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School Leadership Is Context Dependent

Introduction

School context is a complex and important topic and judgements on the practice of school leadership cannot be "one size fits all". Each education system has its own peculiarities, and each school within an education system has its own peculiarities. School leaders, despite years of teaching or leadership experience, cannot simply transfer what worked from one school into another one, no matter how well these may have worked elsewhere (or in the past). Inasmuch as the practice of school leadership is heavily influenced by external, internal and personal factors, school

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We cannot separate the school from the cultural, social and moral context which surrounds it. A school is not an isolated island. The school influences and is influenced by the context that surrounds it. School leadership must adapt itself to this context in order to be efficient and effective. Each school has unique characteristics so the school principal must take these into consideration when he chooses the appropriate leadership style. (Israel, 3F)

Context defines everything. Each school has its own specific context which determines every course of action. This is made very clear when school leaders move from one context to another. When trying to implement tried and tested policies, they can only work if tweaked to reflect the context of the current school. Context is not only important between schools, but within schools themselves. As a school culture changes, so the context changes—what served a purpose once needs to be redefined in order for school improvement to continue and to avoid stagnation. (England, 1F)

leadership is also heavily influenced by time, place and space. In other words, the practice of school leadership is heavily influenced by context, within which there are also layers of contexts or multiple contexts.

Following the publication of Bridges (1977), *The Nature of Leadership*, 'context' as an issue in leadership was picked up on by several researchers. Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982), for example, identified the school district, the community and the school leader him/herself as relevant "contexts" for leadership. They also distinguished between "person-specific" and "widely-shared contexts". Person specific context is made up of the job related knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience possessed by a school leader. Additionally, a school leader's prior experiences and personal resources act as prisms through which information, problems, opportunities and situations arising from the external environment are mediated and filtered (Goldring, Huff, May & Camburn, 2008).

Widely-shared contexts are made up of features of the broader institutional and environmental setting within which a school and its leader are based (Goldring et al., 2008). For example, the school "district context" focuses on the goals, size, structure, complexity, rules and regulations. Similarly, the focus of the school "community context" is on the socio-economic standing of parents, parental and community involvement and engagement, as well as a school's location (e.g. urban/inner-city/rural/remote). Responding to these two broad areas of context, Bossert et al. (1982) proposed two things. First, the peculiarities of context shape the behaviour of school leaders. Second, successful school leaders adapt their leadership to the needs, opportunities and constraints present within their own work contexts. Context is therefore a two-way street, influencing and being influenced by a school leader.

The Issue in Context: Identifying Context

Institutional Context

The institutional context of school leadership/schooling is made up of factors internal to a school as well as those factors outside a school that have a direct bearing of what goes on inside. As stated by Bossert et al.

(1982), the aims, structure, initiatives, size and norms of a school district (or regional educational zone or local [education] authorities) come together to form a work context for school leaders. For example, although support structures that organise and direct the work of school leaders may differ widely across school districts (local authorities, regions), directives and frameworks that guide the work of school leaders are usually determined centrally or regionally. Although important, the school "district context" represents only a single component of a much broader "institutional context".

The structure of a national education system has a very potent impact and influence on the practice of school leadership (Buchmann & Dalton, 2002). Lee and Hallinger (2012) propose that institutional structures contribute to what school leaders do, and how they do it. Drawing on examples of how school leaders in Kuwait and Canada divided their time between instructional leadership and other activities, they found that system-level aims and structures shape the degree to which school leaders are able to allocate time to instructional leadership, administration and community interaction, concluding that "principals in more structured education systems reportedly allocated less of their time for administration" (2012, p. 17).

The degree of centralisation within a national education system is another factor that influences how school leaders do their jobs. For example, school leaders in highly centralised systems may not be able to recruit and select their teachers (e.g. in Cyprus) and must "make do" with the teachers assigned by the central education ministry, compared with systems in other countries that are not as highly centralised (e.g. in Jamaica) where school leaders directly recruit and select teachers.

