

# Preface

*Contemporary educational reform places a great premium upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement. Research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership in securing school development and change. The evidence from the international research base is unequivocal—effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students. The research shows that although the quality of teaching has a powerful influence upon pupil motivation and achievement, the quality of leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom. In summary, the contribution of leadership to school effectiveness and school improvement is significant.*

—Alma Harris (2002)

## PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Distributed leadership is a method for engaging educational practitioners in meaningful and timely dialogue about the effectiveness of their leadership practices as they relate to enhancing and changing classroom practices. This, in turn, enhances student learning. A distributed perspective on leadership is best thought of as a framework for thinking about and analyzing leadership (Spillane, 2006a; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004). It proposes an ideology that predicts success in the purposeful creation of leadership and classroom practices on the basis of situationally interdependent interactions between leaders and followers.

*The Distributed Leadership Toolbox* provides routines and tools for a school's formal leaders and building-level teams that allow them to *diagnose* and *design* leadership practices. These tools help leaders to stop leading by default. Leadership practice is defined as the interactions among the leader(s), followers, and the situation stretched over time (Spillane,

2004a, 2006a). The most important task is to help leaders perfect their performance of these routines and use tools in practice on the basis of observation and reflection. The intent is to give school teams a new way of thinking about the relationship between leadership practice, classroom practice, and student performance.

This book tackles present-day leadership research, which is often on distributed leadership, and transforms it into a precision leadership toolbox for practitioners. Converting research to application has historically been difficult for practicing educators, and the research associated with distributed leadership isn't any different. For most leaders, viewing leadership from a distributed perspective has been, up until now, like trying to read a foreign textbook. Deciphering this research and putting it into practice is a challenge. Therefore, I have worked extensively with several leadership researchers in an effort to translate their research into practical applications for school leaders. It has become clear, as a result of facilitating several leadership teams focused on distributed leadership, that there is a need to have a toolbox of leadership practice diagnosis and design tools.

## **ADOPTING AND CREATING A REPERTOIRE OF PRACTICES**

By no means should this set of tools be perceived as the fix-all for school improvement. Use the tools in this book to begin the process of diagnosing your present practice and to design effective ways to enhance and change teachers' classroom practice. It is important that the tools within this book *don't* become the sole source for evaluation and design of leadership practices. That would be a mistake and I would not have met my objectives of establishing the uniqueness of each school. Leaders must become skilled designers of their own routines and tools. This toolbox was

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*Different forms of leadership are needed in different stages of a project or an organization's development. No one person can be a leader in every situation. Effective organizations allow the natural leader to emerge as needs require.*

—Kathy Kolbe (2004b)

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designed to cultivate a “distributed mind-set” in school leaders to move them beyond an exclusive reliance on school leader superheroes and shared leadership.

Many schools that have adopted the use of these tools have reported to me that they have necessitated redesigning some tools to fit their situation. In other words, they have used the tools in different ways than their original intention

and have redesigned them to meet their unique needs. I celebrate this, because this means they get it. They are adapting and creating their own

tools to meet their needs and situations. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) say we must develop leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed. Without fail, schools who have adopted these tools have said the toolbox gave them a framework to work from. They used the tools from the toolbox and created new ones to meet the objectives outlined in the distributed leadership school improvement framework. The toolbox has provided them with a starting point, and they have adapted their use to fit their particular situation.

## **DO NOT FEAR**

As many of you reading this preface can testify, teachers and administrators already have so many federally mandated programs to adhere to, not to even mention the testing that is required, that it is a major challenge to find the time to plan challenging diversified curriculum that the students deserve. Readers who have read this book mostly agree with the philosophy of distributed leadership; however, a normal reaction is a hesitation to implement the underpinnings. Practitioners do not want another program, and even more so, one that would require so much time. The tools within this book lay out a framework and a foundation for your work within distributed leadership; it is not meant to be the composition of reform. In fact, the framework I offer within this toolbox is a complement to your present practices and reform efforts. Use the tools as needed, when needed. Use the tools once or twice and then adopt the theories and philosophies that shape the very purpose of the tools and discard the tool. Although I have a plethora of tools on which to draw, I use only one or two of them when I facilitate individuals and teams. Instead, I use a series of critical questions to identify the issue and then choose a few tools to use as mediating devices, enabling the individual and teams to reflect on their own practice and to help them design new practices.

