

Distributed Leadership

By

James Spillane

Executive Book Summary

By

Joanne Longneck

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Introduction

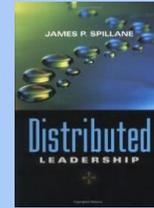
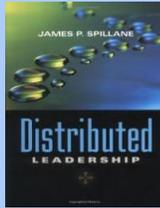
Distributed leadership

James P. Spillane's *Distributed Leadership* provides an overview of the author's perspective on the importance of leadership in any organization. Specifically, school leadership and the importance to school improvement. Throughout the book he emphasizes the aspect that leadership is "how leadership practices takes shape in the interactions between leaders and followers in their situations" He examines how leadership happens in day to day practice, in formal and informal situations within the school systems. Also, he discusses the importance for leaders to utilize the skills and knowledge of teachers and other support staff in order to be successful. Leadership practice includes the ability to delegate to other staff because it is impossible to be an effective, successful leader without the assistance of others.

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"LEADERSHIP WHEN ONE GROUP MEMBER MODIFIES THE MOTIVATION OR COMPETENCIES OF OTHERS IN THE GROUP" (P.10).

About the Author



James P. Spillane

The Author of *Distributed Leadership*

- Formerly a primary school teacher in Ireland.
- A professor Northwestern University of human development and social policy.
- Professor of learning sciences and faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy Research.
- His research focuses on the local implementation of government education policy and on school leadership.
- Author of *Standards Deviation: How Schools Misunderstand Education Policy*(2004) and numerous journals.

Key Questions

- Why do so many leaders experience difficulty when it comes to the delegating aspect of being a leader?
- If Spillane's research suggests the importance of knowing the "how" of leadership, why is the focus on the "what" of leadership in the school system?
- How would Spillane's leadership perspectives be beneficial to leadership practices in schools?



"Studying the "how" as well as the "what" of leadership is essential". (p.7)

Chapter 1

Nature of the Beast



Key Points

1. The Lure of Leadership in the “Heroics of Leadership” Genre

Heroics of Leadership is the idea that success is perceived to be from the principal. Yet, in order to be successful there needs to be a group of people working together to make change happen. It's the leader that initiates strategies to implement change.

2. A Distributed Perspective on Leadership: Essential Elements

When examining the perspective of school leadership there are aspects that are important to be aware of. Leadership is taking into account all individuals that are involved in the school.

There are specific elements that play a role when it comes to examining leadership and the different people involved in aspects concerning leadership. According to Spillane there are three elements to discuss to have a better understanding of distributed leadership in the schools. These elements include; leaders, followers and their situations.

Distributed Leadership is an alternative way of thinking about leadership practice in a different way. Leadership practice involves more than one person within the context. Also, leadership practice includes the important interactions between leaders, followers and their situations. The idea the one person can effectively lead an organization is impractical. “Expecting one person to single-handedly lead efforts to improve instruction in a complex organization such as a school is impractical” (p. 26). The principal is often thought of as the only source of knowledge and skills for leadership. Other potential leaders are not recognized or treated with less importance than the principal, the perceived only leader.

Leaders and Leadership Practice- leadership practice involves many leaders and depends on the interactions of these leaders. “What a leader does influences and in turn is influenced by other leaders” (p.16).

Followers and Leadership Practice- followers can be classroom teachers, administrators, and specialists depending on the situation. “Leaders not only influence followers but are influenced by them” (p.17). Followers are an important component of leadership practice. Followers assist leadership practice by their interactions within the situation.

Situation and Leadership Practice- a situation in which leaders are in contribute to the day to day routine of leadership practice. Routine and tools are important to the work that happens in school. They assist in the effectiveness of leadership practice.

“Leadership practice typically involves more than one person- if not by design, then by default and by necessity” (p.26).

Chapter 2

Nature of the Beast



There are four main questions that are answered in this chapter.

1. Who takes responsibility for leadership work?

Depends on leadership function

Depends on Subject Matter

Depends on School Type

Depends on School Size

Depends on Development Stage

2. How are these responsibilities arranged?

Division of Labor

Co-Performance

Parallel Performance

Goals and Means

3. How do these arrangements come to pass?

Leadership by Design

Leadership by Default

Leadership Through Crisis

4. How do individuals get constructed as influential leaders?

Human Capital

Cultural Capital

Social Capital

When it comes to the factors within the question of responsibility, those factors all contribute to the purpose of examining the leader-plus aspect. The responsibility comes from a multiple of people not just one person. When discussing the factors like school size, school type within responsibility, it depends on what specifically is happening at the time. There are many people with leadership skills and knowledge that can contribute at any given time.

When examining “how” responsibility is arranged within a school situation, there are several factors to take into consideration. For example, when looking at the distribution of labor or goals and means. There needs to be a system in place where leaders are able to recognize the skills and abilities of other employees. By utilizing other staff there is the idea of division of labor which enables productivity.

