

A Model of Successful School Leadership

By Maqsood Ali

According to some social scientists, “there is no consensus about the definition of leadership. Definitions of leadership are often ‘arbitrary’ and ‘subjective’”.¹ However, in the field of education and, in particular, the school context, leadership is defined by some scholars as “those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school’s goals”.² To some scholars, “[i]t is the second most significant school-based variable influencing student outcomes, after classroom teaching.”³ According to Gurr, “in some cultures, there are more than one principle or leadership arrangements”.⁴ There may be proliferated leadership or dispersed leadership.⁵ Whereas in other cultures, there may be one single school leader. To cut it short, “in most countries it is the [headmaster/headmistress or] principal who is regarded as the key educational leader and the one person in a school who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership.”⁶ Nevertheless, it indicates that there, based on the degree of autonomy given to schools, are various structures of leadership existing in the world.⁷ These various leadership structures may be narrowed into two prism-type paradigms *inter alia* centralized and decentralized.

¹ Jita, L. C., & Mokhele, M. L. (2013). “The Role of Lead Teachers in Instructional Leadership: A Case Study of Environmental Learning in South Africa.” *Education as Change Volume 17*, No. S1, 2013, p. S124.

² Leithwood, K. & Riehl, C. (2003). What do we already know about successful school leadership?, paper presented at the *American Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, Chicago, p. 9.

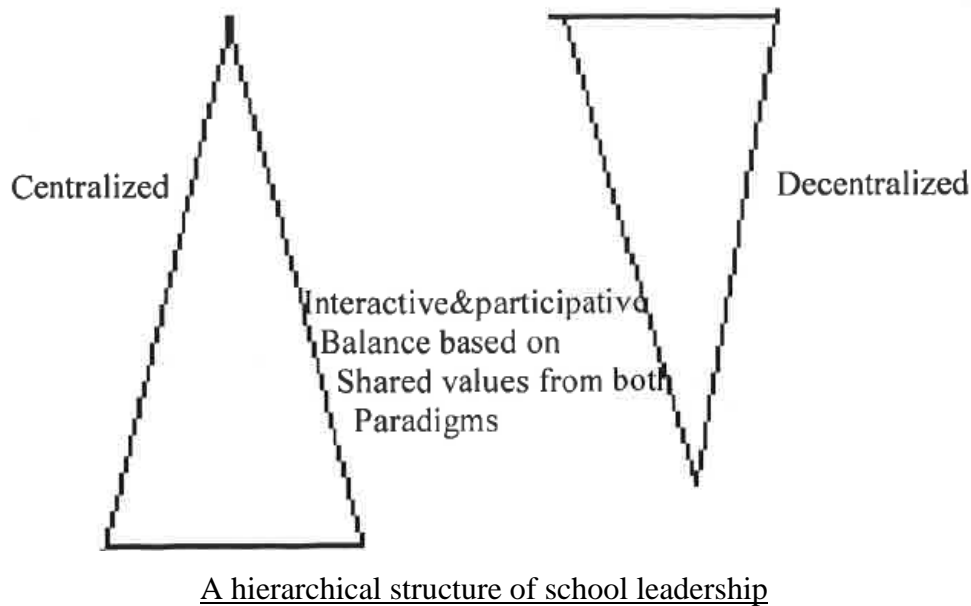
³ Bush, T. (2021). Assessing successful school leadership: What do we know? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, Vol. 49, Issue 5, pp. 687-688.

⁴ Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Models of successful principal leadership, *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 371.

⁵ Grant, C. (Callie) (2017). Distributed leadership in South Africa: yet another passing fad or a robust theoretical tool for investigating school leadership practice?, *School Leadership & Management*, Vol. 37, No. 5, pp. 468-469.

⁶ Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). *Ibid*, p. 371.

⁷ E.g., Höög, J., & Johansson, O. (2005). Successful principalship: Successful principalship: the Swedish case, *Journal of Educational Administration* Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 595-606.



The above-mentioned top-down prism-type paradigm presents centralized and the down-top prism-type paradigm presents decentralized hierarchical structures. The top-down prism-type paradigm points out that command and control are framed from top to down. It shows a centralized system of governance and a typical role of leadership therein.⁸ In a centralized system of governance, a single head/principal/leader is appointed with formal qualifications by government authorities.⁹ He/she inherits a structure with delegated responsibilities. Formal leadership adheres to a typical structure and protocol. In many countries, there exists a hierarchical structure of leadership. For example, in the UK “schools are by history and nature hierarchical.”¹⁰ In regard to the hierarchical structure, the centralized and decentralized paradigms may have commonalities, however, the centralized leadership paradigm may be authoritarian in type and secluded in its characterization. Such type of leadership paradigms is viewed to be less effective in securing the desired outcomes.¹¹

The down-top prism-type paradigm points to the second type of hierarchy. It, by its characteristics, may be called a decentralized leadership structure wherein the leadership,

⁸ E.g., Jita, L. C., & Mokhele, M. L. (2013). Ibid, pp. S123–S135. In the article, Jita & Mokhele explored “the opportunities and challenges for a teacher-level curriculum leadership within an otherwise centralised system of education.” (p. 123).

