LEADERSHIP
DIALOGUES

CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

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Contents

Effective leadership

1   Leadership vs. management

Question

Are leadership and management different, and does it matter?

Why is this important?

One way of understanding the debate about the differences between leading and managing is to think of it in terms of a school's capacity to change. Effective management will lead to incremental improvement that is useful but may not be sufficient. Leadership, by contrast, offers the possibility of transformation.

Key quotes for the section

> The evidence suggests that many school leaders are too involved in operational and delivery matters and that this has been, to some extent, at the expense of embracing their more strategic imperatives … But these ties to the operational space also seem to be related, based on our interpretation of the evidence, to a mindset amongst some school leaders which is often more comfortable with an operational than a strategic role.
>
> **(PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007: 6)**

> Determined and resolute leadership from the headteacher is crucial to improving schools that require improvement. Those headteachers with a successful track record of leading schools from being judged 'satisfactory' to becoming good or better, share some common leadership characteristics. They are absolutely clear that improving teaching and learning is at the heart of what needs to be done, they communicate their high expectations of staff and pupils effectively, and they lead by example, modelling the behaviour they want from their staff.   **(Ofsted, 2012: 4)**

A1

Section discussion (CD-ROM)

This is not a semantic debate. There are many nuances in the definitions of leading and managing. The debate is all-important because it provides a key indication of the relative significance attached to the two elements. The classic distinction belongs to Bennis and Nanus (1985: 21), who distinguish them in terms of leadership being about the right things and management about doing things right. Covey (1992: 101) differentiates between path making and path following. Leadership is thus defined in terms of values, vision and the future. Management is concerned with making the present work.

Which is worse – a school that is well managed and badly led or a school that is badly managed but well led? The answer is, of course, that both scenarios are potentially dysfunctional. There needs to be a balance between leadership and management that is appropriate to the school's context.

A more specific distinction might be found in the comparison between the strategic and the operational. Leadership is about the long-term vision and values of the school; management is about making the school function on a daily basis – the balance between sprint and marathon. Resource A1(i) provides a simple chart to help you to open up debate among your team, beginning by identifying your own position and viewing this in the context of the team.

Schools are complex organisations. Managing them is a sophisticated and challenging process, but that does not make it leadership. Simplistically, the strategic dimension of leadership might be understood in terms of three things: *principle* – the values informing the organisation's culture and priorities; *purpose* – the dominant view as to the *raison d'être* of the school; and *people* – the engagement, motivation and performance of people in securing the principles and purpose. Use resource A1(ii) to consider the balance your leadership team has struck over the past month of meetings. It is not necessarily desirable to have an even split in each dimension, as each school and each part of the journey will require a different focus, but this act of considering the leadership of the organisation is of great potential value for the team.

The operational aspect of leadership, by contrast, is concerned with the routines, systems, structures and procedures that translate principles and aspirations into actual practice. Leadership and management work in a symbiotic relationship, but this should always be with leadership driving management. One issue for leadership teams is to develop a vocabulary that enables effective dialogue about leading and managing. Use resource A1(iii) to analyse the minutes from your last four leadership team meetings, tally the use of the key words (or synonyms) identified and calculate the balance between leadership and management that your team are demonstrating. Are you happy

with your findings? It is common for teams to find that they are focusing more time on management than on leadership. By using tools like this one, it is possible to chart your progress over time.

Key questions

What is the balance in your team between management, leadership and administration (with administration defined as work that could be done by an intelligent 16 year old, i.e. routine procedures)? How would you describe your position on this continuum? Might it be explained by the current context of the school, the expectations of staff, the prevailing school culture or a lack of debate in the school about this issue?

How do your school policies, job descriptions and performance management criteria distinguish between leading and managing? Is this distinction understood and acted on by all leaders and managers?

Do you accept the view put forward in the quotation from PricewaterhouseCoopers?

Resources (CD-ROM)

A1(i)	Finding the leadership/management balance
A1(ii)	The strategic dimension of leadership
A1(iii)	Finding the language of leadership and management

A2

2   Moral leadership

Question

How far is your school a moral community committed to securing equity for all?

Why is this important?

Education is essentially a moral activity. Morality is a crucial factor in educating the next generation, so schools, given the nature of their professional and social responsibilities, need to be moral communities.

There also appears to be a very high correlation between schools that have a clear consensus about their values and those that achieve high performance for all.

