Reading 8

Leadership and management in building 'learning' schools

S. Davidoff and S. Lazarus

Notes

Literature often suggests that good leadership and management is a matter of implementing efficient rules and procedures. Two South African writers, Sue Davidoff and Sandy Lazarus, disagree. They argue that while it is important to have rules and procedures in schools, ultimately good leadership is an *art*. It relies on intuition and personal judgement rather than merely following established procedures. Thus, good leaders must explore and develop their own personal dispositions, not simply learn new skills. This idea fits closely with the kinds of ideas raised by new management writers, like Peter Senge, and is at the heart of building 'learning organizations'.

Reading

The writers use 'leadership and management' throughout the article. We have removed 'and management' in places for ease of reading, but it should be understood that the article is referring to both whenever 'leadership' is mentioned.

Leadership is an art

(…) The art of leadership is a cyclic and sensitive rhythm of opening and closing, stopping and going, creating and receiving, acknowledging and confronting, observing and shaping. Good leaders need to have vision, imagination, passion about their calling, enthusiasm and commitment. They need to be perceptive, so that they know when to push, and when to hold back; when to direct, and when to let go; when to confront and when to leave the situation unchallenged. Being perceptive means being sensitive to the moods of others, and to their needs and organizational priorities. It means fine-tuning yourself to the almost imperceptible messages that indicate what is required in a particular situation. This requires astute observation skills and the ability to listen accurately and at deep levels, not only to the words but also to the feelings surrounding the

words and movements.

Good leadership is the ability (…) to make informed judgements about how to deal with particular situations out of an inherent wisdom and an understanding of the situation in all its complexities. It's about **having a repertoire of responses** and ways of being and doing in the world. Each moment is unique. What worked yesterday might be completely inappropriate today. Being a good leader means having the flexibility to recognize the difference and respond appropriately, so that you are not bound by rules, but guided rather by wisdom and intuition.

Clearly then, there is no set of rules which, if applied, automatically 'makes' a good leader. There is no blueprint which ensures that if the rules are followed, good leadership will be assured. We can develop skills and can understand more. But the mystery of good leadership does not end with these. The paradox of good leadership is that it is difficult to practise the skills, the marks of good leadership, if they are not really part of you. So another aspect of leadership must be **authenticity**: you need to relate to people (…) in a way that is **genuine** for you. People need to be able to trust you, to know that what you say is what you mean, that what you do is what you truly believe in.

repertoire: here, the word refers to a range, a choice of responses, not just one or two

Does this mean that leaders are born, and the rest of us should give up trying to be good leaders?

Not at all. (…) In the process of transformation, it is possible for anyone to develop the capacity to become a true leader. It does require, however, commitment to the process of inner transformation. (…) Very often our true selves lie buried beneath layers of pain, anger, abuse, fear and mistrust. If we are not conscious that this is so, we can't express our full potential. Realizing our full potential is not just about academic or sporting success or the right career moves. Most importantly, it is the ability to operate with clarity, depth, confidence and integrity in the world. *Good leadership is about deep self-understanding.* It includes the acceptance that we never know or understand ourselves in such a way that there is nothing more to know. *Development is an ongoing process* and, ideally, we never stop learning (…). Essentially, then, we are talking about *morality* as the base of good leadership. We are suggesting that good leadership is about **congruence** between our espoused *values* and our *practices*, about respect for others, about modelling what we expect from others, about being an example of what we talk about. This is what is meant by integrity (…).

congruence: agreement, harmony

There are certain skills and understandings which are necessary to leaders and managers. But good leadership is multi-dimensional and *also* requires ongoing commitment to the process of self-understanding and of understanding others. Since all teachers are leaders in their classrooms, this is true for everyone, not just for principals, deputies and heads of department. Ultimately, the challenge is to build leadership

capacity throughout the school community, including students (who are the leaders of the future and need to be equipped to take up that role), parents and community leaders.

Leadership and management: what do they mean?

If we see, in organizational life (as in personal life), the need to be moving forward, to be purposeful, clear and directed, and yet to have a stable environment which provides the base for this forward movement, then we can understand the need for leadership and management in the school setting. It is precisely the ability to maintain this balance between movement and stability, challenge and safety, which is the art of leadership.

