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# Introduction and overview

## Purpose of the book

In 2006 the first edition of this book was published. The context and challenges for educators have changed considerably during this time period. While some challenges identified in that edition are still relevant, they often present themselves in different clothes. As well, new challenges have emerged and some of the earlier ones have morphed into more complicated forms. For these reasons, and the fact that the book had a strong national and international audience, the decision was made with my publishers to issue a renewed and substantially changed edition.

The primary purpose of this book is to provide educational leaders, including teachers, with skills of identifying, analysing and responding to the complex challenges they face each day, including the ethical tensions inherent in many of these challenges. These are important skills for educational leaders if they are to meet the expectations of a cynical public. It is no longer a defence for leaders to say they didn't understand the significance of their behaviours or that they are too busy to play close attention to moral principles and ethical standards in their decision making. A values- and ethics-based approach for making decisions in situations fraught with paradox and ambiguity is a central focus of this book.

There are also clear and precise recommendations provided on the need for all those educators in formal leadership positions to share leadership responsibilities with others by building a sustainable collective ethic of responsibility for leadership in their schools. Great emphasis is given to the importance of educational leaders building rich, engaging, interactive, technologically-smart, and productive learning environments in order to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and student outcomes in their schools. Calls for adherence to high ethical standards and the need for educational leaders to be authentic in everything they do underpin these recommendations. Important research-based advice is provided to encourage educational leaders to become much more influential in their fields or spheres of influence, especially with regard to enhancing the quality of teaching, learning environments, and student outcomes.

All in all, this is a substantially different book from the first edition. It builds on the best of the earlier edition but also introduces and explains many new leadership concepts and explores their implications for educational leaders. This book also contains valuable insights for system policy makers and those responsible for system and school leadership formation, as well as for the practice of leadership at all levels in education systems and schools.



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## Overview

In chapter 1, key elements of the changing context for education are identified, together with their possible impact on schools and educational leaders. The conclusion is reached that there is widespread cynicism about the quality and integrity of many leaders across a variety of organisations and there are increasing calls for greater honesty and authenticity in leadership.

In chapters 2 and 3 key contemporary challenges facing educational systems and school leaders are identified, described and discussed. Those challenges that are of a more global and general nature are referred to as *macro challenges* and are discussed in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the challenges described are more specific to the everyday work of school leaders and are called *micro challenges*. The challenges in both chapters feature some of those from the 2006 edition that continue to be relevant while others have morphed into new forms, thereby presenting school leaders with different and, in some cases, more intense challenges. There are also new challenges presented (primarily in chapter 2) that may have been implied by the findings of the research that underpinned the earlier version of the book, but have now more clearly emerged as key challenges from the author's and others' research. Since 2008, the author has conducted research on key relevant leadership challenges with over 1500 school leaders in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, using interactive technologies.

In chapter 4, challenges are described and analysed as *tensions* involving values and ethics; a framework for analysing these tensions is presented in chapter 5. These two chapters contain material from the earlier version of the book, but it is updated and modified to reflect the changing context and challenges presented in chapters 1 and 2. While specific cases have changed somewhat, the challenges and key ethical tensions remain very similar. This fact has been constantly verified by the author when discussing the ethical issues raised in the first edition with a large number of school leaders in a number of countries.

Since the first edition, ethical awareness and sensitivity has intensified, essentially because of the ethically and morally corrupt behaviour of bankers, financiers and politicians during the global financial crisis. Recent activities in countries like Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the US and the UK have highlighted these ethical problems. The collapse, or near collapse, of banks such as Lehman Brothers, Northern Rock, Anglo Irish and the Royal Bank of Scotland has stimulated degrees of cynicism and disgust in public opinion not seen in many decades, if ever. The more recent scandalous practices of reporters and executives of the *News of the World* (and perhaps other news media), as well as the constant scandals surrounding many politicians (with expense accounts, collusion with



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business leaders, developers and planning authorities) have, one could say, put the icing on the scandal-ridden cake.

Chapter 6 deals with issues related to values and ethics in decision-making and presents a practical approach to, including a method for, ethical decision-making. These ideas are connected to the material in the earlier chapters and have a special leadership focus.