⁹ E.g., MacBeath, J. (2005). Leadership as distributed: a matter of practice, *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 357.

¹⁰ MacBeath, J. (2005). Ibid.

¹¹ E.g., Phillips, V. (2001). Leadership in education: flavour of the month or serious business. In Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2012). Distributed leadership in action: leading high-performing leadership teams in English schools, *School Leadership & Management* Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 22.

administration and teaching practices are inclusive, resorting to the inclusion of all the actors, participants and stakeholders.¹² It should be noted that both the paradigms, centralized and decentralized, stand on certain values and principles, based on which the leadership roles are rendered. These values, principles and practices, despite being similar in many respects, still vary or even differ, considering the aims and objectives in the background of a particular culture.¹³ It means that these variations or differences may affect a school's effectiveness, success or productivity.¹⁴ For productive services, it, therefore, is important to have a balanced interaction of both prism-type paradigms. This interactive and participative balance (equal opportunities) deserves to be based on or calls for shared values taken from both prism-type paradigms.¹⁵ It points to a greater impact on leadership and subsequently on child development.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of human ecology revolves around various learning environments and their impact on child development and in that regard, he created a model that consists of four settings i.e., micro, meso, exo and macro that is a hierarchy of systems moving from the most proximal to the most remote or the vice versa.¹⁶

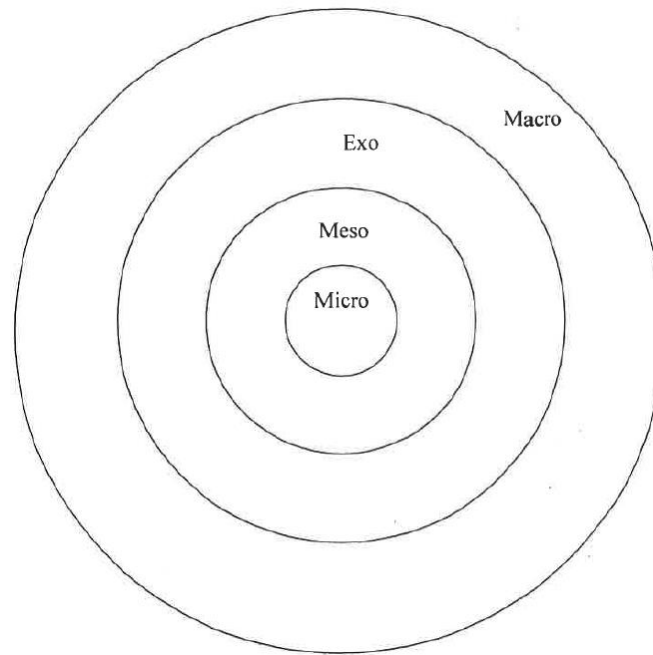
¹² Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited, *School Leadership & Management*, Vol. 40, Issue 1, pp. 13-14 (see the 6th claim, wherein DeFlaminis was cited to have "found that open patterns of leadership distribution were established by flattening the hierarchy and creating new opportunities for those at school and district levels to lead based on their expertise rather than their position."). Harris, A., & DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Distributed leadership in practice: Evidence, misconceptions and possibilities, *Management in Education*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 141-146.

¹³ E.g., Catholic schools, Jewish schools, Muslim schools & secular schools. More at, Hargreaves, A. & Ainscow, M. (2015). The top and bottom of leadership and change. *Phi Delta Kappan* Vol. 97, Issue 3, pp. 42-48. Moos, L., et al. (2005). Successful school principalship in Danish schools, *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 43, Issue 6, p. 563-572. Grant, C. (Callie) (2017). Ibid, pp. 457-475. See also the theoretical model of human development, mentioned below.

¹⁴ Sometimes the terms such as effectiveness & success are interchangeably used for intended outcomes. According to some scholars, for example, "the meaning of successful and effective school leadership is varied for conceptual and contextual reasons. They comment that the term 'successful' is more inclusive than 'effective'". More at, Bush, T. (2021). Ibid, p. 687. Mulford, B. (2003). Balance and learning: crucial elements in leadership for democratic schools, *Leadership and Policy in School*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 110-112 (Mulford talks about illusions related to effectiveness, success & change.).

