

## Chapter 3

# Contextually Intelligent Leadership for Improving Schools Across Different Contexts and Regions

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the main challenges facing school principals in many parts of the world today is how to create a meaningful balance between accountability and innovation. This challenge is rooted in the existing tension between managerialism and leadership theory prevailing across contexts and regions. It is manifested by two competing contextual demands put on school principals, namely, the demand for accountability for outcomes (expressed, among others, through standards-based accountability policies) on the one hand, and the demand for innovation and creativity current leadership theories postulate in view of the context of change schools are operating in. Based on the review of the literature, this chapter presents the tension between school leadership and management and how this manifests itself in both theory and practice. The chapter examines the potential for reducing the tension through contextual intelligence and concludes by outlining possible strategies to narrow the gap between the two and resolve the challenge.*

### INTRODUCTION

It has now become an undeniable truth, that an individual who is placed in charge of a social organisation such as a school, occupies a unique position. The uniqueness of the position derives from the sense that the individual is expected to assume the combined role of both leadership and management and perform their respective functions effectively (Bush et al., 2009; Department of Education, 2008). The two roles, which represent two sides of the same coin with different faces, put different demands on

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school principals working in a given organizational context. Simply stated, principalship has become known as a function of leadership and management. Combining leadership and management elevates school principalship to a higher social status of a hero as Linda Darling-Hammond (2007) once said in the following quotation:

*Too often our nation looks for heroes in all the wrong places. Movie stars and rock musicians, athletes and models aren't heroes, they're celebrities. Heroes abound in public schools, a fact that doesn't make the news (Darling-Hammond, 2007:23).*

The complexity of principalship is demonstrated when different demands and expectations for management and leadership, arising from multiple sources converge in one person, creating complicated challenges overcoming which makes one a virtual hero as Linda Darling-Hammond suggests. These challenges can be summarized in three ways. In the first instance, the demands put on the school principal do not come as distinct packages, but as a mix of leadership and management demands as evident from current policies on standards for principals in developed and developing countries (Condon & Clifford, 2012; DfE, 2015; Department of Basic Education, 2016; Pont, 2013). In the second instance, various stakeholders have various expectations on a principal. For example, one principal serves various constituencies ranging from the education department, the governing body, teachers and learners to the broader community (Marishane, 2011). Lastly, the organizational environment in which schools operate is in a state of flux – it is dynamic and complex and this places a special demand on school principals to respond accordingly.

The high management and leadership expectations are not without foundations and frustrations. While these expectations have their roots in their respective management and leadership theories, the frustrations they cause are felt in the implementation of policies emerging from these theories, as this chapter will show. It is this difference in role expectations that creates tension in the course of pursuing a common goal of organizational improvement (accentuated through student learning and achievement), especially where these roles are either not clearly defined or are confused.

## **Theories Underpinning Contemporary School Management and Leadership Practices**

### **Managerialism**

Managerialism in education may, broadly speaking, be defined as the application of quasi-market principles to public sector organizations such as schools. These principles include, but are not limited to, efficiency, productivity and cost-effectiveness (value-for-money) (Thrupp & Willmont, 2003). Deployed in schools, these principles are expressed through the vocabulary commonly applied in the language of the market. Here, according to Dunn (2013), students become customers, teachers become service providers, educational leaders (principals) become (site-based) managers and the state (Education Department) becomes the main authority driving the process in which outputs or products precede processes and inputs. The argument in support of managerialism is premised on the assumption that the private sector values carry more weight than those in public sector and the conclusion that, given such superlative degree of comparison, the private sector values should be prioritized in managing public organizations

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