

Collaborative Leadership and its Impact on School Improvement: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

When we are talking about school leadership, the school principal's picture as an effective leader came into our minds. But in the world of the 21st century, the extra responsibilities imposed on the school principal make it more complex to fulfill her / his duty as an effective leader. Therefore, an approach that emphasizes collaborative decision-making should move away from 'single person' leadership. When there is a failure in school improvement, lack of leadership is a major contributing factor. In this context, collaborative leadership can make a differentiation in the traditional way of the leadership concept through its shared responsibility. Collaborative leadership encompasses the specific actions taken by leaders to improve teaching instruction, create strong relationships with all stakeholders and make a positive effect on learning outcomes. This article is based on empirical studies, mainly the role of collaborative leadership on students' outcomes and school improvement. In this context, the author first tries to give the conceptual understanding of collaborative leadership in details, and secondly, consider the empirical evidence from various research studies to know how collaborative leadership affects school improvement. Finally, this article concludes by restating the need for future of collaborative leadership and its role in improvement of schooling particularly in the Indian school context.

Keywords: Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, School Improvement.

Introduction

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

-John F. Kennedy

For many people there is a myth that as a leader you have grasps the all possible outcomes of your career so now you must focus on others to motivate in the same way. Schleicher (2008) stated that a vital aspect of leadership is that there should be shared understanding in leadership which can modify the learning of different students in a positive way, can create a

conducive learning opportunities for all the staff, established a reflective leaning environment to innovate and explore different things (as cited in DeWitt, 2018). School is an institution where the role of leadership is pivotal for its development. For the positive movement of a school, a leader not only needs to encourage and create conducive environment for teaching-learning process but the role of leadership strategies is very pivotal in this context.. There are different school related factors that affects on school improvement. Leadership is the second factor after classroom instruction that influence student outcomes (Leithwood et. al. 2004). Different research highlights the relationship among leadership and the improvement of schools. Effective leadership has important effect on the success of students' achievement and on the other hand improvement of the school also influenced by effective leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The role of leadership upon school improvement as well as school effectiveness is very successful (Wallace, 2002). Extensive studies on schooling put an end that leadership effects on students' learning are very short but educationally those studies are very commencing (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)

So, the vital question that needs to be taken into consideration is what are the different types of leadership style that makes a significant contribution to school improvement by maximizing learning outcome? This paper is intended to study this matter. Among the different types of leadership, collaborative leadership is the most effective one. Collaborative leadership contains the specific actions taken by leaders to improve teaching instruction, build strong relationships with all stakeholders and have a positive effect on fruitful learning outcomes. So, the article is mainly focusing on role of collaborative leadership and its impact on school improvement.

Objectives

In tune with the above spelt context researcher formulate three objectives, those are

- a) To examines the concept of collaborative leadership in-detail.
- b) To understand influence of collaborative leadership in school improvement.
- c) To restates the need of collaborative leadership and its role in improvement of schooling in the India.

Methodology

This study is mainly a theoretical paper, based on the literatures related to collaborative leadership and its role on school improvement. Throughout this paper researcher justify the how collaborative leadership makes an effect on school improvement. In this context, the researcher has focused on various research articles and case studies on collaborative leadership, leadership for learning and their impact on school improvement. Researcher use qualitative analysis method to analysis all three objectives. For first objective, researcher goes through various articles to in-detail examine the concept of collaborative leadership and provides a conceptual understanding of collaborative leadership. For second objective,

researcher considers the empirical evidences from various research findings to understand how collaborative leadership influences school improvement. For third objective, researcher critically evaluates the need for future of collaborative leadership and its role in improvement of schooling particularly in the Indian school context.

Conceptual understanding of collaborative leadership

Collaborative leadership is an important leadership process where all stakeholders can actively participate in decision-making process. In this leadership process perspective of all stakeholders is pivotal which will sustain a productive change. Studies have suggested that collaborative leadership is also an efficient process for an organization to openly communicate with all stakeholders. Collaborative effort can be described as a process where people with various viewpoints arrive together by removing their personal interests and discuss the issues openly and collaboratively to solve a richer problem and achieve the ultimate goal (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

Peter M. Dewitt (2017) defines leadership styles in four different ways concerning collaborative proficiency:

- a. **Bystanders:** There is no positive goal in this leadership. Leaders do not inspire stakeholders to work collaboratively. The performance of this leadership is very low and partnership is also very less here.
- b. **Regulators:** These leaders have very high performance and they can control the whole environment. Though they have a pre plan for any work but they cannot inspire true partnership within the school rather than they promote allegation which ultimately creates a holistic school environment where teachers wait to be told what to do. The main problem of these leaders is they do not think outside the box.
- c. **Negotiators:** These types of leaders define the goal with themselves. Then they force to believe stakeholders on that specific goal. These negotiators are mainly look into the process instead of products.
- d. **Collaborators:** They work with other stakeholders collaboratively. They believe in open communication. Transparency is another main driver for these leaders.

