



Breaking the leadership rules

What is the educational 'bottom line'?

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Many claim that the principles and practices of leadership drawn from business are not applicable to education. Often, such claims are accompanied by statements that schools are not 'about making profits', or 'returns to shareholders'. Occasionally, these people will add that what schools do is less tangible than what business enterprises do and the work of schools cannot be measured quantitatively anyway.

This is to ignore the fact that leadership has more to do with people than with the nature of the endeavour to which it is applied. John Macfarlane, Chief Executive of the ANZ Bank, stated last year at the Leadership Victoria graduation that leaders need to believe three things:

- We are in this world to make a difference.
- You cannot get anywhere unless you know two things: where you are now and where you are trying to get to.
- What separates a great business from another is one thing – the people; it is the people in companies that make them great.ⁱ

I dare say that few would argue that these beliefs apply equally to schools.

Other commentators on leadership have suggested much the same, including some of the leading writers on educational leadership, such as Bass and Avolio, Fullan, Sergiovanni, Elmore, and Kotter.ⁱⁱ

Recent survey research by the Hay Group has told us that employers believe that

more than 50 per cent of employees lack the motivation to keep learning and improving; four in ten people are unable to work cooperatively; only 19 per cent of entry-level applicants have adequate self-discipline for their jobs. At the same time, there is a critical shortage of leadership capacity; strong competition for top talent; and leaders are not behaving differently despite years of development programs. Indeed, it has been estimated that more than US\$6 billion is squandered annually on development programs that have little or no impact on the participants or their organisations.ⁱⁱⁱ

People in leadership roles today, and tomorrow, can no longer rely on uni-dimensional solutions, on individualistic approaches, on the use of brain power alone, on management by decree, on attempts to gain compliance through coercion, or on personal charisma. Leaders are no longer commanders who rule by *fiat*, by force or by fear – though we do find many in positions of power who attempt to control their organisations in this way.

The concept of transactional leadership, prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, depended upon contingent reward or discipline for people's performance on specific tasks. Its focus was predominantly on the development and implementation of business strategy.^{iv}

Writers like Sergiovanni and Elmore^v believed that translation of business models of leadership into school practice did not sit particularly well. Sergiovanni

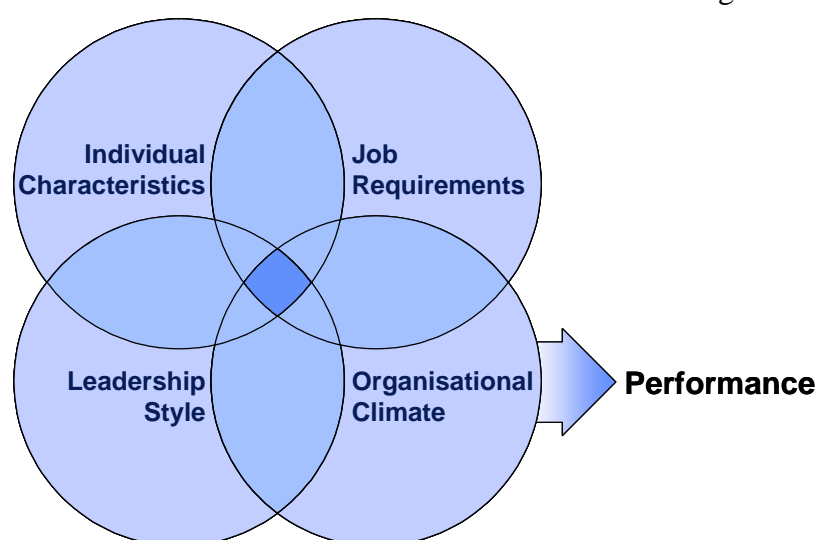
proposed a more democratic model with the central idea of the 'reflective leader'. Though admirable in its attempt to engender an approach to school leadership based on moral imperatives and a conceptualisation of the school as a dynamic community, it created a view that schools are uniquely different from business organisations and tended to ignore the ways in which they are similar. In doing so, much of what was good in the general writings on leadership tended to be displaced and derogated. And many who adopted Sergiovanni's principles soon forgot that reflection needed the structure of evidence and purpose.