Key quotes for the section

> The high quality and performance of Finland's educational system cannot be divorced from the clarity, characteristics of, and broad consensus about the country's broader social vision … There is compelling clarity about and commitment to inclusive, equitable and innovative social values beyond as well as within the educational system.
>
> **(Pont et al., 2008: 80)**

> [For] the majority, the values based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and 'guide to life' provided by the RRSA [Rights Respecting Schools Award] has had a significant and positive influence on the school ethos, relationships, inclusivity, understanding of the wider world and the well-being of the school community, according to the adults and young people in the evaluation schools.
>
> **(Sebba and Robinson, 2010: 8)**

Section discussion (CD-ROM)

Moral leadership is often described as the challenge of converting principles into practice; abstract into concrete; the aspirational into actual experience. Moral behaviour and leadership are about behaviours that focus on complex decision making. In the final analysis, leadership is, often described as 'doing the right thing'. This immediately raises questions about what the right things are and how they are to be agreed.

Decisions imply choices, and it is in the process of choosing between options that leadership will be most clearly manifested as a higher order activity. Indeed, it could be

argued that one of the most significant indicators of the transition from management to leadership, and one of the defining characteristics of highly effective school leadership, is the growth in the range and complexity of decisions that have to be taken. This implies that leaders are morally confident (i.e. they know what they believe) and that leadership teams have developed a consensus (i.e. they agree on the key principles by which they work collaboratively).

Think of a tree. Leaders have deep ethical roots – they are very clear about the fundamental principles by which they live their personal and professional lives. They convert these deeply help principles into personal values – the trunk of the tree, the basis of decision making. Finally, the branches are the day-to-day engagement with the world where ethics and values are converted into action. If the roots are shallow the tree will blow over; if the trunk is not developed the tree will not flourish; if the branches are weak they will break. Resource A2(i) represents this concept on a tree outline. Use this diagram to test the strength of your own ethical leadership.

Although there is very strong agreement about the importance of values in leadership, there is not always the same agreement about what those values should be. UNICEF identify the following core rights for every child in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

→ The right to a childhood (including protection from harm).

→ The right to be educated (including all girls and boys completing primary school).

→ The right to be healthy (including having clean water, nutritious food and medical care).

→ The right to be treated fairly (which includes changing laws and practices that discriminate against children).

→ The right to be heard (which includes considering children's views).

Underpinning these principles is the principle of equity, which is perhaps best understood as all children not only having a right to go to school (equality) but also the right to go to a good school (equity). It is therefore a key function of leadership to ensure equity, consistency and fairness. Few schools would claim any issue with nailing their flag to the UNICEF mast, but many do not necessarily appreciate the full implications of this.

Use resource A2(ii) to consider the extent to which your own school walks the talk. In other words, are principles simply words to please the inspectors or are they really at

A2

the core of all you do? Answer the 10 questions by indicating where you honestly feel the school is on each issue. Once you have completed your own analysis, share this with the rest of your team. If you are unhappy that this questionnaire identifies areas where your actions do not match your words, make rectifying this a priority.

The fundamental issue for leaders and governors is whether, and the extent to which, principle informs practice. Don't assume you are a fair and equitable school just because you say so on your website!

Key questions

To what extent does principle inform practice? For example:

Are the most vulnerable children taught by the most effective teachers (e.g. members of the leadership team)?

Have banding and setting been abandoned because of the negative impact they have on most learners?

Are resources deployed to maximise the impact of intervention strategies?

Do you make maximum use of any 'spare' money?

Resources (CD-ROM)

A2(i)   The effective leadership tree
A2(ii)   The values system for your school

→ ## 3   Brave leadership

Question

What part should bravery play in the role of a school leader?

Why is this important?

Education is frequently the tool by which government tries to make political and social change. Is it the role of a school leader to support the plans of a democratically elected government regardless of personal belief? Or should they fight against changes they believe are not in the best interests of pupils?

Key quotes for the section

> " The opposite of bravery is not cowardice but conformity.
>
> **(Robert Anthony)** "

> " Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.
>
> **(Dwight D. Eisenhower)** "

Section discussion (CD-ROM)

Are you happy with the direction in which you are being asked to take your school? Do you wake up in the morning fired up by the excitement of doing the job you trained for? If the answer to either question is no, maybe bravery is needed. However, before you attempt to repel the forthcoming inspection team by building and arming a 10 metre high barricade, bear in mind that the bravery we need may be something much more subtle. Perhaps, in this case, the bravery is *not* accepting that your only measure of success is jumping your school through the latest set of government hoops. Perhaps the bravery we are talking about here is more akin to the little boy who points out that the emperor is not actually wearing the finest set of clothes in the land, but is in danger of arrest on a public decency charge.

