

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) provides the foundation for implementing the Ontario Leadership Strategy. The framework supports career-long professional learning and helps guide learning-focused conversations about effective leadership practices and approaches to resolving issues. The revised OLF incorporates evidence from recent research and provides new insights into what good leadership looks like.

This document summarizes several of the key concepts from the revised OLF. The key concepts include:

- A definition of leadership
- Leadership practices
- The contingent, or contextual, nature of leadership; and
- Personal leadership resources, which will be a major focus of the discussions and activities at congress.

This summary and the School Level and System Level Leadership Placemats are provided for your use as you work on the advance questions for congress.

DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

For purposes of the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF), leadership is defined as the exercise of influence on organizational members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals. This influence may have many sources (e.g. administrators, parents, teachers), is typically reciprocal rather than unidirectional, and is exercised through relationships between and among individuals, groups, and the settings in which they find themselves.

Leadership, defined in this way, is "successful" to the extent that it makes significant, positive, and ethically defensible¹ contributions to progress in achieving the organization's vision and goals.

THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP "PRACTICE"

The revised OLF is about successful leadership and organizational "practices" as distinct from "competencies" (a concept widely used in the management development field and represented in the original OLF by skills, knowledge and attitudes).

A competency is typically defined as "an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job"². Commonly cited weaknesses of efforts to define management and (especially) leadership competencies include:

- The fragmentation of roles that are better understood as integrated wholes;
- The assumption that a generic set of capacities are suitable in all contexts;
- The focus on current and past performances rather than what is needed to meet future challenges;

¹ There are many perspectives on how to judge the ethical defensibility of a leader's influence. One helpful, reasonably practical perspective has been provided by Warwick and Kelman (1992). According to their conception, influence strategies which are most transparent and leave the most freedom of choice for those being influenced are the most ethical; these are typically "facilitative", followed by "persuasive" strategies. At the least ethical end are "manipulative", followed by "coercive" strategies.

² Carroll, Levy & Richmond (page 364).

- The emphasis on measurable behaviors to the exclusion of more subtle dispositions and “softer interpersonal qualities sought from people at many levels across the organization”³;
- Lack of empirical evidence linking competences to improved organizational outcomes;
- The encouragement of conformity rather than diversity on the part of individuals; and
- The assumption that those who excel in the same role display the same behaviors.

Invoking the concept of “practices”, in contrast to “competencies”, aims to acknowledge:

- The situated and social context in which leadership is exercised;
- The central nature of relationships in leadership work;
- The importance of leaders responding flexibly to the situations, events and challenges which present themselves in order to accomplish important goals; and
- The distributed nature of leadership work in virtually all organizations.

A “practice”, in other words, is a bundle of activities exercised by a person or group of persons which reflect the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and with some shared outcome(s) in mind.

The OLF now describes successful individual and small group practices for both school and system level leaders, as well as effective organizational practices at both school and system levels.

See the School Level Leadership Placemat and System Level Leadership Placemat for a list of the leadership practices in the revised OLF.

THE CONTINGENT NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

The OLF is also explicitly “contingent”. While practices included in the OLF are what most successful leaders do in many different contexts, their practical value depends on leaders enacting them in ways that are sensitive to the specific features of the circumstances and settings in which leaders find themselves. For example, how a leader goes about “developing people” is likely to be very different in a school filled with largely new and eager teachers than it is in a school mostly staffed by a group of experienced and highly skilled teachers.

The contingent nature of the OLF also acknowledges the importance of time in better understanding both the nature and impact of what successful leaders do. Although most formal approaches to leadership neglect considerations of time⁴, leadership practitioners are well aware, for example, that:

- their own skills and performance change over time;
- the internal dynamics of their staff change over time, requiring them to adapt in response;
- their interpersonal relationships with staff change over time;
- building trust with staff requires significant amounts of time;
- much of their influence depends not just on what they do but when they do it;

The contingent nature of successful leadership has important consequences for how the OLF is used. For example, judging a leader’s development entails not only assessing the extent to which a person is generally skilled in the use of OLF practices, it also entails

³ Bolden & Gosling (page 364).

