

Chapter 7

Contextual Leadership: Characteristics and Practices



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Introduction

School effectiveness are highly dependent on how the principals or headmasters can innovatively lead and inspire others to achieve the school's visions and goals (Leithwood 2019). Emerging research highlighted the importance of school leaders to be responsive to context and how effective school leaders should enact their leadership styles appropriately based on the different contextual demands that they face (e.g., Akkary 2014; Falcón et al. 2019; Gao et al. 2018; González-Falcón et al. 2019; Madalińska-Michalak 2014; Mohamed et al. 2020; Noman 2017; Truong and Hallinger 2017) as well as be able to face the dynamic and challenging demands positively and proactively (Lang 2019; Marishane 2020; Marishane and Mampane 2018; Morowane 2019; Mohd Yusoff and Tengku Ariffin 2021).

Most importantly, contextual leadership practices demand leaders to have what is termed as contextual intelligence, which is an ability to scan and diagnose the context before making appropriate decisions to influence subordinates into doing what is best for the organization, given the situation and context they are in (Kutz and Bamford-Wade 2014; Mohd Yusoff and Tengku Ariffin 2021; Velarde et al. 2022). This may sound familiar as what has already been practised as it is not something which is totally new. However, the fact that contextual leadership highlights this aspect as its core practice implies that this alternative leadership style responds to the call for twenty-first century leadership that is more agile to this volatile, uncertain,

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complex, and ambiguous world that we live in now (Braun et al. 2011; Hallinger 2016; Leithwood 2017).

This chapter provides an overview of contextual leadership as an effective leadership in schools, suitable for the current rapid changing world, especially when most of us are facing the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) world. The chapter discusses the core elements which distinguishes contextual leadership practices from other leadership styles. As successful contextual leadership practices are shaped by a leader's contextual intelligence, this chapter also highlights the relation between contextual intelligence and leadership, as well as highlights the importance of contextual factors for leaders to make appropriate judgements and decisions for the present and future of the school.

Contemporary Leadership Framework

Most educational leadership theories refer to the styles of leaders based on essential elements such as proficiencies, practices, and approaches. Among the common leadership styles which are discussed in the educational context are transactional leadership, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership (Adams 2018; Adams et al. 2021). These leadership styles have their own strengths and weaknesses. Transformational leadership and instructional leadership, for example, are found to contribute towards students' achievement (Daniëls et al. 2019; Rodrigues and Ávila de Lima 2021). However, there are also studies which found that these leadership styles as an effective approach in different contexts (Adams and Yusoff 2020; Daniëls et al. 2019; Leithwood 2021). Prominent scholars in educational leadership argued that contextual factors must be taken into account when practising leadership in schools (e.g., Bush et al. 2018; Bush and Glover 2014; Hallinger 2016; Harris and Jones 2018; Leithwood et al. 2019; Leithwood 2021). Parallel to this idea of making context the central focus of leadership pursuit, Oc (2018) strongly claimed sticking to a single style of leadership may no longer cater to people and situations. Leithwood (2021) also found that principals in schools are more effective when they adopt a critical perspective on the policies and practices in their schools and develop a deep understanding of the cultures, norms, and values.

One of the prominent educational leadership models which has been prevalently referred to by researchers and practitioners, is the Instructional Leadership Model by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) conceptualized instructional leadership as a two-dimensional construct comprised of leadership functions. The leadership functions described include: (1) framing and communicating school goals; (2) supervising and evaluating instruction; (3) coordinating curriculum; (4) monitoring student progress; (6) promoting the professional development of teachers; (7) protecting instructional time; (8) maintain high visibility; and (9) provide incentives for learning and teachers. Murphy et al. (2007) extended the Instructional Leadership Model to focus on Leadership for Learning (LfL). In this framework, the concept of distributed leadership is promoted on top of the original principal-centric

approach of the instructional model. Leadership for Learning (L_{FL}) as conceptualized by Murphy et al. (2007) also highlighted the importance of context towards schools' improvement. Thus, the model acknowledges that context plays a significant role in the exercise of leadership for school improvement. The integration of these prominent existing theories in educational leadership is in line with suggestions by prominent scholars who advocate the use multiple theories in school leadership research (e.g., Bush et al. 2018; Faas et al. 2018; Leithwood 2021).

