

Educational Leadership in Changing Times

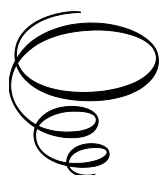
Educational Leadership in Changing Times:

*Responding to the Challenges
of the 21st Century*

Edited by

Trevor Male

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Educational Leadership in Changing Times:
Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-0922-7

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-0923-4

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INTRODUCTION

TREVOR MALE

The only constant in life is change.

(Heraclitus, 6th-5th Century B.C.)

This book comprises chapters from staff, students and alumni of the MBA in Educational Leadership (International) which is run by the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership. Since taking over programme leadership in 2016 I have sought to develop the degree to ensure it matches both the agreed specification for a masters degree in business administration and the development needs of educational leaders in a time of rapid and continuing change. We define the ‘business’ of education to be the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of effective learning environments for the student body to be served. Students on the programme tend to be seasoned practitioners, typically who already hold senior leadership positions and looking at progressing or consolidating their transition to executive leadership with responsibility for multi-part or multi-site educational settings. Consequently, we have a wide range of students from all phases of education from leaders from pre-school to higher education settings and in associated occupations, including local and national administrators as well as entrepreneurs. The degree is ‘international’ both in that it attracts students globally and explores a curriculum that is inclusive of values, cultures and experiences beyond those to be found in Anglocentric settings.

A feature of the current century is rapid and continuing change, a process accelerated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-22 which fundamentally and, in many cases, inexorably amended our view of how formal learning could be organised. Most educational systems across the world normally had formal learning settings catering for students in pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary phases. Typically, the settings required regular student attendance at specific locations commonly known as ‘nurseries’, ‘schools’, ‘colleges’ or ‘universities’. Learning in such settings tended to be based on a didactic model i.e. teacher led and focused on pre-determined outcomes which represent a stage in personal and career development. The impact of the pandemic forced most settings to revise

their provision, however, to be wholly online in the early stages, with a gradual return to ‘normal’ via hybrid systems. Furthermore, again during the early stages of this enforced transition, most provision was delivered synchronously, although it became clear this was not always practical as concentration spells were unsustainable over lengthy periods when online. This also produced an added challenge for universities who often had international students locked into different time zones. The combined effects led to most settings reviewing their provision to have more learning opportunities shorter in duration and asynchronous.

Meanwhile, we live in a world where data is readily available from which it is possible to construct knowledge rather than have it transmitted through a didactic medium. Consequently, some educational settings are making permanent in nature the changes driven by pandemic. Such moves reflect the changing nature of ‘knowledge’ and the need to develop a skills-based curriculum. Young people are now faced with a world that will not remain consistent throughout their lives, working with technologies and jobs yet to be invented. An assessment of the future by Salemi (2018) suggested that 85 per cent of jobs anticipated to be available in 2030 did not exist at that time. This, I argue, is a representative, rather than singular, view as any internet search engine will demonstrate and is thus one which needs to be addressed in terms of people’s education (and not just their schooling). This edited book is pulled together to recognise these are constantly challenging times which place huge demands on leaders in educational settings, requiring them to face change before they are engulfed by it.

The complexity and intensity of continuous change

This is a book which seeks to provides advice and guidance on how to lead educational provision effectively in times of continuous change. There have been several acronyms devised which seek to describe the world as it is emerging:

- VUCA - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (Bennis and Nanus, 1985);
- BANI - brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible (Cascio, 2020);
- RUPT - rapid, unpredictable, paradoxical, tangled (Centre for Creative Leadership (n.d.)
- TUNA – turbulent, uncertain, novel, ambiguous (Oxford Scenarios Programme, 2016).

