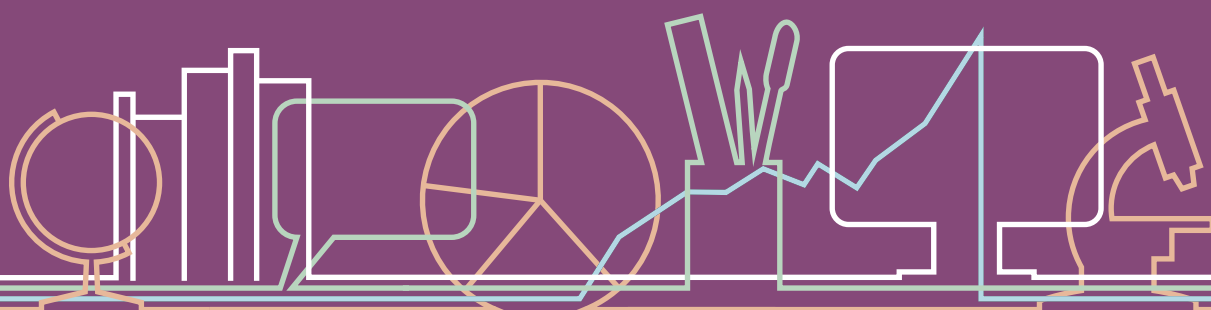


Christopher Day, Pam Sammons and Kristine Gorgen

# Successful school leadership



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## Education Development Trust

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*We are a trusted partner of governments, academics and multilateral agencies across the globe*

## School improvement: international reviews of best practice

Working with partners including the Department of Education at Oxford University, the Centre for Equity in Education at the University of Manchester, the University of Glasgow, the University of Nottingham and the Education University of Hong Kong, Education Development Trust commissioned a series of reviews of international literature. The first edition of these reviews was published in 2014. The titles in the series are listed below and all remain available on the Education Development Trust website:

- **Successful Leadership**
- **Effective Teaching**
- **Assessment for Learning**
- **From Exclusion to Inclusion**
- **School Self-evaluation for School Improvement**

Two of the reports, *Successful Leadership* and *Effective Teaching*, were updated in 2016. This new edition of *Successful School Leadership* brings in the latest evidence and material to what has remained a popular publication. While the fundamentals of what drives successful school leadership remain the same, new evidence further supports the arguments put forward by Christopher Day and Pam Sammons back in 2016. The growing interest in system leadership that we have witnessed over the last five years also features in this edition, as does a reflection on the expanding body of international literature focused on school leadership in low-income contexts.

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## Table of Abbreviations

<b>EEL</b>	Effective educational leaders
<b>GLOBE</b>	Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness
<b>ISSPP</b>	International Successful School Principals Project
<b>LMIC</b>	Low- and middle-income countries
<b>PDI</b>	Power Distance Index
<b>SES</b>	Socio-economic status
<b>SLT</b>	Senior leadership teams
<b>TALIS</b>	Teaching and Learning International Survey

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## Executive summary

The evidence examined by this review indicates that effective school leadership is important but, in isolation, is not a sufficient condition for successful school improvement. It shows that leadership has important effects on school organisation, culture and on teachers. Effects on student outcomes are largely indirect operating through direct effects on the organisation, culture and teaching and learning environment.

The review draws particular attention to three concepts of leadership: transformational, pedagogical/instructional and distributed. While there is evidence that pedagogical/instructional leadership is important for promoting better academic outcomes for students, it is concluded that the three concepts of leadership are not mutually exclusive. It finds that most leadership effects operate indirectly to promote student outcomes by supporting and enhancing conditions for teaching and learning through direct impacts on teachers and their work, and that successful student outcomes are defined more broadly than academic performance alone (including attendance, behaviour, engagement and motivation, etc.). Moreover, single leadership strategies unrelated to educational purposes and national and local contexts are less likely to lead to success than combinations and accumulations of values-led and context-sensitive strategies which best illustrate the dynamic and complex nature of schools in the 21st century.

Whether CEOs of multi-academy trusts, groups of schools, or principals of individual schools, school leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating and sustaining a positive school culture. This includes establishing a proactive, collaborative school mindset, supporting and enhancing staff, as well as student motivation, engagement and well-being, and the collective commitment needed to foster improvement and promote and sustain success for schools and classrooms which serve a range of advantaged and disadvantaged communities.

*School leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating and sustaining a positive school culture*

### Key dimensions of successful leadership are identified as:

- defining the vision, values and direction
- improving conditions for teaching and learning
- redesigning the organisation: aligning roles and responsibilities
- enhancing effective teaching and learning
- redesigning and enriching the curriculum
- enhancing teacher quality (including succession planning)
- building relationships inside the school community
- building relationships outside the school community
- defining and modelling common values
- ensuring students' well-being and providing equitable access to support for all students.

### The challenges facing school leaders include:

- ensuring consistently good teaching and learning
- integrating a sound grasp of basic knowledge and skills within a broad and balanced curriculum
- managing behaviour and attendance
- strategically managing resources and the environment
- building the school as a professional learning community
- ensuring well-being among staff and students
- being or becoming emotionally literate
- developing partnerships beyond the school to encourage parental support for learning and new learning opportunities.

## Introduction

The past 20 years have witnessed a remarkably consistent, worldwide effort by educational policymakers to reform schools by holding them more publicly accountable for improving student performance in state or national tests.<sup>1</sup> It is now widely accepted that 'All students deserve at least a year's progress for a year's input, no matter where they start.'<sup>2</sup> In effect, now and in the foreseeable future, the work of schools and the value they bring to students' learning and performance has become more transparent, and so more subject to both external and internal interrogation and judgement.<sup>3</sup> This increased visibility has impacted upon the work of school leaders, who are positioned more precisely at the interface of policy and practice, and must demonstrate not only the contribution that their work makes to such improvement, but also define its meaning and purpose, both in broad humanitarian and narrow functional terms. The quality of leadership matters, therefore, more than ever in these uncertain times.<sup>4</sup>

International examples of original research provide consistent evidence that demonstrates the influence and impact of particular kinds and practices of leadership on school organisation, culture and teachers' work.<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive and increasingly systematic reviews of such evidence<sup>6</sup> – a major US study carried out for the Wallace Foundation,<sup>7</sup> a large-scale mixed-methods empirical research study on the impact of effective leadership on student outcomes in English schools,<sup>8</sup> and the extensive research over almost 20 years carried out by members of the 20-country International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) – all provide considerable empirical evidence that the quality of leadership can be a critical factor in explaining variation in student outcomes between schools.<sup>9</sup> Recent OECD country evaluations have also highlighted the importance of leadership in supporting school improvement, noting that in many countries principals too often focus mainly on administrative tasks but may need to reinforce their pedagogical leadership skills.<sup>10</sup> While much progress has been made in defining the values, qualities, strategies and actions of successful school leaders, the effect size and the mechanisms through which school leadership (directly or indirectly) raises student outcomes remains a subject of debate.<sup>11</sup>

This review uses the terms 'effective' and 'successful' in reviewing school leadership research. In the past, school effectiveness research has had a strong focus on student academic outcomes; a more effective school is generally defined as one that promotes better student outcomes than would be predicted on the basis of student intake characteristics; more recent research has focused on a broader range of outcomes, both academic and socio-emotional.<sup>12</sup> It can be argued, however, that creating the conditions that promote greater school effectiveness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful school leadership. Thus, although it is acknowledged that measurable outcomes such as student progress and achievement are key indicators of effectiveness, they are insufficient to ensure success when this is conceptualised in broader terms. In order to achieve the latter, schools must strive to educate their students by promoting positive values (integrity, compassion and fairness), love of lifelong learning and fostering citizenship and personal, economic and social capabilities.<sup>13</sup> For successful leaders,

*In many countries principals too often focus mainly on administrative tasks but may need to reinforce their pedagogical knowledge*

<sup>1</sup>Hallinger and Huber (2012) <sup>2</sup>Hattie (2015:3) <sup>3</sup>Hall and Noyes (2009); Reynolds et al. (2014) <sup>4</sup>Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020) <sup>5</sup>Leithwood and Jantzi (1999a); Leithwood and Jantzi (1999b); Silins and Mulford (2002a); Day et al. (2009a); Hallinger and Huber (2012); Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) <sup>6</sup>Hallinger and Heck (1996); Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005); Leithwood et al. (2008); Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009); Hallinger and Heck (2010); Hitt and Tucker (2016); Gumus et al. (2018); Leithwood et al. (2020) <sup>7</sup>Louis et al. (2010a) <sup>8</sup>Day et al. (2010) <sup>9</sup>Møller et al. (2007); Moos, Johansson and Day (2011); Day and Gurr (2014) <sup>10</sup>OECD (2013); OECD (2016) <sup>11</sup>Sebastian, Huang and Allensworth, (2017); Leithwood et al. (2020); Leithwood (2017) <sup>12</sup>Teddlie & Reynolds (2000); Sammons (2007); Day Gu and Sammons (2016); Reynolds et al. (2014); Sammons, Davies and Gray (2014); Sammons et al. (2016) <sup>13</sup>Putnam (ed.) (2002)

promoting these broader individual and social outcomes is likely to be deemed as important as, but not more important than, promoting students' academic outcomes. In addition, education systems and schools are paying greater attention to issues of diversity and inclusion, while the role of schools in promoting greater equity is also an increasing concern given the strong equity gaps identified in many systems (related to gender, socio-economic disadvantage and often ethnicity/language heritage).<sup>14</sup>

This review seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of school leadership and its relationship with school improvement and student personal, social and academic outcomes. It will examine definitions and models of leadership and scrutinise the outcomes of recent research on successful leadership of effective and improving schools. Much of the research on school leadership has focused on the role of the principal or headteacher, but it is increasingly recognised that the distribution of school leadership more widely within schools is important, and can promote improvement. This includes a focus on other senior and middle leaders, and leadership roles among teachers.<sup>15</sup> The review pays particular attention to the three most researched concepts of leadership:<sup>16</sup> transformational, pedagogical/instructional and distributed leadership.

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<sup>14</sup> Sammons, Davies and Gray (2016); Hall, Lindorff and Sammons (2020) <sup>15</sup> Sammons, Thomas and Mortimore (1997); Gronn (2005); Harris (2006); Fullan (2015); Antoniou (2013) <sup>16</sup> Gumus et al. (2018)





# Defining leadership

The concepts of leadership, management and administration overlap and have been accorded different emphases over time and in different contexts. Their usage varies across countries and professional cultures. In English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, the role of leader is seen as of prime importance in raising standards and promoting school improvement, but this is not necessarily so in other countries; for example, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. This difference in emphasis reflects variations in the structures and functioning of education systems and their historical, national and regional policy contexts that exert different degrees of influence on institutions' work and therefore on the role of leaders in schools.

The distinction between the focus or concerns of organisational leadership and management has been summarised as follows:<sup>17</sup>

*In English-speaking countries the role of leader is seen as of prime importance in raising standards and promoting school improvement*

## Leading concerns

- Vision
- Strategic issues
- Transformation
- Ends
- People
- Doing the right thing

## Managing concerns

- Implementation
- Operational issues
- Transactions
- Means
- Systems

This review shows unequivocally that both are necessary elements in defining success.

## Official standards

In appreciation of the importance of school leaders' work, various governmental and professional bodies in countries around the world have published standards that outline the key components and practices of successful school leadership. For example, the Commonwealth Education Secretariat recently undertook a review and cross country consultation to develop

<sup>17</sup>West-Burnham (1997)

a set of 'professional standards' that developed a framework identifying core attributes (knowledge, skills and practices, ethics, values and attributes, leadership, community and relationships, and professional learning) for teachers and school leaders deemed necessary to achieve the wider goal of improving educational quality.<sup>18</sup>

This extract from the English Department for Education's *National standards of excellence for headteachers* emphasises the important boundary role that principals hold within the education system and wider society.<sup>19</sup>

*Headteachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation's schools*

Headteachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of school leaders determine the achievements of schools. They are accountable for the education of current and future generations of children. Their leadership has a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in the nation's classrooms. Headteachers lead by example the professional conduct and practice of teachers in a way that minimises unnecessary teacher workload and leaves room for high quality continuous professional development for staff. They secure a climate for the exemplary behaviour of pupils. They set standards and expectations for high academic standards within and beyond their own schools, recognising differences and respecting cultural diversity within contemporary Britain. Headteachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation's schools.

These *National standards of excellence for headteachers* are a non-statutory guidance document published in 2015. The document defines four domains and six respective characteristics that excellent headteachers in all types of school are expected to master.