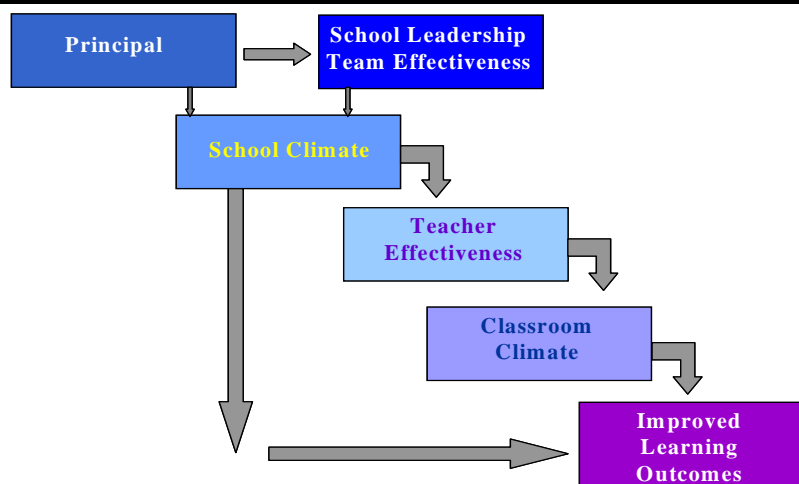
The approach of the new millennium heralded many changes, including an approach to leadership that introduced the term 'transformational'.^{vi} The concept of transformational leadership rests on the use of socialised or resourceful power to motivate people toward the service of collective interests. Its focus is the development and empowerment of others and it has emotional intelligence as its driving force.^{vii}

While education has accepted the notion of distributed leadership, which espouses the devolution of leadership roles to a 'network of interacting individuals with more open boundaries', there is a lack of common agreement on just what the term means or what it looks like in practice.^{viii}

One line of research that has stood the test of time began at Harvard University in 1965 and continues today through the Hay Group's McClelland Center for Innovation and Research in Boston. The essential nature of the findings from these 40 years of research can be summarised in the Four Circle model of organisational effectiveness.^{ix}

This model has been shown to hold in educational settings, where 'bottom line' performance can be equated with improved student learning.^x Hay Group's research and experience with leadership development for principals and school leadership teams in Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Singapore has demonstrated clearly that improved student learning results from a strong professional teaching culture. This, in turn, is more likely in schools that create an energising, productive climate, as illustrated in the diagram below.^{xi}





The most effective school leaders, those who contribute most strongly to the creation of such high-performance climates, are those who:

- demonstrate a passion for teaching and learning
- have absolute clarity about their purpose and priorities
- know what the role boundaries are among members of the leadership group
- build leadership at all levels of the school
- promote high standards and have high expectations of teachers and students
- manage teacher performance with fairness and integrity.

In Michael Fullan's words,^{xii} effective leadership in schools has five mutually reinforcing, powerful components that act as forces for positive change. These are:

- a sense of moral purpose, based on a belief that education is making a difference in the lives of students
- an understanding of change that balances visionary optimism with realistic practicality
- a commitment to building relationships within and between schools
- a belief in the importance of knowledge creation and sharing, especially in respect of professional practice

- a capacity to create meaning from complexity.

For this to occur, it is my view that schools must see themselves not as business enterprises, not as the providers of a community service, not as a professional service organisation, not as providers of professional services, not as simply a community of scholars – but as a community of scholar/practitioners. In other words, school staffs are collections of like-minded professionals who are dedicated to the highest standards of quality and to improvement in teaching and learning within their school community. They are passionate about what they do; support one another professionally; challenge each other to attain excellence; commit to lifelong learning; seek feedback from others on their own performance; and offer balanced feedback to their colleagues to help them improve their practice.

Leaders today must think, reason, sense, understand, feel, and act with integrity. This is the only way that they can create the environment in which others can perform to the highest levels. And this is what the most effective leaders do. For schools, this means that leaders at all levels can not afford to focus solely on educational leadership, but must also provide personal and organisational leadership. This is what transformational leadership requires and, as stated earlier, the foundation is emotional intelligence.

The leadership journey can only find its true destination if the traveller has the level of self-awareness to enable a realistic understanding of her likely response to the variety of situations to be encountered. Only then will the prospective leader have the wherewithal to manage herself along the way or to understand the people she meets. This combination of self-awareness, self-management and social awareness then prepares the ground to enable the person to manage relationships with others. The nature of these capabilities, or competencies, is described in the model of emotional intelligence offered by Daniel Goleman.^{xiii}

While emotionally intelligent leadership is a far cry from the kind of personal dominance prevalent in the past, and is not reliant on manipulation, threat or punishment, neither is it 'warm and fuzzy' to the extent that it kills performance with kindness.

