Leadership Theory and Practice in a Highly Demanding and Changing Educational Environment

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Background

I believe school leadership is changing and it is imperative that I am able to reflect on these changes and adapt my leadership to suit, if I am to lead effectively. Along with the focus for excellence in learning and teaching (performativity), there are increasing demands for accountability. With a laudable focus on 'no child left behind', current neo-liberal education policy has brought further demands for higher levels of managerialism and marketisation, while extending performativity and accountability. These demands have created a vastly different educational leadership platform, together with significant new challenges. Degenhardt and Duignan (2010) note … "the struggle to discover and articulate forms of leadership appropriate for the demands of the 21st century" (p. 130).

I am becoming more and more aware that school leaders, at the present time, must be adept in different styles of leadership, at different stages of the process of change. Alvy and Robbins (2010) give imperative to this, stating that … "the work of school leaders has become so incredibly complex that no one person can address the demands of the role" (p. 46).

As a long serving principal of a large urban primary school, it is timely for me to investigate leadership theory and styles best suited to establish and grow a vibrant learning community that supports and embraces this change. It is, therefore, timely for me to grow my understanding of current pedagogy and practice in and around leadership.

Methodology

a. Research scholarly and seminal literature on leadership styles and practice, to best meet the current demands of leading a school in today's highly demanding educational climate;

Friar.P. **Leadership theory and effective practice**.

b. Investigate a specific leadership strategy / style best suited to meet the demands of leading a school in an environment of continual change;
c. Carry out a situational and personal analysis of leadership within my educational context.
d. Identify future foci / next steps.

Abstract

Technological advancement and the seemingly ever increasing neo-liberal political manoeuvring, together with the resulting performativity and environmental pressures, suggest an imperative for educational leaders to review their leadership practice. Effective organisational structures and processes that support and grow teaching and learning in the present, the knowable mid-term and the 'envisaged future', are essential.

Caldwell (2006) elicits urgency in embracing educational leadership practice for a hitherto unexperienced future in the introduction to the final chapter of his book, 'Re-imagining Educational Leadership':

> "What will education be like 40 years from now? I can't tell you. Nobody can. But I can tell you that it must be totally different because if it is the same as it is today, we're dead. Current approaches will be irrelevant, marginalised, the world will be different. You may want it to be the same, but it can't be the same" (p.183).

Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) refer to 'The Rollercoaster Ride of Change' and posit that "Educators can't hide their heads in the hope that 'this too will pass'. They have a choice to make – wait until directed to change by others, or take charge of change and attempt to influence the future of schools and schooling" (p.2).

While the choice to 'take charge' remains with each educational leader, the importance of doing so is clearly apparent. This paper does not seek to structure the actions that need to be taken, since these actions must suit each organisation's composition, culture, environment and envisioned future. What is hoped is that this paper highlights an urgency to engage in reflective practice that will ensure existing leadership structures are critiqued against the needs of schools today (and the immediate future), so that we meet the demands of the current educational climate and the future needs of tomorrow's leaders − our students.

Leadership Styles: A brief overview

Personal revelation lies in what leadership is about for the individual. Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) aptly encapsulate this for me, when they identify: "Leadership is about vision, often through co-constructing a view of a preferred future in collaboration with others and building on shared values. It is therefore about bringing about change for improvement." (p.38). Ritchie et al (2007, p. 38) go on to postulate that 'co-constructing a view' requires the building of relational trust and respect that empowers transformation, enhances practice, reflection and an aspiration for continual improvement.

Personal reflection and seminal literature on leadership practice suggest veritable arrays of experience engendered situational knowledge and this requires a plethora of 'leadership styles'. The situational and transitional nature of leadership style is of the utmost significance. Bush and Glover (2003), cited in Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007, p. 38-39), provide a typology of leadership styles:

- Instructional: That which impacts student learning.
- Transformational: Envisioning and building a new future.
- Moral: Values based ethical leadership.
- Participative: Collaborative and inclusive of the 'team'.
- Managerial: Organisational leadership.
- Post Modern: Consideration for all stakeholder perspectives and any inherent diversity.
- Interpersonal: Relational leadership.
- Contingent: Situational, adaptive leadership.

Other frameworks for leadership, cited in Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007), were by Hay McBer (NAHT 2001: 11) and presented as authoritative; coercive; democratic; pacesetting; affiliative and coaching.

Clearly, there are many leadership styles. If we are to accept that these styles are transitional, then leaders must embrace and use a range of them on a daily basis. If we consider the growing complexity of educational leadership, the size of many educational institutions in New Zealand and the constant demands for growth and change, then there may well be an imperative to do more than embrace contingent leadership. Harris (2012) echoes the need to embrace change in the way we lead towards future success. She suggests the following:

> "The unit of change is no longer the school or the system but the individual learner with his or her own personalised learning pathway. Schools of the future are more likely to require multiple rather than

> individual leaders. As organisations become more complex, diffuse and networked, various forms of direction and influence will be required to respond to quickly shifting and changing environments" (p. 9).

Personal experience and a growing body of literature suggest that there is no 'one style' or 'one person' that will build and sustain a highly effective educational institution. Caldwell (2006) supports this assumption, when he refers to the need for serious distribution of leadership and identifies "…that transformation across the system will not occur with top-down and bottom-up approaches" (p.193). Duignan (2006), in his chapter on leadership capability (personal and relational), suggests: "It is unlikely that one person, for example the principal, is capable in all these areas. This is why shared and distributed leadership are such important models" (p.150). Bennett, Crawford and Cartwright (2003) posit: "School leadership is beyond the undertakings of one heroic individual. It is simply not possible, and may not even be desirable, for one individual to take every leadership task within a school" (p.181). Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) argue: "We need to move away from the model of a single leader to a more inclusive approach that views the leadership capacity of the school as something that involves all staff, and as something that can be increased over time" (p.37). The enormity of the leadership role (in the context of New Zealand schools) and the impossibility of being 'everything for everybody' must bear considerable reflection. Gronn (2003.b) emphasises this when he states that "… in any organisation there is rarely ever just one leader and a number of followers" (p.278).