Leadership, then, is about moving forward, and having a sense of direction. It is about ensuring that the school does not get stuck in a rut or become stale and reactive. Good leadership will be aware of the school in relation to its immediate and broader context, and will constantly be seeking ways of making the contributions of the school more relevant, more purposeful. Leadership should be visionary, looking towards the future, and nudging and challenging people within the organization to be alert and awake to the challenges. Being a good leader means making sure that all the people in your organization can share your vision, or build upon it, challenge it and make it their own. Vision-building is essentially a collective activity, but requires that someone has a feeling for the road ahead and can steer the organization accordingly. (…)

However, if there is too much movement and too much challenge, it is likely that there will be a loss of direction. This is where management becomes important. *Management is about holding the school, establishing certainty, confidence and security, and allowing for rest and reflection.* Management is about making sure that the school, as a whole, is functioning effectively and achieving its vision. It is pointless being excited and enthusiastic about infinite possibilities, but not achieving them because they are unmanageable or there is chaos. Management is the function which ensures that:

• things are operating smoothly;
• structures are in place to support forward movement;
• processes are contained;
• the school is operating efficiently.

An important management function is that of 'holding' the organization: providing the framework to fulfil its purpose. Thus, relevant management issues would be:

• systems management (ensuring the relevant structures and procedures are in place and functioning effectively);
• time management (prioritizing tasks, setting time-frames and keeping to them, using time productively – for example, when to have meetings and when to send memos out, and so on);
• stress management (producing a working environment which does

> " … the challenge is to build leadership capacity throughout the school community, including students, parents and community leaders "

not cause unnecessary stress), and conflict management (developing mechanisms for dealing with conflict openly and productively);
- looking after the people in the school: if we are too intent on 'doing the right things', and not sufficiently aware of how they are being done and how people feel about doing them, those deeds will probably be accomplished ineffectively.

So leadership and management is about balance. It's about having a picture of the whole, but attending to the parts; moving forward at the right time and staying put when it's time to reflect. Part of the skill is ensuring that everyone is 'on board', but also ensuring that they are on a journey with direction, that they're all aware of the direction, and that they have all agreed that that is where they would like to go. Having everyone on board with no particular place to go may make people comfortable for a while, but when little or no progress is made people get frustrated. It is not possible to say that good leadership and management is half of each all the time. The art lies in knowing *when* to move forward, and *when* to draw the strands together. (…) Being able to lead a school forward creatively means ensuring that the system is operating smoothly and can support any forward motion through appropriate systems and procedures. In a 'mature' organization – one which has developed all its elements over time and is functioning coherently and effectively – leadership and management should be diversified and not rest on a small number of people. (…) However, it is important not to split the roles of leadership and management between people. Some people may be naturally better at leading than managing, and vice versa. But because leadership and management are so interdependent, they need to be practised together. (…)
In South Africa, schools have been run with a focus on management rather than leadership. Good principals were efficient bureaucrats – people who completed forms on time, who established highly efficient structures which ensured that the school functioned as smoothly as possible. Systems for covering for absent teachers, invigilation timetables, procedures for disciplinary problems and systems of reporting were all regarded as essential aspects of a well-run school. As a result, most schools have been rigid in form, and slow to respond to challenges. Schools underemphasized the need to lead the school purposefully and with fluidity in relation to an ever-changing set of circumstances. (…)

Leadership and management styles

(…) Leadership styles can be described in the following ways (*Hope & Timmel, 1984*):
- *autocratic* – those in positions of power make decisions unilaterally and do not allow dissent (…);
- *laissez-faire* – non-directive and open-ended; recognizes the need for a participatory approach, but does not provide direction or a frame-

Think back to the distinctions made by Hopkins et al. between four kinds of schools (Reading 7). They suggested that some were characterized by too much innovation and too little maintenance. Do you think Davidoff and Lazarus are talking about similar things in their discussion of 'management' and 'leadership'?

work for constructive participation (…);
- *peacemaker* – avoids conflict as a way of keeping everyone satisfied, often at the cost of addressing issues which undermine the effective functioning of the school (…);
- *democratic* – a participatory, consultative, negotiating and inclusive style of leadership.

Heron (*1992*) challenged this way of viewing leadership. He pointed out that if we polarize 'autocratic' and 'democratic' leadership, we run the risk of labelling any form of directiveness as autocratic and authoritarian. Heron maintains that in an effectively and democratically run school, *directiveness is an essential aspect*. He describes three main styles of leadership, *all* of which are important:
- *directive* – leaders need to be directive at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Consultation and negotiation are not always necessary nor advisable, and leaders need to be given the trust and the prerogative to make decisions and to steer the school on a particular course with clarity when necessary. (…)
- *consultative* – there are times when it is absolutely necessary for leaders to consult and negotiate. Without consultation and negotiation, there is unlikely to be shared ownership of any change process, and implementation of ideas is likely to be constrained by lack of commitment. Good leadership means ensuring that appropriate consultation and discussion take place as part of school life. (…)
- *autonomous* – leaders need to know when to delegate authority so that they do not hold the reigns of power unilaterally. Delegation of responsibilities provides an opportunity for other members of the school community to take responsibility for, and to participate in, the life of the school in a more meaningful way. Delegation of tasks allows for the sharing of control and responsibility.

