the lack of public recognition of the value of the teaching profession. When teachers become disillusioned by lack of support for their efforts and/or overwhelmed by the pace and expectations, resistance to change can replace the optimistic voice of the profession. Teachers in schools can feel confronted by the paradoxes of change. They can, for example, see "the contradictions between what the policies claimed to do and their efforts" (Blackmore et al. 1996:213). The portrayal of the teacher who can provide the appropriate processes receives applause at a time of great uncertainty and challenge for education. Teachers, like principals, cannot afford to sacrifice being proactive or assertive; or curtail their professional judgement.

Hanson (1996:291) argues that "the interlocking characteristics of the national educational system severely reduce the possibility of educational change". It is the focus of this paper that educators can learn from each other in their approach to change; educators can be change agents by influencing others behaviour in a desired direction (Hanson, 1996:307). While remembering that "there are no blueprints for change" and "change is a learning process loaded with uncertainty" (Fullan and Miles, 1992 as cited by Hanson, 1996:317), it is possible to receive guidance and direction from role models in one's field of expertise (Sarros and Butchatsky, 1996:277). They are capable of empowering others "to achieve commonly- agreed goals through actively involving them in everyday decisionmaking and

policy implementation processes" (Sarros and Butchatsky, 1996:280) even in times of uncertainty.

Leaders are charged with managing uncertainty, managing new ideas and managing stability (Wilson and Barnacoat, 1994:186). Wilson and Barnacoat (1996:188) state that, "To master change we need to master all three of these areas," and it is useful to learn how others achieve this "metabolic balance". It is important to call on multiple approaches to gain an understanding of the ways in which schools conceptualise their futures, plan action and produce new practices (Blackmore, Bigum, Hodgens, Laskey (1996:198). Mortimore (1996:158) claims that a most crucial research goal is that of establishing reliable techniques for transforming ineffective schools. What others do successfully can be some criteria for changing such schools, remembering that success is dependent on factors in given situations. It is a case of evaluating educational applications and dealing with the controversies, thus seeking improvement (Sylwester, 1996:5 as cited by Mortimore, 1996:262). This might mean having sufficient influence to empower staff to become subtle sculptors (moving skilfully with the change) and lively wrestlers (struggling successfully with change) rather than being fretful followers (worrying about and implementing every detail of change) or lively litterbugs (discarding any new innovation) (Morine-Dershimer, 1992:3-4). The message of change is one of working with creative tension which lies between the current reality and the vision (Braham, 1995:77).

Much of what has been expected of principals could clearly be seen within managerial terms. Many of the powers driving education are stressing TQM principles and competitive, marketing strategies. It is said that "managers get things done, but without heart and passion and spirit" and "leaders bring spirit, even integrity into play" (Block, 1993:14). While any such distinction is debatable, there is no doubt that any leadership role demands initiative and responsibility (Block, 1993:13) and a greater relational slant (Wheatley, 1992:144) than just a managerial focus. "Indeed, our world is an interconnected web of relationship" (O'Murchu, 1997:78). It is imperative then for educational leaders to be concerned with the subtle distinctions between maintenance and growth, control and involvement, power and shared power, control and motivation, and, defining the possible as well as the reality (Starratt, 1993:18). These are some of the polarised qualities in the leadership versus administration debate (Starratt, 1993:18).

Regardless of the terminology, leadership presents a vision for the future and some transforming quality (Block, 1993:14). It encompasses authenticity (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997) and credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1996). In considering change in education, the works of Bhindi and Duignan (1997), Stoll and Fink (1997) and Pitcher (1997) and Sarros and Butchatsky (1996) are particularly relevant.

Authentic leadership (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997) is in contrast to the managerial approach. It involves building "meaningful and significant relationships within organisational structures and processes that support core significant values" (1997:199); harnessing the "intellects, hearts and souls into shaping a vision for the future" (1997:199); calling "for the rediscovery of the spirit within each person and a celebration of their shared meaning and purpose of relationships" (1997:199); and for an understanding of the "feelings, aspirations and needs

of others, with special reference to the multicultural settings in which many leaders operate "(1997:199).