Serrell-Cooke (2011) found that establishing new roles for individuals, described as 'Subject Matter Experts', resulted in:

> "…a real and rapid impact on not only the delivery of organisational goals, but also on accelerating acceptance of the organisational change, by even the most resistant members, and on delivering the required culture change. Within a matter of months the organisation was operating at an enhanced tempo, with a co-ordinated focus on enhanced organisational outcomes" (p. 2).

Suffice to say, there is an unequivocal voice to suggest that a more effective leadership style is one that is distributed/distributing. This should imply some urgency for New Zealand schools to distribute leadership and in doing so to grow as 'learning communities' (a feature among institutions where distributed leadership predominates). Harris (2003) supports this notion and identifies that "…leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively" (p. 314). Clearly, distributed leadership is about people and situations and it crosses structural and cultural boundaries.

Distributed/distributing leadership: is it new?

Distributed leadership has been around for centuries, but it has been more widely embraced by education leaders since the millennium. Oduro (2004, p. 4) suggests that accounts of DL date back as far as 1250 BC, thus making it "one of the most ancient leadership notions recommended for fulfilling organisational goals through people" (as cited by Bolden, 2011, p. 252). Lynch (2012) notes the more recent genesis of distributed leadership: "After its disappearance after a short stint in the mid-1990s, it reappeared as a movement of sorts after Gronn (2000) wrote his taxonomy of distributed leadership" (p. 36). The publication database of distributed leadership in organisations, reproduced below from Bolden (2011), gives visual representation to the sharp rise in popularity in distributed leadership from 1999 – 2009.

Distributed Leadership in Organizations 255

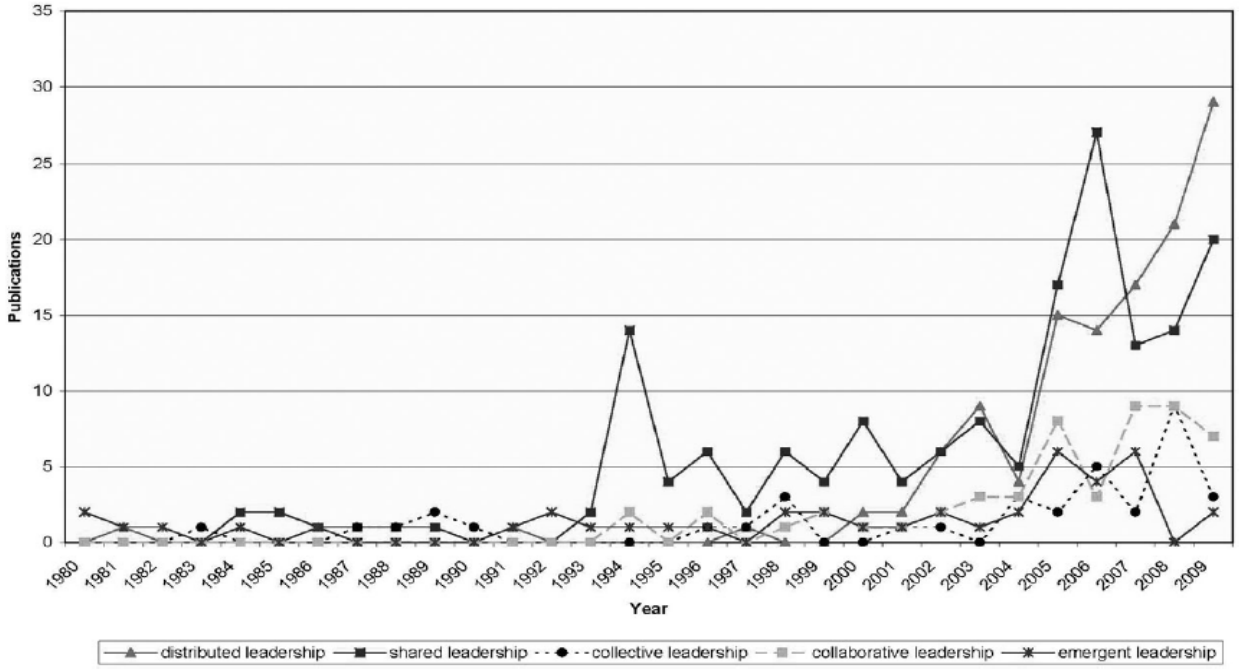

Figure 1. Publications on Scopus database

Reproduced from: Bolden (2011). Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research. International Journal of Management Reviews, Vol. 13, p. 255)

Harris (2012, p.1) cites Barnard, 1968, as identifying that distributed leadership's genesis "…can be traced back to the field of organisational theory in the mid-1960s and possibly further."

Clearly, there is a suggestion that distributed leadership theory is not 'new', but rather it is experiencing an overwhelming increase in popularity which has eminent academics, such as

Caldwell, making direct statements for embracing this style. “Distributed leadership will be taken seriously…” (Caldwell, 2006, p. 193)

Hatcher (2005) argues that within a school context “…the work process has become much more complex and intensive” (p. 254) and refers to two overlapping reasons for a rise in the prominence of distributed leadership in education: one being in human relations (through consultation, participation and team work) which leads to greater job satisfaction, commitment and overall efficiency; and the second in theories of distributed understanding (knowledge is dispersed and all can contribute and influence). The inherent attributes in this leadership style suggest justification for its growth and new popularity.