It is important to decide who owns the direction of travel for your school. Is it the government? Sponsors? Local authority? Governors? Leadership team? Community? Pupils? Or a balance between all of these? This is the vital first step for bravery because

if you decide it isn't you, and that you have no part in the process, you have no need for courage. Simply turn up for work every day and do what you are told – and tell the emperor he looks divine. If, however, you accept part of the responsibility for the direction of your school, where do *you* think it should be going? And what makes you believe this to be the case?

Understanding your own beliefs is vital for effective leadership. Often, these will be a complex balance between your political, moral, religious and personal views, and the experiences you have gained as a school leader or classroom practitioner. You will probably also have ideas and opinions from observed practice and research. This will all be mixed together into a complex stew, often referred to as 'gut'. This gut feeling, once properly investigated and substantiated, should not be discarded but actually used as your touchstone for the journey ahead. Too often, leaders are so focused on the next step in the path that they fail to notice the journey they are on. They accept that some greater force is guiding their way and that completion of the day's tasks is all that is needed to succeed. Challenge the journey you are on as a team. Spend time deciding if the current direction of travel is in agreement with the aims you share for the school.

Use resource A3(i) to focus your discussion about what constituent parts your school is aiming for. Are all the arrows pointing in the same way? If you wish to investigate this in more detail, use the arrow template to reproduce the diagram on a larger scale, using one arrow for each group. This may help you to decide where your priorities should lie – any arrow that is clearly aiming in a different direction should not be ignored.

Resource A3(ii) will help you to focus on what you are currently doing and how this fits into the overall direction of your school. Are you currently on a carefully charted journey or a series of random meanderings?

Now is the time for courage. Bravery without direction is pointless and very foolhardy; bravery must be associated with clarity of thinking and an ability to explain that vision widely. It could be argued that fearlessness should be a skill that is internally awarded rather than acknowledged by others. In other words, if someone remarks, 'Isn't she/he a brave leader?', might this be because they are perceived as going where others would not? Maybe true bravery is giving colleagues the self-belief that the path to be travelled is the one they wish to embark on.

The brave leadership team is many times more powerful than a brave head. A leadership team that deliberately chooses a daring path will do so having considered the risks and understood the difficulties the journey ahead may hold. Use resource A3(iii) to focus the team on finding a clear consensus on the next stage for the school. Distilling the complexity of a school into this simple diagram could be one of the most effective

things you could do to move your school forwards. Can you all agree over what your school is about? Why it exists? And how you will know that it is successful? If your team is motivated by this new clarity of purpose, a team bravery pledge is included for signing (A3(iv))!

Key questions

Who is setting the direction in your school? What is it?

Do you fully agree with the direction of travel?

How have your own opinions been formed? Do they stand up to scrutiny?

When did you last share your vision for the school?

How can you show brave leadership to get there?

Are you part of a brave leadership team?

Resources (CD-ROM)

A3(i)	Who leads your school?
A3(ii)	Do your views stand up to scrutiny?
A3(iii)	What is the direction for your school?
A3(iv)	Bravery pledge

"This is a book that provides a wealth of material for school leaders to get their teeth into … to chew over for themselves and digest the arguments and counter arguments. The text is refreshingly full of experience and insight about how to run a school successfully, not to a formula or defined model, but to the needs of the school community. It offers the reader the chance to find their own starting point based on the circumstances particular to their own school situation."

Mick Waters, Professor of Education at Wolverhampton University

"*Leadership Dialogues* does something rather different from all the other school leadership books – it's designed to use collectively with fellow members of the school's wider leadership. A practical book about principles, a set of questions and provocations to be deployed by leadership teams in order to hold a regular mirror up to what they are doing and how. The format is simple, pithy, deeply informative and full of challenging questions and suggestions that will help to constantly re-root us in what matters most, to think about what our priorities are and why.

"From where I sit, almost thirteen years into headship, *Leadership Dialogues* feels like a necessary and indispensable text."

Geoff Barton, Head Teacher, King Edward VI School

"West-Burnham and Harris's experience in educational leadership burns through every page of *Leadership Dialogues* and, in writing it, they have created a resource that is not only illuminating and helpful, it's also important. A key message is that as leaders we need to ensure that our professional contributions and conversations are transformational and not simply incremental; we need to contribute effectively across the piece. *Leadership Dialogues* offers us the tools to do this (including a nifty CD-ROM of additional resources) whilst developing a strong culture of learning, research and inquiry at the hearts of our communities. A must-read."

Hywel Roberts, Teacher, imagineer, author and trainer

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