A depth of understanding of people, together with demonstrated professionalism, is at the heart of invitational leadership stressed by Stoll and Fink (1997). They challenge leaders to renew themselves both personally and professionally. Leaders then in turn invite others to engage in such a process (Stoll and Fink, 1997). The process is one that calls for optimism, respect, trust and "is intentionally supportive, caring and encouraging" (Stoll and Fink, 1997:109).

Another perspective of leadership for change is to engage the skills of the technocrat, artist and craftsman so that a creative leadership approach results (Pitcher, 1997). This approach could be argued to entail the imaginative approach of the artist, the professional skills of the craftsman and the practical, organisational skills of the technocrat. However, while it is acknowledged that the skills of the three persons can overlap, the lesson for change is that leadership must involve creativity and professionalism.

In contrast to the viewpoints of Bhindi and Duignan (1997), Stoll and Fink (1997) and Pitcher (1997), Sarros and Butchatsky (1996:275) describe another leadership perspective. They present evidence of breakthrough leaders who have been successful in schools. Success is described through "established and nurtured confidence to challenge the status quo", establishing "the capacity to cope with the discipline and rigour of work life" and by utilising "skills in analysis and critical thinking". Sarros and Butchatsky (1996:275) furthermore, identify some skills which school leaders need for the twenty-first century. These include skills and attitudes "to deal with the demands of the workplace", having "varied experiences", and the realisation of "the importance of perspiration, professionalism, persistence, and personality to future careers" (275).

Leadership with different emphases for different times can be traced in history. For example, in the 1920-30 period leadership was conducted in the business-industry environments (McGuinness, 1992:9), then it was defined as transactional, transformational, charismatic and beyond perspectives (Olivio and Bernard, 1988); or from the educational, cultural, technical, symbolic and from the human perspectives (iSergiovanni, 1987:63). Therefore it is not surprising that Nahavandi (1997) presents a model of change-oriented leadership which seems to encompass the recent calls for authenticity (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997) and credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1996). Nahavandi (1997) advocates change through the promotion of genuine, personal growth together with the need for professional development and working with others, particularly with individuals. In promoting any model of change, leaders are searching to add vitality and growth to their workplaces (Wheatley, 1992:144).

Nahavandi (1997:193) presents a change-oriented model for leadership that he associates with transformational leadership. Three emphases - intellectual stimulation, charisma and inspiration, and, individual consideration - comprise the dimensions of the model. The intellectual stimulation embodies empowerment and comprises the ability to question and to

apply new solutions (193) to situations; aspects of the authentic self (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997) and invitational leadership (Stoll and Fink, 1997). Loader (1997:62) states, "My job had become so challenging, demanding and fulfilling that other parts of my life were beginning to look pale and relatively insignificant... how was I to learn to place this work within a normal living context?" This statement certainly highlights reasons for addressing intellectual stimulation (Nahavandi, 1997). The "charisma and inspiration" factor relates to "the intense emotional bond between the leader and followers" (192) which can overcome resistance to change (193). In such, trust, loyalty and respect are highlighted by Nahavandi as paving the way for change (193). This perhaps has a relationship to harnessing the "intellects, minds and souls" (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997:199). The individual consideration factor involves the development of personal relationship with followers - "each is treated differently but equitably, providing followers with individual attention" (193). The individual consideration "allows for the matching of each follower's abilities to the needs of the organisation" (193), thus it entails understanding "the feelings, aspirations and needs of others" (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997:199). Individual consideration also allows for exploration of, What is our shared vision? And for identifying "who is slipping through the cracks" (Cooper and Henderson, 1995:25).

Through research based on the dimensions of change-oriented leadership (Nahavandi, 1997) it was possible to explore the stances and viewpoints of change as carried out by educational leaders.

Four questions were asked:

- What gives you intellectual stimulation?
- Do you have particular ways for (a) presenting new ideas to staff and (b) for empowering them?
- What qualities of the leader are important in reducing resistance to change?
- Do you work with individual staff members in promoting change? Explain.

An initial pilot study, gaining the opinions of twenty educational leaders in the Catholic sector, was conducted at the outset of 1998. The sample was extended during 1998 to include one hundred educators - mainly principals, coordinators and those holding recognised positions of responsibility. The reporting that follows basically paints qualitative pictures of the participants responses.