Distributed/distributing leadership: what is it all about?

Spillane (2006) notes the elusive nature of a comprehensive definition and Bennett et al. (2003) refer to its many varied definitions.

Lynch (2012) suggests the promotion of distributed leadership that “…is ahead of evidence” (p.37). He identifies that academics have differing opinions. He suggests that the essence of distributed leadership is based on individual action making sense “…when viewed as part of a pattern of relationships forming a collective activity” (p. 40).

Timperley (2005) supports this notion and states: “This alternative involves thinking of leadership in terms of activities and interactions that are *distributed* across multiple people and situations (Camburn *et al.* 2003, Copland 2003, Spillane *et al.* 2004) and involve role complementarities and network patterns of control (Smylie and Denny 1990, Heller and Firestone 1995)” (p. 1).

Fullen and Sharrat, found in Davies’ book ‘Developing Sustainable Leadership’ (2007), refer to distributive leadership as “…a critical mass of leaders led by the principal working on establishing a culture of ongoing learning” (p. 127). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) suggest distributed leadership is grounded in moral purpose and the very nature of an inherent shared responsibility that “…benefits future generations, uses resources wisely, and does no harm to others in the surrounding environment” (p. 97). Duignan (2006) notes the style “…enables the ways in which teachers and other leaders think and act to change teaching and learning to be seen more clearly” (p. 110). Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) promote the fact that “…building leadership capacity within schools through distributing leadership is conducive to personalising learning for young people and the school improvement that results from this” (p. 12).

In summary, distributed leadership promotes the growth of trust, collaboration, leadership and communities of learners. The evident benefit of this style of leadership results in engagement of staff, accelerated student achievement and a growth of collaborative learning opportunities well beyond those able to be offered by any 'one leader'. This situation, in turn, encourages collaboration and greater success for schools, staff and students, and I suggest that it will go some way towards meeting the 'pressure cooker' demands of educational leadership and performativity within today's neo-liberal paradigm.

Distributed / distributing leadership: the main ideas.

Peter Gronn, in Bennett and Anderson (2003), suggests that distributed leadership "…rests on a changed set of assumptions about the re-articulation of work as a part of a changing division of labour" (p. 64). He suggests the core of this division is "…an inherent tension between an imperative of 'differentiation', as tasks proliferate through increasing specialisation, and an imperative of 'integration', as these specialisms have to be rearticulated and combined in new work designs" (Bennett et al, 2003, p. 64). He notes a requirement for role complementarity, reciprocity of action and interdependency, which will support staff in coping with ambiguity within a rapidly changing environment, through negotiation, rethinking and restructuring.

Harris (2006) identifies firstly, "…the idea of distributing leadership has a representational power in so far that it reflects the changing organisational structures of schooling" (p. 1). Secondly, "…its normative power; it reflects current leadership practice in schools" (p. 2). Thirdly, it "…has a descriptive power; it describes the forms of practice implicit in the workings of professional learning communities or communities of practice" (p. 2). She goes on to identify the importance of a flattened leadership profile that flows across organisational boundaries, within the increasingly complex world of education.

Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) talk about the reconceptualising of leadership, so that we look beyond the model of a leader of a school and towards the inclusivity of "…the leadership capacity of the school" (p. 37). Littlewood (1990) and Rosenholtz (1989), as cited in Harris (2006), suggest that collegiality, developed through distributing leadership, can form the basis for developing shared ideas and lead towards improvement and positive change. Radcliffe (2012) suggests that "…the way that organisations can truly excel is by encouraging leadership at all levels – everyone is the CEO of something" (p. 153).

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) postulate: "Distributed leadership draws change from the everyday knowledge and capacities of staff rather than driving reforms through them" (p. 96). Clearly, distributing leadership is all about the act of extending leadership beyond the boundaries and roles evident in many schools that showcase leadership as the responsibility of the principal, deputy principals, assistant principals and (on occasions) other structured positions. It requires the building of leadership capacity in all, with the attendant consequence of the development of a learning community.

Distributed/distributing leadership: the negatives

Notman (2011) identifies inherent challenges in this style of leadership, as it assumes "…teachers will have the capability and skills, motivation and time to take up leadership responsibility" (p. 140). If we consider the current demands presented by neo-liberal paradigms, there is much validity in his observation. Certainly, many hours are dedicated to meeting ever changing obligations of performativity, the corresponding administration, the ever changing impact of technology and the macro and micro influences impacting on educational institutions: and this situation currently serves to reduce the capability for staff to embrace new skills, and place their focus on motivation and commitment to leadership. Compounding these environmental factors is the lack of provision for adequate staffing allowances that can provide time for staff to take leadership roles beyond their classroom. Gronn (2003) notes that, even though distributing leadership is a response to role expansion, it can lengthen the completion time "…because of the consultation involved in the allocation of work tasks" and it can "…increase the number of potential veto points throughout the process" (p. 151). This situation presents a significant barrier, as we are immersed in an environment of continual change, since both politics (and apparent whimsical and arbitrary introduction of new strategies) and technology continues to have an unprecedented impact on education. Consultation requires time and it also requires both an interest and commitment from staff, in order to participate.

Harris and Spillane (2008) note the main barriers as follows: the growing complexity of schools; the need to change leadership from 'top down' to something more interactive; and the uncontrollable and compartmentalisation of school organisation by subject, year group/syndication etc. They specifically identify the complexity required to enable collaboration across the many educational platforms.