The arrangement of responsibility comes from several avenues. For example, leadership by design, default, and crisis. There are situations where there are prior formal designated leadership in place. Also, there are scenarios that happen where people just have to make decisions immediately- leadership by default. As well, when discussing crisis situations someone needs to take responsibility which means being in a leadership role.

There are several ways that individuals get constructed as influential leaders. These include: human, cultural, social, and economic capital. Individuals that have the skills and knowledge to be a leader will engage their teachers, show respect, and professionalism. It is also important for an individual to follow through with decisions once they are made.

All of these factors are important when examining the leader plus aspect.

“A distributed perspective presses us to look not only at who takes responsibility for particular leadership routines and functions but also how the practice of leadership takes form in the interactions of these leaders with followers and with the situation” (p. 50).

Chapter 3

The Practice Aspect

According to Spillane in this chapter he discusses leadership through the practice aspect. Which is leadership through practice. This concept addresses the leadership practices of people that influence improvement or change. The example that Spillane utilized was a committee meeting at a school where several of the principal and several teachers had specific discussion on a specific topic. The principal and teachers used a co-perform, working together, technique to engage the others involved in the meeting. Spillane acknowledged the scenario as “the opening scenario displays leadership practice in that practice is exemplified in the interactions among participants” (p. 55). The leadership practice is essential when discussing leadership. Interactions within leadership practice are important to recognize as paramount to leadership.

“In a distributed approach, it is also critical to look at how leadership practice takes shape in the interactions between leaders and followers” (p.57).



Important Points

- People are important when analyzing leadership practice.
- Leadership practice is not a concept that is simple to explore.
- Interdependencies are the activities and interactions between people.
- Analyzing interdependencies assists with how leadership practice is important to leader contribution.
- Actions of school leader are important but still only one of the elements that contribute to defining leadership practice (p.84).
- Interactions are essential when discussing leadership practice from a distributed perspective.
- Leaders can interact in leadership routines without seeking common outcomes.
- Tools and routines are essential for interacts between leaders and followers.

Chapter 4

Distributed Perspective on and in Leadership Practice



“A distributed leadership approach can be a powerful tool for transforming the practice of leadership” (p.87).



In this chapter, Spillane discusses the need to think about leadership in a new way. According to Spillane, the distributed perspective “offers a way of approaching the very practical problems of school leadership” (p.87). As well, distributed perspective can be a framework that will assist leaders to understand leadership by rethinking and revisiting leadership practices. Also, distributed perspective can provide “a way of thinking systematically about the practice of leadership” (p.87). It is important to remember that leadership consists of people’s leadership skills and knowledge, so any theory is just that, without the practices and interactions of leaders.

Getting Practical

The idea that one person alone can lead any organization is unrealistic. By following a distributed perspective on leadership, people are able to be successful as leaders.

Getting To Practice

Leadership practice is important to the leadership roles, structures and functions. Leadership practice is essential. Distributed perspective can be a design tool used for school improvement.

A Distributed Perspective on Leadership Practice

“The distributed perspective provides school leaders and those who work with them a set of analytical tools to support their reflection on leadership practice” (p.90).

A Distributed Perspective in Leadership Practice: Design Principles

“The distributed perspective can also serve as a design tool for school leaders, providing a set of ideas that can be used to inform their design decisions” (p.93).

Developing Leadership Practice

“A distributed perspective challenges preoccupation with leader development, urging greater attention to the development of leadership practice” (p.99).

Leadership practice is important to develop the knowledge and skills as a leader. It is the practice of day to day routine within the school

Leadership Policy

From a distributed perspective, education policy makers need to realize that the leadership is beyond just the principal.

Another concern is that leaders are assigned to schools without regard to the school or the skills and knowledge of the principal.

Leadership development from policy makers perspective concentrate on principals and people who want to be principals. Whereas, with the distributed perspective there is a focus on other school leaders and working together.

Summary

Spillane's *Distributed Leadership* provides an interesting theory of leadership and leadership practice within schools. A distributed perspective of leadership recognizes all the individuals that are involved in leadership practice. The individuals involved are not necessarily appointed formal leaders. The distributed perspective focuses on the interactions of individuals through leadership practice. It is important to remember that when examining the theory of distributed leadership perspective there are many leaders formal or informal. Within the theory, Spillane mentions that one leader cannot lead an organization effectively and successfully on his or her own. The distributed leadership model recognizes the decision making process as a system of routine. Distributed leadership can potentially be a diagnostic and design tools for schools to reflect on what practices are working and what practices are not working within the school. Overall, according to Spillane the theory of Distributed leadership would be an effective way of leadership and leadership practices for schools to incorporate into their system of leadership.

REFERENCE:

Spillane, James. (2006). *Distributed Leadership*. United States. Jossey-Bass