

System Leadership and Governance

School contexts are changing. The traditional models of school leadership are struggling to meet the challenges of the new educational world we all work in. New models are now more likely to provide the entitlement for all young people in an increasingly complex society.

The emerging models of school leadership are attempts to more effectively meet the needs of schools and their leaders, providing more appropriate ways of meeting pupils' needs. As schools start to adopt more unique leadership styles, governance will also need to keep pace.

Governance in educational settings will need to set policy, define strategy, and decide resource allocation and accountability strategies across institutions. This may impact on service providers outside of education.

The model known as **System Leadership** describes the organisation of school/s working closely with outside institutions such as health, social services and adult learning. This is a characteristic of the approach used to meet the challenges of the Extended Schools and Every Child Matters agendas.

Since the days of the Educational Reform Act, schools have become increasingly autonomous, not only from local and national government but in many cases from one another. System Leadership represents a move towards more deliberately collaborative and interdependent systems and more oriented towards the locality. This is a move away from "hero headship" and institutional leadership and towards educational leadership, the responsibility for leadership of a public service that benefits all young people.

System leadership sees, and acts on, the system as a whole. It recognises the interdependence between schools, other public institutions and communities. It recognises that the relationships between them can have profound effects on the outcomes for young people.

Features of system leadership – what leaders do in such a system:

- Vision and purpose
- Capacity building
- Creating a climate of professional generosity and exchange

How leaders lead in this system:

- Recognise there will be multiple perspectives on a problem and draw on these to arrive at solutions
- Build autonomy by setting rules and standards
- Support autonomy by connecting individuals
- Support learning and improvement through feedback
- Maintaining an open learning culture

Practical aspects of what system leaders need to do:

1. Build sustainable capacity in institutions
2. Develop sustainable capacity beyond institutions
3. contribute to the wider system

Three essential features of **Governance**:

1. constitution (who governs and how are they chosen)
2. operation (how governors fulfil functions)
3. spheres of operation (what governance does and in what domains)

Five domains of Governance:

1. Direction pointing Governance offers the potential for, or which protects, continuity and sustainability beyond leadership tenure
2. Boundaries Governance sets directions, but it also defines what can't be done. It defines what is not acceptable and so puts boundaries around the scope and sphere of influence of leadership.
3. Resources Access to shared or collective resourcing strategies is enabling. Resources link to permission and authority.
4. Permissions Context and purpose will dictate emphasis in order to encourage creativity and innovative solutions.
5. Holding to account The more space for leaders to lead, the more important it is that there is a framework of accountability.

System Leadership will require new frameworks of governance if leadership and governance are to be aligned and if purposes are to be maintained as key people come and go.

Useful publications and links

[The Innovation Unit](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/) <http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/>

- Michael Fullan, System Thinkers in Action (2004)
- Paul D Houston, Advancing System Leadership (2004)
- NCSL's research into new models of headship (includes work on Co-headship, Executive Headship and Federations)
- Institute for Research and Reform in Education, System Leadership project
- NCSL's research project, System Leadership in Action (2006)

National College for School Leadership <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/>