A recurring negative identified by a number of scholars is the need to resource the distribution of leadership with 'the time to lead'. This, within a crowded and fast changing environment presents any organisation with a significant challenge − but it is one that somehow must be addressed.

Finally Lynch (2012) promotes caution as he notes "…that policy on distributed leadership is ahead of the evidence" (p. 37). He questions the positioning of distributing leadership within organisational theory. This is a challenging statement, since a significant literary voice suggests the necessity to look towards sharing/distributing leadership − and organisations embracing this style regularly gather evidence of outcomes and engage in highly reflective practice.

The art of growing distributed leadership must address these barriers and minimise any effect they may have, in order to ensure the process is not derailed.

Distributed/distributing leadership: my practice

My journey has evolved from a desire to lead our school towards becoming a 'learning community' and the realisation that theory depicts this journey to be grounded in the practice of distributing leadership.

In reality, most schools have a wonderful starting point for distributed leadership, especially in growing pedagogy and practice within aspects of curriculum delivery. Our school focus on continual improvement provided the vehicle for us all to begin 'learning together', through the recruitment of curriculum facilitators. Constraints on both money and time required the growth of on-site experts, thus igniting the focus for need to distribute leadership.

Personal reflection and an improved understanding of distributing leadership provides for the identification of the following milestones in our journey to date:

- **Re-visioning**: This required the 'authentic engagement' of all key stakeholder groups, thus providing a relevant voice to each entity. This was an exceptionally important starting point, as history provided the teacher voice with an inherent precedence of a teacher centric culture;
- **Re-culturing**: This re-visioning provided a rich array of data that allowed for informed reflective practice and it identified the need to re-culture: not because we were failing as individual educators, but so that we could grow further as a learning community. In order to re-culture, we needed to embrace a student centric focus and lead and model behaviours within these tenets. This required the establishment of a

leadership profile that crossed conventional structures and supported professional learning and collaboration;

- **Re-engaging**: Professional learning served to collaboratively grow pedagogy and best practice. The vehicle for this was literacy and the primacy for this focus was identified collaboratively as an area to grow improved personal pedagogy and accelerate student outcomes. The result was greater professional engagement and (for some teachers) an apparent renewed passion for teaching and an enthusiasm for learning. The demands placed on schools, by neo-liberal politics, Ministry of Education mandates and the ever increasing focus on individualising learning provided a mandate that supported this focus; and
- **Re-structuring**: The target was to distribute leadership widely, in order to foster the growth of our burgeoning learning community. This resulted in the establishment of leadership teams with responsibility for pedagogy, practice and student achievement across the school. Representation within teams was built to cross structural boundaries and roles and responsibilities: and it was formalised to support collaboration and task relative outcomes. Notably, the role of principal has transformed and a significant aspect is to engage, foster and focus leaders, teams and inherent learning, while at the same time facilitating the achievement of envisioned outcomes.

In summary, while our journey has been over six years to date, it has only just begun. It is my fervent hope that we are able to continue to grow leadership in a vibrant and engaging environment of reflection, reciprocity and as Gronn (2003) describes, 'differentiation' and 'integration'.

A situational analysis: what must be considered to distribute/share leadership?

This is arguably a time of historically unparalleled change. Shostak (2008) postulates that "Never before have so many youngsters − 'have much' and 'have less' types alike − had so many high tech communication devices with which to feed their natural curiosity about tomorrow" (p. xxvii). Environmental pressures are evidentially significant. Political manoeuvring, globalisation, technological advancements, finance and culture are but a few. Today's school leader struggles to keep abreast of a plethora of these agendas. Davies and Ellison (1999) stress the importance of an awareness of global trends and their implications on the planning process. Our school environment inevitably impacts on how we educate our children for today − and the time to come. Hicks and Slaughter (1998) highlight this as…"the zone of possibility, always retreating before us, but profoundly influencing the future" (p. 1).

We must, therefore, engage in visionary planning and lead strategically toward new realities. Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) support this notion: "Leadership is about vision, often through co-constructing a view of a preferred future in collaboration with others and building on shared values. It is therefore about bringing about change for improvement" (p. 38). Stoll et al., (2003) suggest: "To succeed in a world characterised by rapid change, it is vital that schools grow, develop, adapt creatively to change and take charge of change so that they can create their own preferable future" (p. 131). Clearly, it will be through the candour of dialogue, strategic planning, organisational structure and visionary leadership that we realise imagined futures and thus, "Informed by a knowledge of the landscape through which the community pass, assisted by an ability to read the changing environment, the leader guides the school across difficult terrain towards an established goal" (Goddard, 2003, p. 24).
If we accept the notion of a climate of unparalleled change, I propose the following steps to develop a viable direction:

- Environmental scanning: current and future drivers of change;
- Envisioning: strategic intent and strategic planning;
- Organisation: systems and structure; and
- Leadership: strategy and capacities

Inherent in the following, is the imperative for effective dialogic practise, thus engaging all stakeholders within our education communities – the professional educators, students, families, ethnic factions and culture groups, goods and service providers and the wider community.