In chapter 7 the focus is on a major challenge for contemporary educational leaders, that of encouraging and sustaining a collective ethic of responsibility for leadership in schools. As professional educators and educational leaders, with a special calling (a vocation) to shape the lives of young people, we are bound by a collective ethic to work together to ensure all our students experience the type of quality learning environments that will maximise their life chances. Issues of distributed leadership, talent development, and leadership succession are discussed and critiqued from this collective perspective. Advice is provided on how schools can embrace new commitments to a collective ethic of responsibility for leadership that relies less on one person or position – the principal or the principalship – and engages more productively with a range of expertise and talent from different areas and levels within and outside the school.

The importance for leaders of authentic presence, relationships, and influence fields is discussed in chapter 8. Practical implications are drawn to assist educational leaders become more influential in their spheres of influence. Much new material and new thinking on leadership as an influence relationship is introduced in this chapter.

A key challenge of an emerging paradigm of learning and teaching is discussed and analysed in chapter 9. This is a challenge that must be met head-on by educators and educational leaders if the new education paradigm discussed in chapter 2 is to be realised. It is the challenge of getting all key educational stakeholders working collectively to build and sustain rich, engaging, interactive, technologically-smart, and productive learning environments in order to enhance a broader range of student outcomes. Research-based practical advice is provided for those educational leaders who wish to take on this challenge.

The need to go beyond leadership training and development and focus more on the formation of leaders is a focus of the final chapter (chapter 10). The argument presented is that authentic capable leadership requires, above all, capable human beings with specific attributes, qualities and capabilities. Key capabilities required for leaders to respond influentially to the types of challenges discussed in chapters 2 and 3 are best formed in learning conditions that are described as 'crucibles of learning', involving a *case-in-point* transformational formation methodology.

Overall, practical advice is provided throughout the book on ways educational leaders and teachers can be more authentic, influential, and capable of generating



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sustainable collective leadership capacities in schools in order to create rich, engaging and technologically-smart learning environments.

'Key ideas for reflection' are presented for readers at the end of each chapter for self-reflective analysis, as well as for further consideration by leaders in relation to leading their schools. Key questions are included to structure these reflections.



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Chapter 1

# The changing and challenging context for educational leaders



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Educational leaders are subjected to external and internal pressures, challenges and expectations that make demands on their time, expertise, energies and emotional wellbeing. Increasingly, they are being held accountable for their own performance and for that of the teachers and students under their care. They are also expected to comply with the highest ethical and moral standards in their relationships and practices.

While some leaders may experience confusion, even frustration, in attempting to respond productively to these challenges, other school members, especially teachers, may feel devalued by the considerable criticism of schools and schooling in the media. The current emphasis on corporate management values, strategies and practices in many educational organisations may seem like an assault on their professionalism.

This book is written within a leadership context that is increasingly sensitive to the need for sound ethical and moral standards in how organisations are led and decisions made. As stated in the introduction, there is greater scrutiny of the behavioural ethics of all our leaders, including those in schools. As many ethical breaches have been exposed in other organisations, the time is now opportune for educational leaders to ensure that they are reviewing and embedding high ethical and moral standards in their policies and practices.

Increasingly educational leaders live and work in a global world that, according to Giddens (1998), influences social processes and institutions and encourages new forms of individualism that contribute to more selfish modes of living. They have, therefore, a particular responsibility to ensure that students in their care receive the type of education and learning experiences that help transform their lives so that they can break the bonds imposed by these forces for intense individualism and better contribute as responsible citizens to the common good (Sommerville, 2000). Educational leaders need to be socially, ethically and educationally responsible, in order to create the conditions within their schools that challenge students to see the bigger picture and to want to make a difference in their own lives and within the larger community.

Unfortunately too many leaders, especially those in politics and the business world, have not lived up to such expectations in recent times. Many in our communities doubt the credibility, especially with regard to ethical and moral behaviour, of leaders of many of our public and private institutions. There is a growing public chorus demanding ethical and authentic leadership. These demands are raising the ethical and moral bar for contemporary leaders.

## Influences of globalisation

In his groundbreaking book *The third way*, Giddens (1998) suggests that globalisation is a complex range of processes and events driven, primarily, by '… a



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mixture of political and economic influences'. It touches all our lives, transforming our social processes and institutions, even the ways in which we relate to one another. It is this latter perspective on globalisation that is of most interest because, as Giddens so clearly points out, it is directly relevant to the rise of the 'new individualism' (p. 33).