⁴ For a very useful analysis of the importance of time in understanding leadership and its neglect in leadership research, see Shamir (2011).

judging the extent to which they are able to enact those practices in a contextually appropriate way. For example, the priority placed by the Ontario government on social justice in the province's public schools, a priority evident in attempts to close the achievement gap and to develop inclusive school organizations, means that key features of their contexts to be accounted for by leaders will be the economic, cultural and religious diversity evident in their schools' communities

While the OLF offers some guidelines for making judgments about the contextual sensitivity of leaders' practices, those using the OLF are expected to bring considerable local knowledge to the task.

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

In addition to the practices found to be effective for most schools, systems and leaders in most contexts, the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) includes a small but critical number of personal resources which leaders draw on in order to enact effective leadership practices. Considered together, these resources substantially overlap some of the leadership "traits" which preoccupied early leadership research and which lately have proven to be powerful explanations for leaders' success.

Leadership traits have been defined broadly as relatively stable and coherent integrations of personal characteristics that foster a consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organizational situations.

While many traits or personal characteristics have been associated with leaders and leadership, the OLF includes only those for which there is compelling empirical evidence indicating they are instrumental to leadership success. Referred to in the OLF as "personal resources", they are of three types— cognitive, social and psychological⁵.

Cognitive Resources

Considerable evidence collected over many decades suggests that leaders' success or effectiveness is partly explained by intelligence and experience. This would only be surprising if it was not the case, although some early evidence indicates that stressful and hectic environments (features of environments in which school leaders often find themselves) reduce the advantage of greater intelligence to near zero . Intelligence and experience, however, are "surface" traits of leaders offering little guidance to those selecting and developing leaders or to leaders and aspiring leaders themselves. Below the surface of what is typically referred to as leader's intelligence are problem-solving capacities and below the surface of "experience" is the "domain-specific" knowledge useful for such problem solving. Intelligence is typically considered to be unchangeable and experience typically considered hard to replicate through training. In contrast, however, there is ample evidence that "expert" problem- solving capacities and the domain-specific knowledge on which they depend can be significantly improved through planned opportunities. So the two categories of cognitive resources included in the OLF are problem-solving expertise and knowledge about conditions which have direct effects on student learning and which can be influenced by schools.

Problem-Solving Expertise

The term "problem", as it is used in this section, is intended to be free of the negative connotations sometimes attached to it. A problem exists when (a) there is a gap between some current state of affairs and a preferred future state of affairs and (b) the

⁵ These three types of personal resources approximate the dimensions used to frame the University of Maine's leadership development program; these dimensions are labelled the "interpersonal", the "cognitive", and the "intrapersonal" (see Ackerman et al, 2011).

means required to reduce the gap requires thought. The literature on expert problem solving processes includes some variation in how the component processes or skills required for gap reduction are depicted. But these different perspectives have much in common and the OLF adopts a perspective emerging from the only two sustained programs of research conducted about expert problem solving on the part of school and district leaders, in particular⁶. This line of research is primarily concerned with how leaders solve “unstructured” problems: these are the non-routine problems requiring significantly more than the application of existing know-how, or what is sometimes referred to as “adaptive leadership”.

Expertise on the part of school leaders, according to the best available evidence, is exercised through six component processes⁷. This section describes each of the component processes and summarizes the results of research about how each is carried out by school leaders who have relatively high levels of expertise.

Problem Interpretation is the leader’s understanding of the specific nature of the problem, often when multiple potential problems could be identified. School leaders’ problems do not come with labels on them; especially unstructured problems first arise as a puzzle if not a mess. So many interpretations are possible, some with more productive possibilities than others. Highly expert school leaders almost always prioritize the problems they chose to work on according their estimates of the consequences for the learning of their students (usually large proportions of their students). These leaders consider difficult problems to be manageable (rather than stressful or frightening) if one thinks carefully about them and they rely on the collection of relevant information, rather than assumptions, to help them clarify the problem. Typically, expert school leaders are willing to spend whatever time it takes to arrive at a clear and comprehensive interpretation of the problem before going further. These leaders often involve others with a stake in the problem in helping to arriving at a productive and defensible interpretation.