Ongoing debates and changes in the global policy environment have also influenced the work of school leaders in institutional contexts, evidenced by the range of system-level quality and accountability frameworks that have dominated the last two decades in both developed and developing countries across the world. In 1992, Bridges reported that teacher evaluation practices in the USA were arbitrary, ritualistic, seldom led to improvements in teacher capacity and did not contribute to weaker teachers being discharged. This led to widespread reforms to teacher evaluation practices in many countries, resulting in teachers who failed to

meet annual performance targets/expectations being discharged. Despite progress in this area, it should be noted that annual teacher evaluation/ performance review is not a formalised activity in several countries, particularly in developing and smaller countries where they do not have either the capacity or available support structures in place. Within the last decade, however, teacher evaluation systems have dominated in countries with strong accountability mechanisms, in particular, in developed countries.

Community Context

The community context of school leadership/schooling is made up of factors in the immediate local environs of a school which have the potential to be brought into school or which can have a direct bearing on what goes on inside. From their study on leadership in instructionally effective elementary schools in poor and well-off communities, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) found differences in leadership practices to support teaching and learning and in how school leaders engaged (with) parents and local school communities. Follow up work a decade later by Hallinger, Bickam and Davis (1996) concluded,

> The nature of principals' instructional leadership differed systematically in relation to student socioeconomic composition in the schools. The direction of the effect indicates that principals in higher-SES schools exercised more active instructional leadership of the type measured in this study than their counterparts in schools serving students of lower SES. The finding supports the notion that principals adapt their instructional leadership to the community context in which they work. (p. 542)

Another element of a school's community context relates to whether the school is located in a remote, rural, urban or inner-city community. As gaps in achievement widen and as debates about social mobility intensifying concerns about school location have highlighted, issues such as the suitability and adequacy of resources and material, the physical conditions of school sites, security and safety for staff and students, the

willingness and availability of staff to work in certain locations (in particular for remote and inner-city schools), and access issues due to poor and unsafe road conditions.

Miller (2015) found that small primary schools in rural and remote Jamaica were at risk of not meeting achievement targets for students due to scarcity of resources and the unwillingness and unavailability of quality teachers to accept jobs in remote/rural communities. In a later study, Miller (2016) found that schools in some inner-city communities in Jamaica were also at risk of not meeting achievement targets due to social upheaval and gang related violence that (often) disrupt schooling. Faced with these location or community-based issues, school leaders reassessed and redefined priorities towards meeting benchmark standards and towards the security and safety of staff and students, thus aligning school development initiatives with "developing school-community initiatives that enhanced school security and curricular needs … [and which] built relationships and reinforced the importance of school-community engagement" (Brooks & Sungtong, 2015, p. 24).

Other aspects of the community context that continue to shape and reshape the role and behaviours of school leaders include more ethnically diverse staff and student populations, schools in "challenging contexts" such as being surrounded by community violence or conflict, and disruptions due to natural or other disasters and hazards. These issues of context not only shape the role of leadership, but also raise the stakes for providing quality leadership since leadership quality improves and intensifies (Hutton, 2014) and assumes greater importance in challenging circumstances (Day, 2005; Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009).

National Cultural Context

The national cultural context of school leadership/schooling comprises factors found within a society as a whole, which are part of a pattern of group identity or socialisation. These factors have great potential to be brought into a school, and to influence what goes on in a school, since no member of a school community is exempt from their impact. Hofstede's (1980) typology of national culture has featured widely in evaluations of

how differences in "power distance" and "collectivism" shape school leadership in different national contexts, leading researchers to argue that in order to achieve their desired outcomes, leadership styles used by school leaders must align with the values and norms identifiable in different socio-cultural contexts. In their cross-national comparative study of school leadership, Lee and Hallinger (2012) found, for example, that socio-cultural factors provided explanations of differences observed in school leaders' use of time. They especially noted:

- Principals from less hierarchically organized societies tended to allocate more time for instructional leadership than principals from societies with higher Power Distance Index (PDI)
- Principals in higher PDI countries may assume a more "traditional head of school" role and delegate instructional leadership activities to others
- Principals in less hierarchical societies appear to allocate more time for interacting with parents and community
- Parents in low PDI societies may experience fewer barriers between the school and its community and interact with the school administration accordingly (Lee & Hallinger, 2012, p. 17).