In fact, our selfish and self-centred ways are causing us to grasp at more temporary and less fulfilling forms of engagement. This gradual disengagement of self from a sense of the collective can lead to the development of a selective blindness for the plight of others less fortunate than ourselves, to the point where it can become entrenched at many levels of society. While such a development can lead to isolation and disengagement, as humans we need community for our identity, even our survival. Belonging to a community helps give greater meaning and purpose to life.

Some warn of the consequences of this love affair with ourselves. They argue that 'the ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society', and the choosing, self-driven individual is 'the central character of our time' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 22). They say that individualised modes of living have the potential to spawn a host of addict-making processes or process addictions, which are destructive of collective and communitarian interests. Process addictions – for example working long hours, stressful jobs, winning at all cost, spending beyond our means – are often seen as barometers of success in our societies (Breton & Largent, 1996, p. 2).

Perhaps the most destructive influence of these process addictions is that they are promoted and supported by society at large and by some key institutions. Our schools, churches, media – even our workplaces – can create feelings of dependency in us (Breton & Largent, 1996, p. 4). Many of society's systems, structures and processes may be eroding our sense of worth and wellbeing, creating dependency, and causing us to forget the bigger communitarian picture.

The more serious concern is the possibility that these addictive tendencies may very well start early in life, even during school years. This raises the issue of the potential role of schools in contributing to the development of these tendencies or habits in children.

## Influence of schools

How well do our schools prepare students to choose morally, ethically and wisely? This is a very difficult question to answer and any response to it is, necessarily, somewhat speculative. As we will discover in chapter 2, there is much evidence to suggest that many schools are failing our students, especially those who find it difficult to cope with a rigorously prescribed curriculum offered in inflexible



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and highly structured ways. Much learning in schools is based on regurgitation of facts in tests, without children knowing why their answers are deemed to be correct. Such inauthentic learning does not generally prepare students to live meaningful, compassionate and fulfilling lives (Starratt, 2004). It is much more likely to encourage and reward competitiveness, and push students toward selfish, individualised attitudes and behaviours.

A sobering consequence of such inauthentic learning approaches to teaching and learning is that at least some schools may be preparing students more for addiction than for making worthwhile choices in their lives (Breton & Largent, 1996, p. 4). According to Usher & Pajares (2008), they may give their students very negative messages, primarily through their restrictive control structures and processes, such as tight time schedules regulated by ringing bells, students moving from classroom to classroom, and constant supervision that seems to prevent children from developing independence and, in fact, may coax them into dependent behaviours.

Structures and processes may fail to take into consideration the holistic and integrating nature of knowledge for the lives of learners, and the role of schools in the spiritual and moral development of students. The most destructive part of the hidden curriculum for students is that they may be 'trained to give up a great deal of personal power' and may experience a 'profound sense of disenfranchisement' (Fourre, 2003, p. 77). While recommending a greater commitment to justice, Fourre cautions that a deep sense of moral and social responsibility can only be applied to life by those who possess a sense 'of their own power and their responsibility to use it for good' (p. 77).

This negative view of schools and schooling presents challenges for educational leaders who have a particular responsibility to use learning opportunities to promote the good of students as well as that of the community. They need to regard it as their ethical responsibility to promote and support policies and practices in their schools that better prepare students to be faithful, responsible and contributing citizens who will not just accept the world as it is but help transform their communities into havens of hope, promise and living witnesses of the common good. In a three-year research project entitled *Socially responsible indicators for policy, practice and benchmarking in service organisations*, Duignan et al. (2005) concluded that 'social responsibility is, above all, fostered by the commitment of leaders to the mission of the organisation' (p. 54), and the mission of many service organisations, such as schools, usually focuses on the people side of the organisation and on the capacity of their leaders to be ethically, morally and socially responsible. Providing students with learning environments that engage and challenge them morally, ethically and socially as well as educationally and academically, is a central challenge for educators and educational leaders in contemporary schools. Our students deserve no less!



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## Leadership for social responsibility

A predominant culture of accountability in today's schools usually means being judged against external standards and benchmarks, but to be socially responsible means to be cognisant of and act on values of justice and equity, as well as on moral principles and ethical standards. By implication, morally and socially responsible leaders need to challenge unethical and immoral policies and practices wherever they find them, especially in relation to justice and equity in their schools and in society.

