

# From Manager to Leader: The Impossible Transition of the Principals of the Schools of Mauritius

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**Abstract:** *In this article, we are going to look at the difference between a manager and a leader; since leadership is a step above management, a manager should make the effort to transit to leadership; what qualities, traits, skills are needed to become a leader; the potentials of leadership; what are the steps to be taken to do this transition successfully; what pitfalls the manager may encounter on his way to leadership. In the last resort, we shall see whether the principals of the schools of Mauritius can make the transition from managers to leaders and what are the barriers that prevent them from doing so, and whether they will ever be able to overcome these barriers.*

**Keywords:** Manager, Leader, Distributed leader, Charismatic leader, Transition

## 1) Transition From Manager to Leader.

John Kotter (2006) is of opinion that leadership and management are complementary: *“Managers promote stability while leaders press for change”*.

The manager is at the head of a team, makes known the priorities of the institution, guides each member of the team.

The leader provides the same service as the manager. But, beyond that, he has elaborated a vision of the institution, where it is going. He has to make sure that his vision is well understood by everyone, and that everyone is going in the same direction.

In order to make the transition from manager to leader, the manager must understand the difference between the nature of the work of the manager and that of the leader; what qualities the leader possesses which he, as manager, does not possess; what steps he should follow to make the transition to leadership. If a manager wants to become a leader, he should have clearly in his mind what kind of leader he wants to be. He should be aware of his strengths and his weaknesses. He will know that communication plays an important role, and so, he will have to develop a proper communication style to deal with employees and clients. A leader will not be successful unless he knows where he is going. So, with his employees, he will have to elaborate a plan, assign time limits, track results, and improve as the plan unfurls.

## 2) Traits and Skills of the Leader.

There are a number of traits and skills to be deployed if one wants to become a good leader. A leader is a role model, and, as such, he should always show empathy, integrity, respect and, above all, lead in a democratic way. The views of the employees have to be taken into consideration. It is this way of leading that motivates them. As soon as a conflict arises, the leader will do his utmost to find a solution. Sir Alex Ferguson (2013), said:

*“My job was to make everyone understand that the impossible was possible. That’s the difference between leadership and management”*.

For John Camp, Executive head - teacher of the Compass Partnership Schools in Greenwich, there are a number of principles that underpin the approach of leadership. For him, leadership is less about power and more about empowerment. It is important to have a culture built for the organisation. Not all the times will a leader be successful. And so, risk assessment will have to be carried out. Failure is an opportunity to change and grow. It is important to develop a narrative that will galvanise the energies of the employees. Leadership must be open. A leader must accept accountability. To elaborate growth plan, the leader must be skilled in system processing and be able to capture essential data and use them. John Camp, in Sue Williamson (2016), SSAT of Leading, points out that *“leadership is a collective endeavour and should be focused on organisational culture. Get the culture right and it will lead the organisation”*.

To change a culture requires a lot of patience. A leader cannot do all by himself. Good strategic leadership is needed. He should become an expert in recruitment and growth. He needs to be forward - thinking. He should always be questioning his leadership skills. The best leaders never stop learning new skills. But, there is also the need to unlearn old ones. This is the secret of success.

Training is an important feature of the success of leadership. It is important to be exposed to a wide range of expertise from different sectors. This helps the leader to challenge his way of thinking, working. It pays to look outward, beyond one’s own institution. He has to learn from others. Initiatives should not always be top - down. A successful organisation is one which enables initiatives to be also bottom - up. The contributions of all stake - holders should be encouraged.

To be successful, a favourable environment has to be created, and an environment in which people can perform to their best, and achieve the goals that have been set. Leadership is about creating effectiveness, excellence in achievement. It is about motivating continually and encouraging creativity and innovation. It is about seeing what is possible and motivate to achieve.

### 3) Why Leadership is important?

It is important for a manager to make the transition to become a leader. When he becomes a good leader of his team, he will, more easily, achieve his objectives. With a vision, he will know where he is exactly going. He will know how to motivate his team to achieve the goals set. Feedback is an important aspect. Without it, there is no progress. It is an occasion for the employees also to voice their views, their feelings, and make contributions.

### 4) The Transition to Good Leadership.

The manager who is transiting to leadership needs to have a role - model. He represents what a good leader should be, what kind of leader the manager wants to be. What makes him different from other leaders? How he has encouraged his team to excel and grow? All this will help the manager to gain enough information to form his leadership's style.

Once the manager has developed an idea about what kind of leader he wants to be, he will elaborate his vision, build his plan, coach his team and drive them to achieve it to completion. If he shows empathy, trust, respect, collaboration, is ready to make tough decisions, deal with conflicts that are bound to arise in an organisation, then, he is on his way to success.