Three standards for school leadership from different national contexts are discussed below: the English Department for Education's *National standards of excellence for headteachers*,<sup>20</sup> the United States National Policy Board for Educational Administration's *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*<sup>21</sup> and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*.<sup>22</sup>

### **National standards of excellence for headteachers, England**

The National standards of excellence for headteachers in England were first published in 2004 and were updated most recently in 2015. The standards apply to all school types and define four domains with six associated key characteristics each:

#### **Domain 1: Qualities and knowledge**

- Hold and articulate clear values and moral purpose, focused on providing a world-class education.
- Demonstrate optimistic personal behaviour, positive relationships and attitudes towards pupils and staff, parents, governors and the local community.
- Lead by example – with integrity, creativity, resilience and clarity.
- Sustain wide, current knowledge and understanding of education and school systems and pursue CPD.

<sup>18</sup> [thecommonwealth.org/project/raising-quality-education-developing-professional-standards-teachers-and-school-leaders](http://thecommonwealth.org/project/raising-quality-education-developing-professional-standards-teachers-and-school-leaders) <sup>19</sup> Department for Education (2015:4-5) <sup>20</sup> Department for Education (2015); National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) <sup>21</sup> National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) <sup>22</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2019)

- Work with political and financial astuteness, within a clear set of principles centred on the school's vision.
- Communicate compellingly the school's vision and drive the strategic leadership.

**Domain 2: Pupils and staff**

- Demand ambitious standards for all pupils, overcoming disadvantage and advancing equality, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff.
- Secure excellent teaching through an analytical understanding of how pupils learn and of the core features of successful classroom practice.
- Establish an educational culture of 'open classrooms' as a basis for sharing best practice within and between schools.
- Create an ethos within which all staff are motivated and supported to develop their own skills and subject knowledge.
- Identify emerging talents, coaching current and aspiring leaders, leading to clear succession planning.
- Hold all staff to account for their professional conduct and practice.

**Domain 3: Systems and process**

- Ensure that the school's systems, organisation and processes are well considered, efficient and fit for purpose.
- Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all pupils and staff.
- Establish rigorous, fair and transparent systems and measures for managing the performance of all staff.
- Welcome strong governance and actively support the governing board to understand its role and deliver its functions effectively.
- Exercise strategic, curriculum-led financial planning to ensure the equitable deployment of budgets and resources.
- Distribute leadership throughout the organisation, forging teams of colleagues who have distinct roles and responsibilities.

**Domain 4: The self-improving school system**

- Create outward-facing schools that work with other schools and organisations.
- Develop effective relationships with fellow professionals and colleagues in other public services.
- Challenge educational orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence, harnessing the findings of well evidenced research.
- Shape the current and future quality of the teaching profession through high-quality training and CPD for all staff.
- Model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to school improvement, leadership and governance.
- Inspire and influence others to believe in the fundamental importance of education in young people's lives and to promote the value of education.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015)

### Professional standards for educational leaders, United States

Along with governments' published standards for school leaders, there are also professional bodies offering a set of recommended practices and standards. In the United States, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration published *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (formerly known as ISLLC standards) in 2020. These ten standards outline how effective educational leaders (EELs) can 'promote each student's academic success and well-being'.<sup>24</sup>

#### 1. Mission, vision, and core values

EELs develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

#### 2. Ethics and professional norms

EELs act ethically and according to professional norms.

#### 3. Equity and cultural responsiveness

EELs strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices.

#### 4. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment

EELs develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

#### 5. Community of care and support for students

EELs cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community.

#### 6. Professional capacity of school personnel

EELs develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel.

#### 7. Professional community for teachers and staff

EELs foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff.

#### 8. Meaningful engagement of families and community

EELs engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways.

#### 9. Operations and management

EELs manage school operations and resources.

#### 10. School improvement

EELs act as agents of continuous improvement.

### Professional standards for principals, Australia

A third example of official standards for school leaders comes from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which published the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals in 2019*. This document 'sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work and ensure their leadership has a positive impact'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) <sup>25</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2019)

The Australian Standard is based on three Leadership Requirements: 1) vision and values, 2) knowledge and understanding and 3) personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills.

Five key Professional Practices are specified, through which the Leadership Requirements are to be enacted:

### **1. Leading teaching and learning**

- creating a positive culture of challenge and support
- enabling effective teaching that promotes enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning
- developing a culture of effective teaching
- leading, designing and managing the quality of teaching and learning
- setting high expectations for the whole school through careful collaborative planning, monitoring and reviewing
- setting high standards of behaviour and attendance, encouraging active engagement and a strong student voice.

### **2. Developing self and others**

- building a professional learning community focused on continuous improvement of teaching and learning
- managing performance, effective continuing professional learning and feedback
- supporting all staff to achieve high standards and develop their leadership capacity
- treating people fairly and with respect
- modelling effective leadership and being committed to own ongoing professional development, personal health and well-being.

### **3. Leading improvement, innovation and change**

- producing and implementing clear, evidence-based improvement plans and policies for the development of the school
- leading and managing innovation and change to ensure the vision and strategic plan is put into action across the school and that its goals and intentions are realised.

### **4. Leading the management of the school**

- using a range of data management methods and technologies to ensure that the school's resources and staff are efficiently organised and managed
- delegating tasks to members of staff
- monitoring and meeting of accountabilities
- effectively collaborating with school boards, governing bodies, parents and others.

### **5. Engaging and working with the community**

- embracing inclusion and helping build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the wider school community
- developing and maintaining positive partnerships with students, families and carers and the wider school community

- taking account of students' spiritual, moral, social and physical health and well-being
- promoting sound lifelong learning from preschool through to adult life
- recognising the multicultural nature of Australia's people
- fostering understanding and reconciliation with Indigenous cultures.

While the terminology and the presentation of concepts varies between the three standards used in England, the US and Australia, there are also striking similarities. All three documents place an emphasis on developing and representing the school's values, focusing on teaching and learning, attention to staff management and development as well as school improvement, the importance of resource management and engagement with the wider community. Furthermore, all three standards define ensuring student well-being and an equitable access to support and resources for all students as a key responsibility for school leaders. Absent from all of these documents, however, is a consideration of how leaders may best achieve the expectations and what kind of leadership is most likely to succeed.

## Successful principal models and practices

In addition to professional and policy derived standards for school leadership, a range of research has identified leadership practices associated with successful schools. For the purposes of this review, we will draw first upon two main models of successful leadership, which (in isolation or combination) have been the focus of much school leadership research: transformational and pedagogical/instructional. To these we will add a consideration of the theory and practices of distributed leadership.<sup>26</sup> We will then move on to a re-consideration of the use of these two 'models', and the practices of distributed leadership in the complex settings and circumstances which characterise successful schools of the 21st century.

*Direction setting practices of principals significantly influence teachers' stress, individual sense of efficacy and organisational commitment*

## Transformational leadership practices

This model of leadership is most often associated with vision; setting directions; restructuring and realigning the organisation; developing staff and curriculum; and involvement with the external community.<sup>27</sup> 'Transformational leaders motivate followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and by inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization.'<sup>28</sup> Much of what has been discovered about such leadership in this body of research reinforces the validity of the following four core sets of leadership practices.

### 1. Building vision and setting directions

This category of practices carries the bulk of the effort to motivate leaders' colleagues. It is about the establishment of shared purpose as a basic stimulant for one's work. The more specific practices in this category are building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and demonstrating high-performance expectations.<sup>29</sup> These specific practices reflect, but also add to, three functions of managerial taxonomy<sup>30</sup> derived from non-educational organisations: motivating and inspiring, clarifying roles and objectives, and planning and organising. Direction

<sup>26</sup> Gumus et al. (2018) <sup>27</sup> Burns (1978); Bass (1985); Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) <sup>28</sup> Marks and Printy (2003:375) <sup>29</sup> Hallinger and Heck (2002) <sup>30</sup> Yukl (1989)

setting practices of principals significantly influence teachers' stress, individual sense of efficacy and organisational commitment. One of these practices – helping the staff develop and inspiring a shared sense of purpose – enhances teachers' work, whereas holding (and expressing) unreasonable expectations has quite negative effects.

## 2. Understanding and developing people

While practices in this category make a significant contribution to motivation, their primary aim is building the knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need in order to accomplish organisational goals, as well as the dispositions (commitment, capacity and resilience) to persist in applying the knowledge and skills. The more specific practices in this category are providing individualised support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modelling appropriate values and behaviours.<sup>31</sup> These specific practices not only reflect managerial behaviours in the managerial taxonomy (supporting, developing and mentoring, recognising and rewarding) but, as further research has demonstrated, are central to the ways in which successful leaders integrate the functional and the personal.<sup>32</sup> Included among these practices are being collegial, considerate and supportive, listening to teachers' ideas, and generally looking out for teachers' personal and professional welfare. Acknowledging and rewarding good work and providing feedback to teachers about their work also mean positive working conditions for teachers. School leaders assist the work of teachers, in addition, when they provide them with discretionary space, promote regular access to a range of professional learning and development opportunities, distribute leadership across the school and 'practise what they preach' (model appropriate values and practices).

*School leadership practices explain significant variations in teachers' beliefs about and responses to their working conditions*

## 3. (Re)designing the organisation

The specific practices included in this category are concerned with establishing work conditions which, for example, allow teachers to make the most of their motivations, commitments and capacities. School leadership practices explain significant variations in teachers' beliefs about and responses to their working conditions.<sup>33</sup> Specific practices are building collaborative cultures, restructuring and reculturing the organisation, building productive relations with parents and the community and connecting the school with its wider environment.<sup>34</sup> Comparable practices in the managerial taxonomy include managing conflict and team building, delegating, consulting and networking.

## 4. Managing the teaching and learning programme

As with the previous category, the specific practices included in this category aim to create productive working conditions for teachers, in this case by fostering organisational stability and strengthening the school's infrastructure. Specific practices are staffing the teaching programmes, providing teaching support, monitoring school activity and buffering staff against distractions from their work.<sup>35</sup>

### Research on transformational leadership

These practices have been tested in US studies with principals<sup>36</sup>. Findings suggest that principal practices most aligned to these were:

- i. focusing on high expectations for student achievement;
- ii. providing context sensitive opportunities for and monitoring of teachers' continuing professional development;<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Bass and Avolio (1994) <sup>32</sup> Fielding (2001; 2003) <sup>33</sup> Leithwood (2006) <sup>34</sup> Louis and Kruse (1998); Chrisman (2005) <sup>35</sup> Duke (2004); Hallinger (2003) <sup>36</sup> Seashore Louis, 2010; Ylimaki et al., 2012



- iii. creating structured opportunities for teacher leadership and collaboration;
- iv. pedagogical leadership; and
- v. building change capacities of staff.

A recent review of transformational school leadership identified the following domains and practices:<sup>38</sup>

**TABLE 1: Domains and practices of transformational leadership**

DOMAIN OF PRACTICE	SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE
<p><b>SET DIRECTIONS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a shared vision</li> <li>• Identify specific, shared, short-term goals</li> <li>• Create high-performance expectations</li> <li>• Communicate the vision and goals</li> </ul>
<p><b>BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOP PEOPLE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff</li> <li>• Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members</li> <li>• Model the school's values and practices</li> <li>• Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents</li> <li>• Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>DEVELOP THE ORGANISATION TO SUPPORT DESIRED PRACTICES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build collaborative culture and distribute leadership</li> <li>• Structure the organisation to facilitate collaboration</li> <li>• Build productive relationships with families and communities</li> <li>• Connect the school to its wider environment</li> <li>• Maintain a safe and healthy school environment</li> <li>• Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals</li> </ul>
<p><b>IMPROVE THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMME</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff the instructional programme</li> <li>• Provide instructional support</li> <li>• Monitor student learning and school improvement progress</li> <li>• Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work</li> </ul>

Four influential practices by school leaders emerged from the review which could not readily be classified among the four sets of core leadership practices. Positive effects on teachers' individual and collective efficacy, organisational commitment and well-being were reported for school leaders who were able to influence the decisions of senior leadership colleagues to the benefit of the school, communicate effectively and act in a friendly manner. By contrast, it was found that excessive stress and loss of trust on the part of teachers resulted from inconsistent behaviour on the part of school leaders, poor communication and interpersonal skills, and frequent failure to follow through on decisions.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson et al. (2009) <sup>38</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020:8)

While some studies have suggested that transformational leadership practices primarily emphasise relationships,<sup>39</sup> it is clear from this body of literature that effective transformational leaders also place an emphasis upon promoting better student outcomes through the use of pedagogical/instructional leadership, also sometimes referred to as 'leading for learning'.<sup>40</sup>

## Pedagogical/instructional leadership

Pedagogical leadership emphasises the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching. It sees the leader's prime focus as responsible for promoting better outcomes for students, emphasising the importance of teaching and learning and enhancing their quality.<sup>41</sup> It is claimed that 'The more leaders focus their influence, their learning and their relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.'<sup>42</sup>

### Practices associated with pedagogical/instructional leadership

A meta-analysis of leadership identified five key dimensions (see Figure 1 above) which were found to influence success in promoting better student outcomes. These are not entirely dissimilar to those identified in the earlier review of empirical studies on transformational leadership.<sup>43</sup> The figures in

**FIGURE 1:** Five key dimensions to influence better student outcomes



<sup>39</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) <sup>40</sup> Hallinger (2010) <sup>41</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) <sup>42</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009:28) <sup>43</sup> Leithwood et al. (2006a) <sup>44</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009: 43–44)

brackets indicate the relative 'effect size' impacts where 0.2 and below is small, 0.4 is medium and 0.6 and above is large. Associated with each of these dimensions is leaders' enthusiasm, optimism, willingness and ability to 'walk the talk' (demonstrating and enacting the dimensions in their everyday professional work).

