

Explanation of the categories in the ‘Monitoring School Leadership’ tool

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The design of the ‘Monitoring School Leadership’ tool is based on the assumption that leadership is not simply ‘what the school principal does’, but that it is a dimension of the complex life of the school. In any organisation we can discern patterns of influence and direction setting (Leithwood & Rheel, 2003). If we apply a socio-cultural perspective, we can see that leadership is evident in the interaction between members of the school community (Spillane et al., 2004). Another way to put this is to say that ‘Leadership is a distributed phenomenon’ (Woods & Roberts, 2013).

It is also recognised of course that the senior leadership team (principal, deputy principals etc) have a special role in the leadership of the school. They are likely to spend more time and energy than others devising ways to set the direction of the organisation and to influence the behaviour of others, but the evidence from school effectiveness research tells us that capacity building (Day & Sammons, 2013) and distributed leadership (Woods & Roberts, 2013) are essential for school improvement. Transformational approaches are axiomatic (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). They build culture.

It has been argued that ‘culture building’ is the most important part of any chief executive’s job (Schein, 1985). The professional culture in a school constitutes the dominant values, assumptions and beliefs which are expressed in language and rituals and can be observed as enacted in the norms of behaviour. Schein’s theory focused on the apex of the organisation, but it can be argued that every member of the school community contributes to culture building albeit sometimes accidentally rather than strategically.

In the English education system, the school inspectors work to a handbook (Ofsted, 2015) which requires them to ‘consider the quality of middle leadership in the school’. This has two dimensions: a) ‘the extent to which schools are adequately developing their middle leadership’, and b) ‘the succession planning and development of future leaders in the school’. These are important considerations but limited in scope.

The monitoring tool is constructed as a matrix. The vertical categories – Purposes – represent the outcomes of school leadership and therefore the rationale for leadership actions. The horizontal set of categories - Spheres of leadership action – represent the means by which leadership is exercised.

Purposes

These appear on the vertical dimension of the matrix. Each of the seven categories are explained in brief below.

To build a coherent vision

In order to have the capacity for improvement and to have sufficient consistency in standards and professional practice, school principals will seek to maximise the extent to which the entire school community including teachers, students and their parents share common goals, values and priorities. It is fallacious to assume that this can be achieved by simply telling everyone what the school principal's vision is. Setting direction is a key dimension of leadership (Yukl, 2010) but chief executives need to cultivate and nurture 'visioning' through a wide range of activities if it is to be authentically shared in common throughout the organisation.

To build social capital

In Putnam's terms, social capital comprises the norms of behaviour, social values and networking (1995). He derived his theoretical perspective from a study of societies, but his ideas are easily applicable to organisations such as schools (Hargreaves, 2001). The capacity of a school to improve itself and achieve a high level of consistency in its practice depends on the degree of trust that exists between members of the school community (Bryck & Schneider, 2002). When colleagues trust each other, they are more likely to be able to share ideas and engage in collegial review, self-evaluation and practice development.

To facilitate knowledge sharing

High social capital is a pre-condition for knowledge building. In commercial and industrial contexts, the literature on knowledge management is often drawn upon in the analysis of the extent to which employees collaborate to increase their collective wisdom. In educational contexts it may be better to talk of 'knowledge building' which implies a more collegial approach in which the principle of professional judgement is upheld (Frost, 2013).

To maintain sustainability

Schools that will be successful in the future will have developed their 'leadership capacity' (Lambert, 1993). This entails both effective succession planning as well as strategies to support and develop the growth of leadership expertise throughout the organisation. The latter may be addressed by accessing continuing professional development programmes. For example, in England the government grants licenses to a variety of organisations to provide courses that lead to the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership. Such programmes, both externally provided and run by schools themselves, are common, but leadership development can be accomplished through systems of shadowing and deputising.

To enable teachers to exercise leadership

Teacher leadership plays a key role, not only in developing leadership capacity, but also in mobilising the creativity and moral purpose of teachers (Frost & Roberts, 2013). In the

HertsCam Network (www.hertscam.org.uk) we have shown how teachers can be enabled to become agents of change. It can also be argued that democratic societies are nurtured when teachers experience full participation in their professional communities, contributing their ideas and having a voice. This experience is likely to be reflected in their pedagogic values and beliefs.