School Contextual Factors

In the field of educational leadership, contextual factors play a pivotal role in shaping the leadership practices and decision-making processes within schools (Kutz 2008). These contextual factors are diverse and multifaceted, encompassing various conditions and elements. They can be categorized into three distinct levels: micro, meso, and macro, each with its own set of influences. At the micro-level, individual factors take center stage. This level revolves around the characteristics, qualities, and attributes of the school leaders directly involved in the educational process. School leaders, teachers, students, and other stakeholders within the school community contribute to this micro-level context. For instance, the leadership style, experience, and expertise of school leaders, as well as the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and classroom management strategies, all fall within the micro-level context (Falcón et al. 2019; Gao et al. 2018; González-Falcón et al. 2019).

Moving up to the meso-level, Braun et al. (2011), Hallinger (2016), and Leithwood (2017) suggested that a broader perspective of context should be taken into account in which school and organizational factors exert significant impact on leadership practices. This level encompasses the broader organizational structure of the school. It involves considerations related to the location of school, history, policy, community, stake holders, external support, physical resources, technology equipment, culture and values, that play vital roles in shaping how school leaders and other members in the school behave. For example, how teachers show their commitment and how they volunteer to work beyond the stipulated jobs. Similar concepts to explain the school context were also used by the present researchers (e.g., Alqahtani et al. 2021; Harris and Jones 2018; Marishane 2020; Morowane 2019; Mohamed et al. 2020; Noman et al. 2018). The concept emphasized by them is context-based leadership.

At the macro-level, the influence extends beyond the school's immediate environment. Government policies, regulations, and educational standards established at the district, state, or national level shape the educational landscape. These policies encompass crucial aspects such as funding, assessment criteria, and accountability measures. Beyond government policies, macro-level contextual factors also include broader societal and cultural influences. Economic disparities, cultural diversity, and prevailing societal values all play a part in shaping how educational leaders carry out their roles. Additionally, global trends in education, including advancements in technology and shifts in the global economy, can impact leadership practices at the macro

level. School leaders must navigate and respond to the complexities of these contextual factors across all three levels. Effective leadership demands an understanding of how these factors interact and influence the school context.

Braun et al. (2011) presented four dimensions of context namely situated context, external context, material context, and professional context. There are several factors which defined each context and differentiated one context from another context. Figure 7.1 illustrates the proposed four context dimensions. Braun (2011) illustrated the main factors into 4 dimensions and labeled them as: (i) situated context—this is more of the background of the school itself; its location, type of school, its composition (student intake and the diversity of student population), school history, expectations, etc.; (ii) professional context—determined by the behaviour of teachers and school management, in terms of their commitment, values, experiences and how they enact the educational policies in professional manner; (iii) material context—in other words, this concerns the facilities and availability of financial support; and, (iv) external context—various external factors which are relevant and related to the school, including the external environment, support, government policies, outside community, and technology. Braun's (2011) model seems to be one of the most comprehensive since it covers almost every aspect of the school setting, including internal school factors and external school factors.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) has begun to critically examine the topology of context by Bossert et al. (1982), namely the Far West Lab Instructional Management Model. In his article, Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) pointed out how the elements of culture as an exogenous variable need to be strengthened in explicating the context in Bossert et al.'s (1982) model and to better explicate the importance of embedding context in school leadership. The scholar then proposed a more comprehensive model (e.g., Hallinger 2016) which views the context in a wider scale. Hallinger (2016) suggested that the model of school context should include three relevant exogenous contexts, which are: (i) the economic context—the economic development status of a certain nation and the social economic background of the community where the particular school is situated in would exert different actions on the part of school principals; (ii) the socio-cultural context—in which leaders conceived of and carried out their role across different contexts. Different socio-cultural contexts evidence different value sets as well as norms of behaviour; and (iii) political contexts—the extent of influence that political actors would shape the educational policy, structure and system; so much so that it would also strongly influence school leaders' beliefs, attitudes and practices.