¹⁵ Hargreaves & Ainscow evidence how a number of schools with different paradigms and structural hierarchies were made to interact with one another, participate in joint activities & share the reasons behind positive outcomes. This interaction & participation based on shared values gave rise to a positive change in all the schools and their learning environments. More at, Hargreaves, A. & Ainscow, M. (2015). Ibid, pp. 42-48. Mulford, B. (2003). Ibid, pp. 109-124. Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Ibid, pp. 372 & 374-389. Grant, C. (Callie) (2017). Ibid, p. 460-462 & 466.

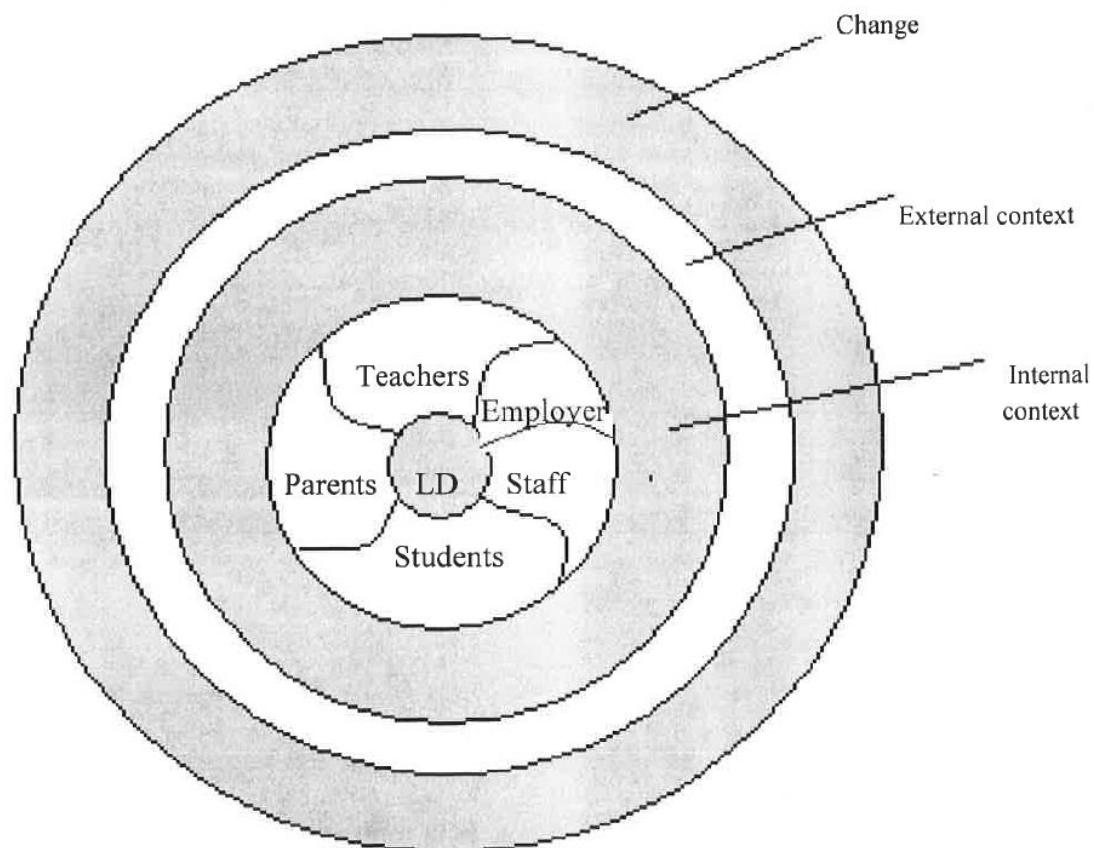
¹⁶ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 226-249). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



Model of Human Ecology Theory

The school system, considering the above-cited model, exists in the micro settings. Moreover, micro settings consist of elements that directly influence the school environment and the participants thereof, including head/leader/principal who is one of the core actors within the school environment in terms of leading the matters and decision-making thereof. Those elements, in addition to school, include home, the first learning centre for a child. The meso settings contain the interaction of or the linkage between/among the microsystems (e.g., home & school). The processes occurring therein are part of the meso settings. A mesosystem gathers on the microsystems. The exo-settings consist of the elements that may partly affect the developing person (child) and partly don't. Parents' workplace may be one such example. Briefly, it depends on how close the mesosystems or the processes involved therein are to the child, *inter alia*, the closer these environmental settings are to the child, the more impact these may have on his/her development. The macro settings are the environments that have an indirect (but considerable) influence on the microsystems such as education policies that are made by those who generally are not in a direct relationship with the children. The macro system also includes belief systems or ideology, ethnic or religious communities, subcultures, social classes, lifestyles or other broader social structures and so on. In short, the macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exo-systems. There may be other features of the macrosystem that are not merely structural but also developmentally instigative.