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Given the current conditions of most schools and my experience in working closely with school leaders struggling to make sense of the collective demands put on them in an era of high leadership accountability, I present this book as a leadership practice toolbox used to focus and guide practitioners through a leadership team's collaboration inquiry, diagnosis, and design.

The book is written to support readers new to the distributed perspective as well as for those who have read prior research. To my knowledge, this is the first resource made available in a practitioner's perspective. Therefore, I made efforts to build a set of guiding principles associated with the uniqueness of taking a distributed leadership perspective and, more important, to offer practical field-tested tools, facilitator tips, and an improvement model.

If deliberately implemented, the tools and the model presented here will increase the awareness school leaders have on teachers teaching and students learning. The facilitator tips will provide guidance and increase the confidence and skills of those who choose to engage other leaders in this valuable process. The tools and model will increase the leadership capacity of your school, which in turn will positively influence the learning potential of each child.

### **Remove the Blinders so You Can See**

Efforts to improve leadership should build upon the foundation of well-documented and well-accepted knowledge about leadership that already exists. We know that leadership is most successful when it is focused on instruction and learning. Yet leaders struggle to move beyond the knowing to the doing.

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*It is possible to find schools all over the country that don't listen to those who say what they are doing is impossible.*

—Karin Chenoweth (2007)

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It is imperative that you as a reader remove your blinders and open up your historical-experience filter to allow for a new way of thinking about leadership. Doing the same thing over and over again gets us the same results. Practitioners and users of this field guide need to understand the unique differences associated with the various aspects of leadership. Why is it so important? Because we are creatures of habit and we will fall back on old ways, it is critical for us to understand the framework of leadership we will be using.

### **What It Looks Like**

The book is organized in a way that enables the readers to start with the current condition of leadership and a rationale for looking at leadership differently (Chapter 1). Chapters 2 and 3 are the foundation research and theories that give shape to the uniqueness of distributed leadership. Chapter 4 is the supportive framework for inquiry into the distributed perspective of leadership. Chapter 5 presents tools that can be used during the Information Cycle of the distributed leadership framework, and

Chapter 6 presents the tools that can be used during the Practice Cycle of the distributed leadership framework. Chapter 7 discusses the reflective tools used to analyze the team's effectiveness in using the routines and tools within the previous two chapters.

## **Brief Description of Each Chapter**

### *Chapter 1: Traditional Thinking/New Opportunities*

Chapter 1 is an overview of the traditional views of school leadership, school change, and analysis of classroom practice. It also provides a foundation of thinking about leadership practice as it is stretched across leaders, followers, and their situations. Accounts of leadership often dwell exclusively on building principal attributes and roles as well as school structures. Principals have been put into a superhero limelight as the so-called action-orientated “instructional leaders” of everything. In recent years, schools have become data critiques of classroom practice but have not been critiqued on the other essential contributing factors in student learning such as leadership practice (Leithwood et al., 2004). The challenges facing practitioners in converting distributed leadership research into useful practice is made easy through a series of examples and case studies. Informed by the latest distributed leadership research and by case studies from my work with schools around the Midwest, this chapter illuminates school practitioner pitfalls as well as the potential for effective changes.

### *Chapter 2: A Distributed Perspective on Leadership*

When looking at leadership from a distributed perspective, it becomes more than counting up all the actions taken by individual leaders to describe leadership—it is more about the practices (Spillane, 2005b; 2006a). Chapter 2 challenges readers to look at leadership from a new perspective composed of interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations. A foundation of support is built around the essential role that followers play in how leadership is practiced within a school. The uniqueness of the situation shapes how leadership is practiced in direct relationship to teachers' classroom practices. The situation, the leader, and follower interactions are explored and defined within a complex system of leadership practices. What is leadership practice? What is distributed leadership, or what is it not? These central questions are answered by connecting research to practitioner examples. This chapter will explore the role of reform models and professional learning communities and the relationship school leaders have on their success and failures.