School related cultural issues may include:

- Organisation of schooling: for example, schools are held on particular days of the week in Western countries and on different days in Muslim countries; female and male students are taught in separate classes in many Muslim countries;
- Scheduling of school day/year: for example, a school day may be between 7 am and 5 pm in one country, between 9 am and 3 pm in another country, and between 7 am and 1 pm in yet another country; the academic school year may be between January and November/December in some counties, but between September and June/July in other countries;
- Out-of-school contact between staff and students: for example, school leaders and teachers may be allowed to visit students at their homes under certain conditions whereas in other countries this is strictly forbidden;

- Arrangements for staffing: for example, school leaders may be able to recruit and select teachers through direct advertising in some countries, whereas in other countries teachers are recruited and assigned by the education ministry/department.

School leadership is experiencing "a multiplicity of economic, emotional and social challenges" (Harris & Thomson, 2006, p. 1) that are important to our understanding of how the cultural context of schooling influences schools/school leadership. In addition to a school's cultural context, there are national cultural factors that combine to shape the work of school leaders at the school level. These factors may include technological factors—the availability and use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education; economic factors—whether education is free or subsidised; social conditions—girls' access to education; the age at which compulsory schooling ends; the likelihood of civil unrest and upheaval; political factors—stability of a national government and/or the coherence of educational policies; environmental factors—likelihood or experience of natural disasters and their impact on schooling. An understanding, if not an appreciation, of these factors is a vital part of the sense and meaning making of the practice of school leadership—in context.

Economic Context

The economic context of school leadership/schooling comprises factors in the economic environment of a country or nation, and is concerned with government spending on education, including capital investments, spending on material and resources for teaching and learning, and staffing. Factors in a school's economic environment, such as teacher quality, class size, expenditure per student, education level of parents, parental involvement in schooling, and size and quality of the school library and access to technology, can have a direct bearing on the ability of the school/school leaders to deliver (quality) education.

Miller (2016) found that economic conditions between Jamaican and English schools were in stark contrast to each other. He also found that each school system comprised very different opportunities, resources, needs

and challenges. For example, several Jamaican schools did not have access to ICT, and where there was access, this was sometimes limited in scope and quality. English schools on the other hand had regular quality access to ICT, which was widely used in nearly all areas of a school's operations—from teaching to procurement. Despite this difference, however, Jamaican school leaders showed greater creativity (entrepreneurial leadership) in how they went about partnering with local communities and industry to acquire funds to purchase ICT equipment and resources for schools.

Lee and Hallinger (2012) examined the potential impact of a nation's level of economic development on the practice of school leaders in 39 high, moderate and low GDP countries. They found that although school leaders in countries with higher GDP spent more time at work, they allocated less time to instructional leadership, compared with school leaders from developing countries.

Political Context

The political context of school leadership/schooling comprises factors in a country's national environment, and is concerned with political structures, educational policy-making and implementation, and the power structures and relationships between educationalists and governments. Factors in a national political environment, for example educational policy agendas, can significantly affect the ability of schools/school leaders to deliver quality education.

Recent research on educational leadership in the UK (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011), Vietnam (Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Truong, Hallinger & Sanga, 2016) and Jamaica (Miller, 2014) identified explicit ways in which national political context shapes normative practices within education. In the UK, performativity has become a main feature in the everyday practice of school leaders, and implementing policy at the school level is at best a fraught exercise. In Vietnam, political structures are integrated into schooling and, as a result, school leaders report to both the Ministry of Education and Training and the Communist Party. In Jamaica, although not established in the education regulations,

it is common practice for Members of Parliament to select the chair of a school board, and it is the job of a school board to appoint school leaders. In Jamaica and Vietnam, one may argue that school officials and school leaders appointed by political actors both represent and facilitate the directives of government at the school level. Thus, in Vietnam as in Jamaica, one could argue that the 'voice' of the school leader is simultaneously the 'voice' of the ruling party (politics) and the 'voice' of the state (government). Recognising (and understanding) the role played by a national state in education in a country is therefore a vital component in assessing the practice of school leadership.