The meta-analysis also identified three dimensions of effective pedagogical leadership drawn from indirect evidence. These are:

**1. Creating educationally powerful connections by:**

- establishing continuities between student identities and school practices
- developing continuities and coherence across teaching programmes
- ensuring effective transitions from one educational setting to another
- building and enhancing home–school connections.

**2. Engaging in constructive problem talk by:**

- discovering the reasons why teachers do the things they seek to change
- leading discussions of the merits of current and alternative practices.

**3. Selecting, developing and using smart tools by:**

- ensuring they are based on valid theories
- ensuring they are well designed.<sup>46</sup>

These last three dimensions provide particularly important knowledge about effective, successful leaders' work, since they highlight the importance of emotional literacy,<sup>47</sup> continuing 'close-up' participation in teachers' work and attending to parental participation to ensure active engagement in support of students' learning. The same study indicated that the impact of pedagogical leadership is nearly four times that of transformational leadership,<sup>48</sup> though this claim continues to be disputed. Furthermore, a recent review of research on school leadership found that practices associated with pedagogical/instructional leadership (along with encouraging parent/child interactions in the home) influence student success at school 'indirectly and most powerfully'.<sup>49</sup>

*Key question: How far can the features of pedagogical/instructional leadership and those of transformational leadership be identified and distinguished in the work of leaders in your school system?*

**Effects of pedagogical/instructional leadership**

Much research has focused on the mechanisms and the size of the effects of instructional leadership on student outcomes. A review study from New Zealand<sup>50</sup> found that leaders have direct and indirect effects on student learning. Direct effects arise through the building of 'organisational learning' through work with staff and leadership capacity that has a clear focus on teaching and learning (associated with instructional leadership). Subsequent, indirect effects arise for students' motivation, behaviour, engagement, learning and achievement. Similar conclusions have been drawn in other studies focused on Australia and England respectively.<sup>51</sup>

*Practices associated with pedagogical/instructional leadership (along with encouraging parent/child interactions in the home) influence student success at school 'indirectly and most powerfully'*

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009: 43–44) <sup>46</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009: 43–44) <sup>47</sup> Harris (2006) <sup>48</sup> Harris (2006) <sup>49</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020:12) <sup>50</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) <sup>51</sup> Silins and Mulford (2002b); Day et al. (2009a; 2011); Sammons et al. (2014)

A recent national survey in the US explored the ways that specific attributes of leadership behaviour affect teachers' work with each other and their classroom practices. In addition, it sought to model the relationship with student achievement in mathematics. This research also found that school leadership effects on student outcomes operate largely indirectly via their effects on instruction and classroom environments.<sup>52</sup>

However, beyond questions of which practices are employed by school leaders, there are also questions of how effectively these practices are carried out. A study with principals in 34 US schools found that, while practices associated with instructional leadership (such as walkthroughs) are overall deemed effective, it is important that such practices are integrated and followed up. For example, the information acquired from walkthroughs and classroom visits should be used to guide further decisions and to provide feedback to teachers.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, as is the case with other leadership models, for instructional leadership to positively impact teaching and learning, as well as the school's climate, it is important that organisational trust and communication are strong. In the absence of trust and support from the staff, the improvement efforts of principals will be less fruitful.<sup>54</sup> A 2016 OECD report based on data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) encouraged the combination of instructional and distributed leadership,<sup>55</sup> while a research study from the UK also highlighted the potential benefits of combining transformational and instructional leadership.<sup>56</sup> It would seem, therefore, that there may be potential in acknowledging some of the similarities as well as differences between these two models, and their combination with distributed leadership practices, and recognising that in combination they may have greater potential to support school improvement.

*For instructional leadership to positively impact teaching and learning, as well as the school's climate, it is important that organisational trust and communication are strong*

## Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is not a 'model' in itself, but rather represents both a concept and set of practices that lie implicitly within the successful application of both the transformational and instructional models of leadership. In terms of origin, the idea of distributed leadership has been derived from cognitive and social psychology, drawing particularly upon distributed cognition and activity theory. It is suggested that cognition is better understood as a distributed phenomenon across individuals, artefacts and internal and external representations.<sup>57</sup> A contemporary distributed perspective on leadership, therefore, implies that the social context and the inter-relationships therein form an integral part of leadership activity.<sup>58</sup>

### Practices associated with distributed leadership

An empirical study<sup>59</sup> of distributed leadership practice suggests that distributed leadership is best understood as 'practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation [which] incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals.' It implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is 'stretched over the work of a number of individuals and the task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders.'<sup>60</sup> Leadership, from this perspective, resides in the human potential available to be released within the entire organisation.<sup>61</sup>

Distributed leadership theory emerged in the 1990s in response to hierarchical structures and suggests that the decision-making process is improved by involving multiple stakeholders.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Louis et al. (2010b) <sup>53</sup> Grissom, Loeb and Master (2013) <sup>54</sup> Glickman et al. (2010); Senol and Lesinger (2018) <sup>55</sup> OECD (2016) <sup>56</sup> Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) <sup>57</sup> Hutchins (1995) <sup>58</sup> Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001; 2004); Timperley (2005); Spillane (2006) <sup>59</sup> Spillane et al. (2001; 2004) <sup>60</sup> Spillane et al. (2001:20) <sup>61</sup> Gronn (2000) <sup>62</sup> Gumus et al. (2018)

The implication is that organisational change and development are enhanced when leadership is broad based, and where teachers have opportunities to collaborate and to actively engage in change and innovation.<sup>63</sup> Current conceptions of distributed leadership do not imply that the formal leadership structures within organisations are removed or redundant. Instead, it is assumed that there is a relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes and that attention is paid to leadership as interaction, rather than just a single leader in action.

Some researchers have argued that school leaders will only be able to exercise essential school improvement functions, such as monitoring instruction and supporting teacher development, if they have the necessary content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge and knowledge of all learners.<sup>64</sup> While this would seem to be an impossible task for one person, it provides a sound justification for the distribution of leadership responsibilities. In fact, the school improvement literature has consistently underlined the importance of teacher involvement in decision-making processes and the contribution of strong collegial relationships to positive school improvement and change.<sup>65</sup> There is an increasing body of evidence that points towards the importance of capacity building as a means of sustaining school improvement.<sup>66</sup> Other researchers echo this sentiment, noting that 'school improvement may be better served by teacher leadership that does not act alone, but is part of a broad system of leadership influences and tasks performed by multiple actors'<sup>67</sup> (which would include students and parents).<sup>68</sup>

### The effects of distributed leadership

Empirical evidence for the effects of distributed leadership on student outcomes is recent and varied, with some questioning its overall positive impact.<sup>69</sup> Research has also pointed at possible drawbacks and caveats associated with distributed leadership:<sup>70</sup> 'it would be naïve to ignore the major structural, cultural, and micro-political barriers operating in schools that make distributed forms of leadership difficult to implement.'<sup>71</sup> Three major barriers to distributing leadership have been identified:<sup>72</sup>

- distributed leadership can be considered threatening to those in formal power positions and places leaders in a vulnerable position by relinquishing direct control over certain activities
- current school structures, such as department divisions or rigid top-down hierarchies may prevent or hinder teachers from attaining autonomy and taking on leadership roles
- top-down approaches to distributed leadership, when not executed properly, can be interpreted as misguided delegation.

It has also been found that current accountability and monitoring structures can hinder distribution,<sup>73</sup> that some patterns of distribution are more effective than others, that effectiveness of distribution depends on the needs and the expertise available at the school,<sup>74</sup> and that distributional leadership should be supported by an appropriately egalitarian culture in wider society, which is not always present.<sup>75</sup>

However, in recent decades, a general consensus has emerged among leadership researchers that 'school leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed.'<sup>76</sup> A study of teacher leadership conducted in England found positive relationships between the degree of teachers' involvement in decision-making and student motivation and self-

*In recent decades, a general consensus has emerged among leadership researchers that 'school leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed'*

<sup>63</sup> Hopkins (2001); Little (1990); MacBeath (ed.) (1998); Murphy and Datnow (2003); Copland (2003); OECD (2016) <sup>64</sup> Spillane and Louis (2002) <sup>65</sup> Rosenholtz (1989); Morrisey (2000); Chapman and Allen (2006) <sup>66</sup> Fullan (2001); Newmann and Wehlage (1995); Sergiovanni (2001); Chapman and Allen (2006); Harris (2013) <sup>67</sup> Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002); Scheerens (2012) <sup>68</sup> Cheng Gorman and Balter (1997); Foster (2005); Goodall (2018) <sup>69</sup> Tian, Risku and Collin (2015) <sup>70</sup> Colwell and Hammersley-Fletcher (2004) <sup>71</sup> Harris (2004:19); Harris (2013) <sup>72</sup> Harris (2004) <sup>73</sup> Goldstein (2004) <sup>74</sup> Harris (2013) <sup>75</sup> Woods and Roberts (2016) <sup>76</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020:13)

efficacy.<sup>77</sup> This study explored the relationship between teacher involvement in decision-making within the school and a range of student outcomes. It was clear from the study that a relationship between more distributed forms of leadership and certain positive student outcomes existed. Both teacher and student morale levels improved where teachers felt more included and involved in decision-making related to the process of school development and change.

An earlier study of leadership effects on student learning was conducted in Tasmania<sup>78</sup> and provided tentative confirmation of the key processes through which distributed kinds of leadership influence student learning outcomes. The work collected survey data from over 2,500 teachers and their principals, and concluded that student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them.

More recently, the OECD found that schools with a strong focus on distributed leadership tend to have a greater sense of purpose, which in turn may be associated with school improvement.<sup>79</sup>

Evidence indicates, therefore, that while leadership distribution is common in schools, its forms and the patterns of distribution vary; and that the distribution of leadership responsibility and power varies according to the influence of national cultures, school contexts and the school leader's judgement. In this respect, research suggests that the pattern of progressive and selective leadership distribution over time is determined by four factors:

- The headteacher's judgement of what is right for the school at different phases of its development.
- The headteacher's judgement about the readiness and ability of staff to lead.
- The extent to which trust has been established.
- The headteacher's own training, experience and capabilities<sup>80</sup>.

It is worth noting that leadership distribution is not the same as delegation, and may operate differently in non-Western cultures (for example, in Asian cultures). The Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) research project conducted in 61 nations in the world found that Anglo cultures (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, white South Africa, the UK and US) view participative leadership in a different way from those in Confucian Asian cultures (mainland China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan).<sup>81</sup> In Confucian cultures, which value power distance and practise relatively high levels of societal collectivism, a leader is trusted to get on with the job on behalf of their subordinates. In East Asia, persons of lower status 'naturally defer to those of higher status, accepting differences in power as a normal feature of social relations.'<sup>82</sup> Influenced by this societal culture, principals there are often expected to take a strong, personal stand, while teachers and parents tend to be more reluctant to engage in shared decision-making.<sup>83</sup>

*Student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them*

<sup>77</sup> Harris and Mujs (2004) <sup>78</sup> Silins and Mulford (2002a) <sup>79</sup> OECD (2016:16) <sup>80</sup> Day et al. (2011) <sup>81</sup> Pittinsky and Zhu (2005) <sup>82</sup> Hallinger and Kantamara (2000:49) <sup>83</sup> Walker (2003)

## 'Real world' successful leadership: schools as complex adaptive systems

*'Ideas about leadership which are predicated upon the assumption that "what works" can be identified, prescribed and replicated are inadequate ways of conceiving the concept and often may be inappropriate and unhelpful. My argument is that, in the leadership world, "making sense of things" is at least as important as "seeking what works".'*<sup>84</sup>

Over the last two decades, a range of empirical work has also been conducted to understand schools as 'complex adaptive systems'<sup>85</sup> in which relationships between leaders, teachers, students and the world outside the school are characterised as non-linear, interdependent and not always predictable. To achieve sustained success, therefore, leaders must ensure that their schools sustain themselves in relation to their environments,<sup>86</sup> which themselves are not always stable or predictable. Thinking about schools as social systems that are nested in wider policy, social and cultural discourses systems stems from complexity theory in which leaders 'accept uncertainty as inevitable'.<sup>87</sup> Essentially, this view of schools suggests implicitly that predictive and generalised models of successful school leadership are oversimplified. Supporters of this school of thought<sup>88</sup> suggest that (successful) leaders have three characteristics:

- **adaptive** – interaction which encourages creativity and learning;
- **administrative** – formal roles played by those in formal leadership positions; and
- **enabling** – encompassing both the administrative and adaptive in order to 'enhance the flow of knowledge and creativity in the organisation'.<sup>89</sup>

In short:

*'organisations are then understood as processes of human relating, because it is in the simultaneously co-operative-consensual and conflictual-competitive relating between people that everything organisational happens.... As they do, they perpetually construct their future together as present.'*<sup>90</sup>

In recent years, a range of national and international research has been carried out which has sought to acknowledge such complexity by constructing and implementing methodologies that enable research to account for multiple perspectives and variables that inform the work of successful school leaders.