The Emergence of Contextual Leadership Practices

The concept of contextual leadership exists as a result of the notion 'no one size fits all' (Bush et al. 2018; Noman and Gurr 2020) and recent prominent school leadership scholars also highlighted the leadership effectiveness needs to be embedded with contextual elements (Harris and Jones 2022a; Leithwood 2021; Marishane 2020;

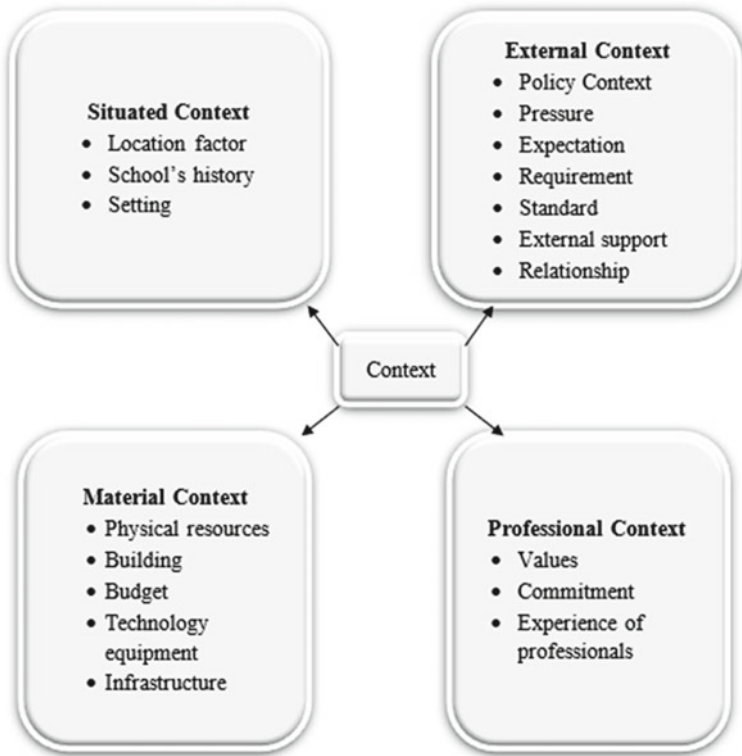


Fig. 7.1 Four dimension of context by Braun et al. (2011)

Marishane and Mampane 2018). Mohd Yusoff and Tengku Ariffin (2021) defined contextual leadership as an agile and thoughtful leadership style in interpreting the context, managing, administering, and leading school wisely.

Prominent school leadership scholars have pointed out that there are several key dimensions of current successful leadership (e.g., Leithwood et al. 2019). These dimensions reflect the transformational and instructional leadership core sets of practices. Leithwood et al. (2019) summarised them into four domains of leadership practices, i.e., (i) Set directions; (ii) Build relationships, (iii) Develop the people and the organization to support desired practices; and (iv) Improve the instructional program. In general, school leaders need to have vision and mission; must know how to communicate with other teachers, listen to them and be trusted by them; it is also the school leaders' job to nurture the teachers and students; and make sure that the main task, i.e., teaching and learning, be carried out effectively. Effective leadership practices should be embedded to the context, as suggested by Braun et al. (2011), Hallinger (2016) and Harris and Jones (2022a).