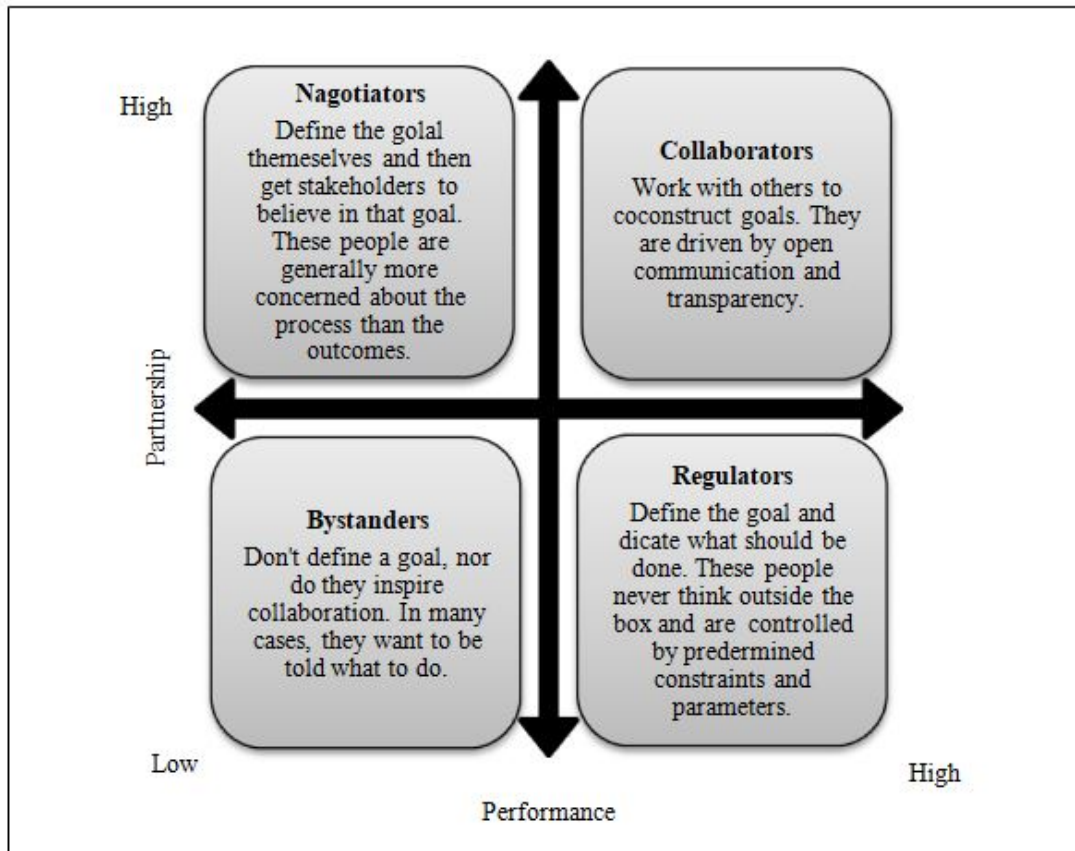


Figure 1. Collaborative Leadership Framework (Dewitt, 2017)

A collaborative leader, therefore

- a) Realize that schools are too complex for one person to make all the decisions,
- b) Thinks about different ways of involving others in school policies,
- c) Share information with others who have a stake in a particular activity,
- d) Listens to other colleagues,
- e) Encourages, trains and coaches others to participate in school wide, subject-specific, or grade level decision making,
- f) Forms committees that are empowered to make important curricular and instructional decisions,
- g) Solicits the advice of teachers and the others,
- h) Reaches out on daily basis parents, students, school secretaries, custodians, specialized support staff, and of course teachers,
- i) Believes that collaborative leadership is a moral imperative for a principal in the 21st century and
- j) Engages the school's staff and community in training to help better understand collaborative decision making.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) suggest that collaborative leadership comprises three important areas to attain its success. Those three areas are vision, governance and resource allocation.

According to them, vision means to make decisions for future to simplify actions that focus on different indicators of schools to improve students' outcomes and cherish the commitment. Secondly, governance is empowerment of the staff and cheering for participation. Thirdly, resource allocation means gaining and allocating resources for supporting teaching and learning.

There are five important components which are very effective for making change (Fullan, 2001, Kotter, 2012).