<sup>84</sup> Simkins (2005:10) <sup>85</sup> Stacey (2006; 2010) <sup>86</sup> Sterling (2004:52) <sup>87</sup> Allen (2006); Bento (2013:37) <sup>88</sup> Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) <sup>89</sup> Bento (2013:86) <sup>90</sup> Stacey and Griffin (2005:4)





# Research findings on effective and successful leadership in English schools

**Reviews of international evidence point to the work of school leaders as a critical determinant in the quality of the psychological, physical and social environments and conditions in which teaching and learning take place. This in turn influences the motivations, expectations, attitudes and conduct of students in classrooms and so helps shape student outcomes. While much of the research on effective schools has identified their leaders as 'strong', 'purposeful', etc.,<sup>91</sup> it is research that focuses upon the work and lives of successful school leaders themselves – their values, knowledge, skills, dispositions, capacities and practices – which supplies direction for those who provide programmes for their preparation and development, and for school leaders themselves who wish to grow and sustain their success.**

The IMPACT research is an example of a recent, national, empirical, mixed-methods, multi-perspective study of the impact of school leaders in effective and more effective English primary and secondary schools. Its conceptual base drew upon a review of selected empirical studies of research on transformational leadership,<sup>92</sup> while its findings provided pictures of values, qualities, strategies, skills and interpersonal relationships which are arguably closer to the 'real worlds' of successful leaders of schools as complex adaptive systems than previous research has been able to reveal. It produced a range of insightful and innovative publications.<sup>93</sup>

The key findings are that these principals:<sup>94</sup>

- measured success both in terms of pupil test and examination results and broader educational purposes
- were not charismatic or heroic in the traditional sense; however, they possessed a number of common values and practices (e.g. clarity of vision for the short and longer term, determination, responsiveness, courage of conviction, openness, fairness, emotional literacy) and their work was informed and driven by strong, clearly articulated moral and ethical values that were shared by their colleagues
- were respected and trusted by their staff and parental bodies and worked persistently, internally and externally, in building relational and organisational trust
- built the leadership capacities and capabilities of colleagues through the progressive distribution of responsibility with accountability, as levels of trust were built and reinforced

*School leaders are a critical determinant in the quality of the psychological, physical and social environments and conditions in which teaching and learning take place*

<sup>91</sup> Sammons (2007) <sup>92</sup> Leithwood et al. (2006b) <sup>93</sup> Day et al. (2008; 2009b; 2011); Sammons et al. (2011, 2014) <sup>94</sup> Day et al. (2016)

- placed emphasis on creating a range of learning and development opportunities for all staff and students
- used data, research, inspection evidence and observation as tools to enhance teaching and learning and thus to support school improvement
- combined and accumulated both transformational and instructional leadership strategies within, through, and across each developmental phase of their schools' long-term improvement.

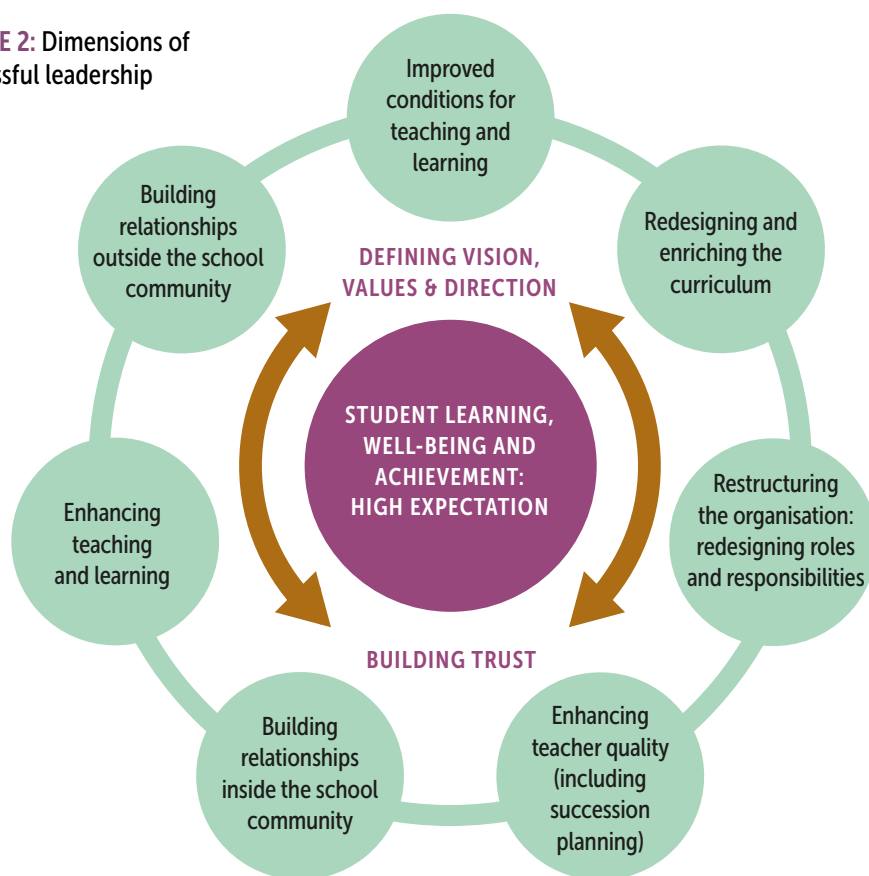
Previous publications from the IMPACT study had additionally identified that:

- school leaders are central to school improvement
- school leaders are second only to classroom teachers in their influence upon student outcomes
- while school leaders influence student outcomes indirectly, they do so through their selection, timing, combination and accumulation of strategies and actions, which are appropriate to individual, organisational and external social and policy contexts
- school leaders whose schools draw their students from highly challenging socio-economically disadvantaged communities face a greater range of challenges in terms of staff commitment and retention, and student behaviour, motivation and achievement, than those in more advantaged communities<sup>95</sup>
- school leaders within schools in disadvantaged communities are likely to be less experienced and stay for shorter periods than those in more advantaged communities.

*School leaders are second only to classroom teachers in their influence upon student outcomes*

Figure 2 (below) illustrates eight key, inter-related dynamic dimensions of successful leadership,

**FIGURE 2: Dimensions of successful leadership**



<sup>95</sup> Day and Johansson (2008); Gu, Sammons and Mehta (2008)

which are further discussed below, identified by the IMPACT research.<sup>96</sup> These key dimensions are represented in the outer circle (green) and inner circle (brown), with 'building trust' being an activity that permeates all other dimensions. The purple circle presents the core focus of leaders' attention.<sup>97</sup>

### **Defining the vision, values and direction**

Effective school leaders had a very strong and clear vision and set of values for their school, which heavily influenced their actions and the actions of others, and established a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school. These were shared widely, and clearly understood and supported by all staff.

### **Improving conditions for teaching and learning**

School leaders identified the need to improve the conditions in which the quality of teaching can be maximised and students' learning and performance enhanced. They developed strategies to improve the school buildings and facilities. By changing the physical environment of the schools and improving the classrooms, school leaders confirmed the important connection between high-quality conditions for teaching and learning and the well-being and achievement of both staff and students.

### **Restructuring the organisation: redesigning roles and responsibilities**

School leaders purposefully and progressively redesigned their organisational structures, redesigned and refined roles and distributed leadership, at times and in ways that promoted greater staff engagement and ownership. This in turn provided greater opportunities for student learning.

### **Enhancing teaching and learning**

Successful school leaders continually looked for new ways to improve teaching, learning and achievement. They provided a safe environment for teachers to try new models and alternative approaches that might be more effective. It affected the way that staff saw themselves as professionals and improved their sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

### **Redesigning and enriching the curriculum**

School leaders focused on redesigning and enriching the curriculum as a way of deepening and extending engagement and improving achievement. Academic attainment was seen to complement personal and social development. They adapted the curriculum to broaden learning opportunities and improve access for all students, with the emphasis on 'stage, not age' learning. Changes to build students' creativity and self-esteem featured heavily in the curriculum, as did a focus on developing key skills for life, without neglecting the academic. There was recognition that when students enjoy learning, they are more effective learners.

### **Enhancing teacher quality (including succession planning)**

School leaders provided a rich variety of professional learning and development opportunities for staff as part of their drive to raise standards, sustain motivation and commitment, and retain staff. They placed a high premium on internally led professional development and learning. Teachers and support staff were encouraged to take part in a wide range of in-service training and were given opportunities to train for external qualifications. Succession planning and

*School leaders purposefully and progressively redesigned their organisational structures, redesigned and refined roles and distributed leadership, at times and in ways that promoted greater staff engagement and ownership*

<sup>96</sup> Day et al. (2008; 2009b) <sup>97</sup> Bryk and Schneider (2002); Louis (2007); Day (2009); Le Favre and Robinson (2015); Gurr (2015)

targeted recruitment were also adopted by effective school leaders.

### **Building relationships inside the school community**

School leaders developed and sustained positive relationships with staff at all levels, making them feel valued and involved. They demonstrated concern for the professional and personal well-being of staff. The relationship between school leaders and senior leadership teams (SLTs), in particular, indicated trust and mutual respect.

### **Building relationships outside the school community**

Building and improving the reputation of the school and engaging with the wider community were seen as essential to achieving long-term success. School leaders and their SLTs developed positive relationships with community leaders and built a web of links across the school to other organisations and individuals. Strong links with key stakeholders in the local community were seen to benefit the school.

### **Common values**

As an overarching, or rather fundamental aspect, common values are not listed in Figure 2 as a dimension of effective leadership strategies. However, evidence shows that successful school leaders achieved improved performance, not only through the strategies they used but also through the core values and personal qualities they demonstrated in their daily interactions.

## **Leadership trust**

This and other recent research confirmed the growing body of evidence which reveals that much of the success of leadership depends on the establishment of trust.<sup>98</sup> Trust is closely associated with a positive school ethos, improved conditions for teaching and learning, an enhanced sense of teacher autonomy in the classroom and sustained improvement in student behaviour, engagement and outcomes. In a Chicago-based study,<sup>99</sup> teachers in schools where trust had increased over the three-year period reported a greater willingness to try new things; a greater sense of responsibility for their students; more outreach to parents; and a stronger professional community (more shared work, more conversations about teaching and learning, and a stronger collective focus on student learning).<sup>100</sup>

Trust is an important factor for success in school, where the headteacher aims to gain the support of school governors, staff, students and the wider community to implement his or her vision.<sup>101</sup> A US-based study with 4,545 teachers in 398 primary schools found that school improvement efforts are unlikely to succeed in the absence of trust in the school leader's skills.<sup>102</sup>

Research has also focused on the relationship between pedagogical/instructional leadership and trust.<sup>103</sup> As this model of leadership is heavily focused on the improvement of teaching and learning, it requires effective communication between school leaders and teachers, students or parents. A recent empirical study on principals' ability to have difficult conversations with teachers and parents found that many conversations were marked by only low to medium levels of relational trust.<sup>104</sup> They suggest that targeted professional development would support principals in being more effective communicators and leaders.

# 4,454

Teachers in 398 US primary schools found that school improvement efforts are unlikely to succeed in the absence of trust in the school leader's skills

<sup>98</sup> Bryk and Schneider (2002); Louis (2007); Day (2009); Le Fevre and Robinson (2015); Gurr (2015) <sup>99</sup> Bryk and Schneider (2002) <sup>100</sup> Robinson et al. (2009:185) <sup>101</sup> Eliophotou-Menon and Ioannou (2016) <sup>102</sup> Finnigan (2010) <sup>103</sup> Le Fevre and Robinson (2015); Kwan (2016); Senol and Lesinger (2018) <sup>104</sup> Le Fevre and Robinson (2015)

Trust is also essential for the timely, progressive and effective distribution of leadership.