### 5) The Pitfalls

There are a number of pitfalls which the manager, transiting, should be aware of, and be able to avoid. A manager who becomes a leader for the first time, thinks that he should do all the work himself. He thinks that, if he does not accomplish everything, people will come to the conclusion that he lacks authority. Authority is not gained in this way. It is the best way to render a task inefficient. Instead, the new leader must learn how to delegate. Employees who possess the skills will be happy to be associated with the management. Others will be able to acquire the necessary skills and become more efficient. Everyone will feel motivated. Without motivation, productivity is affected. Innovative ideas should be designed to reach success. The new leader should be aware of his priorities. He should not do everything at the same time. Prioritisation is an important aspect of good leadership. The new leader should not be inflexible. If there is need to change course, he should be able to adapt. Without proper feedback, there is no way to move forward. The employee should be aware of his shortcomings, should be coached to improve his skills. Only then will the task be performed properly.

### 6) The Importance of Transiting to Leadership.

For John Kotter (1990):

*"Management is a set of processes that keep an organisation functioning. They make it work today. They make it hit this quarter's numbers. The processes are about planning, budgeting, staffing, clarifying jobs, measuring performance, and problem - solving when results did not go to plan".*

As we can see, good management is essential for the success of an enterprise. But enterprises need, not only good management, but also people who can lead. In a Report for Deloitte (2013), the research team found:

*"Companies face new leadership challenges, including developing Millennials and multiple generations of leaders, meeting the demand for leaders with global fluency and flexibility, building the ability to innovate and inspire others to perform, and acquiring new levels of understanding of rapidly changing technologies and new disciplines and fields".*

Gavin Llewelly (2019), Chartered Marketer and Consultant, comes to the following conclusion, in a blog:

*"Management and leadership may be closely connected but there are clear differences between the two. Whilst management is primarily about delivering goals and targets efficiently, leadership is about recognising that the people you're working with are human beings with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations that can be harnessed as part of a healthy, balanced working culture".*

For Michael Watkins (2012, June), this transition is a turning point which he compares to seismic shifts:

*"They need to transform themselves from brick - layers into organisational architects; from problem - solvers into agenda - setters; and, from warriors intent on beating the competition, into diplomats who engage with a full range of stake - holders. Finally, leaders must move out from the wings and get used to living on centre - stage in the full spotlight".*

New capabilities have to be acquired. A shift from a lower position to leading an enterprise is quite difficult. According to Michael Watkins (2012), it is like navigating a tricky set of changes. The new leader has to move beyond managing sales and get his arms around an *entire* business. He is moving from being a specialist to a generalist. The more - experienced team will be of great help. You overmanage what you know well and undermanage others. You need to understand the various sub - cultures of the various managers of an organisation - finance, marketing, HR, R&D. You need to be able to speak their various languages. People need to be evaluated, feedback given, talents to be developed. The managers of each group analyse the specific business activities. The leader has to be able to integrate the collective knowledge to solve organisational problems.

### 7) The Change from Tactician to Strategist.

The newly - appointed leader of an organisation should forget about the day - to - day flow of attending meetings. For Michael Watkins, the new leader is now a strategist, no more a tactician. He has to focus on higher - level matters and be a strategist. The new leader has to focus more on the big picture, to be able to discern the various patterns in a complex business and how they relate. He should be able to anticipate how competitors respond to decisions, predict their reactions and what actions to take. The new leader has to understand what his moves will result in. He is now an architect, no more a brick - layer. The whole strategy, structure have to be changed. It has become now a vast, complex construction site which he finds difficult to cope with alone. He needs to delegate. But what to delegate? He should be aware of the various skills of his team, skills he, himself, does not possess. He has to convert himself into a

diplomat, negotiate, persuade, manage conflicts, build alliances. To be able to do all this, he needs a new mind - set and build effective strategies.

It is time now to sell his ideas. Communication is an important element. Various channels such as texting, group chats, audio, video, file transfer and so on can be used. He should give the opportunity for employees to react. But there are other steps that he might have to take. Time will instruct him what he has to do more.

### 8) The Transition of Principals from Manager to Leader.

As from the 70s, the school has seen a big transformation. The school, up to the 70s, used to be run in a traditional way. The principal was the only leader and he accepted no sharing of his powers. He was a manager who carried out the daily routine task. He was in charge of the administration, finance, discipline. With the development in industry and management, it became evident that the school management practice had become old - fashioned and was no more responding to the needs of education. It was felt that there was a need for school management to innovate. Governments started to introduce industrial quality concepts to the management of schools. Quality and attractiveness of schools had to be improved. Many questioned whether the goals of the private sector were the same as that of public education. If innovation had to be brought to schools, the way schools are administered and led had to be reviewed.