Environmental scanning: current and future drivers of change

There is reason to speculate that the changes we are currently witnessing – those that are imminent (and foreseen), along with the currently unimaginable − are evolving and will in future change the world. Gerver (2010) identifies: "As a species, we now realize that we have to behave and act dramatically differently from our predecessors if we are to bestow upon our future generations any kind of meaningful inheritance" (p. 149). Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur and Chley (2008) state …"more and more companies are moving to take advantage of the new realities of business" (p. 114). This situation should be common practice within schools, where environmental scanning and future sustainability is conceptualised and the vision is integrated into everything we do. The act of taking perspectives, with due consideration for environmental trends embraces … "a taxonomy of four areas for analysis" (Davies and Ellison, 1999, p. 60). They promote the gathering of data to develop perspectives and identify trends in the environment, the school's

customers/stakeholders; the school's products/services; and its competitors. They stress the importance of an awareness of global trends and their implications on the planning process and they encourage us to look towards international comparisons. They also propose the environment can be sub-divided into "…international (or global), national (or macro) and regional/local (or micro)" (Davies and Ellison 1999, P. 62). Chapman, Armstrong, Harris, Muijs, Reynolds and Sammons (2012) break down the complexity of a school's context into four key dimensions: institutional, social, geographical and political. They suggest: "The mix of each of the elements within each context combines to offer an overarching school context with a unique culture and capacity for change" (p. 239). Hicks and Slaughter (1998) promote the importance of gaining first-hand knowledge of the trends and issues that are shaping the future. They identify these factors under the mnemonic STEEP and suggest that the … "STEEP (Social, Technological, Economic, Ecological, Political) categories can serve as a taxonomy for the forces facing the future" (p. 170).

Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2004), note that we must understand the perspectives and factors of significant impact, when visualising our future. The importance of the acts and the structure inherent in constructing understanding is given credence: "When we become more aware of the dynamic whole, we also become more aware of what is emerging" (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers. 2004, p. 10). It is, therefore, imperative that the act of becoming aware of 'what is emerging' is integral to our being able to formulate perspectives, as we … "shift from looking 'out at the world' from the viewpoint of a detached observer, to looking from 'inside' what is being observed" (Senge et al., 2004, p. 41). This inside viewpoint engages a greater sense of understanding and serves to provide a basis on which to collaboratively establish operational targets and strategic intent. Moreover, our school's reason for being should be regularly re-envisioned. For the sake of manageability, I suggest this should occur every three years. The environmental pressures, global (macro and micro) impacting on our school and community have been and continue to be significant, thus resulting in the re-organisation of leadership and the requirement to continually scan and revisit influences and trends, to better inform our organisational imperatives.

Envisioning: strategic intent and strategic planning

Davies (2006) suggests that strategic intent is "…a powerful concept used to describe how a school can take a strategic perspective in a rapidly changing turbulent environment. It is a means of a school operating in a new and significantly different way" (p. 91). He further differentiates between strategic planning as … "knowing where you want to go and how to

get there" and strategic intent as … "knowing what major change we want but not yet knowing how to achieve it" (p. 91). The implementation and realisation of strategic intent provides a vehicle for us to challenge the current organisation, systems and practices, to construct pathways to reach new levels of operation and reality.

In order to develop strategic intent, we must first understand and embrace our core purpose. Each organisation … "is governed according to some explicit principles. These principles are 'guiding ideas' – concepts that define what an organisation stands for and what its members desire to create" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 312). They have moral purpose and philosophical depth, and develop and evolve over time. Senge et al. (2008) indicate that understanding these may require 'suspending assumptions', since this "breaks down the rigidities in thinking that otherwise thwart dialogue" (p. 254). We, as school leaders, must support stakeholders to move from 'assumption' to 'viewpoints' and we must provide opportunities for reflective practice and action that, over time, strategically grows the 'critical mass' for established goals and intentions. Davies and Ellison (1999) posit: "This phenomenon (critical mass) exemplifies why future's thinking and the integrated approach to development planning are so powerful" (p.188).

Caldwell and Harris (2008) talk about spiritual capital and its power to facilitate strategic intent. They identify that it … "refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes" (p. 83). They exemplify that … "a school's intellectual capital cannot be effectively implemented to support the success of all students without a strong moral purpose and shared understandings about life and learning" (p. 85). This highlights an overriding need for our school community to develop explicit understandings of our purpose, which include our spiritual, moral and philosophical beliefs. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) advocate a collaborative approach as the most empowering vehicle for coming to grips with this purpose, since … "collaborative cultures build social capital and therefore also professional capital" (p. 114).

The literary voice provides an imperative for us to examine our school goals, intents, values and missions, since they provide the way toward us realising … "a shared picture of the future we seek to create" (Senge, 2006, p. 9). Senge identifies five component technologies, or disciplines, that allow us to realise our highest aspirations:

- *Systems Thinking*: developing conceptual frameworks and tools;
- *Personal Mastery*: reaching special levels of proficiency;
- *Mental Models*: realising what really matters and striving to achieve them;
- *Building Shared Vision*: collaborating and bringing people together through common principles and practices;

- *Team Learning*: the whole team grows, providing greater opportunity for the organisation to flourish.

He suggests that the disciplines described above are distinct but, when the five converge, they will serve to create a … "new wave of experimentation and advancement" (Senge, 2006, p. 11). His imperative is that they develop as an ensemble.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), in 'The Fourth Way' set out a new theory of action, in order to lead schools to begin addressing their future through the following:

- *Six pillars of purpose and partnership* that support change: "an inspiring and inclusive vision; strong public engagement; achievement through investment; corporate educational responsibility; students as partners in change; and mindful learning and teaching" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 73);
- *Three principles of professionalism* that drive change: "high-quality teachers; positive and powerful professional associations; and lively learning communities" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 88);
- *Four catalysts of coherence* that sustain change and hold it together: "sustainable leadership; integrating networks; responsibility before accountability; and differentiation and diversity" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 95).