'Successful distribution of leadership depends upon the firm establishment of mutual trust – this is the glue that makes all highly effective organisations perform at the highest level.'<sup>105</sup> This confirms the findings of the IMPACT research. The distribution of leadership over time by school leaders in this research was a clear expression of the importance they placed on gaining the trust of others and extending trust to them. The school leaders played an active and instrumental role in the distribution of leadership and this increased the commitment and self-efficacy of staff.

Effective distributed leadership depends upon five key factors of trust:

- **values and attitudes:** beliefs that people cared for their students and would work hard for their benefit if they were allowed to pursue objectives they were committed to
- **disposition to trust:** experience of benefits derived from previous trusting relationships
- **trustworthiness:** the extent to which others trusted them
- **repeated acts of trust:** enabling the increasing distribution of leadership roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, and the broadening of stakeholder participation
- **building and reinforcing individual relational and organisation trust:** through interactions, structures and strategies that demonstrated consistency in values and vision and resulted in success.

<sup>105</sup> Harris (2013:552)



A Vocabulary  
 Use the word to fill in the gaps  
 Milk, dogs, home, hens, money

5. We have different animals at 1.  
 they have different uses, from cows  
 we get 2. we get eggs from 3.  
 these 4. guard our homes and  
 protect us, we sell most of animals  
 to get 5.

4. Write the correct words

L	C	H	X	O	S	H	Y	E
N	F	O	A	B	H	A	Q	M
S	N	S	N	U	Y	K	J	U
H	G	H	S	S	I	U	V	P
U	A	Y	U	H	R	Z	J	F
T	W	J	Y	A	W	W	U	
J	T	W	E	E	M	E	E	P

4. Complete the missing letter

1. Tea - h - r
2. Fr - clay
3. S - rday.

Grammar

5. Complete with are, is

1. this - my arm.
2. there - teeth.
3. this - my hand.

6. Write in Words / 4

- 1) 51 =
- 2) 79 =

3. 9 =  
 4. 125 =

7. Write in  
 a) Sixty  
 b) Two  
 c) Two  
 d) Two

8. Use the Wo  
 Tooth-bru

a) I Wash  
 kill ger  
 b) I use a  
 c) I use  
 d) We use



# International research perspectives

In this section, we discuss key themes arising from the 20-country international research project (ISSPP); a range of educational leadership studies from different international perspectives, which either implicitly or explicitly acknowledge schools as complex adaptive systems; and the importance of contextually sensitive leadership. The ISSPP is the longest running network of researchers, internationally. Since its foundation in 2001,<sup>106</sup> and working to agreed protocols, its members have produced more than 200 publications focused upon successful principalship and brought to the attention of the research community and policymakers the importance of framing understandings of success in different cultures and contexts. It found that the cultural lenses used by the principals, the contexts in which they work, and the external criteria for their success, appear to differ between countries and groups of countries with different social and policy histories, and they demonstrate different identities in relation to these. In an effort to better understand the influence of societal cultures on educational leadership, there have been calls for more in the way of international perspectives, particularly those beyond European and English-speaking contexts.<sup>107</sup>

*'Culture exists at multiple levels. [There are differences] between societal and organisational culture. Societal culture is deeply rooted, based on values and taken for granted usually across a whole country. Organisational culture is made up of more malleable practices that leaders can work to change.'*<sup>108</sup>

While there are differences in leadership context, style and initial management strategies, there are also important similarities across the countries in both the values that the principals hold and in the strategies or range of behaviours they use consistently in order to embed and sustain sets of common values, almost regardless of context. International research has identified five key themes of similarity across countries and differing contexts.

## Key themes from international research on successful school leaders

- Sustaining passionate commitment and personal accountability.
- Maintaining moral purpose and managing tensions and dilemmas.
- Being 'other centred' and focusing on learning and development.

*There have been calls for more in the way of international perspectives, particularly those beyond European and English-speaking contexts*

<sup>106</sup> webpage ISSPP: [uv.uio.no](http://uv.uio.no) <sup>107</sup> Day and Leithwood (2007); Hallinger (2018b); Harris (2013) <sup>108</sup> Slater (2011:221)

- Making emotional and rational investment.
- Emphasising the personal and the functional.

These suggest that successful leadership requires a combination of cognitive and emotional understandings allied to clear sets of standards and values, the differential application of a cluster of key strategies, and the abiding presence of a passion for people and education. School leaders had different starting points but the same visions.

## Context and comparison in school leadership research

Many researchers have argued that comparative studies that take into account contextual factors, can further explore and explain differential educational performance.<sup>109</sup> Comparative multi-level, multi-perspective approaches such as those of ISSPP can, for example, focus on the impact of individual factors (such as the socio-economic background of students or leadership practices) between schools or school districts within the same country.<sup>110</sup> For example, quantitative studies from North America based around the Urban Schools Framework suggested that school leadership influences student outcomes more than other factors, bar socio-economic background and quality of teaching. The report states that 'nearly 60% of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to principal and teacher effectiveness', with principals accounting for 25%.<sup>111</sup> One of the main factors seen to contribute substantially towards the improvement of schools in this study was principals' recognition of the different progress faced by schools trying to improve:

*'Highly effective principals understand this trajectory and constantly diagnose their school's practices against it. They have a clear picture of their current state, future goals, and the path in between. Principals use this information to identify the few, focused, and highest impact actions they can take to move their schools into the next stage and achieve breakthrough outcomes for children. They recognise that key dimensions of leadership in an early turnaround situation are quite different than in a highly successful, well-functioning school.'*<sup>112</sup>

The importance of context for comparative studies is further highlighted by researchers who warn that international policy borrowing without appropriate consideration of national and local contexts could 'lead to unintended consequences and unfortunate side effects'.<sup>113</sup>

*Analysis of quantitative studies from North America based around the Urban Schools Framework suggested that school leadership influences student outcomes more than other factors, bar socio-economic background and quality of teaching*

## Low- and middle-income countries

*'Analyses of the literature in educational leadership and management have found that the vast majority of published sources of knowledge come from a limited set of English-speaking, largely Western, Anglo-American societies.'*<sup>114</sup>

While the body of literature on school leadership from English-speaking, Western contexts continues to grow, recent studies have increasingly focused on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>115</sup> The field of school leadership was born in the US in the 1970s and spread from there to Europe. It emerged in Asia in the 2000s and in Africa thereafter, where 90% of research about school leadership was published after 2005.<sup>116</sup> The growth of evidence in the Global South is welcomed and needs to continue.

<sup>109</sup> Day and Gurr, (2014); Harris and Jones (2015); Hallinger (2018a) <sup>110</sup> Braun et al. (2011) <sup>111</sup> New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) (2009:5) <sup>112</sup> New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) (2009:7) <sup>113</sup> Harris and Jones (2018:195) <sup>114</sup> Hallinger (2018b:363) <sup>115</sup> Cheng and Wong (1996); Dimmock (2003); Mohandas et al. (2003); Wong (2006); Arar et al. (2017); Harris and Jones (2017); Hallinger (2018b); Liu and Hallinger (2018) <sup>116</sup> Hallinger (2018b)



While having been conducted in a different national context, research from LMICs usually focuses on the same questions as research in North America or Europe. A qualitative study with 3,414 teachers and 186 principals in 186 middle schools in the Chinese city of Qingdao<sup>117</sup> confirmed that principal instructional leadership produced moderate direct and indirect effects on teacher professional learning. School leader time management and self-efficacy were found to have small effects on their instructional leadership practices. A study on the relationship between leadership, teacher job satisfaction, school climate and student outcomes with 306 schools in India<sup>118</sup> found that the effect of school leadership on student outcomes is mediated through the social and affective climate, the physical environment and teachers' job satisfaction.

Most studies from LMICs underpin the argument that contextual factors such as culture, political system or economic development influence leadership practices.<sup>119</sup>

A study on school turnaround and improvement in Malaysia and Indonesia found that culture and context influenced the areas that principals chose for improvement. While not finding a 'set of strategies or remedies that work in every school setting' they did identify a number of approaches that were consistently applied and 'that these improvement approaches emanated from two sources: directly from the circumstances they faced, i.e. low parental engagement, or from their responsibilities as set out by the Ministry, District, or Municipality, i.e. school self-evaluation.'<sup>120</sup>

Similar to the study conducted in Malaysia and Indonesia, a recent study on school leadership in Ghana and Tanzania<sup>121</sup> came to the conclusion that training and infrastructure need to be improved if school principals are to fulfil their pivotal role for school improvement.

While this is only a small foray into the rich body of literature on school leadership from low- and middle- income countries, it serves to illustrate that much can be gained from internationally informed research that takes into account or focuses on contextual issues.

*School leaders that integrated practices of instructional and distributed leadership were more strongly associated with professional learning communities, where staff cooperate, collaborate and communicate*

## System leadership

Much has been written about the need for school improvement to be a systematic effort. One way in which school leaders can support such efforts is by considering their entire school as a system with interconnected parts and by establishing their organisations as professional learning communities.<sup>122</sup> In the last two rounds of the OECD's TALIS of 23 and 34 countries respectively, it was found that while varying degrees of instructional leadership exist in different national settings, school leaders who adopted a stronger focus on instructional leadership were associated with more collaboration between teachers, more positive teacher-student interactions and greater recognition of teacher innovation.<sup>123</sup> School leaders that integrated practices of instructional and distributed leadership were more strongly associated with professional learning communities, where staff cooperate, collaborate and communicate.<sup>124</sup>

A review of school leadership practices in international contexts was carried out in eight regions: Alberta (Canada); England; Ontario (Canada); New York (United States); New Zealand; The Netherlands; Singapore; and Victoria (Australia). This analysis indicated that 'high-performing'

<sup>117</sup> China is considered an upper-middle income country by the World Bank but many of its citizens live below the upper-middle income line of \$5.50 a day (see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#:~:text=Today%2C%20China%20is%20an%20upper%2Dmiddle%2Dincome%20country%20and,of%20US%245.50%20a%20day.>)

<sup>118</sup> Dutta and Sahney (2016) <sup>119</sup> Walker and Hallinger (2015); Truong et al. (2017) <sup>120</sup> Harris and Jones (2017:24) <sup>121</sup> Lindsay et al. (2017) <sup>122</sup> Fullan (2010); Leithwood (2012); Shaked and Schechter (2014); Sebastian, Huang and Allensworth (2017) <sup>123</sup> OECD (2009); OECD (2016) <sup>124</sup> OECD (2016)

principals did not necessarily work longer hours than other principals; however, more time was spent with other people in their schools: ‘they walk the halls more, spend more time coaching teachers, interact more often with parents and external administrators, and spend more time with students.’<sup>125</sup> Another review of leadership in various national settings that looked specifically at principals’ time allocation found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that how principals use their time can be influenced by societal factors such as economic, socio-cultural and institutional features of the particular systems in which they participate.<sup>126</sup> Using the Power Distance Index (PDI) as an indicator of the level of hierarchy in a society, these researchers found that principals from lower PDI or less ‘hierarchically organised’ societies indicated spending more time on instructional leadership, collaborating and establishing collegial relationships with teachers and interacting with parents and the wider community.<sup>127</sup>

Further empirical support for calls to make schools into learning communities comes from researchers, who highlight the benefits of integrating and empowering all stakeholders within the school. A qualitative study with principals in Israel described four characteristics of principals that were able to apply systems thinking:<sup>128</sup>

**TABLE 2: Four characteristics of principals in Israel that were able to apply systems thinking**

<p><b>LEADING WHOLES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing the entire school, including all its aspects, as one large system</li> <li>• Seeing pupils’ parents as partners</li> <li>• Having tolerance for ambiguity</li> <li>• Believing that teachers should be committed to the entire school</li> <li>• Understanding that a group is more than the sum of its parts</li> </ul>
<p><b>ADOPTING A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL VIEW</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualising many aspects of a given issue simultaneously</li> <li>• Switching between perspectives</li> </ul>
<p><b>INFLUENCING INDIRECTLY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using an indirect approach when dealing with tasks and challenges</li> <li>• Willing to assume responsibility rather than blame others</li> </ul>
<p><b>EVALUATING SIGNIFICANCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising important issues and prioritising them</li> <li>• Balancing and bridging between internal needs and external demands; buffering against external guidelines</li> <li>• Identifying patterns</li> </ul>

Beyond the school as a learning system, however, there is also the concept that principals should collaborate and be connected with other principals as so-called system leaders.<sup>129</sup> In 2008 the OECD discussed system-wide leadership and international practice as a key component of how principals can contribute to school improvement:

*‘In this new environment, schools and schooling are being given an ever bigger job to do... One of school leaders’ new roles is increasingly to work with other schools and other school leaders, collaborating and developing relationships of interdependence and trust. System leaders, as they are being called, care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.’<sup>130</sup>*

<sup>125</sup> Barber, Whelan and Clark (2010) <sup>126</sup> Lee and Hallinger (2012); OECD (2016) <sup>127</sup> Lee and Hallinger (2012) <sup>128</sup> Shaked and Schechter (2014) <sup>129</sup> Fullan (2010) <sup>130</sup> OECD (2008:6)

The study concluded that systems leadership needs to develop and emerge from principals themselves and from agencies committed to working with them (such as district officials or professional bodies).<sup>131</sup> Collaboration at all levels, and sharing of expertise, resources and skills, can create more opportunities for educational transformation than isolated practices and institutions: 'Attaining this future demands that we give school leaders more possibilities in taking the lead.'<sup>132</sup>

School leaders who operate as systems leaders combine two characteristics: they have the skills, knowledge and experience to have a positive impact in their own schools and, at the same time, they have the standing and connections to establish links and cooperation outside the school. Such links could be with other school leaders, as well as with professionals in educational administration, the local policy level or the wider community. The combination of these two characteristics allows school leaders to operate 'in relation to systems goals' while at the same time being mindful of 'local needs.'<sup>133</sup> Five key roles for system leaders point to the mediating position that principals can assume between the policy level and their own school.<sup>134</sup>

- leadership that sustains improvements in very challenging contexts and then shares its experience, knowledge and practice with other schools
- leadership of collaborative innovations in curriculum and pedagogy
- leadership that brokers and shapes radically new networks of extended services and student welfare across local communities
- leadership of improvement across a formal partnership of schools
- leadership that acts as an external agent of change in other schools that face significant difficulties.