Contextual factors differ for each school, especially for schools which are in different locations. When schools are in different locations such as urban and rural

areas, members in the schools would have their own unique lives, thinking, norm and culture. These differences would require school leaders to apply different approaches in understanding them, and thus face issues in the schools. As mentioned in previous literature by prominent scholars, in explaining school leadership effectiveness and school improvement, one needs to carefully examine the contextual factors that are essential elements in the school setting (Bossert et al. 1982; Braun et al. 2011; Hallinger 2016; Harris and Jones 2022a; Leithwood 2017). In describing the essential elements of contextual leadership, Mohd Yusoff and Tengku Ariffin (2021) developed the Malaysian Contextual Leadership for Principals in Schools Model (MyCLIPS). Briefly, MyCLIPS Model shows the three dimensions which make up the construct, namely (i) contextual intelligence, (ii) collegiality and (iii) pedagogical support. Figure 7.2 illustrates the MyCLIPS model.

The dimension of contextual intelligence is necessary for twenty-first century schools’ leaders especially in times of VUCA for schools’ sustainability. The element of contextual intelligence allows for more intuitive and holistic thinking in decision making, taking into account past experiences, current situations, and future possibilities (Lang 2019; Marishane 2020). It highlights the need for school principals to flexibly maneuver and spearhead school change and improvement whenever deemed appropriate, to suit the demands, requirements, and circumstances (Lang

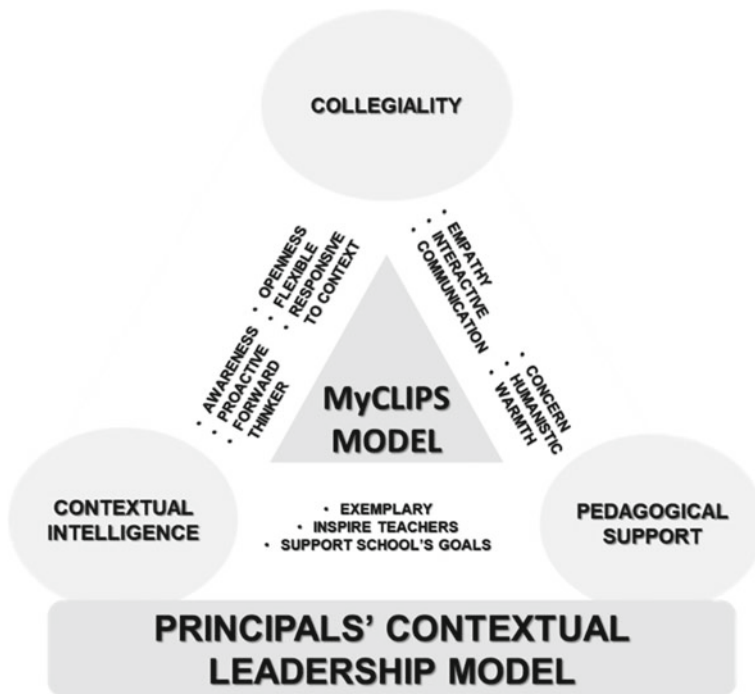


Fig. 7.2 Malaysian Contextual Leadership for Principals in Schools Model (MyCLIPS Model)

2019; Marishane 2020; Marishane and Mampane 2018). Contextual intelligence is the awareness and ability of the school principal to interpret the contexts, more flexible in his or her actions, possess the characteristics of being a forward thinker, proactive and courageous in making decisions. Indeed, in facing an uncertain situation, this dimension of contextual intelligence is seen as very crucial as one of the leadership characteristics required to ensure school sustainability.

The second dimension is collegiality. It is the extent to which a school leader display warmth and empathy in building interactive communication and relationships with people in the school to achieve school goals. Studies by Alqahtani et al. (2021), Gordon (2018), Noman (2017), Noman et al. (2018), and Mohd Yusoff and Tengku Ariffin (2020) have shown that principals who create harmonious environment may successfully enhance teachers' sense of belonging. Having leaders who are more sensitive toward teachers' feelings and well-being is advantageous. The humanistic dimension that emerged in Noman et al.'s (2017, 2018) study highlighted that principals who maintain good relationships with the teachers would be more likely to have teachers who are diligent and committed in the school. Gordon (2018) also stressed on how collegiality and 'reciprocity' in the relationship between leader and teachers are crucial in enhancing the value of working together in achieving shared visions.