Beare (2001) considers that … "one plans not a strategy but the consequences of it. Planning gives order to vision" (2001, p. 107). He presents a 'backward mapping' tool, starting with a vision for the future, followed by a plan for how to get there.

Davies (2006) proposes a strategic intent process, which he refers to as … "the ABCD model with its four stages of Articulate – Build – Create – Define" (p. 93). He states: "The point of moving through this process is to establish a common, clearly understood, mental model of what the school thinks its future will be, and how it can explain the future to all those in the school community" (p. 53). He further suggests: "The key for building strategic intents is for leaders in the school to articulate the desired new objective (strategic intent) and to work through a process with staff of sharing good practice and developing images of what the new strategy can look like" (p. 93).

The literature and my more recent experience in leading a school provide imperatives for us to add clarity and collaboration to all we do. Through dialogue and co-construction, we can realise a powerful vision and mission, which will embrace our overarching values and influence organisational and leadership structure towards new realities. The key to success,

for our school, is to carefully establish and review our strategic goals, using the most appropriate strategies and processes: and then strive to reach envisioned milestones and consciously structure and re-structure the organisation as we progress. Distributing leadership is a continual process and one that must flex, in order to meet the environmental and organisational demands inherent in any journey to an envisioned future.

Organisation: systems and structure

It is paramount that we pay cognisance to the 'people and partnership' foundations, in order to give both engagement and purpose to our school. Schools, which have become learning communities, seem to be best equipped to engage effectively in this process, since:

> "Learning communities know how to deal with and creatively take charge of change because they have a collective understanding of where they are going and what is important. They are open to new ideas and create new ways of learning and working to deal with complex situations" (Stoll et al, 2003, p. 132).

Thomas (1991), in his reflection, aptly focuses our thinking on the necessity to create a 'learning society' … "that bases its very essence on the mobilization of the learning capacities of all of its citizens" (p. 183). It is this learning society that, through dialogue, vision and milestone planning, creatively sets and achieves future intents and over time, restructures practice and protocol to better serve learning and teaching − and is the 'holy grail' for which we aspire to achieve.

The mission, strategic goals and intent now drive the systems and structure of our school. In order to establish this situation, we followed Palestini (2005) and engaged in 'systems planning', which he suggests is a six-step process … "for realising valid, planned change" (p. 139). The six steps are to identify the problem; determine the solution; select the solution strategies; implement the strategies; determine performance effectiveness; and revise if required.

Historically, school organisation over the years is grouped into three types:

> **Classical Theory**: Positions are arranged hierarchically with clear jurisdictions. Power resides at the top with a clear chain of command and high task prescription;
>
> **Social Systems Theory**: A collection of groups that collaborate to achieve system goals as well as on some occasions the goals of the groups; and
>
> **Open Systems Theory**: A set of interrelated parts that interact with the environment. Management is very complex as the leadership has almost no control over the environment.

Palestini (2005) identifies a fourth - 'contingency theory', which he suggests has emerged more recently and treats … "each organisation, and even the entities within the organisation as relatively unique" (p. 13). This theory embraces the changing situational characteristics inherent in education today. Palestini identifies that, in actual fact, this is not a theory but rather a tool to foster understanding of 'circumstances' and appropriate organisational and individual responses.

It is this unique organisational structure (possibly viewed as a sub-division of open systems theory) that I propose is the most apt, in allowing us to meet the demands of change and performativity in our schools. My personal realisation is that what may have worked when leading other schools, in another time and place, cannot be simply transformed and implemented. A further understanding is that gathering data on other schools' organisational structures, without a full understanding of the reasons, circumstances and a comprehensive understanding of one's own school environment, may not be at all constructive. These revelations are empowering. I am fully convinced that, for my current school, open systems theory with its active stream of events, personnel and resources, combined with Palestini's contingencies of leadership, staff motivation and communication, have provided a vehicle for us to begin to cope with an ever changing environment. Continuing our growth of learning and teaching and our focus on continual improvement will, I believe, be dependent on the continued sharing of leadership towards enabling the realisation of our established strategic goals and visionary intents.

Leadership: strategy and capacity

If we consider the growing complexity of educational leadership, the size of many schools, constant demands for growth and change and accountability, then we must look towards leadership and the way we learn, to remain effective within a highly demanding environment. The enormity of the leadership role and the impossibility of being 'everything for everybody' must bear considerable reflection. Alvy and Robbins (2010) give voice to this when they note that … "the work of school leaders has become so incredibly complex that no one person can address the demands of the role" (p. 46). If we are to accept this situation, then there is significant worth in heeding Ritchie and Deakin Crick's (2007) imperative; "We need to move away from the model of a single leader to a more inclusive approach that views the leadership capacity of the school as something that involves all staff, and as something that can be increased over time" (p. 37).

It is without doubt essential that we embrace; the improvement of learning and teaching, high levels of accountability, the ever changing technological advancements, globalisation and the

growth of culture; values, community, creativity and imagination. Inevitably this will require continual reorganisation and restructuring to lead and grow shared / distributed leadership, allowing us to learn together (and from each other), build new meaning and knowledge and meet the myriad demands of our global, macro and micro environment.

Duignan (2006) notes leadership challenges … "involved complex and often conflicting human relationships, as well as contestation of values" (p. 4) and identifies resulting tensions. It is these tensions that I strive to address through sharing leadership and learning collaboratively.

