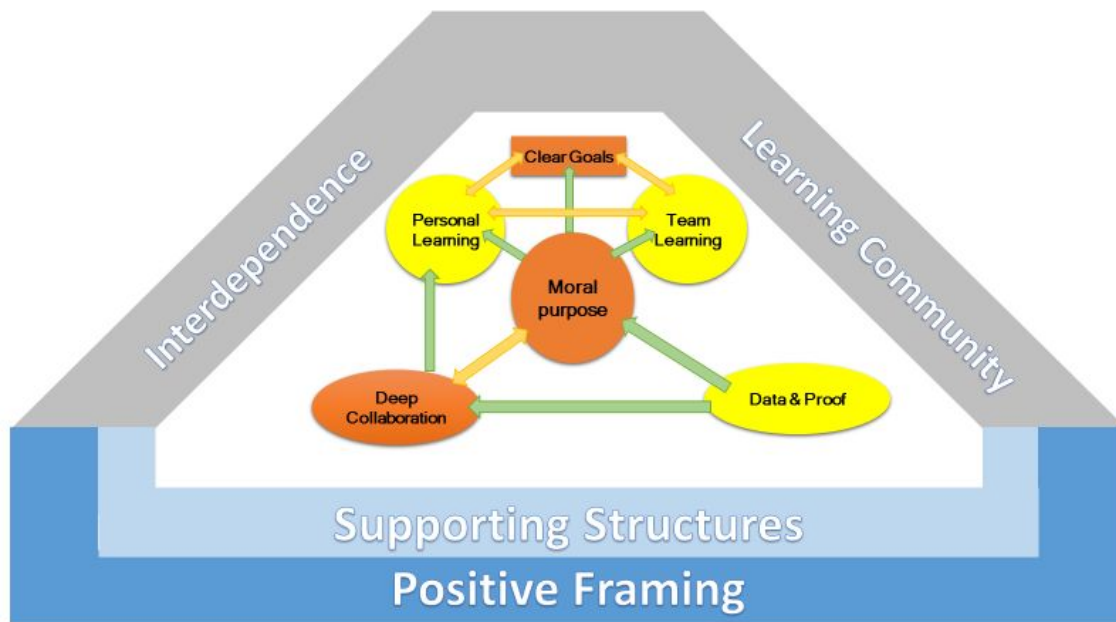


Leadership for Collaborative Practice: a self-reflective framework

This article is adapted from part of my Masters coursework project that I completed in 2017. In this investigation, I created a self-reflective framework for leaders based on theories on aspects of leadership that are most conducive facilitating meaningful collaboration. Since creating the framework, I have continued to use it in my practice on a daily basis. Below is an extract from my project. It is very ‘theory heavy’, but I agree with Evans, Thornton and Usinger (2012) who stress the importance of using theory to guide practice and using the work of others to open up the possibility of creating one’s own theories.

Here is the framework that I created:



Leadership reflective framework

And below is an explanation of where it came from. Enjoy!

Notes from IB documents, over 20 journal articles and 8 books (see References) were collated and 7 reoccurring themes were identified.

The key reoccurring themes are:

- 1) Interdependence over hierarchy
- 2) Positive framing
- 3) Structures that support, not suffocate
- 4) The school as a learning community
- 5) Shared vision and moral purpose
- 6) Clear goals
- 7) Deep collaboration

Theme 1: Interdependence over hierarchy

Literature on leadership has seen a move away from hierarchical structures to distributed practices. As far back as the 1930's, Mary Parker Follet questioned hierarchical forms of organisational leadership, applying the concept of nonlinear dynamics to managerial practices (McLarney & Rhyno, 1999; Mendenhall, Macomber & Cutright, 2009). The move away from hierarchical leadership is a move away from a "subject-object" relationship between administrators and teachers towards a web of interdependence (Senge, 2006; Smythe 1989).

Sergiovanni (1994) calls for schools to change their "root metaphor" (p.215) from organisations (which assume hierarchical structures) to communities which are "organised around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them" (p.217). Similarly, the DAC model of leadership (Direction, Alignment, Commitment) proposed by Drath et al. (2008) is a move away from leader - follower assumptions towards patterns of behaviour between all members of the community which demonstrate, by their existence, leadership presence.

Senge's concept of systems thinking focuses on "the whole" by acknowledging the interdependence of each part. The discipline of systems thinking fuses together his other disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning (Senge, 2006). Like each of the 7 themes presented here, although they are discussed separately, they work as an interdependent system.

Theme 2: Positive framing

In the model of Appreciative Inquiry, the focus is on the positive, rather than "what needs to be fixed". This positivity does not mean that problems are ignored. Rather, problems are

viewed as hurdles to overcome en route to the “image of the future” (Bushe and Kassam, 2005, p.167).

Sergiovanni (1998) refers to the difference between positive and negative framing as the “constrained” and “unconstrained” narrative (p.43). In the “constrained” narrative, people are believed to be self-centred, leading to a culture of reward and punishment. The “unconstrained narrative” is dependent on human altruism; motivation is intrinsic and based on care for the common good. Sergiovanni admits that the “truth lies somewhere between” (p.45). However, the positive framing of the unconstrained narrative supports the power of positive intrinsic motivation based on shared moral purpose.

Theme 3: Structures which support, but do not suffocate.

Sergiovanni’s tasks for leadership (1998) include a “workable set of procedures and structures” (p.41). Caine and Caine (2010) define protocols as a “container” (p.39). An organisation that does not rely on top-down mandates needs some sort of guiding structure. There are many declared models in literature - some more prescriptive than others. The amount of regulation in the container needs to scaffold, but not constrict, or it may start to mirror hierarchical organisational practice. Examples of structures include allocated time for collaboration; meeting agendas; the organisation of study groups; essential agreements. The usefulness of these structures needs to be reviewed; paperwork without purpose is pointless.