In response to the question, What gives you intellectual stimulation? The following insights were gained from the one hundred leaders. Four basic categories- family and friends, general interests, professional knowledge and skills, and children and their learning - were identified as providing intellectual stimulation. One's family and friends, whether close or extended, were seen as supports for leaders. The general interests of reading, gardening, music, current affairs and fitness training in many sporting forms, as well as travel, computer interests, craft, shopping and watching movies contributed to intellectual stimulation. Professional interest encapsulated the use of formal and informal dialogue; emphases on

professional reading and formal study; attendance at conferences, association with professional networks, conferencing and networking; and, to a lesser degree, reflection and research. Children and their learning as a category of influence on intellectual stimulation, was not mentioned in the pilot study and was only mentioned by a minority in the major work.

The second question was, Do you have particular ways for (a) presenting new ideas to staff and (b) for empowering them? The responses suggested two categories - (a) those of setting the atmosphere for change and (b) those relating to specific process elements. The atmosphere was seen as necessitating excitement, enthusiasm, listening in a non autocratic way; also providing a quiet, supportive atmosphere for some staff. The process factors stressed "Starting where individual staff are at", "Listening to staff firstly to gain their ways of incorporating new ideas", "praising staff for what they have achieved and/or are already achieving in the area" and "giving them real opportunity for input". The leaders also stressed the following- being thoroughly prepared in regard to the knowledge of considered change; ensuring the need for the change was perceived, identifying the positives in the present status quo and the projected change; and clearly stating the non-negotiable issues; having different people and small groups present their ideas to challenge the status quo; using individuals and small groups (taking into account the different personalities) to initiate the change slowly; and, ensuring storytelling of past and present experiences of change and of future planned change. Empowerment was related specifically to tapping the enthusiasm of individuals; listening to them and affirming their professional expertise; giving time for realistic personal ownership of goals; involving the staff in some input for decisionmaking; working specifically with key individuals who could influence others; allowing the freedom to initiate change and giving time for questioning of the projections and processes in relation to research on quality learning. Recognition was also given to setting the expectation that others would respond in a professional manner. Feedback for staff was also seen as important for empowerment.

These responses could be summarised in a simple change model , Table 1, as follows:

Table 1: A Model of Change

In this model elements of knowing the current scene (Hanson, 1996), promotion of communities of practice (Blackmore et al., 1996), process -oriented education (Combs, 1991) and receiving guidance from role models (Sarros and Butchatsky, 1996) were apparent. Also elements of other change models and current theory can be identified -

planned change, TQM, effective schools and storytelling. The cornerstones of planned change, together with some elements of Deming's fourteen points for continuous improvement ("Sharing leadership based on knowledge and competence first and authority second", and, "Realising that the world is changing and we must change our leadership style to tap into everyone's potential", Hanson, 1996, 302) are apparent. The change factors also address issues associated with effective schools (Mortimer, 1996:256), for example, a learning culture, shared goals, teamwork and recognition of rights and responsibilities. The storytelling element of the presented change model has implications for "building strong, persistent efforts because much of the current effort is embedded in structures and routines and internalised in individuals..." (Fullan, 1990 as cited by Groundwater, Cusworth and Dobbins, 1998:311). The storytelling approach captures the details of initiatives and processes. It also highlights the human experiences which are both worthwhile and challenging; perhaps for clarifying the three skills of managing uncertainty, managing new ideas and managing stability (Wilson and Barnacoat, 1994:186) which are essential in any change process.

The third question was, What qualities of the leader are important in reducing resistance to change? The responses provided lists of qualities and a list of skills. The qualities identified were friendship, humor, empathy, openness, care, concern, encouragement, trust, confidence, patience, integrity, wisdom, honesty, enthusiasm, sincerity, loyalty, sensitivity, flexibility, courage and strength. These stress the authentic self (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997) and credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1996). The skills named for handling resistance to change were the ability to explain the current means of proceeding; being organised and focused; listening; clarifying the purpose; expecting, foreseeing and handling conflict; acknowledging the negatives and defensive stands adopted by staff; sharing the resistances; planning for networking, fear reduction, and handling the politics of change conflict; giving feedback; understanding others perspectives; and taking the hard decision when necessary. Other important responses were, "Always focusing on what is best for children", "Set the agenda and be up front about it. Be transparent"; Question whether any goal could be achieved in a different way; and also identify, "What obstacles within and without create adverse feelings" towards the change.