However, considering the above model, the micro settings are actively child-centered *inter alia* whoever or whichever comes in direct interaction with the child, generally falls in the micro settings which call for corresponding measures on the part of participants including the leadership because it ultimately is the child and, in particular, his/her quality and productive learning that matters. The following diagram may give us a better understanding related to the model of successful school leadership.



Wheel Mechanism in School System

In the above-mentioned diagram, the innermost circle is about the leadership (LD), the driving force revolving around various participants, whereas the outer circle is about the change that is contextualised in various ways in this article and elaborated in this paragraph too. Change, in fact, comes from internal and external contexts, acting in circles in the above-cited diagram. Internal and external contexts may be called as stressors or forces. These stressors or the forcing factors shape the microenvironment leading to change, a sustained and renewed change.

Change, within the school context, may mean a positive and improved outcome.¹⁷ It is also implied in the aims, objectives, goals, vision, mission or success which may vary from time to time.¹⁸ From another perspective, change may mean a new or renewed understanding and transformation (a conception of transformational leadership, which appeared in the literature in the 1990s, “was a reaction to the type of leadership that emphasizes hierarchy and top-down relationships”).¹⁹ In the above-mentioned paradigm, change is a dominating or overwhelming factor, considering various types of contexts.²⁰ For example, an internal context that may be based on or includes school profile, history, type, location, size, reputation, socioeconomic status, values and beliefs, quality, traditions and so on.²¹ External context may be grounded on society, organisations, local media, councils, community, national context, culture, State policies, global stressors and so on.²² These contexts, whether described under Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model of human ecology or in another way by scholars, play a great part when it comes to everyday decision-making processes related to children. These contexts are attributed as the stressors or forcing factors giving rise to change that has an impact on the decision-makers. Change is a challenge under the wheel mechanism.

According to some scholars, “leadership is about communication, decision making and community building at several levels in schools.”²³ However, his/her leading role seems to be

¹⁷ Hargreaves & Ainscow evidentially explain how the interactive & participative processes based on shared values of both paradigms (the top & the bottom) changed a number of schools in the UK & Canada in terms of learning outcomes. They further explain how the barriers such as unfair budgetary allocations & unhealthy interschool competitions imposed by the top-down hierarchies were suppressed in collaboration by changing the schools into budgetarily balanced and healthy learning environments for all. A fair or balanced interaction and participation of different hierarchies based on shared values enriched learning environments and learning outcomes of a number of schools. More at, Hargreaves, A. & Ainscow, M. (2015). Ibid, pp. 42–48.

¹⁸ E.g., Grant, C. (Callie) (2017). Ibid, pp. 457-475. Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Ibid, p. 387. Höög, J., & Johansson, O. (2005). Ibid, pp. 595-606.

¹⁹ Gumus, S., et al. (2018). “A Systematic Review of Studies on Leadership Models in Educational Research from 1980 to 2014.” *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, Vol. 46, Issue 1, p. 31. Höög, J., & Johansson, O. (2005). Ibid, p. 597. Mulford, B. & Silins, H. (2003). Ibid, p. 187.

²⁰ Regarding the example of the application of distributed leadership in contextualised settings & change, “[t]he Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project [DLP] was one of the first efforts in the United States to deliberately take on the challenge of building distributed leadership capacity in a diverse set of urban schools.” According to Harris & DeFlaminis, “[t]he DLP has exemplified the potential for distributed leadership to contribute to authentic school improvement, school transformation and change.” More at, Harris, A., & DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Ibid, pp. 142–144.

²¹ Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Ibid, p. 381. Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L., (2005). Successful principal leadership: Australian case studies, *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 43, No. 6, p. 541 (e.g., see the selection criteria). Mulford, B. & Silins, H. (2003). Ibid, (see the context section, p. 187-188).

²² Hallinger, for example, has described contexts in terms of institutional, community, socio-cultural, economic & political factors that have an impact on the leadership role and school outcomes. More at, Hallinger, P. (2016). “Bringing Context out of the Shadows of Leadership.” *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, Vol. 46, Issue 1, pp. 5–24.