Theme 4: The school as a learning community

“Intellectual stimulation”, according to Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014, p.178), is an essential ingredient in creating a collaborative culture. The leadership practice with the biggest effect size in Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe’s literature analysis (2008) was engaging in professional

learning. In their critique of Appreciative Inquiry, Busch and Kassam (2005) stress the necessity of acquiring new knowledge in order for the process to be transformational.

Sergiovanni (1998) argues for the importance of developing “professional capital” (p.40), by actively encouraging teachers to be inquirers themselves. E. Hargreaves et al. (2014) connect teacher learning to a leadership style that motivates intrinsically through teacher autonomy, choice and responsibility. Tapping into teachers’ intrinsic motivation to learn is exemplified by Senge’s concept of personal mastery: the continuous pull that comes from where one sees oneself and where one wants to go (Senge, 2006, 2012).

Senge (2012) recommends an approach where all members of the community “continuously develop and grow in each other’s company” (p.4). A learning school is thus a school where everyone’s personal learning passions coexist along shared community learning. Senge’s “team learning” (p.115) needs the honest dialogue of deep collaboration (number 7 on our list) and is motivated by shared vision, our next item.

Theme 5: Shared vision and moral purpose

Shared vision is evident in many leadership models. It is key feature of Senge’s systems thinking (Senge, 2006, 2012); MacNeil, Cavanagh & Silcox’ framework for pedagogical leadership (2015); Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) and Sergiovanni’s “ten tasks” (Sergiovanni, 1998, p.41). Kong and Sperandio’s study (2013) identifies a “shared vision of learning that permeates the school” (p.78) as a key indicator of a school’s success within the IB PYP.

For the shared vision to be powerful, it needs to bring people together by tapping into their values and beliefs, (Fullan, 2001; Kinjerski & Skrypek, 2004) and be “worth fighting for” (A.

Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris, 2014, p.11). With the emphasis on the importance of beliefs, it may seem surprising that the IB uses Guskey's model (Guskey, 2002) as its theoretical framework for adult learning (IB, 2013b). Beliefs, Guskey argues, do not change without solid classroom evidence. Although Guskey's model initially seems unconnected to creating shared vision, his model is based on the theory that teachers genuinely want to improve student learning. This strong moral purpose, revolving around student learning, thus serves as a vessel for a shared teacher belief system. Opinions on *how* may vary, but the moral purpose of *what* teachers want, can be a uniting force.

Theme 6: Clear goals

Clearly defined goals are identified as high priority in several studies (Robinson et al., 2008; Szczesiul and Huizenga, 2014; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes & Kyndt, 2015). Reeves (2009) goes as far as to say that "every collaborative meeting must have defined results" (p.47). Spark's rubric for team collaboration (2013) has "clarity of purpose" (p.30) as its primary expectation. A recent collaborative planning rubric from the IB (2016) identifies "actionable outcomes", as criteria for success. Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014) conclude that clear goals lessen the burden on teachers and provide accountability.

Like the shared vision, the quality of the goals is important. If goals are based on what matters, student learning, they will connect to the shared vision of the teachers and ultimately elicit more commitment.

Theme 7: Deep collaboration

Woodland, Lee and Randall (2013) warn against "making nice," confusing "congeniality and imprecise conversation" (p.444) with professional dialogue that is needed for a learning community. Further literature concludes that all teacher collaborations are not equal. Focused

collaboration requires bravery to examine and challenge each other's deeply held beliefs (Caine & Caine, 2010; Fullan, 2001; Reeves, 2009; Senge, 2006, 2012; Tam, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2015).

The influence of deeply held assumptions has already been introduced in our cross-cultural context. For Senge it is important to cultivate a culture where people can expose their own thinking, opening it up to the critique of others (Senge, 2006, 2012). Caine and Caine (2010) examine the role of dialogue in helping members of the group loosen fixed ideas "so they can penetrate deeper meanings." Dialogue is not about "consensus building" (p.179). It is honest, reflective, non-competitive, non-egocentric conversation.

Evans et al. (2012) clarify the role of data in facilitating dialogue. Data is neutral; although it may be viewed with different perspectives, it can be the springboard for deep discussion and, "illuminate frames of reference and surface individual assumptions" (Wellman & Lipton, 2004 as cited in Evans et al., 2012, p.163). This supports Guskey's argument that teachers require proof. In a PYP context, the proof may include examples of student work, observation notes, diagnostic assessments or report data. When student achievement is the focus of discussions, specialist teachers have an important role; they are teaching the same children, but in a different context. Their input is invaluable in building a picture of the whole child.

Leadership reflective framework

The leadership reflective framework (above) is a visual representation created from the 7 themes, their necessary ingredients and their connections. From the 7 leadership themes, the concept of *interdependence* and the school as a *learning community* act as guiding scaffolds which encompass every other element. *Positive framing* and *supporting structures* act as interdependent containers which support shared *moral purpose*, *clear goals* and the honest

dialogue needed for *deep collaboration*. Practical *data and proof* are used to deepen dialogue and provide accountability. *Personal learning* and *team learning* are essential ingredients in the learning community, connected to the *moral purpose*. They simultaneously influence and are guided by *clear goals*. All parts of the model are interdependent. For example, to create a safe place for honest dialogue, we need to provide structures where all teachers are given the opportunity to be listened to. If data is going to be used as a springboard for deep discussion, we need protocols for teachers to collect meaningful assessment data.

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