Seven Principles of Strategic Leadership

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Abstract: Prompted by a perception that many leaders may not invest sufficiently in strategic effort, we set out to examine what might give school leaders the confidence to take on more strategic leadership. Based on our work with school leaders over three years, we identified what effective and successful strategic leaders seem to do. We tried to capture this in terms of seven principles. The purpose of these interconnected principles is to enhance individual leader effectiveness in leading strategically. They are written to inform focused leadership reflection and action. We suggest that being strategic is more than strategic planning, or strategic intent, it is about deliberate and sustained practice. The principles assist those who are preparing for school leadership to assess their professional learning needs. They may also assist principals and others who are currently in leadership roles to reflect on the effectiveness of their strategic efforts. The principles can be used as a device for reflecting on the strategic focus of schools and for assessing why some schools are better than others at positioning themselves to take advantage of an ever changing educational milieu.

Our purpose is to answer the question, ‘What is strategic leadership and what do strategic leaders do?’ and in the process to describe a framework that can be used to inform leaders’ practice. We call this framework Seven Principles of Strategic Leadership.

Schools as organisations are complex, interrelated systems, where leadership has intended and unintended outcomes. Leadership is deliberate – or should be – and is about focused action and considered decisions. Leadership should also be strategic, where strategic means positioning the organisation to its best advantage in order to maximise goal attainment. For schools, this means achieving the best possible student outcomes now and into the foreseeable future.

Strategic leadership used to be defined as determining where an organisation was heading and how to get there. It was mainly about leaders engaging in strategic and ‘long-range’ planning, and was seen as a process that belonged to upper management alone, often taking place behind closed doors (Cheng 2000: 17). When leaders engaged in the management processes of analysing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating they were basically considered to be strategic.

In this paper we argue that strategic leadership has grown to be more than this. It involves more than the rational linear processes of writing vision statements and establishing strategic plans. As Davies (2008) describes, strategically focused schools are those that use strategic approaches and strategic processes (which includes strategic planning), but they also must have strategic leadership.
There was a time when strategic leadership was also tied directly to the work of transformational leaders. As Burns defines it, transformational leaders apprehend the future, see and articulate a compelling vision for what is possible, and ignite in others the enthusiasm and energy to make that vision a reality (Burns 1978). In this sense strategic leadership was also ‘heroic leadership’: the leader who sees a problem or an opportunity and develops a solution on his or her own, or with the help of a few like-minded others. Since this time in the 1970s when Burns wrote about transformational leadership, and with the advent of the knowledge age, it can be argued that the world has become more complex; as a result, it can be argued that strategic leadership as transformational leadership is also a story of the past.

As Robinson (2007) writes, ‘we have found that studies based on transformational leadership, a theory of generic leadership, which is very popular in education, showed no or weak impact on students. Transformational leadership has moderate impact on staff, but those impacts do not flow through to students’ (Robinson 2007: 10). Today’s world calls for post-heroic leaders whose work involves collaborating with multiple stakeholders and putting in place strategies to respond rapidly to solve complex problems that often require new ways of thinking and understanding of rapidly changing knowledge (Marturano & Gosling 2007); such leaders can be said to be strategic.

Our purpose in investigating strategic leadership was prompted by our perception that many school leaders did not invest greatly in strategic effort. As the PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PWC) independent research study on school leadership in the UK found,

Many Headteachers recognise themselves that they are struggling to create sufficient time to engage effectively with the various strategic issues that they are required to deal with. Part of this is driven by the sheer volume of operational delivery issues that school leaders now have to address. However there was also a sense in which the data suggested that some school leaders were more comfortable with an operational role than a strategic one. (PWC 2007: 7)

We believe that such reticence to take on strategic leadership is due to tentativeness caused by the insecurity of some school leaders who are not confident in taking on strategic issues. We then set about examining what would give school leaders the confidence to take on a strategic focus. Based on our work with four cohorts of school leaders over four years, we have explored what it was that effective and successful strategic leaders do and we have described this in terms of seven principles.

