

- x A definition of leadership
  - Leadership practices
  - The contingent, or contextual, nature of leadership; and
  - Personal leadership resources, which will be a major focus of the discussions and
- Provided for you and the School level at the System level Leadership Practitioners are

### **DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP**

For purposes of the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF), leadership is defined as the exercise of influence on organizational members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals. This influence may have many sources (e.g. administrators, parents, teachers), is typically reciprocal rather than unidirectional, and is exercised through relationships between and among individuals, groups, and the settings in which they find themselves.

Leadership, defined in this way, is “successful” to the extent that it makes significant, positive, and ethically defensible

<sup>1</sup> contributions to progress in achieving the organization’s vision and goals.

### **THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP “PRACTICE”**

The emphasis on measurable behaviors to the exclusion of more subtle dispositions and “softer interpersonal qualities sought from people at many levels across the organization”<sup>3</sup>;

judging the extent to which they are able to enact those practices in a contextually appropriate way. For example, the priority placed by the Ontario government on social justice in the province's public schools, a priority evident in attempts to close the achievement gap and to develop inclusive school organizations, means that key features

means required to reduce the gap requires thought. The literature on expert problem solving processes includes some variation in how the component processes or skills required for gap reduction are depicted. But these different perspectives have much in common and the OLF adopts a perspective emerging from the only two sustained programs of research conducted about expert problem solving on the part of school and district leaders , in particular <sup>6</sup>. This line of research is primarily concerned with how leaders solve “unstructured” problems: these are the non-routine problems requiring significantly more than the application of existing know-how, or what is sometimes referred to as “adaptive leadership”.

dealing with those constraints and almost never consider a constraint to be an insurmountable obstacle to moving forward.

*Solution processes* include the actions taken by leaders and others involved to solve the problem. Experts plan carefully and in some detail as they go about arriving at their solutions and preparing to implement them. They consult extensively with those who might be involved in the solution. Because of the significant resources that experts devote to problem interpretation, finding suitable solutions is often much less complicated for them than it is for those with unclear understandings of the problem they are attempting to solve.

*Mood* refers to the leader's emotional response to the problem and what is required to solve it. Experts remain calm and confident in the face of unstructured problems and they exude that calmness and confidence to their problem-solving partners. This mood contributes to their ability to think flexibly about problem solving.

### *Knowledge about School and Classroom Conditions with Direct Effects on Student Learning*

Because school leaders' influence on student learning is largely indirect (a well-documented assumption of the OLF), knowledge about those school and classroom conditions with significant effects on students ("learning conditions") that can be influenced by school leaders is an extremely important aspect of what leaders need to know. Indeed, "leadership for learning" can be described relatively simply, but accurately, as a process of (a) diagnosing the status of potentially powerful learning conditions in the school and classroom, (b) selecting those learning conditions most likely to be constraining student learning in one's school, and (c) improving the status of those learning conditions. Several syntheses of recent research about school and classroom conditions mediating school leaders' influence on student learning identify four categories of such conditions – technical or rational, emotional, organizational and family conditions<sup>8</sup>.

*Technical or rational conditions.* Exercising a positive influence on this category of conditions calls on school leaders' knowledge about the "technical core" of schooling; these are both school and classroom conditions. In the classroom, for example, a recent synthesis of evidence implies that school leaders carefully consider the value of focusing their efforts on improving the extent to which teachers are providing students with immediate and informative feedback, teachers' use of reciprocal teaching strategies, teacher-student relations, the management of classrooms, and the general quality of teaching in the school. Many school-level variables have reported effects on student learning as large as all but a few classroom-level variables. Both Academic Press or Emphasis and Disciplinary Climate stand out among these especially consequential variables, for example.

*Emotional conditions.* Rational and emotional conditions are interconnected. clag in the schobievejudgeral indwayefully

efficacy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale, stress/burnout, engagement in the school or profession, and teacher trust in colleagues, parents, and students.

*Organizational conditions.* Structures, culture, policies, and standard operation procedures are among the conditions in this category. Collectively, they constitute teachers' working conditions which, in turn, have a powerful influence on teachers' emotions. These variables constitute both the school's infrastructure and a large proportion of its collective memory. At minimum, a school's infrastructure should not prevent staff and students from making best use of their capacities. At best, school infrastructures should magnify those capacities and make it much easier to engage in productive rather than unproductive practices. A recent synthesis of evidence identified more than a dozen conditions in this category. Some can be found in the classroom (e.g., class size, ability groupings) while some are school-wide (e.g., school size, multi grade/age classes, retention policies).

*Family conditions.* It is often claimed that improving student learning is all about improving "instruction". While improving instruction in classrooms is both important and necessary work in many schools, this claim by itself ignores the potential impact of both the Emotional and Organizational categories of conditions. Even more critically, this claim seems to dismiss factors conditions created by students' families which typically account for as much as 50% of the variation in student achievement across schools. Since best estimates suggest that everything schools do within their walls accounts for about 20% of the variation in students' achievement across schools, influencing family conditions is a "high leverage" option for school leaders. By now, there is considerable evidence about the conditions created by families that can be influenced by schools and their leaders. A recent synthesis of evidence, for example, points to seven family-related conditions with widely varying effects on student learning. At least four of these conditions are open to influence from the school including home environment ( $d = 0.57$ ), parent involvement in school (positive and moderately strong effects), time spent watching television (weak negative effects), and visits to the home by school personnel (weak positive effects). Parent expectations, this and other recent evidence suggests, have among the strongest effects on student learning.

