

Executive Book
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Sustainable Leadership

Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink
(2006)

Principles of Sustainable Leadership

1 – Depth

Learning and Integrity

2 – Length

Endurance and Succession

3 – Breadth

Distribution, not Delegation

4 – Justice

Others and Ourselves

5 – Diversity

Complexity and Cohesion

6 – Resourcefulness

Restraint and Renewal

7 – Conservation

History and Legacy

Introduction

In Hargreaves and Fink's *Sustainable Leadership*, the authors work through the seven fundamental principles of sustainable leadership. Listed to the left, these principles guide leaders through the many different factors involved in creating a high quality learning environment for all students, that will sustain itself for many years and over the course of many leaders. The authors draw comparisons to environmental sustainability and sustainable business practices, with practices that are prevalent in education – and utilize these comparisons to discuss what direction school leadership should be going in order to create lasting, positive change in leadership practices.



Depth – Learning and Integrity

“Learning is a preparation for life and also a part of life. The meaning of learning is embedded in the meaning of life.”
(p. 32)

Leaders Must:

- Be passionate advocates for and defenders of deep and broad learning for all students
 - Commit to improving the old basics of literacy and math but not focusing on them to the exclusion of everything else, while also embracing the new basics
 - Put learning before testing
 - Make learning the paramount priority in all leadership activity
 - Become more knowledgeable about learning
 - Make learning transparent among the educators in the school
 - Become omnipresent witnesses to learning
 - Demonstrate evidence-informed leadership by promoting active inquiry into learning
 - Promote assessment for learning
 - Engage students in discussions and decisions about their own learning
 - Involve parents more in their children’s learning
 - Model deep and broad adult learning
 - Create the emotional conditions for learning
- (p. 41-43)

Sustainable leadership puts learning at the forefront of everything a leader does. When the clear focus of a leader is to put student learning first, all other decisions revolve around that central goal. Leaders must serve as instructional leaders, despite the constant demand of managerial tasks. A strong leader’s central focus must be on deep learning for all. Instead of being distracted by high stakes testing, school comparisons, or government agendas, leaders should encourage slow knowing. Allowing teachers and students the time to problem solve, reflect, and come to an answer or a solution in their own time ensures that there is a depth to their thinking.

Fundamental types of learning:

1. Learning to know
2. Learning to do
3. Learning to be
4. Learning to live together
5. Learning to live sustainably

“Schools and systems that deal with the pressure to make annual literacy test gains by pretesting students and then applying intensive coaching to a percentile of students that fall just below that passing mark are not creating sustainable improvement that matters. They are concentrating calculatively on the measured results instead of on the learning the results are supposed to measure. They are valuing what they measure, not measuring what they value.”

(p. 31)

Length – Endurance and Succession

Leadership succession is a difficult challenge. In the corporate world, successful businesses plan in advance for leadership changes, actively recruit and develop potential leaders, and have a clear definition of the leadership skills they value. In education, leadership changes occur regularly. Principals are constantly on the move – retirements, promotions, and transfers – all contribute to a steady flow of leadership in schools. The key to ensuring sustainability for Hargreaves and Fink is to make a plan that creates “the positive and coordinated flows of leadership, across many years and numerous people, that will secure improvement over time” (p. 92). Planning for leadership succession can be difficult as it makes the leader feel vulnerable. It places the leader in a situation where they need to consider that they are not the key link in the success of the school. Succession needs to be focused on and done carefully; parachuting high-performing principals into under-performing schools may work from time to time, but it does not create lasting improvement. Especially when that same principal is moved on again 3 years later to the next under-performing school in need of “saving.”

Good Succession Plans:

- Are prepared long before the leader’s anticipated departure or even from the outset of their appointment
 - Give other people time to prepare
 - Are incorporated in all school improvement plans
 - Are the responsibility of many, rather than the prerogative of lone leaders who tend to want to clone themselves
 - Are based on a clear diagnosis of the school’s existing stage of development and future needs for improvement
 - Are transparently linked to clearly defined leadership standards and competencies that are needed for the next phase of improvement
- (p. 71-72)

Hargreaves and Fink argue that a focus should be placed on retaining leaders in schools when they are doing well.

- Leaders who are achieving significant success in a school must normally stay for at least five years if their improvements are to survive their departure
 - Outstanding leaders should anticipate fewer rather than more successions
 - While leaders should be expected to change assignments over the course of their career, policies of frequent rotation of leaders should be abandoned
 - Leadership that turns around underperforming schools must not depend on transient heroes but on leaders who are attached to the community they serve
- (p. 83)

Critical Aspects of Leadership Succession and Sustainability:

(p. 62)

Succession Planning

Succession Management

Succession Duration and Frequency

Succession and the Self

Breadth – Distribution, not Delegation

In order for leadership to be sustainable, the leadership in a school must be properly distributed. When distribution is maximized, teachers take on leadership roles in the school environment, and help drive student learning and the vision of the school. Certainly, having teachers buy in to the leader's vision for the school is an integral way for leaders to influence learning, as teachers are on the ground floor with students delivering the learning agenda of the school, division, and government. Encouraging and empowering teachers to lead creates an environment where all teachers feel that they have a strong voice, their professionalism is respected, and they can help to drive positive change within a school. Leadership must be distributed to engage staff and enhance the learning of all students.