Goals are the relatively immediate purposes that the leader is attempting to achieve in response to the interpretation of the problem eventually settled on. For expert school leaders, these goals usually have implications for student learning and program quality. These goals also typically include keeping parents well-informed and place greater weight on the knowledge that will be required to solve the problem than the emotions that might arise during the course of problem solving.

Principles and Values are the relatively long-term purposes, operating principles, fundamental laws, doctrines, assumptions guiding the leader’s thinking. Expert school leaders, as compared with more typical school leaders, rely more on a consistent set of values they are able to articulate quite clearly. They use these values as substitutes for knowledge in responding to those unstructured problems about which they might have little relevant knowledge.

Constraints are significant barriers, obstacles or factors severely narrowing the range of possible solutions the leader believes to be available. Expert school leaders usually identify relatively few constraints to their problem solving, are quick to find ways of

⁶ For a recent study using the Arts to foster leaders’ problem solving see Katz-Buonincontro & Phillips (2011)

⁷ These processes overlap substantially with a model of expert problem solving largely developed in non-school settings by Mumford et al (2007). Processes included in their formulation include, for example, identifying the causes of the problem, determining the resources available to solve the problem, diagnosing the restrictions on one’s choice of actions, and clarifying contingencies.

dealing with those constraints and almost never consider a constraint to be an insurmountable obstacle to moving forward.

Solution processes include the actions taken by leaders and others involved to solve the problem. Experts plan carefully and in some detail as they go about arriving at their solutions and preparing to implement them. They consult extensively with those who might be involved in the solution. Because of the significant resources that experts devote to problem interpretation, finding suitable solutions is often much less complicated for them than it is for those with unclear understandings of the problem they are attempting to solve.

Mood refers to the leader's emotional response to the problem and what is required to solve it. Experts remain calm and confident in the face of unstructured problems and they exude that calmness and confidence to their problem-solving partners. This mood contributes to their ability to think flexibly about problem solving.

Knowledge about School and Classroom Conditions with Direct Effects on Student Learning

Because school leaders' influence on student learning is largely indirect (a well-documented assumption of the OLF), knowledge about those school and classroom conditions with significant effects on students ("learning conditions") that can be influenced by school leaders is an extremely important aspect of what leaders need to know. Indeed, "leadership for learning" can be described relatively simply, but accurately, as a process of (a) diagnosing the status of potentially powerful learning conditions in the school and classroom, (b) selecting those learning conditions most likely to be constraining student learning in one's school, and (c) improving the status of those learning conditions. Several syntheses of recent research about school and classroom conditions mediating school leaders' influence on student learning identify four categories of such conditions – technical or rational, emotional, organizational and family conditions⁸.

Technical or rational conditions. Exercising a positive influence on this category of conditions calls on school leaders' knowledge about the "technical core" of schooling; these are both school and classroom conditions. In the classroom, for example, a recent synthesis of evidence implies that school leaders carefully consider the value of focusing their efforts on improving the extent to which teachers are providing students with immediate and informative feedback, teachers' use of reciprocal teaching strategies, teacher-student relations, the management of classrooms, and the general quality of teaching in the school. Many school-level variables have reported effects on student learning as large as all but a few classroom-level variables. Both Academic Press or Emphasis and Disciplinary Climate stand out among these especially consequential variables, for example.