Such an approach to leadership is based on the misguided assumption that the best way to get performance from people is to create harmony, to keep people happy, to deal with their personal needs and look after their feelings when they do not perform to expectations - because 'they feel bad enough knowing they have failed'. The impact of this style, however, is that people believe that the 'leader' does not have the strength to make the tough decisions, that she plays favourites, that you can get away with anything if you have a good story. As a result, people do not know where they stand and, ultimately, will find their work unrewarding.

Leaders who are not emotionally self-aware will not be tough enough to survive in tomorrow's business environment. Educational leaders must be equally emotionally self-aware if they are to meet the challenges facing teaching and learning.

The best leaders focus their thinking on helping people feel energised, clear about their responsibilities, focused on the business target and their progress toward it. Believing that strategy can only be achieved through people, they:

- articulate and operationalise as clear a sense of direction as possible for the organisation
- set the target and elicit staff perceptions on the best way to hit it
- sell the vision, describing the target in terms of the organisation's and their own potential for success
- set performance standards and hold everyone accountable for meeting them - they do NOT tolerate mediocrity.

Staff satisfaction and contentment follow then from the knowledge that their jobs have been well done.

Let me finish with a brief overview of a study conducted by the Hay Group in 2000, comparing 200 outstanding UK headteachers with a group of 200 high performing senior business executives.^{xiv}

In summary, the findings were:

- Headteachers exert strong and versatile leadership, adapted to the needs of their staff, with particular strengths in raising individual capability and promoting individual role clarity.
- Highly successful business leaders would be extremely challenged to exert outstanding leadership in schools, as the role of the headteacher is stretching in comparison to business.
- Headteachers rely heavily on telling people what to do. They need to think more about how the **influence** of leadership can raise standards and how to link rewards (recognition and praise rather than monetary reward) to performance more strongly.

- Headteachers think of leadership in terms of developing people, whereas business leaders think of leadership in terms of strategy. Where headteachers see their staff as individuals, show them where they fit in the scheme of things and support their long-term growth, business leaders create a sense of mission, drive standards and communicate their vision well.
- Schools need more strategic leadership to raise standards. But, equally, business leaders need to adopt more of the headteachers' style if they are to increase their people's long-term capability to implement strategy.
- Both groups improved their leadership – by becoming more transformational – after accurate and specific feedback.

To quote Michael Fullan once again, 'The principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kinds of reforms that we need for the future. We need, instead, leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and the teaching profession itself.'^{xv}

ⁱ Macfarlane, J (2003) *On leadership* address to the graduation dinner for Leadership Victoria, December.

ⁱⁱ See, for example: Avolio, B J & Bass, B M (2002) *Developing Potential Across a Full Range of Leadership*, Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, London; Fullan, M (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco; Fullan, M (2003) *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, RoutledgeFalmer, London ; Sergiovanni, T J (1991) *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, Second Edition, Allyn and Bacon, Boston; Sergiovanni, T J (1996) *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco ; Elmore, R F (2000) *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*, Albert Shanker Institute, Washington, DC.

ⁱⁱⁱ Goleman, D (1998) *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, London.

^{iv} Boyett, J & Boyett, J (1998) *The Guru Guide: The Best Ideas of the Top Management Thinkers*, Wiley, New York.

^v Sergiovanni, T J (1991) *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, Second Edition, Allyn and Bacon, Boston; Elmore, R F (2000) *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*, Albert Shanker Institute, Washington, DC.

^{vi} Avolio, B J & Bass, B M (2002) *Developing Potential Across a Full Range of Leadership*, Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, London; Goleman, D, Boyatzis, R & McKee, A (2002) *The New Leaders: Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results*, Little Brown, London.

^{vii} Power, P G (2004) *Leadership for Tomorrow: Once More, with Feeling*, Mt Eliza Business Review, Summer/Autumn, 2003–2004.

^{viii} National College for School Leadership (2003) *Distributed Leadership*, NCSL, London.

^{ix} Copyright Hay Acquisition Company No.1.

^x See, for example, Watkin, C (2000) 'The Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers: probably the world's largest leadership development initiative', *The Leadership & Organization development Journal*, 21, 1, 13-19.

^{xi} Diagram copyright Hay acquisition Company No.1.

^{xii} Fullan, M (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

^{xiii} Goleman, D (1998) *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, London; Goleman, D, Boyatzis, R & McKee, A (2002) *The New Leaders: transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results*, Little Brown, London.

^{xiv} Forde, R, Hobby, R & Lees, A (2000) *The Lessons of Leadership: A comparison of headteachers in UK schools and senior executives in private enterprise*, Hay Group, London.

^{xv} Fullan, M (2003) *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, RoutledgeFalmer, London.