Teacher Leaders:

- Contribute to school development and classroom change
- Promote teacher collaboration within and across schools that leads to school effectiveness, improvement, and development
- Improve schools' decision-making processes
- Enhance teacher self-efficacy as well as morale and retention in the profession
- Treat leadership as an emergent property of a group rather than as a function of an individual
- Improve the achievements of students in disadvantaged schools (p. 105)

Autocracy – Principals make all of the important decisions, not drawing on the strengths of others

Traditional Delegation – Principals delegate tasks that fit within the vision they have for the school

Progressive Delegation – Principals and other formal leaders delegate tasks to staff, occasionally asking for staff input, but only if it fits within the current vision

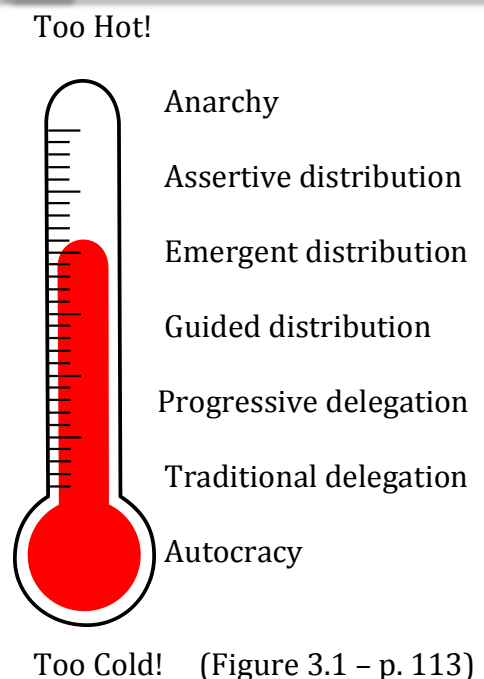
Guided Distribution – Principal guides and creates professional learning communities, a culture that engages teachers

Emergent Distribution – Teachers take on leadership roles without the guidance of the principal, in which the principal plays a supporting role through creating an environment that values learning and change

Assertive Distribution – Teachers take on leadership roles without the guidance of the principal, and feel comfortable challenging school and division norms

Anarchy – Principals are not present to lead, staff are left to distribute tasks themselves, often creates division among staff members

Raising the
Temperature
of Distributed
Leadership



Justice – Others and Ourselves

Justice in sustainable leadership presents a challenge in looking out for not only what is best for a principal's own school, but what is best for the surrounding schools and community. Leaders cannot be self-serving, or only aiming to achieve greatness for their own schools, otherwise the leadership is not sustainable. Sustainable leadership is socially just and focused on the common good of all, not just those within the walls of a given school. This is difficult in a competitive culture, especially in the USA, where schools compete against one another for high quality teachers, motivated students, and funding.

Some examples of current situations that represent socially just leadership are: **paired schools** (successful schools work with struggling schools to share resources and ideas), **networked districts** (schools share resources, students have access to the network instead of just their school), **community consultation** (determine community need and avoid hoarding the best teachers for specialist schools), **collective accountability** (pooled achievement scores between schools), and **environmental impact assessment** (new schools should assess the impact of design and policies for choosing students and staff).

“The hardest part about sustainable leadership is the part that provokes us to think beyond our own schools and ourselves” (p. 158)

About the Authors

Andy Hargreaves - is the Thomas More Brennan Chair in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. He hails from England and started his career in education as a primary teacher. He has authored or edited more than 30 books, and his current research focus is on successful educational change strategies in high performing schools.

All information from <http://www.andyhargreaves.com/>



Dean Fink – is an educational development consultant, born in Canada. He spent 34 years in public education, thirty of which were in leadership roles. He has published 6 different books, the latest of which was titled *The Succession Challenge: Building Educational Leadership Capacity through Succession Management* and came out in 2010.

All information from *Sustainable Leadership* and http://home.cogeco.ca/~deanfink/Dean_Fink_PH.D/Welcome.html

Diversity – Complexity and Cohesion

Diversity allows for schools to flourish by promoting and drawing on the diverse knowledge and experience base of its teaching staff. Schools are constantly changing because staff and students bring with them a diverse background of experiences. As the people in a school change, so to does the school's culture.