²³ Moos, L., et al. (2005). Ibid, p. 563.

dependent on other elements for achieving the goals or being successful. Each element is important because each one has an individual role to play and that individual role or responsibility contributes to the collective outcomes.²⁴ For example, parents have a great role in the education of their children and they, therefore, are active partners in the education system in the micro settings.²⁵ The parents thus are important to take on or include in the leadership role. In an inclusive and shared hierarchy, the parents are supposed to participate, contribute and intervene. It, in other words, is an opportunity for the schools or the actors therein to learn from the views and opinions of parents. Not only that but creating opportunities for students and involving them in the decision-making processes pave the way for leadership qualities in them.²⁶ Students may be called the decision-makers or leaders of the future and hence, encouraging them to exercise leadership e.g., through extra-curricular activities, leads to the exposition of the positive aspects of their personalities.²⁷ The establishment of a student council at school may be another example of how the students can evolve as decision-makers related to their matters. In the same line of thought, the role of teachers, staff and employers cannot be set aside as they not only are the facilitators but they also have an active role to play in the decision-making of everyday life related to children and school activities.²⁸ In other words, all the elements within the school system or in the micro settings not only have the duty to perform but may also have the right to participate, interact, reciprocate, share and intervene.²⁹ However, there should not be role conflict, role distance and role discontinuity within these elements of

²⁴ E.g., Mulford, B. & Silins, H. (2003). Ibid, pp. 175-195. Mulford, B. (2003). Ibid, pp. 109-124.

²⁵ MacBeath, J. (2005). Ibid, p. 352.

²⁶ MacBeath, J. (2005). Ibid, p. 352 & 364. Print, M., Ornstrom, S., & Nielsen, H.S. (2002). Education for democratic processes in schools and classrooms. *European Journal of Education, Vol. 37, No. 2*, p. 200 (the scholars give examples from the Danish education system on “how democratic values are integrated within school curricula and how pupils may influence both the content and the teaching-learning strategies and have the right to evaluate the teaching within the classroom.”).

²⁷ E.g., Mulford, B. & Silins, H. (2003). Ibid, (for instance, see “Broadening of Student Outcome Measures”, pp. 189-190).

²⁸ Grant, C. (Callie) (2017). Ibid, p. 467-468 (Grant argues that teachers are not always involved in the decision-making processes and even their involvement remains restricted to maintenance and administrative tasks at the expense of authentic leadership practices. On the other hand, there are situations when teachers themselves want to stay away from the extended responsibilities called for by distributed leadership. In other words, involving unwilling teachers in the extra tasks may adversely affect the desired or healthy outcomes and Grant attributes such leadership as “leadership as disposal”. P. 472).

²⁹ For example, from the South African perspective, Jita & Mokhele concluded “that even as the South African education system is essentially centralized, decisions about what to teach and how are still within the purview of each classroom teacher. What this means is that teachers are not just mere implementers of the curriculum (policies), but are challenged to make sense of the national curriculum guidelines for action in their classrooms.” More at, Jita, L. C., & Mokhele, M. L. (2013). Ibid, p. S134.

the school system or the micro settings, considering especially the leadership,³⁰ with “the fact that school leadership matters greatly in securing better organisational and learner outcomes.”³¹

Some scholars have made various claims and asserted “that leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organisation and on pupil learning.”³² In the school environment, the leadership role may be distinctive from the point of personal characteristics and professional potentiality. In any case, both these values (personal and professional) are integrated, intertwined, intermingled or inseparable. However, good personal characteristics may lead to the potential increase in the professional values of a head/principal/leader and turn him/her into a more functional, qualitative and productive personality, a successful role model that may be achieved through a constant educational process.³³

The article began with the two distinctive paradigms wherein interactive and participative processes of both paradigms (a fair or balanced interaction and participation) based on shared values were shortly discussed. Under these paradigms, there are contexts that have an impact on everyday decision-making. The impact of these contexts gives rise to change that has its role in leadership, which may be viewed from the point of personal values and professional qualities. Both the values are worthwhile because of which other elements have enhanced opportunities to participate in everyday decision-making processes related to children that are the ultimate school product or the school outcome. Change may not be achieved merely by the personal *cum* professional role of a school leader but equally by the school community and the society at large to which schools and children belong.

³⁰ E.g., Loder, T. L., & Spillane, J. P. (2005). Is a principal still a teacher?: US women administrators’ accounts of role conflict and role discontinuity, *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 263-279.

³¹ Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Ibid, p. 16.

³² Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership, *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 28-29.

³³ See also, Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Ibid, pp. 5-22 (especially 7th claim). Gumus, S., et al. (2018). Ibid, pp. 25–48.

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Print, M., Ornstrom, S., & Nielsen, H.S. (2002). Education for democratic processes in schools and classrooms. *European Journal of Education, Vol. 37, No. 2*, pp.193–210.

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