To enable students to exercise leadership

Students occupy a range of roles in the process of learning, some passive and some active. Chis Watkins said: 'In classrooms where a sense of community is built, students are crew, not passengers' (Watkins, 2005: 47). Schools also vary in the extent to which they engage students as partners. For some it is a matter of allowing students a voice by consulting them (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) but some commentators would say that this can be tokenistic. In some schools 'leadership density' (Sergiovanni, 1987; 2001) is evident when students have the right to be proactive and exercise leadership to address their concerns about school life, and support to enable them to do this (MacBeath et al., 2008).

To enable parents to exercise leadership

There has been a wide range of different types of research focusing on the crucial role of parents in the process of their children's learning and in the life of the school (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011), but still many schools fail to engage parents. This may be because the culture engendered by the neoliberal policy environment tends to cast parents in the role of consumers rather than partners. Beyond the usual pursuit of effectiveness there are serious questions about equity which can be addressed when the school enables parents to exercise leadership (Díez, Gatt & Racionero, 2011; Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014).

Spheres of leadership action

These appear on the horizontal dimension of the matrix. Each of the five categories are explained in brief below.

Organisational structures

These constitute the fabric of the organisation and are often dictated by national systems or can seem to be immutable merely because of tradition. Issues of power and authority associated with positions and procedures can be obscured by concerns with accountability and efficiency. In the UK, schools are increasingly free to design and develop their own organisational structures but in some countries, this seems unattainable (Yakavets et al., 2015).

Transactional intervention

This category is seemingly out of place given what is said above about the importance of transformational leadership and capacity building. In the literature the transformational and transactional approaches are cast as dichotomous (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). However, for a range of complex reasons, the hierarchical organisation model persists for schools and this

gives those in positions of responsibility the additional resources of power and authority which can be used to intervene, to indicate value to this or that behaviour, to sanction or discourage. The question is whether this is done in ways that help to build capacity or not.

School improvement strategies

Strategic thinking about the school as an organisation is a challenge for all concerned, but it is reasonable to expect that the school principal will be the key strategist. Research shows that improvement in school performance requires strategies rather than mere tactics (Gray et al., 1999). Strategies might include things such as a system of classroom observation and mentoring or a reorganisation of the timetable of lessons and lunch breaks in order to create more time for learning.

Programmes

This category is closely related to the one above. The distinction is that programmes are more tightly designed with a clear set of goals, beginning and end dates, costing and so on. In the English system it is common for example to design and deliver a 'Middle Leaders Development Programme' which would be a series of training sessions for those with positions of responsibility such as 'Head of Department'. The HertsCam Network's TLDW programme is an example of programmes that are 'non-positional' (Hill, 2014) and concerned to build the leadership capacity of all teachers.

Tools and resources

This is so commonplace that we may fail to reflect sufficiently on the choice and design of tools. This document is a tool. An agenda for a meeting is a tool (Spillane et al., 2004). A Staff Bulletin is a tool. In schools where there is a high level of 'leadership density' (Sergiovanni, 1987; 2001) or which could be described as 'leaderful organisations' (Raelin, 2003), tools are more likely to be used to facilitate collective deliberation and reflection.

Using the matrix

From the inspector's perspective, at least those in the English system, it would be difficult to collect hard evidence of the successful realisation of the kinds of purposes and actions outlined above, but this should not be reason for ignoring them. The matrix offered here can help us to shine a light on good leadership practice and stimulate discussion about how leadership could be improved. It can be used to identify dimensions of leadership practice and to highlight the gaps in both intention and action.

We can use the matrix to frame questions that could be put to teachers and senior leaders during a school visit. For example, if we look at the first of the categories in the vertical dimension: '*To build a coherent vision*', this might suggest a question such as '*How does this school work towards shared values and common professional standards?*'.

Answers to such a question might vary according to whom the question is addressed. One answer – perhaps from a teacher - might be: "*When you first join this school you get a*

teachers' handbook which sets out everything that is expected of you". Another answer – perhaps from a Deputy Principal - might be: “*We have a staff conference every term in which the Principal gives us a talk about the school's priorities and then we organise everyone into discussion groups to explore the implications for our practice.*” In this way, a picture of leadership practice can be produced and a helpful discussion can arise.

What remains of course is the challenge of how leadership actions can be evaluated. It may be that this is beyond the scope of a brief school visit, but senior leaders in the school can be encouraged to undertake self-evaluation exercises which could then be judged by visiting inspectors as to their validity and effectiveness.

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