**Principle 1 - Strategic Leaders are Futures Oriented and have a Futures Strategy**

Strategic leaders force themselves to look beyond the present and into an uncertain future. It is about strategic intent, which is a powerful concept used to describe how a school can take a strategic perspective into a rapidly changing and turbulent environment (Davies & Ellison 2003: 54). Strategic intent is when ‘we know what major change we want but we do not yet know how to achieve it’.

Strategic leadership is more than having a vision about an ideal future. It is about acknowledging the complex and unpredictable nature of the future and developing strategies to ‘prepare for the unexpected’ rather than just to ‘plan for the known’.
Davies & Ellison (2003) recommend ‘futures thinking’ developed through ‘futures dialogue’ in order to ‘build a “futures perspective”’ in a school (2003: 7). The goal of a futures perspective ‘involves agreeing and living a set of values as a benchmark and building a set of learning skills so that opportunities can be shaped and taken rather than the school being the victim of unforeseen changes and events’ (2003: 8).

A metaphor for strategic leadership is that of principal as a car driver, someone who has an image of where they want to end up, but who does not have a GPS to lock-step their journey. A leader is a driver who is willing to take different turns and different roads to take into account changing road and traffic conditions and to improve the experience for the passengers. The driver keeps checking the dashboard of the car for indicators and gauges that tell of the state of the car, but he or she also constantly scans the road ahead for whatever may appear around the next bend.

The strategic leader’s job is to point the way forward for the people they work with through developing and communicating a futures strategy. Having a futures strategy means more than having a ‘strategic plan’. It also means working to understand the world where their students live and prepare them to take their place as valued citizens of a global community.

The key question asked when developing a futures strategy is:

Given our current situation and context, what is the best course of action to take us to the future we desire at this point in time?

This means embedding an ongoing learning orientation into our leadership and school life and helping colleagues understand ‘Why I am doing this?’ and ‘Where are we heading?’

At the school level this means understanding why an innovation has been adopted or why a pedagogical initiative has become popular. At a higher system and community level, strategic leaders need to determine what future citizens of their society need to learn and to experience in order for their nation to be prosperous and harmonious in the era in which their students will graduate. As an example, consider the problems that would face a society where the education system fails to strategically perceive the need for future citizens of the UK, Australia or USA to be ‘Asia smart’, or alternatively the Asian nation that strategically fails to perceive the need for their future citizens to be educated and business ready in English.

Strategic leaders ensure:

1.1 the school has a ‘futures strategy’ that is clearly articulated, shared, understood and acted upon. A futures strategy is NOT a strategic plan (or improvement plan), but a strategy for continuously scanning the horizon and preparing for what lies ahead.

1.2 the school’s future strategy takes account of the diversity of the school and its community at large, their dreams and aspirations.

1.3 that values underscore the school’s future directions whilst accepting that values change.

1.4 that student outcomes are at the centre of the futures strategy and resource management.

1.5 creativity, innovation and the use of appropriate technologies are embedded in the school’s future strategy.
1.6 a culture and ethos of challenge and support where all staff can engage in looking ahead and positioning themselves for the future – including ongoing professional learning and other forms of building capacity.

**Principle 2 - Strategic Leaders are Evidence Based and Research Led**

Strategic leaders know the importance of basing their strategic intent, change and action on evidence-based and research-led practice (Groundwater-Smith 2000).

Evidence-based practice means that strategic leaders collect and examine student outcome data on a continuous basis in order to make appropriate decisions about the school’s direction. At the simplest level this is about examining evidence of learning in order to ensure that every learner is achieving improved outcomes. Evidence-based practice is the judicious use of data to make decisions in school. It is about obtaining strategic data from the social, technological, educational, economic and political environment; analysing, interpreting and integrating that data into useful information; and the exploration of desirable options (Davies & Ellison 2003).

As well as drilling down through evidence of outcomes (for example student results), strategic leadership is also about making decisions based on the evidence of ‘inputs’. This is drawing upon the data collected of the actuality of the teaching and learning process. What is it that the teacher or learning facilitator is doing, and what evidence is there that this strategy will lead to learning?