Emotional conditions. Rational and emotional conditions are interconnected. Considerable evidence indicates, for example, that emotions direct cognition: they structure perception, direct attention, give preferential access to certain memories, and bias judgment in ways that help individuals respond productively to their environments. A recent review evidence about teacher emotions and their consequences for classroom practice and student learning unambiguously recommends leaders' attention to this category of conditions as a means of improving student learning. Among the most influential conditions within this category are both individual and collective teacher

⁸ See Leithwood et al (2010) for an empirical test of the effects on student achievement of leadership mediated by these four categories of learning conditions.

efficacy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale, stress/burnout, engagement in the school or profession, and teacher trust in colleagues, parents, and students.

Organizational conditions. Structures, culture, policies, and standard operation procedures are among the conditions in this category. Collectively, they constitute teachers' working conditions which, in turn, have a powerful influence on teachers' emotions. These variables constitute both the school's infrastructure and a large proportion of its collective memory. At minimum, a school's infrastructure should not prevent staff and students from making best use of their capacities. At best, school infrastructures should magnify those capacities and make it much easier to engage in productive rather than unproductive practices. A recent synthesis of evidence identified more than a dozen conditions in this category. Some can be found in the classroom (e.g., class size, ability groupings) while some are school-wide (e.g., school size, multi grade/age classes, retention policies).

Family conditions. It is often claimed that improving student learning is all about improving "instruction". While improving instruction in classrooms is both important and necessary work in many schools, this claim by itself ignores the potential impact of both the Emotional and Organizational categories of conditions. Even more critically, this claim seems to dismiss factors conditions created by students' families which typically account for as much as 50% of the variation in student achievement across schools. Since best estimates suggest that everything schools do within their walls accounts for about 20% of the variation in students' achievement across schools, influencing family conditions is a "high leverage" option for school leaders. By now, there is considerable evidence about the conditions created by families that can be influenced by schools and their leaders. A recent synthesis of evidence, for example, points to seven family-related conditions with widely varying effects on student learning. At least four of these conditions are open to influence from the school including home environment ($d = 0.57$), parent involvement in school (positive and moderately strong effects), time spent watching television (weak negative effects), and visits to the home by school personnel (weak positive effects). Parent expectations, this and other recent evidence suggests, have among the strongest effects on student learning.

Social Resources

The importance attached to leaders' social resources has a long history. For example, early efforts to theorize leadership carried out at Ohio and Michigan State universities in the 1950s and '60s situated relationship building among the two or three most important dimensions of effective leadership. According to these theories, effective leaders demonstrated "consideration" for their colleagues, for example, by acting in a friendly and supportive manner, showing concern for and looking out for their welfare.

More recent evidence continues to link leader effectiveness to perceptions of leader empathy on the part of colleagues, building on Goleman's claim that empathy "represents the foundation skill for all social competences important for work"⁹. These relationship-oriented behaviors also included demonstrations of trust and confidence, keeping colleagues informed, and showing appreciation for their ideas and recognition of their accomplishments.

More recent theories of transformational leadership continue this focus by including "individualized consideration" among their categories of leadership practices, as does

⁹ Sadri, Weber & Gentry (2011, page 819).

the claim made by leader-member exchange theory (LMX)¹⁰ that leadership effectiveness depends on building differentiated relationships with each of one's colleagues, relationships that reflect their individual needs, desires and capacities.

So the ability to develop and sustain good working relationships has long been acknowledged as fundamental for leaders in almost all organizational contexts. However, the importance of this ability grows with the interpersonal intensity typically experienced within an organization and the demands such intensity places on its leadership. Schools typically experience a level of interpersonal intensity virtually unmatched in any other type of organization. Such intensity is experienced by both teachers and administrators. For teachers, interpersonal intensity is largely a function of working with many students at one time, and responding to their individual needs, capacities and interests as a means of helping them all achieve the common set of purposes found in the school's curriculum. School administrators also interact with students, often under emotionally-charged circumstances. But all school "stakeholders", not only students, have the right and frequently the desire to interact with especially the school principal. Many exercise that right. These stakeholders include everyone inside the school building, as well as parents, members of local businesses and community groups, sometimes trustees, certainly anyone from the central office of the school system, and occasionally Ministry of Education officials.