The Evidence

Evidence from this 16 nation study is consistent with the available literature on school leadership and context. Context matters in school leadership and leadership matters in context. The context has been viewed as a constraint (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996) and a lever (Hallinger, 2016) in the practice of school leadership, which intensifies and contributes to the overall quality of school leadership. Context is independent of a leader, and whereas school leaders contribute to the shaping of institutional and community contexts, these contexts also contribute to the shaping of school leaders. This two-way effect of context acknowledges "environments" and associated factors and how these may influence leadership practice, as well as a school leader's personal agency and how this may influence "environments".

Locating a School's Context: Place, People, System

Context is everything! It is also an essential element in any attempt to understand the practice and impact of educational/school leadership. As established above, context is a multiple pronged lever that shapes, if not defines, leadership. Clarke and Wildy (2016) identify "place, people,

system and self" (p. 45) as four focal points for understanding school leadership. Where applicable, I draw on different parts of this framework in presenting key findings within this chapter.

Place

Having a knowledge of place means school leaders are able to read the complexities of their context, especially the people, the problems and issues, as well as the culture of the school and the community in which a school is located. Having this knowledge puts the school leader in a better position to deploy suitable strategies and interventions. The (then) UK's National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2007) describes having this knowledge as being "contextually literate":

> *School leadership is most definitely context dependent. In a changing educational market, the best leaders need to be able to analyse and quickly work with the contextual setting of schools. It is key to rapid improvement. One size does not fit all. Leaders need to get 'under the skin' of school context.* (England, 9M)
>   *All leadership must respond to the context. It is not possible to mindlessly utilise ideas and solutions from other contexts as the risk is that they will not work or—even worse—create a bigger problem than the one started with.* (England, 3M)

Getting under the skin of context means being contextually literate or showing awareness of the isms and particularities of place, such as institutional structure, culture, policies, clients, employees and stakeholders (e.g. community and parents). Isms and particularities are a powerful force that have a direct impact on which activities are undertaken and how these activities are undertaken. Context thus plays an important role in setting the tone of a school by providing direction, meaning and an identity to those who study and work in it. Furthermore, as each school has its own isms and particularities, school leaders must carefully consider these in their own approach to, for example, relationship building, strategy development, community engagement and staff development. This crucial point is sustained by school leaders who identify improvements in teaching and learning or in the quality of leadership

practice without a good understanding of place. They warn against parachuting in solutions used elsewhere without first considering the specific needs and/or the isms and particularities of context, or without giving thought to tweaking interventions developed in another context.

> *Every location and school has its own culture about how things are done, so what works in one school may not work in another school.* (Antigua, 1F)
> *Context is a huge factor of school leadership; everything must be done within the context in which it operates.* (Jamaica, 7M)

Schools are dynamic and getting under the skin of a school's context is a necessary first step towards successful leadership. According to Clarke and Wildy (2016), this involves using data to make decisions and develop strategies and action plans, and being able to read into and ahead of situations. Being able to read into and ahead of situations is a skill associated with foresighting, an area of business concerned with predicting or sensing future (market) trends. Put differently,

> *School leaders have to be savvy. They have to be intuitive and be able to see trends in education and capitalise on these trends. The leader 'goes with the flow' but like a stockmarket broker, is alert to changes in atmosphere, all aimed at maximising achievements.* (Jamaica, 1F)

Lovett, Dempster and Fluckgier (2014) thus argue that school leaders' consideration of place must not be limited only to the micro-context of a school but should also encompass events in the macro-context. In particular, they argue that school leaders need to be au fait with events and trends in the international and national policy environments and how these (may) impact curriculum and other arrangements at the school level.