Strategic leaders examine the research findings in order to find out ‘what works’, to source ideas, to search research possibilities for ways to achieve improved student outcomes. It is also about having regard to the need to ‘say why’ or to justify why the school is doing things as they are. For example, consider the strategic leadership needed to improve spelling in the national assessment result of a primary school over a two-year period. What whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling will be adopted? And what research supports that choice? Even strategic decisions about whether to adopt explicit teaching or constructivist approaches to the teaching of spelling are embedded in research.

Hargreaves (1999) has suggested that evidence-based practice is an important term for us to consider when wishing to move towards school improvement and teachers developing a soundly informed knowledge base. Indeed, he goes further to propose that schools should be knowledge-creating organisations. Strategic leaders may create new knowledge through their own research into what their school is doing. They may analyse their own practices to tell others of ways to bring about improved outcomes. It is about recognising their achievements and the value of their school’s practices. Such research can range from data-gathering, through parent perception surveys, to the collection of data from trialling innovative pedagogical programmes, to research based on the analysis of data from their own students’ moderated assessments as linked to their school’s existing practices.

Strategic leaders:

2.1 use data and benchmarks to monitor, track and analyse progress in students’ learning in order to determine where strategic intervention is required.

2.2 research into what works, to establish creative, responsive and effective approaches to learning and teaching. They scan the literature and seek information from fellow professionals through conferences, networks and professional learning for ways to achieve school improvement.
2.3 use evidence to challenge teacher under-performance at all levels and ensure effective corrective action and follow-up.

2.4 work closely with others to establish practices to continuously collect evidence that is productive and meaningful to improving student learning in their school.

2.5 engage in ongoing professional learning (reading and other systems for keeping up to date) to maintain current knowledge of educational trends and school leadership research.

2.6 value the work of their staff, recognise their successes and actively pursue creating new knowledge to be shared with others (through participating in research and evidence collection).

Principle 3 - Strategic Leaders Get Things Done

Strategic leaders strive to make a difference. They just don’t talk about what they might do, they actually do it. In order to be recognised as strategic, the school leader must be perceived as someone who ‘gets things done’. Not only do they have innovative ideas and ‘the big picture’, but their ‘feet are also firmly on the ground’ in the sense that they are considered to be practical achievers. There is nothing less strategic than being a leader who is an unrealistic visionary – a ‘dreamer’ – someone who has little idea about what can be achieved and what cannot.

Getting things done involves nurturing our own and our staff’s technical, mental and emotional capacities and mobilising these to achieve important outcomes. Strategic leaders draw on their tacit knowledge and position in the school to focus action on what is important. They get things done both personally and in collaboration with others.

In terms of ‘getting things done’, one criterion upon which strategic leaders are often judged is their talent for ‘strategic resourcing’ (Robinson 2007). This is about leaders securing the resources their schools need. Strategic leaders have the ‘knack’ of ‘finding the money needed’ to get initiatives running – although, as Robinson (2007) points out, ‘strategic’ refers to resources that are aligned to pedagogical purposes, rather than leadership skill in securing resources per se. Thus, this principle should not be interpreted as an indicator of skill in fundraising, grant writing or partnering with business, as those skills may or may not be applied in ways that serve key pedagogical purposes.

Getting things done also entails building confidence as a person and a leader, and modelling the abilities necessary to energise the school community. Building confidence calls for humility, an understanding of self, identification of individual and collective potential, and a belief that leaders have the power to make a positive difference to students’ lives.