Responses to the question, Do you work with individual staff members in promoting change? were as follows. Change was channeled through official groups - executive teams, leadership teams, coordinators; through different areas of schools, with different people, exercising their position of responsibility; also with young teachers and those who expresses "a wish list". A definite indication was that the leaders worked mainly with those who were recognised as affirming the change or idea. The aim was "lobbying these key people" and "providing the opportunity for thought exchange" with them. Working with these individuals was the means whereby the ideas of the leader and others were tested and endorsed or when caution or hesitation was expressed. Working with volunteers was also suggested as a means to bring about change. Trust, respect and optimism were stresses as essentials in such a move, thus building meaningful relationships (O'Murchu, 1997), and structures and processes (Hanson, 1996); and leadership dimensions rather than a managerial focus (Hanson, 1996). Emphasis was placed on working with teachers who were not at ease with the change and who became defensive and threatened. It was illustrated that this required discussion and providing reassurance. It was acknowledged that this took time. However, this could be done through the process of delegation. Mention was also made of the need to change structures and processes for some people (Hanson, 1996). However much less

reference was made to working with individuals who resisted than those who showed some enthusiasm for the change.

From the study it was possible to identify that the leaders were aware of the need for continuous change. They were taking measures to address the reality (Starratt, 1993) which they faced, and were seeking improvement (Mortimore, 1996). They were able to respond to issues connected with intellectual stimulation, charisma and inspiration and to individual consideration in the change-oriented model of leadership (Nahavandi, 1997). However, some issues for further investigation were identified. Reading of and conducting research gained a low profile. Leaders identified that staff had a working knowledge of new emphases but had not sufficient professional knowledge for the implementation, application and sustaining of many of these. They needed advice from others in the profession. In regard to charisma and inspiration, there seemed to be a definite gap in knowing how to deal with resisters. There were few means discussed to approach this issue.

What became clear from the study was the need for leaders to continue to reflect on the processes used and the future challenges of change. Reflection was defined by one leader as "the time to crystallise" and address, "What can we do better?" A culture of reflection was seen as important for initiating ways to involve staff in change for "a group can make a difference".

If the model of change-oriented leadership (Nahavandi, 1997) was expanded, it might be perceived as follows, Table 2 -

Table 2: A Model of Change-Oriented Leadership (adapted from Nahavandi, 1997)

Intellectual Stimulation	Charisma and Inspiration	Individual Consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying attention to life giving connections • Working for balance in personal and professional life • Affirming our contribution to the wider community and the contribution of the wider community to personal development • Seeking effective, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing one's personal qualities • Adhering to shared values • Encouraging professional development as a constant • Encouraging feedback on the leader's manner of operation • Using reflection to define professional relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing challenge through the recognition and utilisation of individual professionalism • Encouraging reflection on and evaluation of the professional competence by individuals • Exploring alternative means for change with individuals

<p>in depth professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting more on professionalism 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing conflict resolution
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Three basic questions for reflection which leaders must continue to keep in mind are, What aids my professional development? How do my relationships advance professionalism? What help do I offer to individuals in their professional lives?

In conclusion, educational leaders have opinions and practices which they exercise within the dimensions of intellectual stimulation, charisma and inspiration, and individual consideration - the foci of the model as presented by Nahavandi (1997). These present stories of how they handle and advance change. It is argued that the sharing of how change is made can influence future strategies used by leaders. For example, "I like to explore an idea and its genuine application to the students' needs" can inspire teachers. So too, the following messages, "If you are going to initiate change do your homework thoroughly and be ready to adapt", "Always work with people to help them to see how exciting change is and where it might be going in the curriculum", "Persevere, don't give up", "Be patient - the best change may happen slowly", "Ensure you know what is going on - not fait accompli - rather this is what's going to happen", and, "Work on conviction and communication. Never be satisfied with mediocrity for students' lives are at stake." The paper has addressed the challenges of change mainly from responses of those holding positions of responsibility in schools. Further work might explore more classroom teachers' responses so that comparisons can be made, for indeed, "storytelling (about change) is a process of communicating, revitalising and...changing the organisation" (Kaye, 1996:111).

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