Of course, taking such action involves risk and daring (Hannah & Avolio, 2010) and ethically responsible educational leaders require great courage. In an address titled, 'The courage to lead', Heft singles out two areas of leadership in which contemporary leaders must do better – *justice* and *diversity* (Heft & Bennett, 2004). In relation to diversity, often referred to as multiculturalism, he cautions that some approaches by leaders '… are based on a false idea of tolerance' (p. 17) that actually avoids commitment to principles and ethical standards. Tolerance and civility shouldn't be characterised as 'moral ambivalence', which can quickly lead to moral indifference (Keane, 2003, p. 199). On the other hand, arrogant adherence to absolute values or inflexible principles can lead to self-righteous behaviours. A basic ethic of tolerance, based on mutual respect for differences enshrined within a global civil society, is one way of striking a balance between bland tolerance and self-righteous behaviours (Keane, 2003). Educational leaders need clearly articulated moral principles and ethical standards for action that will help schools steer a course away from intense individualism, bland tolerance, or self-righteous behaviours, toward more ethical, moral and communitarian processes and actions.

## Need for clear moral purpose

A hallmark of authentic leadership is that it is inspired by clear moral purpose (Ryan, 2008). He suggests that all educators need to rediscover and renew their moral purpose and passion (p. 4).

Many contemporary educational leaders are under strong external pressures that tend to drive and control what they do every day and rob them of the meaning, moral purpose, and the passion of their professional work. Ryan argues that teachers join their profession because of deep moral purpose and to make a difference in the lives of their students. Their passion comes from deep inside and is inspired by their personal and professional principles and values.

In recent times a strong emphasis on ethics and moral purpose, as well as recognition that leadership is a values-based activity, has emerged in educational leadership (e.g., Cranston, Ehrich & Kimber, 2006). They suggest that 'communities expect those holding leadership positions to act justly, rightly and promote good …



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as well as demonstrate moral and professional accountability' (p. 106). It appears, too, that school principals have the same expectation of themselves. In research with over 550 school principals, Cranston et al. (2006) reported that 'participants emphasised the need not only for ethical organisational cultures but also the importance of having clear personal ethical values and professional ethics' (p. 114). This heightened awareness of ethics may be due to the very nature of their jobs – complex and crises-filled – because Cranston et al. found from their research that leaders may not be fully aware of their values 'until they are confronted with a crisis' (p. 114).

As identified earlier, many leaders do not follow ethical standards or act in socially responsible ways. In fact, there is currently widespread cynicism about the credibility and authenticity of leaders in a number of our public and private institutions.

## Growing cynicism for leaders and leadership

Why is there such widespread doubt in the community about the sincerity and credibility of many leaders in our organisations and in public life? Freeman and Stewart (2006) suggest that while 'it is important for leaders to tell a compelling and morally rich story', a problem is that they do not always 'embody and live the story' (p. 3) and this can lead to feelings of cynicism from staff and stakeholders. There may, however, be important reasons why educational leaders fail to give sufficient attention to the moral and ethical dimensions of their work. Moberg (2006) argues that the chief cause of recent corporate scandals is a 'breakdown in moral agency,' which he blames on their reliance on 'patterns of perceptions that undercut the moral capabilities of the actors' (p. 413). People's personal patterns of perceptions or their perspective, which he calls 'a frame', create what he refers to as '*blind spots*, those defects in one's perceptual field that can cloud one's judgment, lead one to erroneous conclusions, or provide insufficient triggers to appropriate action' (p. 414, italics in original). Because of their particular frames, leaders can have both personal and interpersonal blind spots. Interpersonal blind spots occur when they place more emphasis on others' negative characteristics than on their positive traits, thereby making 'positive elements of character less salient than negative ones' (p. 416). Because of this, he suggests that 'whistle-blowing is seen by insiders more as an emblem of betrayal than a sign of virtue' (p. 416). However, he explains that an interpersonal blind spot 'does not appear to represent a serious threat to moral agency' because, while it might 'diminish virtue,' it 'does not undermine the identification of moral qualities altogether' (p. 417).

A more serious threat to moral agency in an organisation is when 'individuals act on an incomplete assessment of their own personal qualities – *their personal*



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