The third dimension of pedagogical support is the school principal's ability and awareness to plan and support the schools' activities in order to improve students' achievement. Every school leader strongly emphasizes the need to plan and support school activities for the sake of student achievement. However, in this dimension, the need to enhance teachers' skill in teaching is also included in the efforts of school leaders to ensure school effectiveness. This dimension is in line with the previous work of Daniëls et al. (2019), Leithwood et al. (2019), Murphy et al. (2007), and Noman (2017), Noman et al. (2018), which highlighted how providing support for pedagogical or instructional matters should be one of the trademarks in successful leadership practices.

Although contextual leadership is important, school leaders as practitioners would find it difficult to put the concept of contextual leadership into practice. This is due to the fact that some contextual elements may not seem tangible—neither can they be directly observed nor easily measured. Intangible contextual factors are like school norms and culture, which are hard to explain, yet give a lot of weight to people's behaviour. It requires school leaders to analyse them carefully and wisely before they could connect the dots. Due to the complex nature of the contextual factors, school leaders need to acquire a certain set of skills to diagnose the context. Failure to interpret the context may be detrimental because decisions made may not be rightly aligned with the issues that they have to confront. Hallinger (2016) did mention the need to explore how leaders try to fit into the different contexts they are in. The elements of contextual intelligence and critical thinking are recommended as essential in enabling school leaders to identify the contextual factors within the school itself as well as other relevant and pressing contextual factors which co-exist outside the school (Dong and Niramitchainont 2021; Harris and Jones 2022a; Marishane 2020).

Some case studies related to contextual leadership demonstrated that successful school leaders align their leadership practices with their own unique contextual requirements. In other words, context factors shaped their leadership style. Case studies by some scholars (e.g.: Alqahtani et al. 2021; Akkary 2014; González-Falcón et al. 2019; Harris and Jones 2022a; Madalińska-Michalak 2014; Mohamed et al. 2020; Noman and Gurr 2020; Truong and Hallinger 2015; Gao et al. 2018) explained how the context-based leadership successfully addressed their problems with different approaches. In other words, they adapted a multiple leadership style instead of single leadership style. A study by Mohamed et al. (2020) in Maldives found that effective leadership in Maldives is an integration of two leadership styles, namely transformational leadership and instructional leadership. Harris and Jones (2022a) highlight that contextual factor needs to be paid attention to in order to improve the performance of schools. In other words, they need to respond to pressures of greater accountability while trying to deal with the myriad of complex internal challenges that they face (Harris and Jones 2022a). Harris and Jones (2022a, p. 2) further stressed that ‘there is no quick fixes that school leaders can deploy; every school improves in its own way and at its own pace.’

Similarly, Noman and Gurr (2020) found that in determining an effective leadership style, contextual factors such as culture needs to be considered. For example, cultural differences in a country that practice a ‘top-down’ approach in decision making and ‘bottom-up’ approach in decision making certainly require a different management and leadership approach. In other words, these different cultures will cause different ways of thinking and acting. Hence, the implication is the ‘top down’ approach is seen as more rigid and task oriented, while on the other hand, a ‘bottom-up’ approach is seen as more people oriented. Apart from that, they also refute the belief that solo leadership can be applied to all situations as they highlighted how effective leadership is closely related to how a leader adjusts their actions based on wider contextual factors.