Furthermore, the positional authority or power of school leaders, in relation to all these stakeholders, is quite circumscribed. Depending on the issue, parents, central office staff, teacher unions and trustees can often command a level of authority or power equal to or greater than the principal's. Principals have an enormous range of responsibilities but very constrained positional power. Being an effective leader under circumstances such as these entails, for example, discerning the expectations of others, appreciating their points of view, finding common ground among competing interests and creating a sense of shared purpose among all or most of the school's stakeholders. This interpersonal work of school leaders is ubiquitous, as well as emotionally laborious. And doing it well requires substantially more of leaders than what early leadership theories described as "showing consideration" or engaging in "relationship building".

The capacity to do this kind of work depends on leaders' "social intelligence", "social appraisal skills" or "emotional intelligence", concepts treated as largely similar in the OLF and referred to subsequently as Social Resources. These resources account for a large proportion of a leader's interpersonal competence and an impressive amount of evidence now demonstrates the contribution of these relational resources to a wide range of desirable individual and organizational outcomes¹¹.

Social resources encompass the leader's ability to understand the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of persons, including oneself, in interpersonal situations and to act appropriately on that understanding. The three sets of social resources included in the OLF are about perceiving emotions, managing emotions, and acting productively in response to their own and others' emotions. Enacting these social resources well helps build a positive emotional climate in the school, an important mediator of leaders' impacts on the performance of their organizations¹².

¹⁰ Although not much discussed in the educational literature, this leadership theory is widely evident in mainstream leadership literature: for example, see Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995)

¹¹ For an especially meaningful description of how one group of female secondary principals managed their own emotions and the emotional climate of their schools see Smith (2011).

¹² For example, see Menges, Walter, Vogel and Bruch (2011).

Perceiving Emotions

This set of social resources includes the ability to detect, from a wide array of clues, one's own emotions (self-awareness) and the emotions of others. People with this relational resource are:

- Able to recognize their own emotional responses and how those emotional responses shape their focus of attention and influence their actions;
- Able to discern the emotions being experienced by others from, for example, their tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and other verbal and non-verbal information.

Managing Emotions

This set of social resources includes managing one's own and others' emotions, including the interaction of emotions on the part of different people in pairs and groups. People with this relational resource:

- Are able to understand the reasons for their own "intuitive" emotional responses and are able to reflect on the potential consequences of those responses;
- Are able to persuade others to be more reflective about their own "intuitive" emotional responses and to reflect on the potential consequences of those responses.

Acting in Emotionally Appropriate Ways

This set of social resources entails the ability to respond to the emotions of others in ways that support the purposes for the interaction by:

- Being able to exercise a high level of cognitive control over which emotions are allowed to guide their actions;
- Being able to assist others to act on emotions most likely to best serve their interests.

Psychological Resources

There are two primary reasons for including psychological resources in the OLF. One reason has to do with the complexity of school leaders' jobs. Complex jobs feature higher than average amounts of:

- Ambiguity (e.g., expectations from parents are sometimes different than expectations of the school system or the Ministry of Education);
- Risk (e.g., school leaders are the focal point for much public accountability); and
- Uncertainty about achieving desired outcomes (e.g., "closing the achievement gap" is a goal for which many schools and their leaders are held accountable even though codified knowledge about how to accomplish this goal is quite limited).

As the challenges facing leaders become increasingly complex, there is an increasing drain on their psychological resources. Well-developed psychological resources allow leaders to cope productively in the face of high levels of complexity without giving up, experiencing excessive strain or becoming burnt out.

A second reason for including psychological resources, particularly the three resources identified here is their contribution to leader initiative, creativity and responsible risk-taking behavior¹³. Leaders are unlikely to deviate from well-established practices in order

¹³ Considerable evidence suggests that initiative a very important personality characteristic of effective leaders (e.g., Murphy & Johnson, 2011)

to improve their schools unless they believe they have a very good chance of being successful. The three psychological resources included in the OLF foster such a belief.