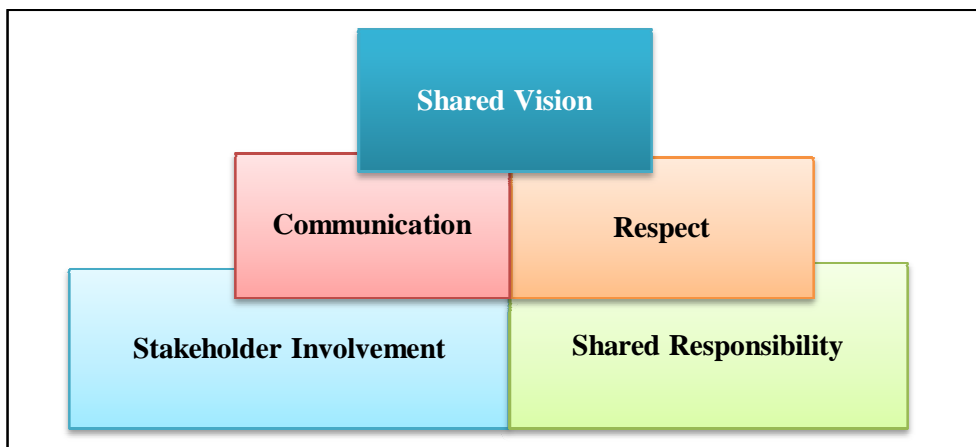


Figure 2. Five components of collaborative leadership: these five components build a collaborative leadership environment together. They are independent to create a shared vision for the organisation (Vitale, 2016)

In a collaborative leadership process all the members of an organisation has an important point of view to understand the requirements of the organisation. So, while taking a decision every viewpoint should be need into considerations. Secondly, to achieve the broader goal in future the organisation must have a common vision (Fullan, 2001). The vision should be like that which can consider the each and every goals of an organisation. For the success of an organisation shared responsibility is another integral component (Kotter, 2012). For making collaborative leadership an effective one team approach is an important driver. Supportive culture is the heart of a team which is built upon honesty and also mutual respect. Last but not the least communication is the most important components of collaborative leadership (Scharmer, 2009). The stakeholders of the organisation should have good communication skill to convey their ideas overtly with other members based on trustworthiness (Poff & Parks, 2010, Gano-Phillips et al., 2011).

Examples from evidence

Generations of school efficiency research show that excellent leadership is typically one of the dominant factors in high-performance school systems. The empirical evidence about collaborative leadership and its impact on school improvement is located in several different research works. Drawing upon various methodological traditions and positions the research

terrain is very much diverse. Despite their broad nature of diversity, there are some consistent messages about collaborative leadership and their role in school improvement. In this section the researcher will try to explore examples from these empirical evidences to justify the how collaborative leadership makes an effect on school improvement.

The first study researcher take as an example is an extensive study done by Hallinger and Heck (2010) who explored the role of Collaborative leadership and school improvement for understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. The main aim of this research is to assess the effects of collaborative leadership on school capacity improvement and student learning over a four-year period in a large sample of U.S. primary schools. These sample data described student and teacher perceptions of collaborative leadership and capacity to improve the school, as well as student achievement in reading and mathematics. Different items used in this study covered three dimensions of school leadership. First is that collaborative decisions are made focusing on educational enhancement. Second, emphasizing school governance that empowers staff as well as students. Third, encouraging engagement, broad participation, and shared accountability for student learning; emphasizing wide participation in efforts to evaluate the academic development of the school. The researchers used a set of eight subscales to operationalise school improvement capacity. These subscales mainly described that how much school follow the state curriculum standards to their educational programme, how these programmes implemented for the students' achievement over time; what is the status of communication system; how staff are involved in educational decision making; whether school has a well developed academic and social support system for their students; and has a professional teaching personnel well qualified for assignments and responsibilities and committed to the purpose of the school. The research findings can be divided into three ways. First, it suggests that only one type of leadership approach can not apply to improve all the schools. Second, this research suggests that there is no doubt that leadership is a potential driver of change but it is not sufficient to make learning outcomes better only through leadership. Third, the effort of the research is really significant for investigating the fact that how much collaborative leadership has an impact on learning. Ultimately, the research findings agree with the point that collaborative leadership can attempt a way towards more sustainable school improvement that is opposed the concept of leadership from the principal alone.

Their subsequent study (Heck & Hallinger 2010) examined the effects of collaborative leadership on school improvement and student reading achievement over a 4-year period in 192 elementary schools in one state in the USA. This main focus of this article was to understand the role of collaborative leadership on the improvement of elementary schools as well as students' learning. This research examined how school performance has been impacted by collaborative leadership. This study bring out the fact that student learning is indirectly influenced by collaborative leadership with the help of capacity building in school.