Harris (2001) purports that tension results in "…creating the conditions, opportunities, and experiences for collaboration and mutual learning" (as cited in Katz et al, 2009, p. 15). Hord & Somers (2008) propose a distributed leadership structure enables us to engage in "…sharing expertise, wisdom and craft knowledge with colleagues" (p. 21). It is primarily the pursuit of these outcomes that sharing / distributing leadership and learning has such a mandate. Coles and Southworth (2005) promote: "Success is more likely where people act rather than are always reacting; are empowered, involved in decision-making through a transparent, facilitative and supportive structure; and are trusted, respected and encouraged" (p. 148). The garnering of this success has much to do with the culture of leadership and learning.

Ritchie et al., (2007) purport that distributing opportunity to lead provides "…the processes and structures that will facilitate learning at all levels of the organization" (p. 23). Therefore distributing leadership and learning also enriches the learning culture as we (staff) engage without relational recompense or perceived hierarchical power, in the interests of improved outcomes for the school. This is paramount if we are to meet the demands in education identified by Bennett & Anderson (2003) for "…reciprocity and interdependency, the ability to cope with a sense of impermanence, a willingness to continually restructure procedures in the search for successful operational formulae, a finely tuned tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty and heightened negotiation skills" (p. 70). Ambiguity and impermanence brings a plethora of potential new realities and provides the contextual imperative for shared / distributed leadership.

Personal experience and current literature indicates considerable benefit in growing shared / distributed leadership. Bush (2008) aptly gives this notion great import when he posits; "Genuine and sustained school improvement is only likely to occur if the thrust shifts from preparing individuals to empowering and developing schools as organisations" (p. 9).

It is evidently paramount that we pay cognisance to the 'people and partnership' foundations giving both engagement and purpose to planning, visioning, organisation, structure and

leadership of change. This requires us to focus on building trust that the new way will be the right way, through open participation in the construction of viable and achievable strategic direction. Davies (2006) notes "…the key to effective strategic development is not the written document but the quality of the dialogue that goes to make up the strategic conversations in the school" (p. 10).

Establishing strategic direction in an environment of change requires strategic goal setting – knowing where you want to go and how to get there; and also strategic intent – visioning the future even though we are not sure of how to get there and its eventual reality. It requires us to continually engage in environmental scanning, being flexible in our school structure and sharing/distribution leadership to realise our strategic goals and intents. Through collaboratively engaging in these pursuits we are; challenging past and current organisation, systems and practice; constructing pathways toward new levels of operation; keeping abreast of a plethora of political agendas; coping in a challenging economic climate and embracing the integration of an ever burgeoning expansion of technology. The outcomes I have witnessed to date on our journey give significant practical evidence that for our school "…to flourish, it must look simultaneously at both its present situation and the future" (Scott, 1999, p. 194), and support this through sharing/distributing leadership, organising flexibly and constantly reviewing progress toward our strategic goals and intents.

Personal contextual reflections on leading change and distributing leadership

The outline that follows is designed to add colour to our school journey, but not to dwell on the intricacies of every initiative. Significantly, our progress was given some recognition after our last Education Review (December 2012). This was welcome recognition for the degree with which we have learnt and grown together, although is also tempered by the limited profile of the review process and its politically driven areas of focus. However, I have no desire to write a book and to give each aspect of our journey and future pathway its due, would require this. Instead, I intend to address leadership in four key areas: trust, culture, shared/distributed leadership and vision that (I believe) is seeding and growing our learning community.

Establishing trust: Danielson (2009) argues … "the most important characteristic of a school making progress toward improved student learning is that the leader has established an atmosphere of trust; trust among teachers and between teachers and administrators" (p. 19). This development of trust is imperative and gives focus to the fact that the depth of trust, as

described by West-Burnham and Otero (2004), is relational to time: "Relationships create a common language and a sense of shared responsibility, provide channels for communication and disseminating information to one another about network members' expertise, and develop readiness to trust one another" (as cited in Katz, Earl and Jaafar, 2009, p. 12). The leader's role is to lead with passion, consideration, fairness and consistency – and to bring clear purpose, focus and professionalism to all that transpires. There is no doubt that time, and some significant challenges have seen a burgeoning trust among key stakeholders for both leadership and strategic intent. This is evidenced during a recent management performance review, which identified a focus 'on being a 'community of learners' – people connected in relationships that focus on student learning, the evidence of this and the effective practices of teaching and learning'. I have reflected on this aspect first, as I believe the development of trust is the linchpin to authentic leadership. Argyris gives this great contextual clarity when he reflects:

> "Low trust has no ending: it can always become lower. The irony is that to deal with the issue by covering it up activates the downward spiral.
>
> High trust also has no ending. It feeds on itself and increases and expands. In order for this expansion to occur, however, the issue of trust has to be dealt with openly and competently. Most individuals bypass it" (Argyris, 1990, p. 111 as cited in Cardno, 2012, p. 54).

This journey continues and is paralleled with my personal learning pathway through the developmental stages of leading with emotional intelligence, paraphrased by Branson (2010) as my need to … "nurture both personal and social competence" (p. 98).

Pathways toward re-culturing: Duignan (2006, p. 4) refers to the conflict, complexity and contest of values in relationships and notes resulting tensions. Evident tensions in our educational community were presenting a lack of vision and providing a pathway to dysfunction. The tensions manifested in a predominantly teacher centric culture that impacted on our core business − and the resulting conventions placed barriers to growing partnerships within and across the school community. It was essential that leadership focus was to begin a re-culturing towards a student centred ethos. This was facilitated by developing an outline of the skills and attributes that described our vision of the 'school learner', relative to their 'age and stage'. Stoll et al (2003) support this differentiation when they note the … "fundamental differences in how learning occurs for children and youth" (p. 46). Engagement and enthusiasm for this reached a level that resulted in the teacher voice establishing the 'attributes' of learners within our community that embraced themselves and the

skills/attributes desirable in both staff and community alike. This evidenced a significant step towards a community of learners and created opportunities and experiences for further collaboration, as described by Harris (2001). Using this vehicle for learning, there is a developing learning centred focus that is beginning to embrace the 'staff and students'. This situation has supported the growth of a student voice across the school; , the review and continued scaffolding of learning and teaching; and a growing appreciation for (and understanding of) the place of dialogue and collegiality within our growing learning community. While these are significant outcomes in themselves, they have also provided a basis to work more … "collaboratively, sharing expertise, wisdom, and craft knowledge with colleagues" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 21).