Heron claims that all three styles need to operate while a school is trying to build a democratic ethos. They are interrelated; any one in operation without the others will result in an unbalanced situation. The art is knowing when each is appropriate, and having the wisdom and flexibility to move between them without undergoing 'personality changes' in order to do so. A wise leader is one who does not have only one way of responding to situations.

Gender-based leadership theory

Yarborough (*1985*) maintains that leaders need to have an understanding of the various phases of change, the kinds of roles that are necessary in each phase, the personal qualities required to accompany these roles, and the appropriate intervention methods in each phase. Her approach is based on the assumption that there are two basic forces in any situation: the masculine and the feminine which, in turn, are associated with the directive and the receptive, the hard and the soft, respectively. These

> **" … in an effective and democratic school, directiveness is an essential aspect … "**

two forces are inseparable. Leadership skills involve the gathering of accurate information of how people relate to one another, to leaders, to processes and materials, and then intervening appropriately. Effective leadership involves a holistic orientation towards oneself and others (self-understanding and understanding of others), listening and observation skills for gathering the appropriate information, intervention skills for clarifying action and interaction, and self-development. (…)

Yarborough argues that within a holistic orientation, a soft approach would involve being open, aware, receptive, flexible and open-minded. These stances all increase the leader's ability to perceive people and events in a systematic way, noticing how everything fits together. It is the ability to understand ambiguity, it is the gesture of 'being' rather than 'doing', the gesture of the healer. The hard approach requires the ability to categorize, to judge information, to name certain behaviours and to direct participants to move in a certain way. A hard holistic orientation is interested in efficiency, structure and precision. It is the stance of 'doing', of the warrior. Soft listening skills involve being non-judgemental and non-focused, developing a heightened sensitivity to various stimuli (for example, voice tones, body language, hearing the entire message); concentrating on the interpersonal needs of people's safety, security and closeness, and being accepting and tolerant of where others are. This obviously requires a high degree of self-acceptance. Hard listening skills are focused, quick to respond and offer solutions, and are often related to needs of power and control. Soft observation skills involve seeing the larger picture, noticing a range of behaviours (without interpreting them), and developing images and metaphors for the group. Hard observation skills tend to use the rational mind and focus on the specific. Soft intervention skills involve formulating tentative guesses about the meaning of people's behaviour, reflecting on these behaviours, indicating to participants the function of their behaviour, changing your response as leader without giving feedback, and waiting longer than usual to intervene. Hard intervention skills involve confronting certain behaviours, making suggestions for change, teaching specific skills, indicating your own boundaries as a leader, and indicating concern or worry about certain dynamics.

Self-development is a crucial dimension of good leadership. Leaders themselves are the best (or worst) tools in the facilitation of change. Self-developed leaders, according to Yarborough, are those who are aware and accepting of a wide range of feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and are in themselves *multifaceted*. She emphasizes the importance of being able to embrace all of the above; to be able to understand a situation and to know how to respond appropriately. Empathy and softness are not always helpful and developmental. Similarly, an approach which is always hard, directive, specific and focused will inevitably crush commitment and enthusiasm. Knowing how to lead and manage appropriately does not depend only on learning specific skills, but rather on developing ourselves so that we are able to respond with greater depth, breadth

> " *… effective leadership involves a holistic orientation towards oneself and others …* "

multifaceted: many-sided, not 'one-dimensional'

and understanding in any given situation.

Task and maintenance functions

A major challenge faces leaders attempting to build an effective school: that of creatively and sensitively working with the tension between task (or product needs) and the people (or process) needs of the school. This means ensuring, on the one hand, that the school fulfils its task as defined by its mission and particular goals set, and, on the other hand, ensuring that human and other resource maintenance and development are occurring. These are referred to as the **task and maintenance** functions. Having clear tasks is important for the ongoing development of any school, and for the morale of the teachers. However, when schools become too 'task-oriented', the process of achieving goals is achieved without due respect for the people who are working towards making them happen. This problem can be addressed by becoming more mindful of the maintenance of the organization and the people in it. We should not be so task-oriented that we ignore the realities existing in the school which might hinder the achievement of the tasks. At times it might be necessary to put aside the task at hand and deal with other concerns, for example, people might be experiencing burn-out or some conflict might have arisen. (…)