All these acronyms point to the same thing and should not be viewed as in competition with each other, rather that they reflect complexity induced by contemporary and future developments which should fundamentally change the way in which we organise and deliver learning in the current century. For educators this identifies a need to enhance their capability to support student learning in a world that is fast changing and to place emphasis on individual capability, to not only make sense of emerging environments, but also to take control:

The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination. (Schaar, 1981: 321)

The key components of the emerging world identified in our work on the MBA are:

- **Globalisation:**
 - The concept that requires countries to recognise the interconnectedness between them and the need for citizens to be able to deal with a complex, interconnected and rapidly changing world to create meaningful relationships with others who do not necessarily share their same cultural background. This raises a call for the decolonisation of educational practices.
- **Learning technologies:**
 - Greater understanding of learning, with notions of pedagogy (child learning), andragogy (adult learning) and heutagogy (self-directed learning) being developed to create more effective student learning environments
- **The use of digital portable devices:**
 - Digital portable devices have become and will continue to be ever more sophisticated. Learners can now access data and resources at any time and from most locations.
- **Artificial intelligence (AI):**
 - AI is described as the fourth industrial revolution that will transform all our jobs, lives and education. Potential uses in education include assessing skills, increased personalisation of learning and the automation of systems management.

The emergent implications for educational leaders

Education leaders are the pivotal point of formal education who need to develop the capacity to deal with a rapidly changing world and act before they are forced to change. In terms of the provision their setting should offer, they should:

- constantly review curricular provision from the perspectives of decolonisation of educational practices and skills enhancement;
- enhance the capability of their settings workforce to maximise self-managed, directed and collaborative student learning;
- engage with different approaches to learning emerging from new technologies;
- engage with external influences, particularly parents and other community members.

The organisation of this book

The book is in two parts, with Part 1 identifying the challenges facing education and Part 2 exploring examples of structural responses to changing times.

In Part 1, *Simon Camby* discusses the broad challenges educational leaders face in changing times of the 21st Century and the need for adaptive organisations and leadership before *Trevor Male* switches to the concept of using portable digital technologies to support learning and identifies the implications. *Melody Bailey* and *Faye Ellis* then investigate the need for a skills-based curriculum to prepare the workforce of tomorrow and the centrality of online learning. *Eugene Du Toit* explores challenges likely to be presented to assessment and curriculum design before *Natalia Ramos* then presents a new construct of leading and managing change in education settings with *Christopher Richards* exploring the way in which desired technological change can be implemented. *Lucy Ellis* then looks at distance learning through the medium of digital technologies. The first part closes with contributions from *Mark Nichols* and *Wang Yintang* on the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

Part 2 focuses on case studies for developing 21st Century readiness for students with contributions from *Aqeel Ashiq*, based in a state-maintained school in London, and *Amy Cowling* who looks at transitioning to a university hybrid campus. *Louise Payne* and *Paul Hill* then report on the implications of developing a skills-based curriculum for private schools in

England, with *John Harris* exploring similar issues in the Gulf Region. The use of portable digital technologies in primary education is explored by *Catherine Warland*, whilst *Samuel Goh* looks at the concept of personalised learning in an independent school in East Asia. *Eugene Du Toit* reports on the internationalisation of an English independent school whilst *Tessa Hodgson* (state-maintained primary schools in England) and *Alyssa Phillips* (UK Higher Education) investigate the leadership qualities and organisational structures needed for changing times. The book closes with a summary and conclusions from me as the editor.

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PART 1 –
THE CHALLENGES FACING EDUCATION
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

CHAPTER 1

ADAPTIVE ORGANISATIONS AND LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

SIMON CAMBY

Abstract

Given the pace and complexity of change for education globally, this chapter reports on a case study which investigated how leaders of international schools were navigating the future for the organisations they led. The research draws both on literature related to adaptive organisations and adaptive leadership (which has mainly evolved outside the education sector) and data gathered from leaders of international schools. The research reported here explored how significant the relevance, applicability and relationship between the two concepts of organisations and leadership were for the international schools that form this case study.

Introduction

This chapter draws on a qualitative enquiry, using semi-structured interviews with twelve school and system leaders working in the international school sector. The participants within this study defined, with a strong degree of consistency, their view of schools as adaptive organisations and leadership, identifying three overarching components:

- openness
- a strong sense of identity
- empowerment.

The research reported here contributes to a gap in the knowledge base relating to adaptivity in the education context, in this case specifically in relation to international schools, although the discussion is applicable across most education settings. In summarising, detail is provided on the

characteristics of an adaptive organisation and leadership in international contexts.

Why is adaptivity important in relation to education settings?