By the end of last century, and the beginning of this century, there has been a paradigm shift. The school of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a new frontier and the learners a new breed. This world is totally different from the older generations. Children, nowadays, are, at an early age, at ease with smartphones, tablet - computing, 3D televisions, 5Gs, quantum computers. Since childhood, they have been exposed to advanced technologies. We have now instant information. They communicate with people around the world. On certain topics they know more than their teachers. We no more teach children. We guide them. We dialogue with them. We listen to them and learn from them. The traditional way of managing schools has no more its place in a completely changed world. We require a new kind of leadership.

### 9) What is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leader?

We said that, in a traditional school, the principal was the only one to take decisions. Managing a school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become a quite complex task. The principal is now accountable to stakeholders. He needs to show results. To do this, he has to create an atmosphere of peace, harmony, serious work, be able to communicate, collaborate, motivate so that everyone feels part of the institution, wants it to progress, to succeed. To do this, he has to look after the day - to - day running of the school. But beyond, he has to build a teamwork closely with that team, create a vision, with all the members participating, make sure that everyone understands this vision, professionalise the staff, check the work of teachers and students, provide feedback, see to it that rules and regulations are observed by teachers and students, have constant and close collaboration with all stakeholders. This is an impossible task. The load is too big.

Fortunately, since the 90s, there has been a change of the concept of leadership. It is no more a one - man show. We have moved from a one - man leader to that of shared, distributed leadership.

According to Alma Harris (2009), distributed leadership *“can be equated with shared, collective, and extended practice that build the capacity for change and improvement”*.

Through distributed leadership, expertise at all levels can be mobilised. This will build the opportunity for change and improvement. To build such kind of leadership, trust, transparency, mutual respect is required. For Harris, there is the recognition that a single leader has its limitations and lacks power to bring transformation and growth.

Peter Gronn (2002) outlined the concept of distributed leadership *“as a solution to the tendency of leadership thinking to be divided into two opposing camps”*. Leadership is conceived as a *“collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple factors”*.

James Spillane (2005) defines leadership practice as an interaction between leaders and followers. The most important characteristic of interactions among leaders is interdependency. For Spillane:

*“Distributed leadership practice includes the ability to delegate to other staff because it is impossible to be an effective leader, successful leader, without the assistance of others”*.

School, nowadays, have become a organisation, too complex, for one person to lead. It would be highly impractical for one person to single - handedly lead efforts to improve instruction. The principal should not be considered as the only source of knowledge and skills for leadership. Other members of the staff should participate in leadership. But this cannot be achieved unless the authorities are ready to bring about structural changes. Harris and Chapman (2002), Spillane et al (2001), found that changes in the organisational structure of the school, are essential to provide impetus to distributed leadership. There are also the social and cultural contexts that have to be taken into consideration. The social and the cultural have a significant bearing on distributed leadership. Knight and Trowler (2001), found that the conditions for distributed leadership to flourish are created and sustained by social and cultural contexts. This makes it difficult for distributed leadership to flourish in a hierarchical society. A culture of non - participation and passivity can prevent distributed leadership to be established (Brytting and Trollestad 2000; Coad 2000).

### 10) Importance of a Charismatic Leader.

A charismatic leader can bring about the development of distributed leadership (Blasé and Blasé, 1999; Gold et al, 2002). That charismatic leader is found in the school itself, either from the principal, or, a bottom - up initiative, from the teachers.

In order to bring distributed leadership to fruition, professional development is primordial. Teachers should be given basic ideas in leadership and management; how to

work in team to resolve conflict. The development of a culture of sharing will allow distributed leadership to flourish. Distributed leadership has to be developed and constantly nurtured.

Distributed leadership contains key concepts: visioning, relating, sense - making, creating. It is important to have organised effort to promote this concept. Harris (2006) defines this concept as “*engaging people in leadership activity*”. Ritchie et al (2011) speaks of “*Cogenerated Dialogue*”, that is, interaction with others and interpersonal dialogue. There should be shared responsibility and solidarity. Sergiovani (1990) says that there should be change in thinking concerning the school. It is important to develop organisational cultures involving shared purposes. It becomes important to engage expertise wherever it exists (Harris, 2003).