Distributed leadership is categorically not a reform model and is not the same as professional learning communities; however, it is not in conflict with either of them.

### *Chapter 3: The Impact of Leadership on Successful Schools*

Chapter 3 explores four distinctive leadership aspects and the impact they have on school improvement efforts when deployed. All four of the aspects can produce effective results, but only one will create a cohesive maturity among its leaders, which in turn will produce communities of practice. One aspect will produce a series of unwanted outcomes across multiple leadership and organizational factors, including school culture and instructional focus of the teaching staff. The other two aspects of leadership can produce positive enhancements and changes to the organization and student performance. However, if school leaders linger too long in one of these two aspects, they may begin to produce undesirable results.

This chapter also constructs and transcribes a vision for developing facilitative conversations within the distributed perspective of leadership. *How do we know our leadership practices are enhancing and changing teachers' classroom practice?* This question will be surveyed often through a set of essential critical questions for facilitating conversations with school improvement leadership teams. In addition, we will learn about the three vital leadership functions that all successful schools adequately incorporate into their leadership practices. The importance of structuring collaborative inquiry into leadership practice is central; therefore, a provocative leadership impact survey is introduced within this chapter.

### *Chapter 4: The Framework of Success: A Model for Leadership Inquiry*

Distributed leadership is a description of how leadership is at present and what it can become (Spillane, 2006a). A multiphase school leadership improvement outline, “The Distributed Leadership Improvement Framework,” is presented as a means for thinking about leadership practice by design. The framework is broken down into three improvement cycles interwoven in partnership with leadership practice and classroom practice. The Distributed Leadership Improvement Framework is a tool that provides the means for practitioners to use a distributed leadership perspective within their present school improvement efforts. The framework takes the reader from diagnosis, to design, to new practice, and finally to the results and analysis of school leadership practices. The framework serves as a foundational tool for all the tools that are explored in the remaining chapters.

### *Chapter 5: Information Cycle: Effective–Efficiency Process*

Chapter 5 is broken into seven sections (labeled A through G). This chapter provides practitioners the opportunity to explore the lived reality of their leadership practices and to put new or reworked practices in place by design. This chapter is devoted to guiding leaders through the Information Cycle in preparation for the Practice Cycle. A wide array of diagnostic tools for teams, each with stories, examples, facilitator instructions, and rationales, are explored.

Section A helps identify a starting point, the Dimension of Practice, which serves as the foundation for diagnosis of a school leadership and classroom practice. Section B tools are used to determine which leaders are influencing which classroom teachers in direct association with the identified Dimension of Practice. Sections C, D, and E tools are designed to give guidance to practitioners as they diagnose and analyze their leadership practice in association with classroom practice. The tools are created for the purpose of helping practitioners make purposeful application in direct relationship with distributed leadership. Sections F and G are a set of design tools used to assist leaders in their efforts to enhance and change their leadership practices, including routines, tools, and structures. Sometimes teams hesitate to undertake a major leadership initiative because they fear the potential difficulties and negative repercussions that might ensue from innovative actions. The tools within this section facilitate alternative solutions to practices while using the unique talents of an array of formal and informal leaders. The tools make it possible for teams to move beyond good intentions to meaningful action. The anecdotes and strategies constructed within this chapter serve as a practical resource for the novice as well as the experienced practitioner.

### *Chapter 6: Practice Cycle: Practice Improvement Process*

Chapter 6 tools assist leaders as they move from the Information Cycle to the Practice Cycle. A series of new practices and data tools for teams, each with stories, examples, facilitator instructions, and rationales, are investigated. Chapter 6 is divided into three sections (labeled A through C). The tools are designed to give guidance to practitioners as they design and monitor leadership practices that enhance and change teachers' classroom practice. Only when practices are put in place by design can they be evaluated for their effectiveness in enhancing and changing classroom practices, which in turn may boost student learning. Section A is intended to help bridge the gap between design and new practice. Section B exposes leaders to planning templates that are uniquely designed to address the interactions of leaders and followers in association with their identified

situation. The tools in Section C provide teams with a means for evaluating the results that are produced from their new leadership practices.