The three psychological resources included in the OLF are optimism, self-efficacy and resiliency. While evidence suggests that each of these resources make significant contributions to leadership initiatives, responsible risk-taking and eventual success, a recent line of theory and research argues that when the three resources act in synergy, that is, when one person possesses all three resources, they make an especially large contribution to leadership success.

Optimism

Generic definitions of both optimism and hope are included in the meaning ascribed to optimism here, even though they are sometimes considered distinct dispositions. Optimism is the habitual expectation of success in one's efforts to address challenges and confront change now and in the future. Optimistic leaders habitually expect good things to result from their initiatives while pessimistic leaders habitually assume that their efforts will be thwarted, as often as not. When the expectations of optimistic leaders are not met, they pursue alternative paths to accomplish their goals. Leaders' optimistic expectations, however, do not necessarily extend to their organizations as a whole. Rather, optimistic leaders expect their efforts to be successful in relation to those things over which they have direct influence or control but not necessarily to be powerful enough to overcome negative forces in their organizations over which they have little or no influence or control; they are realistic as well as optimistic.

Optimism is associated with leadership success because, as one group of researchers explain:

Optimists tend to make internal, stable, and global attributions for successes and external, unstable, and specific attributions for failures. Thus, should a negative outcome occur during the process of change, optimists would tend to remain motivated toward success because they conclude the failure was not due to something inherent in them (external) but was instead something unique in that situation (specific) and a second attempt will likely not result in failure again (unstable)... [furthermore]...optimistic people expect positive outcomes for themselves regardless of personal ability.

Optimistic leaders, as a consequence, are likely to take initiative and responsible risks with positive expectations regardless of past problems or setbacks.

Self Efficacy

Both optimism and efficacy (or confidence) contributes to the likelihood of a leader possessing such dispositions continuing to strive for success even in the face of initial failure. Unlike optimism, however, efficacy's contribution is ability based. Sense of efficacy is a belief about one's own ability to perform a task or achieve a goal. It is a belief about ability, not actual ability. That is, efficacious leaders believe they have the ability to solve whatever challenges, hurdles or problems that might come their way in their efforts to help their organizations succeed. Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to leaders' success through their directive effects on leaders' choices of activities and settings and can affect coping efforts once those activities are begun. Efficacy beliefs determine how much risk people will take, how much effort they will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty. The stronger the self-efficacy the longer the persistence.

Leadership self-efficacy or confidence, it has been claimed, is likely the key cognitive variable regulating leader functioning in a dynamic environment and has a very strong relationship with a leaders' performance. This belief in one's ability encourages leaders to generate alternative means for achieving their goals, to take action toward accomplishing their goals and to persist, in the face of challenges, toward achieving those goals.

Resiliency

Resilience, the "ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change", is significantly assisted by high levels of efficacy but goes beyond the belief in one's capacity to achieve in the long run. At the core of resiliency is the ability to "bounce back" from failure and even move beyond one's initial goals while doing so. Resilient leaders or potential leaders have the ability to thrive in the challenging circumstances commonly encountered by school leaders.

The combined effect of Optimism, Efficacy and Resiliency, as Luthans and his colleagues explain, is characterized by:

(1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive expectation (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future...[as well as]... (3) Persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals ... in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.

Using Personal Resources for Leadership Recruitment and Selection

The three sets of personal resources included in the OLF - cognitive, social and psychological - begin to identify some of the underlying explanations for differences in what leaders do and account for variation among leaders in how well they are able to enact OLF's effective leadership practices. However, the acquisition of some of resources, for most people, takes place over extended periods of time, typically much more time than is provided by even the most well-planned and sustained leadership development program. Of the three sets of Personal Leadership Resources, cognitive resources are the most responsive to direct and short-term intervention. While considerable effort has also been made to develop interventions for improving leaders' social resources, this is a more complex and less certain undertaking. And we know much less about how to successfully build the psychological resources included in the OLF. For these reasons, the possession of many of these resources ought to be among the most important criteria used for the initial recruitment and selection of school leaders.