However, despite changes in governance structures in many countries which have the effect of encouraging cross-school collaboration, system leadership is not as widely practised as policymakers or educational experts might like it to be. Various barriers to system leadership have been identified; schools have historically operated in isolation, current policy-related pressures and rivalries force principals to prioritise their own schools over other schools and resources for collaboration (including time and money) are often lacking.<sup>135</sup> It is therefore crucial that principals are given the resources to connect with colleagues in other schools and that networks and systems for collaboration rather than competition are set up by the appropriate authorities.<sup>136</sup>

Where the necessary conditions exist for principals to operate as system leaders, positive results have been achieved. In Vietnam for example, principals were found to regularly meet at the district level to tackle issues and challenges together.<sup>137</sup> In London, Dubai and Rio de Janeiro models have been implemented where principals at weaker schools are paired with principals from well-performing schools for support and professional development.<sup>138</sup>

*Collaboration at all levels, and sharing of expertise, resources and skills, can create more opportunities for educational transformation than isolated practices and institutions*

<sup>131</sup> OECD (2008) <sup>132</sup> OECD (2008:7) <sup>133</sup> Fullan (2015:24) <sup>134</sup> Higham et al. (2009) <sup>135</sup> Higham et al. (2009) <sup>136</sup> Leithwood (2012); Fullan (2015) <sup>137</sup> Elwick and McAleavy (2015); McAleavy, Tran and Fitzpatrick (2018) <sup>138</sup> Matthews et al. (2006); Elwick and McAleavy (2015)



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# Leadership values: ethical/moral leadership

**An area of leadership so often overlooked in the more recent empirical mainstream leadership research, is the key role that values- and ethics-driven purposes play in leadership decisions, staffroom relationships, classroom pedagogies, supporting 'can do' cultures and positive 'mindsets' of school improvement.<sup>139</sup>**

*'The most successful school leaders are... flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values including persistence, resilience and optimism, [and] such traits help explain why successful leaders facing daunting conditions are often able to push forward when there is little reason to expect progress.'<sup>140</sup>*

Research internationally demonstrates the nature of such values-led, flexible, persistent, resilient and optimistic leadership in the face of the challenge of parental passivity, emotionally and intellectually alien community environments and, in some cases, national policies which are not perceived by the school leaders to be of particular benefit to the school.

Much literature has long acknowledged the strong sense of vocation that the best leaders (and teachers) demonstrate through their presence and their work. The evidence is unambiguous – the most effective leaders have strong moral and ethical purposes and a strong sense of social justice.<sup>141</sup> They care passionately about improving educational experiences for all groups of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and have strong commitments to promoting equity and inclusive practices to benefit all students. These are evidenced in the ways in which effective leaders ensure that ultimately all stakeholders (teachers, non-teaching staff, students, parents, governors and the broader community) participate through forms of capacity building, distributed leadership, and along with these, increased collective responsibility and accountability for promoting student progress, achievement and well-being.

Research also tells us that moral/ethical purposes in action are evidenced by:

- regular professional dialogue about teaching and learning
- strong social support in problem-solving (care)
- shared goals and collective responsibility
- individual and collective efficacy
- norms of equity and justice.

*Much literature has long acknowledged the strong sense of vocation that the best leaders (and teachers) demonstrate through their presence and their work*

<sup>139</sup> James et al. (2006) <sup>140</sup> Day et al. (2010:14) <sup>141</sup> Starratt (1991); Reitzug and Patterson (1998); Begley and Johansson (2003)

Overall, equity, also called ‘leadership for social justice’ or ‘culturally responsive leadership’,<sup>142</sup> has received increasing attention in recent years. Not only do professional guidelines and standards<sup>143</sup> emphasise the importance of equity (as discussed above) but the body of evidence is growing that illustrates that principals can have a key role in increasing the equitability of an education system.<sup>144</sup> A recent study has outlined that in order for school leaders to contribute to equity, all leadership decision (defining a vision; hiring and placing staff; CPD, etc.) have to be made with the most vulnerable student groups in mind.

Successful school leaders achieve their success by establishing two kinds of relations – the personal and the functional. It is argued that functional relations are essentially instrumental in nature, whereas personal relations have no purpose other than to enable us to be ourselves.<sup>145</sup> A fourfold typology of schools has been used to illustrate the different possible combinations of emphasis in these relationships (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3: The organisational and communal orientation of schools<sup>146</sup>**

SCHOOLS AS IMPERSONAL ORGANISATIONS	SCHOOLS AS AFFECTIVE COMMUNITIES	SCHOOLS AS HIGH-PERFORMANCE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS	SCHOOLS AS PERSON-CENTRED LEARNING COMMUNITIES
The functional marginalises the personal	The personal marginalises the functional	The personal is used for the sake of the functional	The functional is for the sake of/expressive of the personal
Mechanistic organisation	Affective community	Learning organisation	Learning community
Community is unimportant/ destructive of organisational purposes	Community has no/ few organisational consequences or requirements	Community is a useful tool to achieve organisational purposes	Organisation exists to promote community
Efficient	Restorative	Effective	Morally and instrumentally successful

*Successful school leaders achieve their success by establishing two kinds of relations – the personal and the functional*

The interdependence of the functional and personal is seen as both inevitable and desirable. It is further suggested that ‘not only is the functional for the sake of the personal, and the personal achieved through the functional, but the influence of the personal on the functional is transformative of it: the functional should be expressive of the personal.’<sup>147</sup> This suggests that school leaders should, for example, institutionalise care for the well-being of their students and staff. Caring for other members of the school community (the personal relation) can thereby be expressed in the functional.

It may be useful to remember at this point that:

*‘Without effective teacher guidance and instruction in the classroom, learning and progress cannot be achieved. The underlying rationale is that while organizational aspects of schools provide the necessary preconditions for effective teaching, it is the quality of teacher-student interactions that principally determines student progress.’<sup>148</sup>*

<sup>142</sup> Khalifa Gooden and Davis (2016) <sup>143</sup> Department for Education (2015); Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2019) <sup>144</sup> Sammons (2010); Ishimaru and Galloway (2014); Woods and Roberts (2016) <sup>145</sup> Fielding (2001:11) <sup>146</sup> Fielding (2006:354) <sup>147</sup> Fielding (2003:5) <sup>148</sup> Antoniou (2013:126)

This further highlights the need to integrate functional/organisational aspects of school life with (inter-) personal dimensions.

**Key questions:** *What is the appropriate balance between the functional and the personal in schools in my education system? How far do schools demonstrate different positions in the typology of organisational and communal orientations?*



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# New research knowledge about how leaders succeed in different contexts

**While theories and models of school leadership types are helpful in understanding different approaches to leadership, empirical research has shown that, in practice, successful school leadership approaches do not mimic any single model. Moreover, in all cases, they do not work alone. Rather, it seems to be the collective leadership effects that count. In fact, as the different models champion different practices and focus on different aspects of school leadership, recent research has begun to support understanding about the combination of different leadership models.**

Research in England that studied the relationship between leadership and improvements in student outcomes (the IMPACT study noted earlier) provides robust evidence-based responses to four fundamental questions about school leadership. These are discussed below.

**QUESTION 1: What is it about school leadership in schools in the IMPACT study which enabled the school's effectiveness to increase or be sustained over several years in terms of student outcomes?**

## **The seminal role of the school leader**

School leadership remains the major driving force and underpins the school's increased or sustained effectiveness and improvement. 'School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organization which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. While moderate in size, this leadership effect is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts.'<sup>149</sup>

## **Alignment: a key strategy**

A key strategy in the endeavours of school leaders to improve the cultures of teaching, learning and achievement in their schools is the alignment of structures and cultures with 'vision' and 'direction'. In effect, they reposition their schools internally through changing expectations, aspirations, structures and cultures so that they are able to build and sustain performance. They increase effectiveness through a sustained focus upon raising the quality of teaching and learning, by raising the levels of individual and collective efficacy and the involvement of staff.

## **Positioning for improvement: more than a repertoire of basic leadership practices**

Successful school leaders demonstrate four core sets of leadership qualities and practices:

*School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organization which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning*

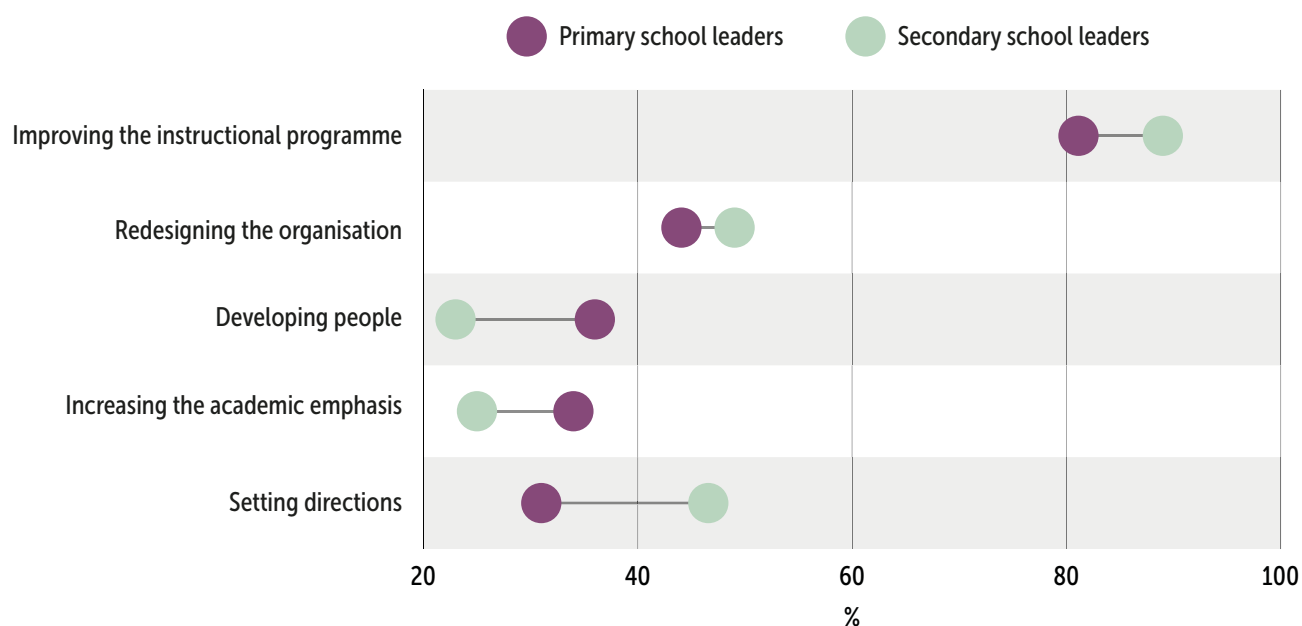
<sup>149</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020:6)

defining vision and direction; developing people and relationships; redesigning the organisation; and improving the instructional programme.<sup>150</sup> However, there are differences in the degree of their perceived emphasis between leaders in primary and secondary schools, and teachers in relatively advantaged and relatively disadvantaged schools.