People

To get under the skin of a school's context requires leadership that understands and values people. As one Jamaican school leader noted in Chap. 4, "Teachers can either make you or break you". More widely applied, "people can either make you or break you". Thus, school leaders should

have the knowledge, understanding and skills to manage complex inter-actions with staff and multiple stakeholders (e.g. officials in the education ministry/department, parents and community groups), since "these inter-actions highlight the importance of the interpersonal, political and ethi-cal dimensions of the school leaders' role" (Clarke & Wildy, 2016, p. 46).

The two-way relationship between school leaders and context is an important one, and one that is currently under-researched. For, as much as school leaders shape (school) context, context (e.g. school, commu-nity) also contributes to their moulding. In other words, the views expressed and actions and attitudes held by staff, students, parents, com-munity members and other stakeholders contribute to shaping a school's context and therefore the practice of leadership.

> *School leaders are shaped by context and school leaders help to shape context. It is a two-way street.* (Pakistan, 1M)
>
> *I do not function in isolation of the skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that students, teachers, leaders and other stakeholders bring on board. These attri-butes jointly shape or create the context in which I work. This ultimately makes school leadership a highly contextual practice that is dependent on others.* (Montserrat, 1M)

If appropriately managed, the relationship between a school leader and school context can be an essential capacity-building tool for the school leader and others within the context as a leader draws upon the skills, talents and experience of others within a school community and beyond, to better anticipate and respond to current and foreseeable challenges and opportunities.

System

Events in society can positively and/or negatively affect all areas of school-ing. This is an area of agreement among school leaders and researchers on school leadership. Clarke and Wildy (2016) argue that "school leaders do not simply descend into implementing the policies and values of the sys-tem, but are also able to question or to adapt system imperatives" (p. 47). This view is supported by evidence from studies of school leaders in

England (Riley, Dockings & Rowles, 2000) and Jamaica (Miller, 2016) where it was found that school leaders engaged in "rule breaking" and "policy filtering" in order to cope with the content and volume of policy implementation required of them. Lovett et al. (2014) point out that the plethora of regulatory requirements in an education system is directed at securing "compliance". As a result, Clarke and Wildy argue, "dealing with the system, therefore, takes not only functional knowledge, understanding and contending with matters of compliance, but also confidence, determination and political sophistication" (p. 47). Political sophistication, they argue, is grounded in the ability to adapt and align external policy dictates to suit a school's internal capabilities and purposes. This argument is sustained by findings from this research.

> *Schools are constantly responding to national and local pressures. It is for schools to have the integrity and courage to respond appropriately to the different contexts in which they find themselves.* (England, 7F)
>
> *The political environment here in Mozambique makes it very hard for school leaders to see the fruits of their work, as almost weekly there are changes and new demands.* (Mozambique, 1M)

Harris and Thomson (2006) remind us that school leadership is experiencing "a multiplicity of economic, emotional and social challenges" (p. 21). The ability of school leaders to manage multiple complexities of people, place and system is crucial to their own success as well as to the success of their schools. On the one hand, school leaders must deliver truth to purpose. On the other hand, they must successfully navigate complex institutional, social, interpersonal, economic and other environmental factors in trying to secure an advantage for their school.

Context and Leadership Practice

School leadership is hard work, and, as discussed above, the context in which a school/school leader operates can make or break them. That is, is a school a high performing school? Is it a coasting school? Is it a low performing school? Is it an improving school? Where a school is at in the improvement cycle and how it sees itself are important factors in

establishing its internal culture (Hallinger, 2016). Furthermore, as Clarke and Wildy (2004) note, "[u]nderstanding the impact of contextual factors can contribute to the principal's ability to work in the particular setting" (p. 556).

Day and Leithwood (2007) also found evidence that school leaders adjust their leadership practices in response to changes in a school's capacity and performance over time. Specifically, they found that in trying to turn schools around, successful school leaders prioritised safety, behaviour management, teaching and learning, performance objectives and management. School leaders also provide a positive learning culture, professional development opportunities for staff and, where appropriate, shared leadership.