Since the 1980s in the USA, and more recently in the UK and Australia, issues of performance-based accountability have emerged with regards to strategic leadership, and ‘getting things done’. In effect, school leaders are held accountable for achieving improvements in student outcomes as measured by student performance in national tests (or other benchmark indicators). Expectedly, when a leader’s job is on the line, many leaders’ strategic intention becomes preoccupied with increased performance in these assessments. The risk is that such a preoccupation may not be strategic at all, but a limiting and pragmatic response that is both short sighted and detrimental to strategic thinking by leaders. Elmore (2002) says:
During the cold war, just about anyone who raised questions about the distribution of wealth in America was branded a Communist, thus chilling debates over social justice. Debate in the realm of education reform is being similarly chilled. Critics who suggest that there might be problems with the ways in which tests are being used for accountability purposes have been essentially marginalised. They’re smeared with accusations of being against accountability of any kind and of being apologists for a broken system. The idea that the performance of students and schools can be accurately and reliably measured by test scores is an article of faith in test-based accountability systems. (Elmore 2002: 2)

Regardless of how outcomes are determined, strategic leaders focus ahead and position themselves to ‘get things done’. They focus on improvement, and through strategic processes design ways to achieve improvement. Consider the following examples. The strategic leader in one primary school may ‘drill down’ through student data to find that appropriate focused leadership action would be for the school to put in place a whole-school approach (Scope and Sequence) to spelling. Another example could be that, from analysing the college’s exit data, it is discovered that as focused leadership action the college needs to rebuild its career and vocational pathways programme in a strategic attempt to build retention to Year 12. Finally, from looking at the school’s budget the leader decides that there needs to be focused action to reduce the cost of photocopying over the next 12 months. The key in these three examples is not ‘strategic planning’ but deliberate, focused leadership action based on analysis of data that achieves outcomes. Staff can see that the leader is someone who gets things done.

Strategic leaders:

3.1 build a school culture which values achievement and is focused on ‘making a difference’.
3.2 regularly and routinely review the school’s handbook including policies and procedures to ensure they are effective and relevant.
3.3 manage their unit’s financial and human resources effectively and efficiently to achieve the school’s educational priorities and goals.
3.4 deploy staff appropriately through maximising the use of their skills and knowledge and managing their workload to achieve enhanced student learning outcomes.
3.5 develop and maintain effective strategies and procedures for staff training, professional learning and performance management.
3.6 manage and organise the learning environment efficiently and effectively to ensure that it meets the needs of the curriculum and occupational health and safety.
3.7 ensure that the range, quality and use of all available resources (including ICT) are monitored, evaluated and reviewed to improve the quality of education for all students.
3.8 retain a certain humility and work respectfully with others to show that they value their views and input to overall achievement.

Principle 4 - Strategic Leaders Open New Horizons

Strategic leaders are aware of the vital role schools play in a world where information flows,
where knowledge and understanding are constantly changing and where, for some leaders, the tendency is to avoid this complexity by focusing on the day-to-day, the immediate and the routine.

The strategic work of leaders is to collect and expose possibilities beyond the mundane and to open horizons and new directions for their school. Strategic leaders are always on the look-out for new ways of doing things and for pedagogical innovations, and they seek to position their school so that they can take advantage of them as they unfold.

Strategic leaders need to understand how their work interweaves with that of their students, colleagues and communities to create opportunities for innovative practice. They know that accessing new horizons requires educated minds that can create, absorb and apply new and emerging knowledge.

Opening new horizons, however, does not mean thoughtlessly discarding what schools currently value or neglecting the routines needed for schools to run smoothly. Rather, it means helping others see beyond established orthodoxy to experiment with new, exciting and more effective ways of meeting the needs of their students. As an example, consider the community school that opens a ‘bike repair’ store on campus as a means of creating experiential learning for students in such skills as business numeracy and literacy, metalwork and craft as well as vocational skills. Such a project, in the right context, might open new horizons for students’ enhanced learning and for the community as a whole.

Being strategic does not mean a headlong rush into innovation; rather, being strategic may actually mean at times the need to stand back from change and consolidate existing initiatives. An example lies in the concept of ‘appropriate technology’, where a school leader may decide that it is more strategic to pass on the adoption of new technology that is presented, not for any Luddite reasons, but because their current technology is more appropriate to the needs of their community. Adopting ‘low-tech’ solutions may open new horizons as effectively as innovative high-tech packages, in the situation where the older technology is better suited to enhanced learning outcomes.