A study by Dong and Niramitchainont (2021) also revolves around how contextual factors influences administration and leadership in Chinese Private schools in Northern Thailand. These schools faced difficulties and challenges including the preservation of Chinese culture, school status, financial constraints, political crisis, academic problems, teacher recruitment, and interaction with the local community. The principals were responsive to the contextual problem. They played a variety of roles to deal with the challenges by using appropriate approaches. For example, they proactively try to solve their schools’ financial problems by establishing good relations with external organizations and obtaining funds for their schools. Notably, the problems faced by them may not be faced by schools in other areas. Indeed, an external context such as pressure is also one of the context factors that will influence the leadership practices of principals (Braun et al. 2011).

Contextual Intelligence

Theoretical Notions of Contextual Intelligence

The theorist who first introduced the term “contextual intelligence” was Robert Sternberg (1985), a Yale psychologist. Sternberg (1985) proposed what he called as Triarchic Model to explicate the three important components of intelligence, which are: (i) Analytical intelligence; (ii) Creative intelligence; and (iii) Contextual intelligence. While the traditional concept of intelligence would only refer to analytical intelligence, i.e., reasoning, information processing and analysing abilities, Sternberg highlighted other abstract and complex abilities such as generating new ideas or formulating atypical solutions when experiencing novel situations (i.e., creative intelligence); as well as applying knowledge and information accordingly to suit to the people and situations (i.e., contextual intelligence) as other components of intelligence. According to Sternberg (1985), contextual intelligence can be divided into social and practical intelligence. Social intelligence relates to the ability to empathize with others and navigate yourself through interactions, in efforts to build the web of relationships; while practical intelligence is the ability to actually implement the essential knowledge to perform and be successful in the dynamic, real-world setting. Besides analytical intelligence and creative intelligence, Grotzer and Perkins (2000) recognized the need to consider cultural and contextual cultures, which are important elements in contextual intelligence. This would mean that intelligence can also come in the form of the ability to analyse environmental patterns and be aware of the cultural supports available in the context.

In the educational context, the concept of contextual intelligence has been used by Terenzini (1993) in describing three levels of skills for institutional effectiveness. According to Terenzini, Level 1 is called the technical intelligence where fundamental and foundational knowledge becomes the core input in applying technical skills; Level 2, labelled as issues intelligence, is the necessary skills or ability to recognize related problems and issues in applying the knowledge in Level 1; and finally, Level 3 is termed as contextual intelligence. Contextual intelligence is grounded not only in the technical know-how, but also try to solve the issues which come along the implementation, through the lenses of the specific culture and context of the institutions. In doing so, the values and norms of the people are well-considered in making any decisions for institutional effectiveness.

The next important theoretical perspective on contextual intelligence, which is also the most applicable in leadership context, is the one by Kutz (2008, 2015). Parallel to the above conceptions of contextual intelligence, Kutz (2008, 2015) denotes that contextual intelligence is an intangible ability to scan, diagnose and interpret abstract patterns in an environment, and then, intentionally make decisions to exert appropriate influence in the particular context. In other words, contextual intelligence requires these three soft skills: (i) being insightful towards past events; (ii) highly attentive to the present contextual factors; and (iii) able to forecast future preferable context and proactively design what is best for the defined context.

Contextual Intelligence and Leadership

Leadership in the age of uncertainty requires quick adaptations to the rapid changes that occur—leaders must always expect the unexpected and make the necessary adjustments to ensure quick adaptations to the pressing challenges the organizations are facing (Megheirkouni and Mejheirkouni 2020; Padilla et al. 2021). Leadership is more effective when leaders integrate the ‘intelligence’ element in their practices (Marishane 2020; Marishane and Mampane 2018; Morowane 2019; Kutz 2008). For example, Kutz (2008) has pointed out the significance of ‘intelligence’ and how this extraordinary trait can contribute to effective practices in leadership. Intelligence is defined as ‘an ability to transform data into useful information, information into knowledge, then most importantly assimilate that knowledge into practice’ (Kutz 2008). Therefore, a domain of ‘intelligence’ in contributing to leadership effectiveness and student achievement is foremost for a school leader who can interpret the context before any decision is made.