### **Social Resources**

The importance attached to leaders' social resources has a long history. For example, early efforts to theorize leadership carried out at Ohio and Michigan State universities in the 1950s and '60s situated relationship building among the two or three most important dimensions of effective leadership. According to these theories, effective leaders demonstrated "consideration" for their colleagues, for example, by acting in a friendly and supportive manner, showing concern for and looking out for their welfare.

More recent evidence continues to link leader effectiveness to perceptions of leader empathy on the part of colleagues, building on Goleman's claim that empathy "represents the foundation skill for all social competences important for work"<sup>9</sup>. These relationship-oriented behaviors also included demonstrations of trust and confidence, keeping colleagues informed, and showing appreciation for their ideas and recognition of their accomplishments.

More recent theories of transformational leadership continue this focus by including "individualized consideration" among their categories of leadership practices, as does

---

<sup>9</sup> Sadri, Weber & Gentry (2011, page 819).



### Perceiving Emotions

This set of social resources includes the ability to detect, from a wide array of clues, one's own emotions (self-awareness) and the emotions of others. People with this relational resource are:

- Able to recognize their own emotional responses and how those emotional responses shape their focus of attention and influence their actions;
- Able to discern the emotions being experienced by others from, for example, their tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and other verbal and non-verbal information.

### Managing Emotions

This set of social resources includes managing one's own and others' emotions, including the interaction of emotions on the part of different people in pairs and groups. People with this relational resource:

Are able to understand the reasons for their own "intuitive" emotional responses and are able to reflect on the potential consequences of those responses;  
Are able to persuade others to be more reflective about their own "intuitive" emotional responses and to reflect on the potential consequences of those responses.

### Acting in Emotionally Appropriate Ways

This set of social resources entails the ability to respond to the emotions of others in ways that support the purposes for the interaction by others in

- Being able to exercise a high level of cognitive control over which emotions are allowed to guide their actions;
- Being able to assist others to act on emotions most likely to best serve their interests.

### **Psychological Resources**

There are two primary reasons for including psychological resources in the OLF. One reason has to do with the complexity of school leaders' jobs. Complex jobs feature

- Ambiguity (e.g., expectations from parents are sometimes different than expectations of the school system or the Ministry of Education);
- Risk (e.g., school leaders are the focal point for much public accountability); and
- Uncertainty about achieving desired outcomes (e.g., "closing the achievement gap" is a goal for which many schools and their leaders are held accountable even though codified knowledge about how to accomplish this goal is quite limited).

As the challenges facing leaders become increasingly complex, there is an increasing drain on their psychological resources. Well-developed psychological resources allow leaders to cope productively in the face of high levels of complexity without giving up, experiencing excessive strain or becoming burnt out.

A second reason for including psychological resources, particularly the three resources identified here is their contribution to leader initiative, creativity and responsible risk-taking behavior

---

<sup>13</sup> Considerable evidence suggests that initiative a very important component of effective leadership (e.g., Murphy & Johnson, 2011)



to improve their schools unless they believe they have a very good chance of being

Leadership self-efficacy or confidence, it has been claimed, is likely the key cognitive variable regulating leader functioning in a dynamic environment and has a very strong relationship with a leaders' performance. This belief in one's ability encourages leaders to generate alternative means for achieving their goals, to take action toward accomplishing their goals and to persist, in the face of challenges, toward achieving those goals.

### Resiliency

Resilience, the "ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change", is significantly assisted by high levels of efficacy but goes beyond the belief in one's capacity to achieve in the long run. At the core of resiliency is the ability to "bounce back" from failure and even move beyond one's initial goals while doing so. Resilient leaders or potential leaders have the ability to thrive in the challenging circumstances commonly encountered by school leaders.

The combined effect of Optimism, Efficacy and Resiliency, as Luthans and his colleagues explain, is characterized by:

*(1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive expectation (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future...[as well as]... (3) Persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals ... in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.*

### **Using Personal Resources for Leadership Recruitment and Selection**

The three sets of personal resources included in the OLF - cognitive, social and psychological - begin to identify some of the underlying explanations for differences in what leaders do and account for variation among leaders in how well they are able to enact OLF's effective leadership practices. However, the acquisition of some of resources, for most people, takes place over extended periods of time, typically much more time than is provided by even the most well-planned and sustained leadership development program. Of the three sets of Personal Leadership Resources, cognitive resources are the most responsive to direct and short-term intervention. While considerable effort has also been made to develop interventions for improving leaders' social resources, this is a more complex and less certain undertaking. And we know much less about how to successfully build the psychological resources included in the OLF. For these reasons, the possession of many of these resources ought to be among the most important criteria used for the initial recruitment and selection of school leaders.