> An effective leader is about individuals, circumstances and surroundings and is willing to adjust their approach to leadership as is needed. (St Maarten, 1F)
>
> Challenging contexts bring additional difficulties- an schools in leafy affluent areas have their own challenges. The culture of a challenging context with families suffering can lead to low aspirations for students, and breaking down these barriers makes the work of a school leader much harder. (England, 4F)

This important juxtaposition underlines the importance of the relationship between outcomes for students and school context. School leaders do not operate in a vacuum and, largely, their actions depend not only on the context in which they work but also on how they perceive this context (Bredeson, Klar & Johannson, 2011). Familial structures and the wider community context influence leadership practice and success. Being able to read one's environment thus allows school leaders to devise strategies and interventions grounded in a clear purpose and that can help them "deal with the problems, issues and challenges they encounter in their work" (Southworth, 2002, p. 86). This purpose is primarily the success of students.

> *I read and hear a lot about the moral purpose of working in areas of deprivation and I don't dispute this, but all teaching has a moral purpose. For all children this is their one chance, whether they live in a leafy, lovely village such as mine, or not, and so I feel pupil achievement is non-negotiable no matter where a school is located.* (England, 10F)

Continuing, she also highlights:

Nevertheless, I have certainly ended up in a 'niche' very different to my first school, and have not applied for headships because the context of the school was not 'in my skill set'. Different contexts bring very different challenges. For example, in particular, parental concerns are expressed very different here, compared to the school where I began my teaching career. (England, 10F)

No two schools are the same, and each school offers a leader varying degrees of opportunities and challenges for learning and personal growth. Southworth (2002) found that the most important learning for school leaders occurred "on the job". Clarke (2003) also found that the most significant learning for school leaders occurred on the job through trial and error. Schon (1983) describes this as "knowing-in-action" (p. 43).

Context and Purpose

No two school contexts are the same, and interventions and strategies that work in one context may not work in another. As noted above, however, all leadership is purpose driven. This means that, as a factor in leadership, purpose is non-negotiable regardless of school location or environmental constraints. Put another way, although factors related to the purpose of schooling may change, such as school leaders or strategies used by school leaders, the purpose of schools and schooling does not change. Purpose therefore transcends other factors associated with leadership and may be seen as a central force in leadership practice and an aspiration.

This is my second school as Headteacher. The contexts of both schools are very different so it is impossible to just try and repeat what I did in my first school. It just won't work. There are some fundamental things that work regardless of context: strong behaviour systems, high expectations etc, but you need to understand the context of your school in order to be a successful school leader. (England, 2M)

   School leadership is contextual and a different leadership style may be needed in different locations or circumstances. However, the nature and purpose of leadership shines through regardless of the context. A school leader's relationship

with individuals (students, staff, parents, wider community) is dependent on his/her values, not necessarily the size of the school, the location of the school or the economic standing of the school environment. (Canada, 1F)

Context shapes purpose and purpose shapes context. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, a school's context comprises several factors that present themselves as levers and/or constraints. Although having potential to significantly influence the realisation a school's purpose, environmental factors cannot in and of themselves detract from the purpose of schooling, nor do they detract from a school's mission and vision. This paradox acknowledges two important things. First, the purpose of schools and schooling is an independent variable that has an enduring quality. Second, achieving the purpose of schools/schooling is dependent of contextual factors. Bossert et al. (1982) support this proposition by arguing that the peculiarities of context shape the behaviour of school leaders, and successful school leaders adapt their leadership to the needs, opportunities and constraints present within their own work contexts.

Moreover, for schools to achieve or exceed their aims and objectives, school leaders must have a vision for what they want their school to achieve, and when and under what conditions achieving these will be likely. Pashiardis and Johansson (2016) propose that "context is a bridge between success and effectiveness" (p.9). This important proposition recognises an important relationship between context and leadership whilst simultaneously highlighting that context is (only) one of several factors constraining and/or energising leadership. Beyond and within context there must therefore be a strategy and plan for how leadership is to be done and how targets can be realised.