Coupled with that, the concept of ‘contextual intelligence’ arose as an extraordinary trait contributing to recent effective leadership practices (Marishane 2020; Marishane and Mampane 2018; Morowane 2019; Kutz 2008). The concept of ‘contextual intelligence’ enables one to apply and adapt knowledge generated in one situation to a different situation, after giving due consideration to the differences both situations may have (Khanna 2014). Besides, contextual intelligence also depicts the ability to recognize and diagnose the plethora of contextual factors inherent in an event or circumstance, then intentionally and intuitively adjust behaviour in order to exert influence in that context (Kutz 2008). In addition to the abovementioned underpinning tenets of contextual intelligence, Kutz also discussed 12 important elements which resembles behavioural skills, often associated with leadership skills. These significant elements are further discussed below to elaborate contextual intelligence in tandem with school leadership:

(i) *Future-minded*

A school leader should be forward-looking. He should be able to anticipate and forecast what is best for the school, teachers, and students; and then develop a clear direction based on informed decision-making. The ability to predict the future and

make adaptations based on analysis of the current and emerging trends which are pressing in the educational context and for the particular school, is one of the vital survival skills.

(ii) *Influencer*

True inspiring school leaders who can influence others to be committed must be able to reach out and make them commit to the school vision and mission. In order for them to become an influencer, leaders must first be respected and exemplary. They must also portray the best professionalism and ethics; as well as possess excellent interpersonal skills to affect the actions and decisions of others, in a non-coercive manner.

(iii) *Ensure awareness of mission*

All successful organisations have their vision and mission. It is most important for a leader, not only to digest the vision and mission, but also be able to communicate them effectively across the organization. Only then, the leader will be able to guide members in the organisation to perform well and see how they can contribute and how their work gives impact to the rest of the other members, which eventually helps to realise the organizational goals.

(iv) *Socially responsible*

Being contextually intelligent also means having greater concern for the wellbeing of others in the organization, its surrounding community, and the larger society. Leaders should be more sensitive, responsible, and responsive towards social trend and issues; they should volunteer to participate in community-based work, so that they can get to the grassroots and find out for themselves the challenges faced by the community and society, and then try to see how they can offer solutions to the problem within their perimeters.

(v) *Cultural sensitivity*

Diversity in organization must be acknowledged and well-respected. Leaders can promote non-discriminatory environment by providing equal opportunities and be more aware of signs of bias and indirect discrimination. Embracing diversity can be done by developing culturally literate employees, as well as practice mutual respect and good communication skills among organisational members. This will enhance unity and productivity; in addition to avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts in organizations.

(vi) *Multicultural leadership*

Similarly, good leaders can actually practice multicultural leadership by becoming more aware of the differences in culture—they should study the culture of others more and observe how other people practice their culture. By understanding the multiple cultural backgrounds that exists in the organization, the leaders can fine tune the

way they communicate and deal with the different individuals in the workplace. Indeed, leaders who are able to navigate themselves in highly multicultural context are well-respected by others.

(vii) *Diagnosing Context*

In strategic management, environmental scanning is done to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Diagnosing context is doing all those and beyond. It does not stop at the surface level of knowing all those facts, but it goes deeper into interpreting what they actually mean and how they are inter-connected with one another, in the past and at present, to see the clear pattern for better future prediction.

(viii) *Change Agent*

Based on the diagnosis, school leaders should not only be able to react to situations, but more than that, they should proactively prepare the whole school for the dynamic and volatile surroundings; rising up to challenges and brave themselves in making changes which are deemed necessary.

(ix) *Effective Use of Influence*

Contextual intelligence also acknowledges the need for the head of the school to appropriately use their influence to motivate teachers and students in the school to accomplish their shared goals. School leaders must realize the different types of power that they have and use them effectively enough to inspire others to perform successfully.