Opening new horizons is also about strategically enabling professional learning. As Elmore notes, 

The work of turning a school around entails improving the knowledge and skills of teachers – changing their knowledge of content and how to teach it – and helping them to understand where their students are in their academic development. Low-performing schools, and the people who work in them, don’t know what to do. If they did, they would be doing it already. You can’t improve a school’s performance, or the performance of any teacher or student in it, without increasing the investment in teachers’ knowledge, pedagogical skills, and understanding of students. (Elmore 2002: 3) 

Finally, opening new horizons is about recognising that school leaders are leaders of transition; their work is not the management of the status quo, but the management of the moments in organisations that are dedicated to transition.

While a McDonald’s outfit is committed to strategic planning, the fact remains that their day-to-day is committed to ensuring that their basic product (Big Macs, Fries, etc.) are the same each day. In schools the product is transitional. It is about children growing, developing,
changing and of course learning. The school also needs to respond to the needs of a transitional society, which in our Knowledge Age is rapidly changing.

Strategic leaders:

4.1 build a school culture and curriculum which takes account of the richness and diversity of the school’s community.

4.2 create and promote positive strategies for the acceptance of innovation and ongoing school improvement.

4.3 ensure that the goal of enhanced learning experiences for students are linked into and integrated with all school change.

4.4 develop and maintain an effective partnership with parents and carers to support and improve students’ learning.

4.5 collaborate with other agencies in providing for the academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural wellbeing of students and their families.

4.6 seek opportunities to engage parents, community members or support organisations to come into the school to enhance and enrich the school’s programmes.

4.7 retain what is good about current practice but plan for how this can be extended.

4.8 challenge existing orthodoxies in terms of pedagogy, relationships and ‘ways of working’.

Principle 5 - Strategic Leaders are Fit to Lead

Leaders strategically manage their physical and mental wellbeing in order to be resilient, flexible, reliable and resourceful.

Resilience is the ability to overcome the inevitable obstacles which accompany change and the stress of working with the unknown. Resilient leaders are able to persist in meeting the challenges of the future.

Flexibility is the ability to adapt professionally and emotionally to the change and diversity which typifies work in futures-oriented schools.

Reliability is about being there when the going gets tough. An unfolding future can cause a high degree of anxiety; unexpected changes can pose threats and risks which in turn can lead to stress and illness and time off work. Reliability is also about being to a degree predictable, so that people know where the leader is coming from and have a firm basis for decision-making. Leaders who don’t take care of themselves cannot be relied upon in times of confusion and stress. ‘Fit leaders’ are those who can be relied upon in times of high pressure and when problems need to be solved.

Being ‘fit to lead’ is also about getting a reputation for being resourceful. Resourceful leaders are mentally prepared to exploit opportunities which arise unexpectedly, to cope with uncertainty and ‘make things happen’ with limited resources. They are school principals who seem to be able to ‘find the resources’ that are needed, when they are needed. Which is usually not about being a excellent manager or procurer, but about being ‘cool’ in times of pressure and being able to think laterally about what to do when everyone else is panicked.

The question arises, ‘can you be “fit to lead” if you are overweight, past 60, and have never been to a gym in your life?’ The answer is certainly yes you can, and many highly regarded school principals stand testimony to this. But the chances are that someone who is physically
fit (regardless of age) is better able to manage their personal and professional wellbeing than someone who is physically less able. High blood pressure causes headaches that get in the way of effectiveness at times of hectic staff interaction, and tiredness and lethargy caused by excessive body mass and poor diet can stand in the way of effective leadership action in dealing with strategic issues. As this article is about being strategic, it is important to state that strategic leaders are those who plan their own wellbeing and have strategies in place to manage their own levels of fitness in acknowledgement of their personal limitations.

Strategic leaders:

5.1 have a strategic approach to ensuring their own wellbeing and a degree of fitness that enables them to do their job effectively; they manage their work/life balance to enhance their capacity to lead.

