

Distributed leadership: According to the evidence

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper aims to provide an overview of the literature concerning distributed leadership and organisational change. The main purpose of the paper is to consider the empirical evidence that highlights a relationship between distributed leadership and organisational outcomes.

Design/methodological approach

The paper draws on several fields of enquiry, including organisational change, school effectiveness, school improvement and leadership. It systematically analyses the evidence in each field and presents a synthesis of key findings.

Findings

The evidence shows first, that there is a relationship between distributed leadership and organisational change, second, that there is evidence to suggest that this relationship is positive and third, that different patterns of distribution affect organisational outcomes.

Originality/value

The significance and originality of this paper lies in the fact that it: takes a normative position on distributed leadership and is chiefly concerned with the question of organisational impact; demonstrates the importance and necessity of further research about the way in which distributed leadership influences organisational outcomes; and acknowledges the methodological challenges in conducting research on distributed leadership but argues that such research will make a significant contribution to knowledge and theory generation in the leadership field.

Keywords

Distributive control Leadership Organizational development Organizational change Professional education

Citation

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emphasis is upon interdependent interaction and practice rather than individual and independent actions associated with those with formal leadership roles or responsibilities. Leithwood, K., Mascal, B., & Strauss, T. (2009) *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*. London, Routledge. We recently shared the story of a Tasmanian school that has adopted a K-10 model based on shared and distributed leadership. So, what is distributed leadership? What does the evidence say? And, can it work for your school? Teacher asked Professor Alma Harris. *Distributing Leadership or Distributing Tasks? The Practice of Distributed Leadership by Management and Its Limitations in Two Spanish Secondary Schools*. According to [53], with the arrival of the law regulating education in Spain in 1985, the development of the educational policies in our country was associated with putting organizational structures into practice that could allow for the participation in the management of schools. This situation, in principle conducive to the development of distributed leadership by the management, often runs the risk of being limited to formal and bureaucratic aspects, far removed from genuine participation and the involvement of other agents and members of the school. Distributed leadership has caught the attention of researchers, policy-makers practitioners and educational reformers (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009a). It is the leadership... *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*, London, Routledge. Google Scholar. Leithwood, K., B. Mascal, T. Strauss, R. Sacks, N. Memon, and A. Yashkina (2009b). *Distributing Leadership to Make Schools Smarter: Taking Ego out of the System*. In K. Leithwood, B. Mascal, and T. Strauss (2009). *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*, London, Routledge. Google Scholar. Lieberman, A. (1995). "Practices That Support Teacher Development: Transforming Conceptions of Professional Learning." *Distributing Leadership Matters*. Distributed leadership has already been mentioned as part of the section titled 'Leaders of learning'. For some researchers, distributed leadership is, without doubt, one of the current big ideas which has swirled around during the last 5 years (see Spillane, 2005). There is considerable advocacy for the concept from a number of different perspectives. NCSL research shows that distributed leadership has a part to play in school improvement; it does makes a difference to school and student performance (NCSL 2004a, 2004b, 2006c). Moreover, NCSL's work demonstrates that distributing leadership is vital if schools are to be places where pools of leadership talent are created and from which tomorrow's school leaders can be drawn.