Leadership is all about the school context, understanding where we are now and having a collective sense of where we want to be in 3 to 5 years. The journey being mapped out and not being knocked of course by national initiatives, do we know our school and what our children need now, are we looking to the future needs of our children and community. (England, 6M)

Ideally, school leaders will not mindlessly try to import ideas and solutions one context to another without first assessing the isms and

particularities between different contexts. These could include the capacity of a new context, and any associated conditions related to the success of particular ideas and interventions. Leadership purpose and the purpose of schooling are sustained over time and between spaces and are non-derogable, but context is fluid and has a direct impact on schools/leaders fulfilling their purpose. It is this fluidity that makes context such an important factor in school leadership.

Evidence Summary

With respect to school leadership is "context dependent":

- Both male and female school leaders regard context as an important element in the success or failure of leadership, although female school leaders scored more highly. This suggests that female school leaders believe more strongly that leadership effectiveness is context dependent.
- Female leaders showed a stronger correlation between "entrepreneurial and enterprising leadership" and "context dependent leadership".
- "Personal and internally motivated leadership" is strongly correlated with "context dependent leadership". This suggests that a strong relationship exists between a leader's personal agency, the quality of their leadership and the context in which they work.
- There were significant correlations between "teacher dependent leadership" and "context dependent leadership" among both female and male school leaders.
- All school leaders were influenced by a combination of events in their national social, cultural, political and economic environments, although some more than others. In Pakistan, school leadership is more likely to be influenced by events in the cultural and social environments. In Jamaica, Mozambique, South Africa, Cyprus and Turkey, school leadership is more likely to be influenced by events in the economic and social environments. In the USA, Canada and England, school leadership is more likely to be influenced by events in the economic and political environments.

Characteristics of context dependent school leadership include:

environmental awareness
accountability mechanisms, performance targets
improvement orientation, purpose led
multiple approaches to leadership, directional conflicts
adding value, flexibility
motivation, agency
vision, people

Making Sense of It All

Context matters in leadership, and context is a significant factor in determining leadership effectiveness and success. Events and conditions in the international context, national context and institutional context have an impact on the ability of a school to achieve its goals at a particular point in time. Furthermore, the social, cultural, geographic, economic, technological and, where applicable, religious contexts of a school combine to influence its likely direction, short- to mid-term aims and objectives, and the approach to leadership provided by school leaders. Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2008) assert:

> [T]here is no single model of leadership that could be easily transferred across different school-level and system-level contexts. The specific contexts in which schools operate may limit a school leader's room for maneuvering, or provide opportunities for different types of leadership. Depending on the school contexts in which they work, school leaders face very different sets of challenges. (p. 31)

In this study, school leaders from developing countries are working in contexts where financing education is problematic, leading to schools and school leaders having to make do or simply do without. This is not the case for school leaders in developed countries, in particular in England, who are working in a context where there are frequent changes to school curriculum and to the structure of schooling. Among all 16 countries in the study, there is increased national focus on schools contributing more

to, if not leading, economic renewal. There is also increased focus on more and better outcomes for students, performance targets and external accountability matrices. The education policy context in all countries also appeared to be somewhat ad hoc and conflictful. Nevertheless, the purpose of schools does not itself waiver or change with context. As one school leader states, "*the context makes the school; the school is what the leader makes it; but the purpose is the purpose*" (South Africa, 6M). This observation acknowledges the interlocking of leadership practice, context and purpose. How, when and what a leader does are therefore important factors in their leadership, in "getting under the skin" of context and in avoiding "mindless actions". One school leader articulates this important point thus:

> *Effective leadership has to take advantage of education in a variety of contexts both inside and outside the school environment. Leaders have to be able to see through complexity and find clear direction. They have to be able to put the right resources and people in the right place at the right time.* (Jamaica, 2F)

Arguably, this is the nub of context dependent leadership. That is, school leadership takes account of events in a school's environments; uses available resources appropriately; and combines these with judgement, vision and purpose to make decisions about a school's capacity to achieve its goals.

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