Sharing/distributing leadership: In order to give greater context and urgency to this aspect, there is much scholarly literature identifying the change in depth and convolution of school leadership. For this reason alone, sharing/distributing educational leadership has a mandate in our school. The fact that it is invitational rather than imposed has (I suggest) added to job satisfaction and self-worth. As has already been suggested, there is a need to engage staff collaboratively and to empower them to share their professional knowledge and expertise beyond the classroom. This was originally initiated through school-wide professional learning with external facilitators and the establishment of on-site experts. It is now also fostered and generated through curriculum leadership and inquiry into student learning. This empowerment has had a profound effect: and staff are beginning to talk to each other about their practice, share their knowledge, observe one another and celebrate evident success. Coles and Southworth (2005, p. 148) note the importance of people action, trust, respect and transparent decision making, on a pathway to success. In order to garner this situation, we have re-structured the leadership profile and opportunities within the school and continued to review and change. This transformation has seen a huge growth in leadership profiles within the school, from the original hierarchical profile of five positions to the current shared array of 15. This change appears to have engaged staff, raised professional value and worth and − by the very nature of the distribution − grown strategic intent, especially around student learning outcomes. The transfer of focus and the benefits of this distribution have seen a … "simple shift – from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning" Richard DuFour (2005) (as cited by Grey & Streshley, 2008, p. 108). A less expected, but herald worthy, outcome of this sharing is the apparent re-engagement of some staff, reconnecting their passion and enthusiasm. Duignan (2006) gives voice to this phenomenon by suggesting longer serving staff … "be encouraged and supported to 'share their wisdom' on teaching and learning, and

to engage with younger teachers in a two-way dialogue on how to enrich the learning experiences of students in the school" (p. 39). Sharing leadership is certainly beginning to provide a vehicle for this engagement.

The relatively simple act of distributing opportunities to lead appears to be supporting our organisation to be more learning centred and it is facilitating learning at all levels. Opportunities for distributing leadership within our organisation continue and the richness of the culture change, from the past to the present, is that engagement in leadership is not necessarily relational to recompense, or perceived hierarchical power, but rather to professional interest and outcomes for learning and teaching. A recent external independent appraisal of the school's operation and leadership identified that 'there is a deliberate focus on 'learning to lead' in the school as strong connections are made between and with all leaders through syndicates.

This is a salutary outcome and one that is a far cry from our beginnings. This new culture is increasing our ability to meet the demands of reciprocity, interdependency and impermanence and they are features of our current educational environment, as identified by Bennett & Anderson (2003, p. 70).

Our burgeoning learning community also presents a leadership challenge, especially in the realms of work/life balance and support for staff challenged by the rate of change and resulting 'new realities'. This is our next hurdle and it may well necessitate the creation of a change in teaching options. Duignan (2006) posits: "Such options could include: part-time employment; flexible working hours; shorter working hours; job sharing and other family friendly practices" (p. 39). We will need to carefully ponder our next steps, in relation to situational contexts, emotional intelligence and the potential impact on our learning community.

Distributed/distributing leadership: what does the future hold?

While moving to a more distributed model of leadership has been a rollercoaster ride (to date), reflection suggests that it is resulting in the growth of collegiality; greater professional integrity; ever growing trust; a heightened feeling of self-worth; passion for (and achievement in) the job; and evidentially raised student achievement outcomes.

Ritchie and Deakin Crick (2007) purport "…that leadership by individual leaders, however committed and hard-working, is unlikely to be adequate" (p. 11). This resonates and my next conscious act towards leadership distribution is to address the issues identified by Nottman (2011) and grow leadership skills, through focussed and personalised support for both

individuals and leadership teams. The growth of leadership skills across the school will, I believe, allow the focus to move toward greater distribution of responsibility, team work and collaboration and thus intentionally grow "the conditions in which people exercise leadership - the organisational culture, and the inter-relationships that enable leadership at every level to be exercised in line with the school strategy and purpose" (NCSL (ibid) as cited in Ritchie and Deakin Crick, 2007, p. 41).
This vision of leadership skill growth across our team, although somewhat challenging, clearly has the potential to provide exponential value to our learning community.

As I delved into the literature, I gained a greater appreciation for the situational nature of leadership and the primacy of developing an intimate knowledge of an organisation's culture, community, environment, history and vision, in addition to the evident need to lead collaboratively from 'within' the organisation, thus empowering others to invest their time and share their expertise, as we lead, grow and learn together − and also acknowledging the time that this takes.
My research and reflections, to date, leave little doubt that distributing/sharing leadership in education is essential, if we are to meet the ever changing environmental demands and the needs of tomorrow's leaders – our students.
It is time we all reflected on our organisation's ability to grow and distribute leadership and how our community of learners might creatively take charge of and lead this change. Perhaps, the first step towards this development is to reflect on our envisioned future and the milestones achieved in its pursuit. The very act of developing a collaborative vision will, I suggest, empower members to begin to pursue it − some may want to lead aspects of the journey if you give them authority and the support to do so.

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