There are two ‘whys’ that guide this chapter. Firstly, it is well acknowledged that we live in a time of considerable change.

Humankind is facing unprecedented revolutions, all our old stories are crumbling, and no new story has so far emerged to replace them. (Harari, 2018: 301)

The World Economic Forum asserts that change is now different from any other time in history (World Economic Forum, 2018), marked by a significant velocity (Schwab, 2016; Servoz, 2016; Universities UK, 2018). Change is exponential rather than linear and far more all-encompassing in its scope (Universities UK, 2018). The most commonly cited view is that the two main drivers of change appear to be globalisation and the rapid advances in technology (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019; Male, 2018; WEF, 2019).

Secondly, as someone that works with schools every day of my professional life, I was intrigued why, in the face of similar challenges, some schools appear to thrive, whereas others appear unable to navigate their own pathway to success.

It is the combination of these two ‘whys’ that drive the focus on exploring adaptivity in the context of education and, more specifically, K-12 schools.

There are references in leadership literature to adaptivity and adaptive capacity being enabling mechanisms to manage complexity and continuous change. As a working definition, an adaptive organisation is defined as one that can adjust to meet the complexities of a changing operating environment (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018). Little, however, has been written about this in relation to schools or educational settings.

The literature that informed this enquiry sat comfortably under the umbrella of Systems Theory, a framework that addresses the organisational whole by carefully examining the relationship between its parts (Senge, 1990). The theory views organisations as organisms, dynamic in nature and capable of growth and change (Morgan, 2006). Systems Theory proposes that what takes place outside an organisation affects what occurs within it (Lawrence

and Lorsch, 1967). By viewing these factors as an interrelationship, organisations work in a synchronised way with forces beyond their boundaries. This concept relates to the work of Weick (1976) who defined systems as being ‘open’ to their operating environment. These authors assert an interrelationship between an organisation and its organisational context and that feedback is an essential element in this relationship. Without this learning organisations are in danger of becoming less relevant and, at worse, extinct.

Specific context

The context of the data referred to in this chapter is specifically from K-12 international schools. Informal conversations around the world with school and system leaders suggest that the findings explored here are applicable more broadly.

Relevant literature

The literature relating to adaptability has a focus on managing the future in an increasingly complex operating environment. This research drew on Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, 2007) and Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz, 1994), both originating from a Systems Theory perspective. Complexity Leadership Theory claims to address the leadership challenges present in the knowledge era as opposed to theories developed for previous times.

Adaptive Leadership Theory claims that it can be used to address the most complex issues, especially when ambiguity is involved. There is congruence between many aspects of Complexity Theory and Adaptive Leadership Theory, posited as addressing some of the criticisms of longer standing leadership theories. The points below summarise these two theories.

1. These theories distinguish between leaders and leadership. Leadership is seen as an emergent, interactive dynamic that is productive of adaptive outcomes (Heifetz, 1994). Leaders are viewed as individuals who act in ways that influence this dynamic and outcomes. Earlier literature focused largely on formal leaders as opposed to the more complex systems and processes in which leadership is exhibited.

2. Leadership is viewed as separate from a specific role or title, and allows for leadership which occurs throughout an organisation (Schneider, 2002).
3. Both leadership theories are conceived to support how organisations and their leadership face the significant challenges of becoming adaptive in complex environments, where change and uncertainty are paramount (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018).
4. Context is integral to understand leadership and not separate from it. Context is not an antecedent, mediator or moderator variable. Leadership is viewed as socially constructed in and from context (Cilliers, 1998; Osborn, Hunt and Jauch, 2002).
5. Complexity Leadership and Adaptive Leadership address adaptive challenges (typical of the knowledge era) rather than technical problems (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz and Laurie, 2001).
6. Both Complexity and Adaptive Leadership theories recognise the importance and need for conflict and disequilibrium as integral to realising adaptive change (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz and Linsky, 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2017).