Caldwell and Spinks (1998) believe that the traditional way schools are organised will not survive. There is a great need for drastic changes. There is need for synergy, that is, working together. Fukuyama (1995), speaks of the importance of the “*ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations*”. There should be, not only collaboration within a school, but also, among schools. Networking should evolve: “*Networks of schools working together to solve shared problems, network of schools sharing information to upgrade schools.* (DFESA, 2004).

Leadership should be distributed across the school to sustain development at all levels of the school. It is important to constitute a pool of leaders.

### 11) Distributed Leadership and its Potential.

Harris (2008), describes distributed leadership as “*collective leadership responsibility rather than top - down authority, constructed through shared action and interaction*”.

Distributed Leadership has the potential of enhancing educational transformation. Teachers are a potential source of leadership. They need freedom to execute their work and to bring innovation and changes. Teachers must do, what Peter Drucker (2006), asserts: “*Unlearn, Relearn, Learn*”. John Kotter (2006) speaks of the creation of the creation of a new culture, develop team spirit, vision, strategies, have effective communication and give everyone the power to act. As far back as 2006, Brian Caldwell organised a workshop in Mauritius, “*Re - Imagining School Leadership towards Quality Education for All in Mauritius*”, and said that it was important for schools to join networks to share knowledge (Caldwell and Bhowon, 2006). Spillane et al (2002), have found that student outcome is the primary purpose of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership transforms the school in a better learning organisation. Day, Sammons et al (2007), have found that distributed leadership has a big influence on schools and students. Leadership distributed among teachers bring them to help each other to improve classroom practice (Muijs and Harris, 2007). Through distributed leadership, teachers become a professional learning community (Harris and Jones, 2010), who can make significant contribution to learning. Mulford et al (2003), have said that students’ outcomes are indirectly related to

distributed leadership. There are a number of factors which can make distributed leadership successful:

- (a) Senior leadership should act as role - models.
- (b) Have a shared organisational purpose.
- (c) A behaviour that shows values of distributed leadership.
- (d) Consistently developing for decision - making.
- (e) Learning and collaborative achievement.

Caldwell and Spinks (2013) aim at creating a self - managing school: “*A self - managing school is one which has been decentralised and significant amount of authority given to make decisions on allocation of resources within a centrally determined framework of goals, curriculum, standards and accountabilities*”.

### 12) Can the Principals of the schools of Mauritius Make the Transition to Leadership?

Empirical studies carried in various schools around the world have clearly shown that there is a strong, positive relationship between distributed leadership and performance of students. (Gold et al, 2002; Harris, 2004; Blasé and Blasé, 1999; Dinham et al, 2005; Torrance, 2020; Grenda and Hackman, 2014; Malloy and Leithwood, 2017; Heck and Hallinger, 2009). A large number of teachers can participate in decision - making. This results in greater commitment of teachers to make the organisation’s goal a success.

If principals, in so many schools, have been able to make the transition to leadership, then, why would it be impossible to do the same in Mauritius? According to Jackson and Temperley (2007); Harris and Chapman (2002) Spillane et al (2001); Goodman et al (2001) unless changes are brought to the structure of the organisation of the school, it is impossible to introduce distributed leadership.

The schools of Mauritius ha a top - down leadership. Up to now, the authorities of Mauritius have been open to changes in various aspects of the school organisation, except the way schools are led. This is why it is difficult to expect changes in the near future; that distributed leadership will be introduced in schools. In Mauritius, the role of the principal has remained traditional. He is the manager without any contest and accepts no sharing of powers. Because of the long history of absence of sharing, it becomes quite difficult to change this culture. How are we going to convince the principal to accept the introduction of distributed leadership? But, even if he is convinced, he cannot, on his own, introduce this concept. It is because the Constitution of Mauritius has given all powers of control, decision - making to only the Minister of Education. He decides upon the organisation of schools, its pedagogy, text - books, discipline and any other aspects. All decisions are taken at the level of the ministry and communicated to the principals, who, in turn, inform teachers. And principals have to see to it that teachers put into practice the instructions of the Ministry. If principals consider that some of these instructions are not favourable to the good running of the school, they cannot do any changes. They have to apply instructions received. So also, for teachers. As time goes by, the Ministry has developed a fortress, a silo attitude. There is no mechanism to dialogue, to come up with suggestions, to try something new. The minister cannot err and he/she does not want to know. Autonomy, decentralisation are not themes that even a

minister can discuss. Government machinery is totally centralised. As time goes by, the policy is for more centralisation. The principals of Mauritius are professionals, have long experience and have the capacity of becoming visionary leaders. But the way schools are organised prevent them from jumping the last step to become efficient leaders.

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