(x) *Intentional Leadership*

In order to keep improving, a school leader must always reflect on their leadership skills, practices, leadership performance, strengths and weaknesses. Contextual intelligence includes this as part of becoming more aware of oneself and how he/she functions as a leader in the school context. The current educational setting, which are exposed to high uncertainty and complexity, requires all school leaders to self-audit and then take proper actions to level themselves up because the expectations becomes higher and the rides, tougher.

(xi) *Critical Thinker*

School leaders with high contextual intelligence also have strong cognitive ability to analyse and evaluate the context before they make any judgements and conclusions about something. They are critical thinkers who would not take anything at face value, but would make an effort to dig out for more information and data in order to better understand a phenomenon that exists in the educational context in general, and the specific school context which they are directly in. These leaders are inherently inquisitive—they are genuinely more interested in things and people who are working with them; and other matters related to it.



Fig. 7.3 Elements of contextual intelligence for leadership

(xi) *Consensus Builder*

In effective schools, decisions are made based on agreement by the majority of the school members, if not all. Such democratic practice requires interpersonal skill on the school leaders’ part in trying to convince all teachers to agree to disagree; and also see the goodness in others’ perceptions and values. It is important for the leaders to make the school members to finally come to a consensus in making decisions, so that everyone feels a sense of ownership of the decisions and see the win-win situation that they are in. With such contentment, later, it would be easier to gauge them all in as a strong team at the implementation stage. Fig. 7.3 illustrates the twelve elements of contextual intelligence for leadership.

Future Directions of Contextual Leadership

The present discussion on contextual leadership has taken a stance on highlighting the importance of diagnosing the contextual factors and then use the past and present event or information, to make appropriate judgements and decisions to suit the present and future context of the school (Meyer and Patuawa 2022). School leaders need to remain calm in volatile situations and be flexible to embrace changes more proactively (Neelakantan et al. 2022). Contextual factors, among others, may include diversity among members of the organization. It was also mentioned how the school, as with other organisations, should embrace diversity and celebrates the differences and leverage on them. For contextual leadership to be seen as an approach that is soft and humane, rather than just the hard version of context, there is need for leaders to see it through multiple lenses of intelligence, especially, the contextual intelligence, and

not forgetting, social emotional intelligence. It is only through the lenses of social and emotional intelligence, that leaders are able to lead with more passion and empathy.

Goleman (2004) has elaborated on the five components of social emotional intelligence, which are: (i) Self-awareness—the ability to become aware of one’s own moods, feelings and character; and how these may affect others; (ii) Self-regulation—the ability to monitor and control oneself through positive emotional management; (iii) Motivation—the drive and passion to do work above and beyond what is stipulated in black and white; and doing it with full enthusiasm; (iv) Empathy—trying very hard to understand others by looking at situations from other people’s perspectives and showing deep compassion towards how they feel about it; (v) Social skill—ability to easily establish rapport with others, build and sustain healthy networks, and develop trust among others in order to effectively influence them. All the above components of social emotional intelligence, co-existing with contextual intelligence, makes it more apparent to the school leaders on how they can optimally drive and influence the teachers and students to retain their passion and become resilient in the face of adversity. This results from the fact that such effort makes them feel that they are being appreciated and empowered to do their best.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of contextual leadership as an effective leadership in school. It then discussed the core elements which distinguishes contextual leadership practices from the other leadership styles. In addition, the chapter also highlighted the relation between contextual intelligence and leadership as well as provided insights on the importance of contextual factors for leaders to make appropriate judgements and decisions for the present and future of the school. Contextual leadership is a more robust type of leadership that is said to be a flexible approach to cater to the various contexts that exist in schools. Contextual intelligence is an important ability for leaders to acquire in order for them to become more sensitive and aware of the pressing situations in the context, which in turn, would assist them in enacting the necessary practices. The way of thinking and problem-solving seems to be crucial characteristics of twenty-first century school leaders in a VUCA world.

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