The theories reject leadership based on title, inherent character traits, personality type or charisma. Instead, they are predicated on the conception that leadership can be learned and practised from multiple levels of an organisation, without boundary or title. Adaptability is thus being explored in recognition of the numerous factors within the external environment which impact all organisations. Drawing on the work of Birkinshaw et al (2016) and Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018), organisational adaptability is defined as:

The ability of an organization to adapt to a changing environment and shifting market conditions. (Schulze and Pinkow, 2020: 1)

Purpose

The purpose of the exploration outlined in this chapter was to explore more about the characteristics of:

1. an adaptive international school; and of
2. adaptive international school leadership.

This research was undertaken through interviews with school and system leaders working globally.

Overarching themes

Based on data analysed, three themes were identified, and these are outlined below. The themes connect the participant views of adaptive organisations and adaptive leadership.

Theme 1: Openness

(1a) Organisational lens

Being an intentionally outward facing organisation that looks beyond the organisational and sector boundaries, proactively engaging with stakeholders to bring diverse perspectives.

(1b) Leadership lens

Leaders proactively working to see the bigger picture and looking beyond the organisation that they lead. This openness is underpinned by an enquiry-based perspective that is, in itself, open minded.

Theme 2: Identity

(2a) Organisational lens

Having deeply embedded and robust self-evaluation that is shared and understood. This organisational self-knowledge is the basis for all improvement. From here, organisations develop their clarity of direction, which is ultimately expressed as strategic thinking, direction and planning.

(2b) Leadership lens

Leaders knowing themselves. This reflexive self-knowledge is underpinned by a strong sense of humility. Being firmly rooted brings a sense of purpose guided by moral and/or ethical principles. Throughout is a clear view that identity includes a learning disposition, a view that learning is integral to continuous development.

Theme 3: Empower

(3a) Organisational lens

Intentionally building capacity. This connects to the view that the people create cultural, social and professional capital. Successful nurturing of capital allows the organisation to manage change, not as an event but as a process of ongoing and constant evolution.

(3b) Leadership lens

Leaders nurturing and growing a collective mindset. This empowerment is about building collective efficacy and creating a climate that intrinsically drives the organisation.

Each of these themes is exemplified below, including quotations from participants in this study in order to bring the theme to life.

Theme 1: Openness – Organisational

This organisational theme of ‘openness’ reflects that data asserts that adaptive organisations are outward looking and proactively interrelating with the operating environment, explored through two sub-themes:

- Outward looking
- Stakeholder engagement

Participants made strong assertions that organisations that adapt and intentionally lead their destiny are outward looking, typified by the following extract:

For me, adaptive means that we need to be consistently evaluating where we are in place and time, on our journey, relative to the environment that’s around us [as international schools].

Invariably, participants also talked of utilising external sources of information and data and that an adaptive organisation will take this input to analyse, synthesise and independently define their direction.

Adaptive is not just looking at our immediate place and time, but looking at the signposts that are being flagged by agents or organisations we’re connected to and then looking well beyond them.

It was common for participants to cite that they draw on a range of data and evidence sources to inform planning.

It’s about looking outwards and saying, ‘What is coming down the track? versus, ‘Right, there’s a new government directive saying I have to do this’ or ‘Every other school in my area is doing this, I’d better start doing it now’. I think the hallmark of [adaptive schools] are the ones where the school, the organisation - specifically the leaders - are much more aware of the shifting educational landscape, before it’s shifting.’

Participants repeatedly cited that adaptive organisations are alert to, and listen closely to, a “range of stakeholders”, “listen to the voice of the community” and “work with others”. The interpretation of the term “stakeholder” varied between participants with some seeing these as “immediate stakeholders”, e.g. students, parent staff; with others broadening this category to include external partners. It was neatly summed up by one

participant in asking, “Who is part of the conversation?”. The extract below is chosen because it exemplifies the broadest view and summarises the range of views expressed.

I would look to see what processes were framed that supported faculty and other wider staff that we have within a school organisation, to take action. I would look to see to what extent our student population and our parent population were a part of the conversations. I would look to see to what extent the school is connected with the external community, to what extent the school is connecting or interacting with the external community to be able to better understand the landscape and the environment that they’re part of. I would look for partnerships that the school had developed, where potentially those partnerships are enabling or empowering the school to be able to look at different ways or different approaches.

The essence of this theme is that adaptive schools look beyond their boundaries and proactively utilise a range of sources of information to inform their intent when considering the future.