### *Chapter 7: Tools for Reflective Practice*

Teams habitually move from one practice diagnosis to another without processing the tools and course of action the team used. It is essential that teams review the tools and processes used for the diagnosis to determine what should be repeated, revised, or deleted. This chapter explores the collaborative successes and struggles of the team as they use a number of different Information and Practice Cycle tools. Teams identify the impact of their practices, distill a formula for improving the use of the routines and tools, and examine how to apply this knowledge to future leadership practice reviews.

### *Reproducible Blank Templates*

Many of the tools you are exposed to in the various chapters have reproducible templates. The templates can be accessed from the section immediately following Chapter 7, and they are arranged in alphabetical order. Maximize your facilitation of leadership teams, faculty meetings, and workshops by reproducing the templates for handouts or overheads. These templates have also conveniently been provided electronically on the provided CD.

### *Reproducible Resources*

Many of the concepts and visual tools used throughout the chapters have been reproduced for your convenience in a handout form. In addition, a list of terms associated with distributed leadership has been created for facilitators and leaders during inquiry sessions with leadership teams and faculties. These templates have also conveniently been provided electronically on the provided CD.



## DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP TOOLS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Reproducible templates</b>	<b>Page #</b>	<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Facilitator tips</b>	<b>Page #</b>
Leadership Impact Survey	✓	232–236	Dialogue	✓	59–62
A Vertical Leadership Component Map	✓	238	Information	✓	94–96
Advice Network Map	✓	243	Information	✓	109–111
Identified Leadership Practices	✓	244–245	Information	✓	117–119
Routine Microanalysis Chart	✓	246	Information	✓	124–126
Microanalysis Chart Reflection	✓	247	Information		
Systems of Practice	✓	249	Information	✓	138–141
Directional Intentions of Leadership Practices	✓	268	Information	✓	157–160
Competing Dimensions of Practice	✓	269	Information	✓	153
Common Dimensions of Practice	✓	270	Information	✓	155
Multiple Leaders Practice Diagnosis	✓	250	Information	✓	146–148
Practice-to-Practice Vertical	✓	251	Information	✓	170–172
Practice-to-Practice Horizontal	✓	252	Information	✓	170–172
Shaping of Leadership Functions Form	✓	253–254	Information	✓	164–166
Side-by-Side Content Comparison	✓	255	Information	✓	174–176
Side-by-Side Building Comparison	✓	256	Information		
Practice Gap Summary	✓	257	Information	✓	179–181
Practice Bridge Dialogue Questions	✓	258	Information	✓	181
Forecasting Leadership Initiatives Grid	✓	259	Information	✓	185–187
Alternative Solutions Applied Chart	✓	260	Information	✓	191–194
Leadership Function Support Analysis Form	✓	261	Information	✓	196–197
Intentions Versus Action	✓	262–263	Practice	✓	203–205
New Practice Action-Planning Chart	✓	264	Practice	✓	208–210
Stakeholder Analysis Support Chart	✓	266	Practice	✓	213–215
Tally Log			Practice	✓	216–218
Data Collection Chart	✓	265	Practice	✓	218–219
Verbal Flow			Practice	✓	220–221
Reflection Worksheet	✓	241	Reflective	✓	229
Lessons Learned Questionnaire	✓	240	Reflective	✓	228
Post-Leadership Routine Reflection	✓	237	Reflective		
Shaping Our Reflection	✓	239	Reflective	✓	229
Systems of Tools: Circle Reflection	✓	248	Reflective	✓	229
Leadership and Classroom Practice Worksheet	✓	242	Reflective	✓	229
Example 6 Person Placemat	✓	267	Decision Making		