**Improving the teaching and learning**

In the IMPACT research the vast majority of primary school leaders (81%) focused on improving the teaching and learning programme, in combination with a range of other foci. For secondary school leaders, 89% reported that their first priority action related to improving the programme.

**FIGURE 3: IMPACT research findings on primary and secondary school leaders' priorities**



**QUESTION 2: How did school leaders in the IMPACT study contribute to sustained school effectiveness?**

**Diagnosis and differentiation**

School leaders do not engage simultaneously in developing, implementing and sustaining all the strategies recognised in the literature as being necessary for effective leadership, but they prioritise according to context.<sup>151</sup> It is their ability to identify the most important changes and to ensure that these are made which forms the key characteristics of successful school leaders. They combine a number of approaches but prioritise within them. In other words, they are able to diagnose (needs), differentiate and apply (in levels of importance and timing of strategies to meet these) and actively coordinate these strategies. Successful school leaders apply their judgements about the timing and nature of change and prioritise the change strategies in their schools in different ways, reflecting their school's history, staffing and context.

Although school leaders draw upon the same range of qualities, strategies and skills, the combinations will vary, as will the way they are applied or enacted, since this relates closely to

<sup>150</sup> Hitt and Tucker (2016); Leithwood et al. (2020) <sup>151</sup> Day, Gu and Sammons (2016); Dutta and Sahney (2016); Harris and Jones (2017)

their personal qualities and traits. This helps to account, for example, for the different ways in which they distribute leadership influence among staff.

### **Building care, learning and achievement cultures: changing expectations and improving the quality of practice**

School leaders sought to build cultures that both promoted student engagement in learning and raised students' achievement levels in terms of value-added test and examination results. The IMPACT study data suggests that school leaders are perceived by their staff to focus primarily upon:

- creating and sustaining cultures of high expectations for themselves and others by staff and students
- distributing responsibilities and accountabilities, particularly in disadvantaged contexts
- nurturing care and trust with collegiality
- improving relationships between staff and students
- connecting student behaviour with student outcomes (all school leaders were perceived to have influenced the quality of classroom practice through encouraging more consistency in classroom teaching approaches)
- engaging productively with external agencies in ways which provided additional benefits to the school.

### **Leading the learning: being responsive to context**

The claim that school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions is well substantiated in all the research reviewed here. The IMPACT study provided many examples of school leaders:

- aligning CPD to the school development plan
- improving the physical working conditions for staff and students
- nurturing staff self-efficacy and motivation
- engaging in succession planning through, for example, clarifying roles and distributing responsibilities to selected staff
- building inclusive teams of staff in order to break down barriers to the commitment to whole-school vision.

The timing and application of these strategies are always sensitive to context but all are used. It was found that when school leaders promote and/or participate in effective professional learning, this has twice the impact on student outcomes across a school than any other single leadership activity.<sup>152</sup>

### **Broadening staff participation in decision-making processes**

The IMPACT research revealed that school leaders recognised the importance for the success of the school of broadening the participation of staff, consulting with them on a regular basis and, in some cases, the increased involvement of students in school-wide decision-making processes. There was evidence also of much effort to reshape and broaden the senior leadership

*School leaders do not engage simultaneously in developing, implementing and sustaining all the strategies recognised in the literature as being necessary for effective leadership, but they prioritise according to context*

<sup>152</sup> Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009)

team into a group which represented more strongly the 'core' business of raising teaching and learning standards.

**QUESTION 3: What are the differences in the IMPACT study between school leaders in different experience phases, different school sectors, different socio-economic contexts and in schools in different improvement trajectories?**

**Similarities across improvement groupings**

Schools in the IMPACT research were drawn from three improvement groups: those improving from 'Low' to 'Moderate' achievement levels and identified as highly effective in terms of student progress (these often served highly disadvantaged student intakes); those improving from 'Moderate' to 'High'; and those that were stable or 'High Effective'. Overall, there appear to be more similarities than differences between schools serving different communities, particularly in relation to:

- the extent to which leadership practice in school is provided by other people or groups;
- the way that leadership tasks are distributed or shared within schools; and
- the kinds of leadership practice provided by the SLT in school.

**Differences by improvement groupings in the extent of change**

Nonetheless, some significant differences were found in both primary and secondary schools between the three improvement groups in terms of the extent to which school leaders reported change or improvement across their schools, including aspects related to disciplinary climate, reduction of staff mobility and enhanced commitment and enthusiasm of staff. More improvements or changes were likely to be reported by school leaders in the 'Low' to 'Moderate' or 'Moderate' to 'High' improvement groups.<sup>153</sup> This finding provides evidence that effective school leaders have a positive influence on the 'mindset' of the school and its culture, including fostering positive staff and student relationships in the school. This is likely to be especially important for schools in challenging circumstances which start from a low base in terms of student attainment.

In both primary and secondary sectors there were significant differences between the three school improvement groups in relation to the reported use of data to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Analysis provides evidence for the hypothesis that effective school leaders in English schools use, and ensure that staff adopt, evidence-based approaches to the use of assessment data, intervening early and monitoring and evaluating continually at school, department and classroom level. In addition, while the use of data to inform individual student target-setting was widespread, it was a particularly important strategy for schools improving from a low attainment base.

**Differences by socio-economic status (SES) context**

The finding that school leaders in high-disadvantage schools were more likely to report change in leadership practice in their schools supports the hypothesis that effective school leaders in challenging circumstances have to be more responsive to school cultural and policy contexts in order to improve student outcomes. They also have to make greater efforts to effect improvement in a range of ways. This finding is consistent with earlier evidence which indicates that a change of headteacher can act as a catalyst for improvement for schools in difficulty.

*It is the way in which leaders apply leadership practices, rather than the actual practices themselves, that demonstrates their ability to respond to the context in which they work*

<sup>153</sup> Gu, Sammons and Mehta (2008)

**QUESTION 4: Are there identifiable sequences or patterns of actions taken by incoming school leaders in the IMPACT study?**

There is now a growing body of research which suggests that successful school leaders use the same basic leadership practices, but in combination and not at the same time or in the same way. Thus, it cannot be claimed that there is a single model for achieving success.

Rather, successful school leaders draw equally on elements of both instructional and transformational leadership as well as distributing responsibility to their staff.<sup>154</sup> They work intuitively and from experience, tailoring their leadership strategies to their particular school context.<sup>155</sup> Their ability to respond to their context and to recognise, acknowledge, understand and attend to the needs and motivations of others defines their level of success.

It is the way in which leaders apply leadership practices, rather than the actual practices themselves, that demonstrates their ability to respond to the context in which they work.<sup>156</sup> New evidence of how these core leadership practices are used sensitively according to context relates not only to school turnaround scenarios:<sup>157</sup> studies forming part of a five-year study of leadership and learning in the US<sup>158</sup> indicate that student poverty, diversity and school phase (primary or secondary) can significantly moderate the positive effects of school leadership on student achievement.<sup>159</sup>

Overall, it was concluded that success is built through the synergistic effects of values and qualities of the headteacher and the combination and accumulation of a number of strategies which are related to the headteacher's judgements about what works in the particular school context; in other words, regardless of the model.

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<sup>154</sup> Dutta and Sahney (2016); OECD (2016) <sup>155</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020) <sup>156</sup> Grissom, Loeb and Master (2013) <sup>157</sup> Day and Leithwood (eds.) (2007) <sup>158</sup> Louis et al. (2010a&b) <sup>159</sup> Wahlstrom and Louis (2008); Gordon and Louis (2009)



# Combining leadership models

**Research suggests that within-school variation in student outcomes is often considerably greater than the variation between schools. Highly effective and improving schools tend to reduce within-school variation by building common goals and being consistent in their approach.<sup>160</sup>**

*'Most school variables, considered separately, have only small effects on student learning. To obtain large effects, educators need to create synergy across the relevant variables. Among all the parents, teachers and policymakers who work hard to improve education, educators in leadership positions are uniquely well positioned to ensure the necessary synergy...'<sup>161</sup>*

This statement by the authors of a large-scale research study in 180 schools in 43 school districts in North America, which focused upon *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, provides further confirmation of research findings reported throughout this review that leadership, particularly that of the headteacher, counts, and that although most school-level variables have small effects on student outcomes when examined independently,<sup>162</sup> the combination of their impact tends to be stronger.

Figure 4 shows graphically how student learning and achievement are shaped by a combination and accumulation of leadership strategies which, taken together, address school culture and staff development, and reveal a strong focus on enhancing the processes of teaching and learning. It presents an explanation of the relationship between leadership practices (in red and coral) and changes in secondary student outcomes (in yellow) and is the result of detailed analysis of the quantitative evidence gathered from successful school leaders in secondary schools. In all cases, examination results had improved over at least three consecutive years under their leadership, and their performance was identified as highly effective in value-added analysis of school results.

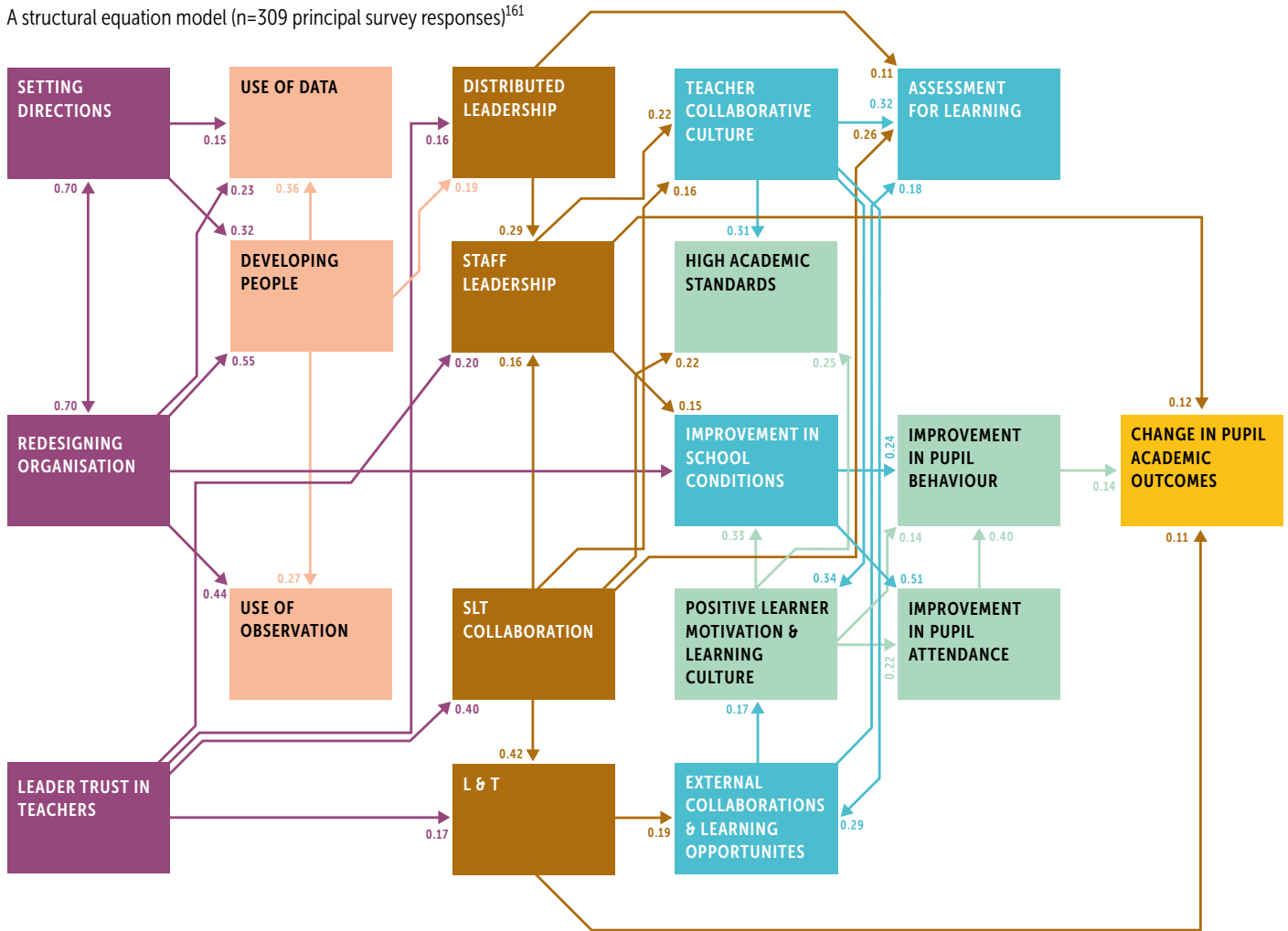
The influence of variables on students' learning and behaviour is indirect, but there is clear evidence of their effects on retention and attendance of staff, improvements in student attendance and behaviour, and increases in student motivation, engagement and sense of responsibility for learning – all of which are themselves the result of leadership values, strategies and actions.