5.2 have a positive attitude, for even the most optimistic person can become discouraged when assailed by opposition. Leaders take responsibility for an action by thinking and saying, ‘how can we…?’ rather than ‘we can’t’.

5.3 tolerate ambiguity in order to remain flexible, and understand that while certainty and predictable outcomes are desirable, they are not typical in schools.

5.4 tolerate unfamiliar situations and are willing to act on incomplete, even contradictory information.

5.5 develop proactive behaviours by recognising when change is inevitable, taking risks despite potentially adverse consequences and forming new approaches to standard procedures when faced with unexpected challenges.

5.6 recognise when people’s wellbeing is at risk and they need support, and help others to adapt to new or different situations as they arise.

5.7 coordinate and enable collective effort to support overall team fitness and ethical behaviour by all staff.

**Principle 6 - Strategic Leaders Make Good Partners**

Strategic leaders work effectively with students, parents, other staff, schools and school leaders. They understand how their work interweaves with that of their colleagues to create opportunities for innovative practice. Strategic leaders learn together, share a compatible view of the future, communicate freely and respect others’ values. This often involves a knowledge of, and sensitivity to, different cultures and cross-cultural issues, and entails an understanding of partnerships within and between schools. Partnerships are based on camaraderie and trust.

The power of collective effort is enhanced by a belief in shared leadership. Partnerships, however, in whatever form, are not always easy or comfortable. Good partners have the courage to confront issues and articulate a perspective that is different from prevailing or dominant thinking. Strategic leaders therefore also need to be skilled at managing conflict positively and at framing dynamic relationships in ways that are productive.

The concept of a leader as a ‘good partner’ is an important metaphor and one that is contrary to traditional concepts of ‘top down’ leadership within hierarchies and of delegation. This metaphor draws upon the icons of successful business partnerships and successful marriages, to try to capture the essence of leadership as a co-joined venture in which strategically the leader recognises the importance of partnerships that they have to form both
within their school and within the external community. Being partners in leadership is aligned with the concept of parallel leadership (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann 2002), which is a way of describing teacher leaders working in parallel with administrator leaders to build on their school’s successes and enhance their achievements – together building their desired future for the school. It encompasses the notions of teachers as partners in the school’s leadership, and of teacher leaders working in parallel with principal leaders to achieve improved outcomes.

One example of a strategic partnership is the role that strategic leaders play in protecting teachers from undue pressure from education officials and from parents. In what is in some ways a symbiotic partnership, such protection is not motivated by defensiveness; the purpose is, rather, to allow teachers to focus on their teaching and to enable a coordinated rather than ad hoc response to parental politics and lobby groups (Robinson 2007: 9).

Being a good ‘partner’ is also about leadership transition or succession planning. It means that effective school leaders put in place strategies for ensuring that their work is sustainable. Strategic leaders:

6.1 treat people fairly, equitably and with respect in order to create a school culture within which teamwork and collaborative work practices are highly valued.

6.2 build a collaborative learning culture within which staff learn from each other and encourage each other to develop.

6.3 encourage shared leadership by recognising the role of teachers as parallel leaders and acknowledge and celebrate the skills, knowledge and achievements of individuals.

6.4 ensure effective planning, allocation, support and evaluation of work undertaken by teams, ensuring clear delegation of tasks and devolution of responsibilities.

6.5 develop and maintain high-quality communication across the school.

6.6 co-ordinate and enable collective effort that ensures common purpose. Act as a ‘go-between’ or mediator to build a set of shared ideals, beliefs, values and objectives amongst teachers.

6.7 recognise and respect cultural differences in their planning and actions.

6.8 confront existing ‘ways of doing things’ if necessary.

Principle 7 - Strategic Leaders Do the ‘Next’ Right Thing

Strategic leadership is about ‘doing the next right thing’, which is about ethical leadership. Leaders who are strategic will recognise the importance of ethical behaviours and act accordingly, whereas leaders who are egotistic, openly ambitious (for personal gain), autocratic, manipulative or just dishonest are not likely to be successful school leaders or to hold their positions for very long (Ramsey 2003).