There is widely accepted belief that leadership quality makes a significant difference to school improvements. So, there is a great trend of research on educational leadership in the early part of the 21st century. School requires effective leaders for providing a conducive environment for their learners to get a best possible outcome. Bush (2007) examined the theoretical background for education leadership and management, assess various leadership models and discuss evidence of their relative effectiveness in the development of successful schools. In his paper “Educational Leadership and Management: Theory, Policy, Practice” Bush (2007) described the participatory leadership model which is the basis of collaborative leadership. In this paper we can capture some ideas about participative leadership. Leithwood et al. (1999) remarked that “Participative leadership ...assumes that the decision-making processes of the group ought to be the central focus of the group” (as cited in Bush, 2007). There were three underpinning in this model. First, school effectiveness will influenced by participation; secondly, democratic principles justify the participation; and thirdly, leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholder, in the context of site based management (Leithwood et al., 1999). The importance of a participative approach was pointed out by Sergiovanni (1984) which can make a bonding of different staff to help the principals by easing his/her pressure. If there is a replacement of principal leadership with the participative leadership the burden of leadership from the principal becomes less with the shared responsibility.

James, Mann and Creasy (2007) conducted a study on “Leaders as Lead Learners: A Case Example of Facilitating Collaborative Leadership Learning for School Leaders”. In their study they mostly focused on distributed leadership as a traditional top-down organisation and also discussed the theories in distributed leadership to bridge the gap. The main question is where and by whom collaborative leadership is exercised. The important component of distributed leadership is systematic change. Individual leadership helps to achieve systematic change. Therefore, people of the organisation should look into the ideas of leadership again with more focus. The main idea of collaborative leadership is to collaborate within a group and with all stakeholders of any organisation. Changing behavioural pattern is the key in collaborative leadership.

Critical reflection

Collaborative leadership can be preferable than the other type of leadership mainly transformational and instructional leadership. Through collaborative leadership all stakeholders can participate actively in decision making process. These decisions have a positive impact on school improvement. Collaborative leaders are responsible for inspiring and shaping student learning. The only thing that collaborative leaders ensure is the support and understanding of the different stakeholders involved, whether they are parents, teachers, other district officials or relevant members of the community.

In this article, with the help of different empirical evidence the fact came out that collaborative leadership has a significant impact on school improvement. However, this issue cannot be generalized because school improvement leadership is highly contextual. While applying any kind of leadership style to the school improvement leadership team, it must be connected with the profile of the school, i.e., student learning outcomes and capacity improvement of the school in a specific time period. Each school has its unique characteristic and has an own trajectory of its improvement. The leaders must therefore be prepared to adapt or change their strategy at the various stages of the school improvement journey.

A collaborative leader should have a comprehensive perspective on how to contribute in school improvement. When this leadership acts as a catalyser for school improvement, it should take into account both the nature of leadership and the current conditions in the school. Academic structures, school standards and ongoing organisational process can create both opportunities and constraints for effective leadership. Team based collaboration and curriculum standards are important in academic structures. Professional learning, tangible support for students and teachers and open communication are the indicators in school standard. In last, resource allocation, decision-making opportunities, and external policy are important factors to know the status of ongoing organisational process (Bridges, 1977).

Collaborative leadership should focus on strategic school based action by all the stakeholders like administrators, teachers and others stakeholders for the improvement of students' learning environment as well as school environment. Collaborative leadership encourages shared commitment to achieve school goals, make a positive effort on decision making and also broad participation of all stakeholders for productive learning outcome.

Conclusion

Every school is unique in its combination of variable situation. The most important variable is school culture which may be societal or organisational culture. There are other contextual factors in school e.g. school type, school location, governance system, values, beliefs, customs and rituals of schools. There is no single form of leadership that improves performance in every context in the same way. So, while applying collaborative leadership for school improvement we have to consider the above context in our mind. For further research in this field, one can take a step to do this type of research in the Indian context. Here also the context of schooling in India is so varied marked by social and geographical diversity, diversity in school managements, school size, and diversity within schools and classrooms. Schools are different by virtue of being located in remote and hilly areas, conflict prone areas, near international borders, in flood and drought regions, islands, near coal mines, in historically backward areas-either rural or urban or semi-urban townships or inaccessible regions of north-east India. Schools also come under various managements for example, schools run by State Departments of Education, Government supported grant-in-aid schools, local body managed schools and schools managed by Tribal/Social Welfare Department and

the like. Diversity also comes from schools in various sizes which include small schools, large schools, single teacher schools, two teacher schools, etc. Schools are the replica of the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the society in which it exists and functions. In this so varied situation of Indian school it is not possible to impose all the responsibility to the school principal as a leader. There should be a move away from a 'single person' leadership to a 'collaborative approach' to leadership. This kind of study in the Indian context would enable arriving at policy decisions and generating need based professional development programmes for collaborative leaders to improve the school positively.

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