Standardized education is a threat to educational diversity. Creating a standardized approach in education can negatively impact both teacher creativity and student learning. School leadership can encourage diversity by allowing teachers to be flexible with curriculum and focus on collaboration with their peers. Through the sharing of ideas and the freedom to be creative, teachers will stretch their own thinking, and thus the thinking of their students. Diversity among students and teachers is a wonderful gift in education, and leaders must work hard to enable diversity to flourish rather than be eliminated when faced with standardized education.

Professional Networks between schools:

- Enable and encourage schools to share and transfer the considerable knowledge already in existence that can help children learn better
 - Stimulate the professional fulfillment and motivation that comes from learning and interacting with colleagues
 - Capitalize on positive diversity across teachers and schools who serve different kinds of students or who vary in how they respond to them
 - Provide teachers and others with opportunities for lateral leadership of people, programs, and problem solving beyond their own school setting
 - Provide opportunities to draw on and develop evidence informed, research-derived practices
 - Promote innovation and its dissemination across large groups of interested schools
 - Give teachers more of a voice in professional and school-based decision-making
 - Help personalize every school as a learning community
 - Are flexible and resilient in the face of crises or misdirected system initiatives
- (p. 181-182)

“Productive diversity requires less rather than more testing, greater curriculum flexibility and creativity, explicit acknowledgement of and engagement with the knowledge and learning needs of culturally diverse communities, personalized learning rather than scripted instruction, focused cohesion instead of forced alignment, and intelligent professional development rather than paint-by-numbers in-service training.” (p. 190)



Resourcefulness – Restraint and Renewal

Sustainable leadership pays careful attention to its resources, both financial and personal. In order for leadership to be effective, they must look after themselves and the people around them. In an education setting, where there is often outside pressure from governments and communities to improve test scores, leaders must protect themselves and their teachers from being overwhelmed.

System Leaders who slow down depletion and waste:
(p. 203)

Infuse additional resources and extra energy into the system

Replace externally imposed targets with internally agreed-on targets for improvement

Reduce the speed and scope of reform implementation, accepting that there are human limits to the rate of progress

Replace the emotionally depleting strategies of shaming and blaming with supportive strategies that rebuild confidence, competence and pride

Three Sources of Renewal

1. Trust
2. Confidence
3. Emotion

Trust – Standardized reform and quick fix government agendas affect the public's level of trust in the education system, and educator's trust in the government. Trust is difficult to develop and easy to lose. Within schools we must foster trust, in our colleagues, leaders, and learning initiatives.

Confidence – Teachers need to have confidence in their leaders, and also in themselves. Teachers gain confidence from seeing their students succeed, leaders need to help to create the conditions for those successes to be possible.

Emotion – Educational leaders must motivate staff and support them emotionally. Teaching is an emotional profession, and without proper supports, teachers can become emotionally drained.

“Trust works. It improves organizations, increases achievement, and boosts energy and morale.” (p. 215)



“When leaders feel energized and alive, there is almost no limit to what they can achieve” (p. 224)

Conservation – History and Legacy

Conservation requires that leaders learn from the past in order to benefit the future. It is important not to romanticize the past, creating a longing for easier or better times, but to carefully reflect on the positives and negatives of the history of a school. Through this reflection, leaders can move forward into the future with an eye on the past, keeping in mind what has made the school successful (or not) as they search for continual improvement. Reformers (often governments with quick fix education agendas) desire rapid change and improved test results. School staff who are subject to these reforms often get nostalgic about the good old days, which leads to frustration and decreased morale. The challenge for leaders is to “preserve what they should from the past and learn from it whenever they can” (p. 243). Leaders should work to build off the developed strengths of a school, and add their expertise where they can to drive positive change.

Fundamental learnings on Conservation:

- There is no Eden or Golden Age of history, nature, child-centered learning, or teacher-developed curriculum to which we can or should return
- When leaders and reformers dismiss or demean the past, they create embittered and resistant nostalgia among its bearers
- The point of progress is not to ignore or suppress the past but to learn from it and work with it when we can (p. 245-246)

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Critique

Sustainable educational leaders promote and practice sustaining learning.” (p. 272)

Hargreaves and Fink have developed a great manual for educational leaders. They discuss the benefits of distributed leadership, focusing on student learning, maintaining the emotional health of staff, etc. Through the many real world examples that the authors lend, the reader is able to put in perspective how these ideas would come to life in an actual school setting. The reader gets to know certain leaders throughout the book, knowing their strengths or challenges, and is able to connect the theory to practice through these meaningful snap shots of school life.

The connections between sustaining the environment and sustaining leadership are effective. Sustainability is a term most often used when discussing environmental concerns, and there are strong parallels between policies in place to protect and sustain the environment and policies which could help to sustain and encourage strong leadership in schools.

Hargreaves and Fink’s seven principles of sustainable leadership create a powerful view of the positive impact that a principal can have on teacher creativity and morale, and most importantly, on student learning.