*Highly effective and improving schools tend to reduce within-school variation by building common goals and being consistent in their approach*

<sup>160</sup>Stringfield, Reynolds and Shaffer (2008) <sup>161</sup>Louis et al. (2010a:9) <sup>162</sup>Creemers and Reezigt (1996)

**FIGURE 4:** Example of leadership practices and changes in secondary pupil outcomes over three years

A structural equation model (n=309 principal survey responses)<sup>161</sup>



While all the links between the different dimensions are statistically significant, some are stronger than others. The strength of these connections indicates which features of leadership practice are most closely linked. Figure 4 shows that the school processes directly connected with school leaders' leadership strategies are those that also connect most closely with improvements in aspects of teaching and learning, and staff involvement in leadership; these in turn help to predict improvement in school conditions and improvement in student outcomes.

Of particular note are:

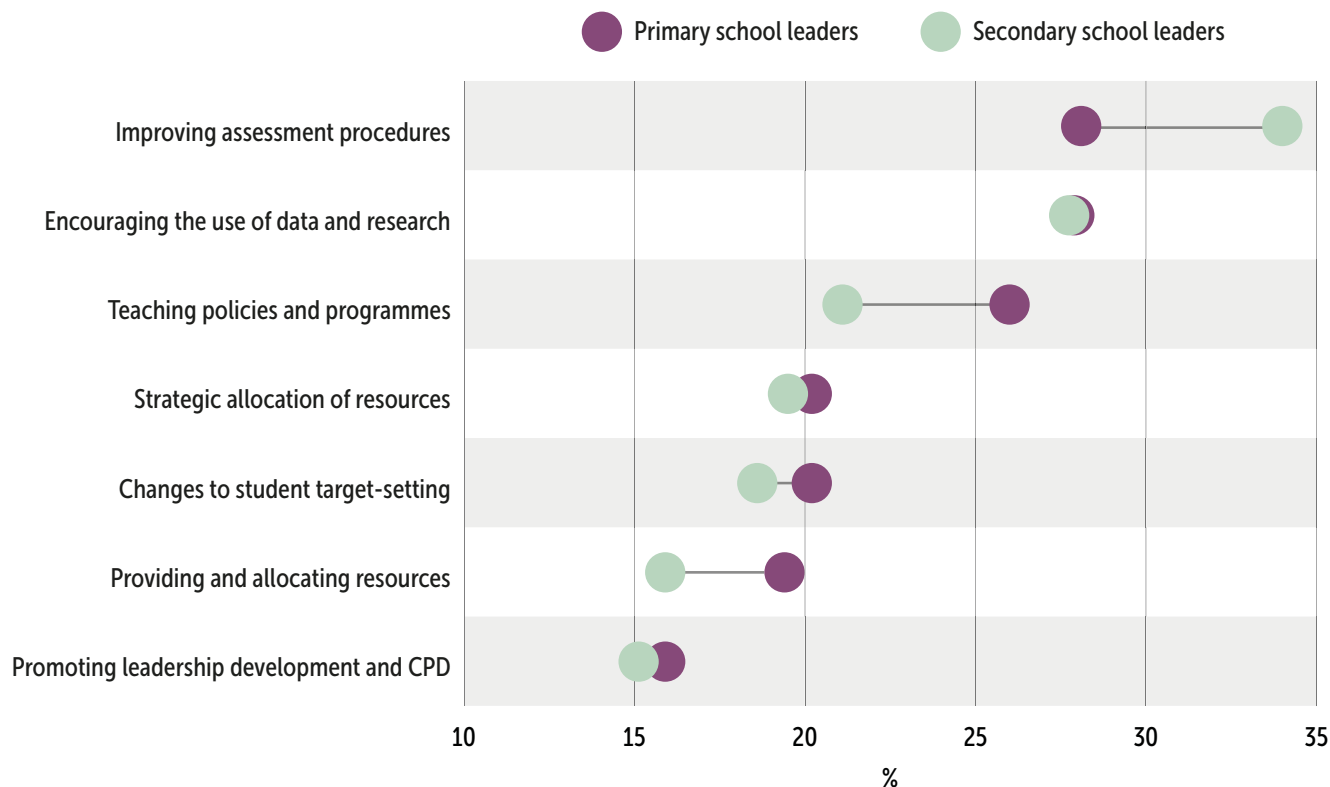
- the role played by school leaders' trust in teachers, both in relation to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and broader staff leadership
- the important link between redesigning the organisation and setting directions
- the way in which redesigning the organisation predicts improvement in school conditions
- the way in which leadership strategies to develop people link with the teacher collaborative culture, and with high academic standards, positive learner motivation and a learning culture
- the positive associations between improvement in school conditions for teaching and learning and better outcomes in terms of student behaviour, attendance and motivation, and a learning culture.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Day, Gu and Sammons (2016:231)



The research furthermore questioned school leaders about their school improvement strategies and the actions that they believed had helped improve student attainment. The most frequently cited foci for improvement actions/strategies by primary and secondary school leaders were:<sup>164</sup>

**FIGURE 5: IMPACT research findings on primary and secondary school leaders' school improvement strategies**



### School development phases and layering of leadership strategies

The IMPACT research in English schools identified different phases of leadership success that could be classified under four broad headlines: foundational, developmental, enrichment and renewal phases (see Table 4).<sup>165</sup>

In schools in more challenging contexts, greater attention and efforts were made in the early phase than in other schools to establish, maintain and sustain school-wide policies for student behaviour, improvements to the physical environment and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The further the school improvement efforts have progressed, the more attention can be paid to maintaining good practice and results. A school in the renewal phase can focus on further specialisation and the empowerment of staff and students.

Some strategies do not continue through each phase; an example being restructuring, which is a particular feature of the early phase. Others grow in importance and form significant foundations on which other strategies are built. For example, growing confidence in using data, which began in phase 2, is a necessary step on the way to developing a complex personalised curriculum in phases 3 and 4. The two strategies then continue to develop in tandem. By the later phase, a range of strategic actions are being implemented simultaneously. Some have a higher priority than others, but it is the combination of actions, along with gradual broadening and deepening

*School leaders grow and secure success by layering leadership strategies and actions*

<sup>164</sup> Day, Gu and Sammons (2016:231) <sup>165</sup> Day, Gu and Sammons (2016)

**TABLE 4:** Four different phases of leadership success in English schools

FOUNDATIONAL PHASE	DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE	ENRICHMENT PHASE	RENEWAL PHASE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• redesigning the leadership and staff teams</li> <li>• training and development for all</li> <li>• school ethos and high expectation</li> <li>• pupil behaviour</li> <li>• improving the physical environment</li> <li>• raising expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance management</li> <li>• high expectations and use of data</li> <li>• pupil behaviour and pastoral care</li> <li>• pupil voice</li> <li>• becoming a (preservice) training school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• distribution of leadership</li> <li>• curriculum enrichment, personalisation, and pupil-centred learning</li> <li>• developing the school ethos and raising aspirations</li> <li>• specialist status – building an improved environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further distribution of leadership</li> <li>• further pastoral restructuring – focus on learning and inclusion</li> <li>• further curriculum enrichment and personalisation</li> </ul>

of strategies, that enables the later strategies to succeed and makes it possible for the school leader’s leadership to have such a powerful impact on student outcomes.

School leaders grow and secure success by layering leadership strategies and actions. Effective school leaders make judgements, according to their context, about the timing, selection, relevance, application and continuation of strategies that create the right conditions for effective teaching, learning and student achievement within and across broad development phases.

The ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work. Much has been written about the high degree of sensitivity that successful leaders bring to the contexts in which they work.<sup>166</sup> Some would go so far as to claim that ‘context is everything’. However, based upon this review of the evidence, it is suggested that this reflects a superficial view of what successful leaders do. Without doubt, successful leaders are sensitive to context, but this does not mean they use qualitatively different practices in every different context. It means, rather, that they apply contextually sensitive combinations of the basic leadership practices described earlier in this review.

*Considerable emphasis has recently been placed on school leaders’ contributions to building staff capacity in particular*

### Enhancing staff motivation and commitment

School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. A key task for leadership, if it is to influence student learning and achievement, is to improve staff performance. Such performance is a function of staff members’ motivations, commitments, capacities (skills and knowledge) and the conditions in which they work. Considerable emphasis has recently been placed on school leaders’ contributions to building staff capacity in particular; this links with the leadership dimension ‘Developing people’ in the IMPACT research.

<sup>166</sup> Leithwood et al. (2020)

This emphasis is reflected, for example, in the popularity in many countries of the term ‘instructional leadership’ and in fledgling efforts to discover the curriculum content knowledge that successful school leaders should possess (as discussed earlier in this review). Recent research in the US demonstrates that the exercise of instructional leadership was much easier in elementary than in secondary schools, reflecting the greater complexity and size of secondary schools and the range of curriculum knowledge required.<sup>167</sup> In secondary schools it is likely that the Head of Department plays a more important instructional and curriculum leadership role.<sup>168</sup>

The nature of the evidence of leaders’ strong and positive influences on staff motivation, commitment and beliefs about supportiveness of their working conditions has been illustrated by the results of a study carried out across England.<sup>169</sup> Based on a national sample of teacher survey responses, the study enquired about the effects of most of the basic or core transformational leadership practices, as enacted by school leaders, on teachers’ implementation of the Primary Strategies (originally the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy) and the subsequent effects of such implementation on student learning and achievement. The model indicates that the more school leaders enacted the core leadership practices described earlier, the greater was their influence on teachers’ capacities, motivation and beliefs about the supportiveness of their working conditions. In turn these capacities, motivations and beliefs had a significant influence on classroom practices. The influence of leadership practices was strongest on teachers’ beliefs about working conditions, followed by their motivation to implement the Primary Strategies, and then by their views of their preparedness to implement those strategies.

This study, along with other evidence,<sup>170</sup> points to the importance of leadership – alongside other mediating influences – in shaping teachers’ commitment, resilience and effectiveness, and highlights the key role of emotional understanding in successful leadership. A Leadership Framework used in Ontario, Canada, outlines three Personal Leadership Resources and associated skills that successful leaders should apply. In addition to cognitive resources the Framework includes social resources, useful for interactions and communication, and psychological resources, which relate more to school leaders’ personalities.<sup>171</sup>

*The exercise of instructional leadership was much easier in elementary than in secondary schools*

**TABLE 5: Personal Leadership Resources and skills that successful leaders should apply**

COGNITIVE RESOURCES	SOCIAL RESOURCES	PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem-solving expertise</li> <li>• Domain-specific knowledge</li> <li>• Systems thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived emotions</li> <li>• Managing emotions</li> <li>• Acting in emotionally appropriate ways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Self-efficiency</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Proactivity</li> </ul>

<sup>167</sup> Louis, Dretzke and Wahlstrom (2010b) <sup>168</sup> Sammons et al. (1997) <sup>169</sup> Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) <sup>170</sup> Fielding (2006); Taliadorou and Pashiardis (2015) <sup>171</sup> Leithwood (2012; 2017)



# Conclusions

**This review has provided an overview of a substantial body of evidence-informed international literature that examines the nature and purposes of school leadership and its relationships to school improvement. It focused particularly on the links leadership, school and classroom, examining especially how leadership can enhance and support better teaching and learning and thus promote better outcomes for students. It is argued that effective leadership is important, but not a sufficient condition for successful schools.**

The review has drawn particular attention to three concepts of leadership: transformational, pedagogical/instructional and distributed. While noting particular evidence that pedagogical/instructional leadership has been shown to be important for promoting better academic outcomes for students, it is concluded that the three concepts of leadership are not mutually exclusive. The review presents recent evidence which reveals that a combination of strategies can be most beneficial in ensuring success in schools as complex adaptive systems, and that most leadership effects operate indirectly to promote student outcomes by supporting and enhancing a positive culture or mindset, and conditions for high-quality teaching and learning through direct impacts on teachers and their work.

Furthermore, the review draws attention to the growing demands on school leaders, reflecting increased expectations of the education system in many countries, including greater accountability pressures and emphasis on both raising standards and widening the social goals of schooling.

Models of successful schools have been examined and the role of leadership values, practices and emotions highlighted. The evidence suggests that school leaders have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school mindset and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment, which is needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools in challenging circumstances. As the field of school leadership research continues to grow, further in-depth evidence may emerge that moves from describing successful leaders' work to outlining how leadership affects schools and what the resulting impacts can be in different contexts.<sup>172</sup>

*A combination of strategies can be most beneficial in ensuring success in schools as complex adaptive systems*

<sup>172</sup> Leithwood and Sun (2018); Gumus et al. (2018); Leithwood et al. (2020)

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