Empowerment and other issues of power

Essentially leadership is about power relations, about influence. The way an organization is structured and the way people in leadership positions relate to other members of the school community will give some indication of the power relations existing in that particular school. It is important to be able to understand the forms of power and influence existing in a school. If too much power is held within the management structures of the school (or by any other minority or exclusive group), it is likely that the school will not function **optimally** because the contributions of others will be constrained. The challenge is for people who hold positions of power (whether this be structured or through personal and interpersonal dynamics) to ensure that all other role-players feel able to participate meaningfully in the life of the school.

optimally: at its best

There are two dimensions to the empowerment process: *subjective* and *objective* empowerment. Subjective empowerment is about personal power: where people believe that they can make a difference in a situation, where they feel confident and assertive and able to participate. Objective empowerment involves the taking of power, building structures where people can participate and involve themselves in decision-making processes. Objective empowerment links to the need for structural power. Empowerment is about sharing control and responsibility: providing structures (objective, formal) and relationships (subjective, informal) where people are not merely carrying responsibilities, but also

exercising real control over the situations within which they are carrying such responsibilities. (…) Leadership which entrenches *power over* others reinforces unequal power relations, where domination and *subjugation* become part of relationships and of the organization. Those being dominated experience a lack of control over their lives, and their frustration and resentment become part of the culture of the organization. Leadership which supports and encourages *power from within* recognizes the intrinsic worth of all people in the school, and will try to find ways, both at an interpersonal and at a structural level, to validate and give space for the development of all (*Starhawk, 1982*).

Empowerment is important simply because it is a basic human need to feel a sense of control over your life. Without this assurance, people tend to feel disconnected, undervalued and ultimately not engaged in their work. It is very difficult to put your heart fully into something if there is a fundamental sense of lack of control. (…) Empowerment is related to participation: any society is only as good as the people who contribute towards the development of that society. If people do not feel empowered to contribute towards it, that society is weakened. (…)

Empowered leaders have a great degree of self-knowledge, understand themselves, know their own strengths and limitations, and are willing to work towards their own process of transformation. More broadly, an empowered leader is both willing and able to work with others as a team. Empowered leaders keep a freshness and openness to the world so that they remain at a critical edge and recognize that they cannot do everything on their own, and that far more is achieved by working collaboratively with others. The principle of synergy – of understanding and building on the collective energies of *all* role-players to create something far more than individual efforts could achieve – is relevant to the empowered leader. (…)

Building leadership and management capacity

A major challenge for all schools is to build leadership and management capacity throughout the school: teachers, non-teaching staff, students, parents, and any other people involved in the life of the school. (…) Organization development can play a key role in developing this capacity. But, as we have emphasized, it is not merely the acquisition of a particular set of skills, or of a defined volume of information that will build leadership capacity. It is a particular *way of being* in the world, and a way of understanding ourselves, that needs to underpin all of this. It is the artistic interplay between knowledge (and particularly self-knowledge), skills, attitudes and other qualities that will build capacity throughout the school. The way the school is structured and the ongoing staff (and other) development programmes that are in place will ensure such growth.

subjugation: keeping people under one's power; letting them have no power

The importance of participation

Building leadership and management capacity is essentially about participation. When people in any context participate in shaping the life and direction of that situation, their capacity is enhanced. The more people participate, the more meaningfully they will be able to participate. Therefore appropriate structures and processes need to be in place to facilitate such participation, and control and responsibility need to be shared. Participation is not about delegating certain jobs (as decided by management, which essentially maintains control) to particular people. Decision-making is a key issue here: how decisions are made can be a powerful capacity-building (or **breaking**) mechanism. Who makes decisions about what and for whom is a question which needs to be addressed when we talk about capacity-building. It is vital that those people who are affected by particular decisions need to be represented in the decision-making process. Identifying developmental needs among the staff and other role-players (and then making provision for these needs through appropriate programmes, courses and processes, both at the school and off-campus) is an important way of building leadership capacity. It is important to recognize the particular needs of a school, the particular skills and interests of the role-players in the school, and then to try to marry these as far as possible. Providing support and responsibility for people to fulfil tasks which interest and excite them is important in building healthy organizational life. However, this obviously needs to be seen and accomplished within the context of the school's organizational needs.

Davidoff describes an organizational development process at a school she worked with in Reading 12 on page 100.

Finally, the way the school operates as a whole can contribute significantly to the development of leadership and management capacity. Respect for one another, openness, affirming the contributions made by people, structuring meetings in such a way that maximum participation is facilitated, showing interest in others, transparency and accountability and, ultimately, the recognition that every person makes a valuable contribution which needs to be fostered, are all part of the process. (…)

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