Theme 1: Openness – Leadership

This leadership theme of ‘openness’ reflects that the data assert that adaptive leaders are outward looking and proactively interrelating with the operating environment, explored through two sub-themes:

- See the bigger picture
- Enquiry minded

Seeing the bigger picture relates to the outward looking component within the earlier organisational section. There was a repeated view that leaders within adaptive organisations are “outward looking” and “see the bigger picture” beyond the organisation they lead or sector within which they lead. Two points were clearly made: firstly, that leaders are knowledgeable and up to date, and secondly that they value and utilise multiple sources of evidence. The deeper aspect of this component was frequently cited as the leader proactively utilising evidence to inform the organisation’s development, described by one participant as the leadership ability to “read the educational headwinds”.

The enquiring mind component is linked to the “bigger picture” and relates to being inquisitive about oneself, others and the operating context. All participants referred either directly or indirectly to this as an essential

element of Adaptive Leadership using a range of terminology: for example, “enquiry”, “open”, “curious” and “explorative”.

They have to be open minded; they have to be... I keep using this word ‘curious’. I don’t know if there’s a better word for it. They have to be sort of curious about what’s going on and why things are going a certain way, why they aren’t going a certain way.

In defining this aspect of leadership, participants consistently shared the view that adaptive leaders proactively seek feedback. This was expanded to include: creating a climate conducive to thinking, conversation and enquiry - exemplified by one participant as “opening up thinking and enquiry”.

I think, leaders, adaptive leaders, need to be very good at asking searching questions, meditative questions, so that we can actually create thinking within our teams.

The essence of this theme is that adaptive leaders look beyond their boundaries and intentionally utilise a range of sources of evidence to inform their leadership. This is fuelled by an inquisitive and enquiry-based outlook which gathers information about the context and seeks feedback about themselves as a leader.

Theme 2: Identity – Organisational

The organisational theme of ‘identity’ reflects that data assert that adaptive organisations have a clear sense of identity, explored through three sub-themes:

- Organisational self-evaluation
- Direction
- Strategic thinking

Organisational self-evaluation

All participants stressed the importance of organisational self-evaluation. This sense of being reflexive was viewed as integral to an organisation being responsible for, and intentional about, steering its future development.

I would say [an adaptive school is] a school that’s constantly reflecting and going through a self-evaluation process; constantly questioning whether the decisions that are made around pedagogy and desired academic outcomes are the right ones for the children and will help them in the future.

I think that an [adaptive] school is knowledgeable and reflective with really strong self-evaluation so they know that they are making decisions based on knowing themselves, not based on what they thought might be a good idea at the time, so it's driven by evidence.

There were repeated mentions of strong adaptivity being about learning from past and from mistakes as well as successes. This is typified below:

In those adaptive schools are strong leaders that do look forward, but that also learn from the past. Are able to predict or identify things that are worth noting, but also things that you should probably ignore and aren't worth a lot.

From self-evaluation, participants drew the link with a clarity of organisational direction, underpinned by a shared understanding on what the organisation stands for. Participants articulated this in a range of ways dependent on the system they work within. Terms included: "mission", "vision", "values", "purpose" with a repeated view that as well as understanding its direction, an adaptive school needs to be able to relate its actions back to its vision and mission, for example:

[Adaptability is] being able to make changes within the organisation without losing sight of its mission and vision.

In different ways, participants recurrently defined the need for a strong purpose as being an anchor to facilitate adaptability, as illustrated by this contribution.

The ability to be agile and to adapt is important. But I think this is where schools and school organisations can get lost... So, I think that's where, you know, if you've got a really strong values set, if you've got a really strong sense of identity as an organisation... but there's enough flexibility in there, I think you can be adaptive.

Within this component about a clarity of purpose were repeated mentions moral purpose.

Really understanding deeply, as an organisation, what your moral purpose is [...] so that when you are framing conversations [...] it always comes back to, what's your vision, what's your mission, what are you trying to accomplish?

The quality of self-evaluation and clarity of direction were subsequently linked to the effectiveness of strategic thinking. All participants referred to a long-term view, but used a range of terminology, including "strategic