Being strategic is about knowing that the best teachers, best students and best families are attracted to a school with a strong reputation for its values, and the values the school reproduces in children. Principals with principles have a reputation for building schools that attract students, support and staff.

Amongst the most important values is trust – which in our postmodern age is unfortunately difficult to achieve. In a time when most parents would not ‘trust’ their children to be alone
with their local church priest on a weekend camp, when they would seek a second opinion if
their family doctor told them they had cancer, and wouldn’t dream of investing all their
money based on the advice of the local bank manager, parents have come to distrust teachers
(Starratt 1993). Yet trust is the ‘lifeblood’ of learning (Ramsey 2003: 26), and parents want to
trust their child’s classroom teacher. Strategic principals recognise this and they work
assiduously at being ‘trustworthy’.

Strategic leaders constantly find themselves struggling with ethical dilemmas and issues of
accountability. These issues transcend school boundaries and inevitably touch upon social
justice, equity and culture. At a more pragmatic level, decisions must be made on resource
allocation, ensuring professional standards, and ways to manage the ‘difficulties’ people
seem to get themselves in.

Strategic leaders know that putting self-interest to one side and maintaining an ethical and
socially just stance is not easy. They constantly and consistently apply the ethics of justice
and caring in responding to hard and ambiguous questions such as: Who has the greater
need and what is best for our school? In dealing with such questions, integrity is vital.
Integrity in leadership means being honest and transparent in motivations and intention; it
calls for leaders who can acknowledge mistakes and failures and are prepared to expose
their humanness. It is about doing the next right thing.

Strategic leaders:

7.1 develop a clear statement of roles and responsibilities so that all staff are clear about
lines of accountability.
7.2 are ethical and have the habit of ‘doing the next right thing’.
7.3 ensure that individual staff accountabilities are clearly defined, understood and
agreed.
7.4 reflect on their personal code of conduct and ethical practice to ensure they are a role
model to others.
7.5 ensure that their actions match their words.
7.6 ensure that the key basis for all decisions can be justified in terms of student needs.
7.7 promote a better, more equitable society through actions and leadership.
7.8 are transparent and ensure natural justice in all their dealings with staff, parents and
students.
7.9 look beyond their school to broader issues of social justice and societal change and
the role of the school in reproducing a democratic society.
7.10 admit when they are wrong or make a mistake.

**Conclusion**

This paper has put forward seven principles of strategic leadership. Over four years with
different cohorts of school leaders, these principles have been distilled and refined, and have
been used successfully to inform leadership development.

The purpose of these principles is to enhance individual leader effectiveness in leading
strategically. These should assist those who are preparing for school leadership to assess
their professional learning needs in the light of these principles. This paper should also assist
principals and others who are currently in leadership roles to reflect on how effectively they
meet the seven principles. The principles can also be used as a device for reflecting on the strategic focus of schools, and in assessing why some schools are good at positioning themselves to take advantage of the ever changing educational milieu and others are not. The principles are written to inform focused leadership action, for we believe that being strategic is more than strategic planning, or strategic intent; it is about deliberate and sustained practice.

In order to be an effective strategic leader, we suggest that school leaders need to:

- be futures oriented and have a futures strategy;
- base their focused leadership actions and their decisions on evidence, and invest in and be led by research;
- get things done, which means to have the reputation as a person of action and achievement, someone who can be relied upon to deliver outcomes;
- open new horizons, which mean to be innovative, receptive to initiatives and to be a leader of transition;
- ensure that they are fit to lead, which is all about planning and working on their wellbeing – fit leaders’ are resilient and reliable in times of stress and rapid change;
- know how to be good partners and be seen by staff to be good people to partner with in dealing with issues and in moving into the future; and
- do the ‘next’ right thing, which means to be ethical and values driven and to have a reputation for leading a school that instils values in children.

References


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