

Chapter 5

Digitally Mediated Leadership: Harnessing Tomorrow's School-Leadership Skills Today – A Maltese Outlook

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of digital technologies and accompanying arbitrated attitudes in formal educational contexts have for a long time been expected to trigger radical transformation in schools. Yet, these still have to materialize. The subsequent engagement of the first generation of maturing digital natives as school-leaders is in itself not a guarantee that the associated and much-anticipated change will take place. In the interim, the situation is weighed against a theoretical backdrop that merges transformational leadership qualities, work experience and embraced interpretational traits, a designated group of Maltese school-leaders manifest with respect to technology inclusion in their school. Subsequently disclosed experiences and insights were used to synthesize forward directions that current school-leaders and future educational leadership personnel may choose to adopt for the initiation and setting of today's 21st century school leaders in the anticipation of tomorrow's schools.

INTRODUCTION

The Story Behind the Write-Up

The truth is that helping all children master skills and knowledge [...] requires an amount of time, practice, reinforcement and customization that is simply not feasible in most conventional schools and classrooms [...] Emerging technological tools, however make it newly possible [...] if school and system leaders know what they are doing. (Hess and Saxberg, 2014, p.xi)

Some time ago the author happened to attend an event organised by the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment. It marked two important milestones in the government's objectives of enhancing ICT presence in schools. The first was the inauguration of the future classroom; a radical approach that pro-

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notes innovative and flexible ways in which traditional physical spaces in schools can be transformed to embrace new modalities of digitally mediated teaching and learning that instigate creativity and spaces in which communities of practice can foster. The second was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, whereas the Ministry concerned established the provision of a number of tablet PCs to be availed for in teacher training programs within the Faculty of Education where the author works. While all of this was very significant, the highlight of the event came from an unexpected source. It was a snippet of a conversation the author inadvertently happened to overhear where the minister concerned shared a thought with a high-ranking official, that rather than having schools set up by architects, they should be designed by the teachers themselves. While not directed to anyone in particular, it was admittedly a very valid comment that ultimately directed the course of this write-up. Ironically, notwithstanding the good intentions, schools are being designed by professionals who are the products of an Industrial or Fordist pedagogy (Bates, 2000). Without question, the constructed schools may be aesthetically pleasing but as they are, they inadvertently are perpetuating physical and organisational structures that promote redundant pedagogical conducts, largely unsuited to technologies and related digitally mediated attitudes. Thus, as technology gains a stronger physical foothold in schools, preparation in digitally mediated learning may not be enough for teachers. Rather, equipped with innovative pedagogies but immersed in these Fordist realities (Bates, 2000) where productivity is favoured over creativity, they are not only perpetuating out-dated historical model structures that inadvertently are alienating the schools from the reality outside but also failing to achieve the expected digitally mediated outcomes.

In Malta, there are on-going government initiatives to enhance good practices for technology-enhanced learning. Yet there are also limited examples of educational institutions that have significantly restructured and/or reorganised themselves to embrace digitally mediated attitudinal shifts to teaching and learning as a holistic school initiative. In context, the considerable financial commitments involved in ICT implementation and the ensuing expected organisational changes in teaching and administrative levels, demand a major transformation that calls on innovative leadership decision-making qualities to embrace change. Therefore, motivations underlying this write-up converge onto the effects of a rapidly unfolding digitally mediated reality. As arguments focus on the consequences of pressures that teaching styles and the school realities are being subjected to, a call to a new facet in leadership that can embrace change and which in this article is intentionally coined as Digitally Mediated Leadership is made. Subsequently, as theory is grounded into nascent leadership practices, reference is made to residing beliefs and interpretations that a chosen group of Maltese Heads of Schools are employing in the setting of support systems and initiatives that can facilitate and actively reorganise school realities to embrace technology induced transformation.

Accordingly, this write-up is structured as follows:

- Firstly, a brief history on digital technologies in formal educational contexts will set up the backdrop across which arguments will be formed.
- It will secondly be complimented by an informative insight into the Maltese educational system and underlying contextual school leadership roles that will intrinsically lead to the central arguments for leadership styles that can instigate change. Subsequently this will define ‘digitally mediated leadership’ as an established requirement and dimension into school leadership skills that acknowledge and encourage digitally mediated transformation in formal educational institutions.

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