# Introduction

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Context

The drive to raise educational standards in many countries has, over the last decade, concentrated on more tightly focused curricular frameworks and testing regimes. This has resulted in improved standards as measured by test scores (Fullan, 2005). However, this raises two questions: are these results sustainable and are there other objectives that we should be pursuing? Providing answers to these questions involves moving from a short-term to a longer-term view. Achieving success for children, in terms of how they develop academically, socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually, is the aim of all schools. How do we achieve that success both in the short and long term and how do we ensure that success is sustainable?

In leadership terms, what are the challenges and pressures that individuals in schools have to cope with? How do they meet short-term accountability demands and at the same time build longer-term learning communities based on clear moral and educational values? How do individual leaders build frameworks of care and compassion so that all who work in the school (students and adults) enhance their personal and professional health? Most importantly, how can leaders support themselves both to survive and to develop as creative educationalists in an increasingly results-driven accountability climate? In brief, how do we sustain leaders and their schools to achieve that longer-term educational success without exhausting themselves and their organizations in a search for ever-increasing short-term results? It is important to understand sustainability not as a continuation of the status quo but as sustainable improvement.
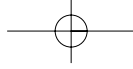
Sustainability might be considered as the ability of individuals and schools to continue to adapt and improve to meet new challenges and complexity, and to be successful in new and demanding contexts. Most significantly, this should be seen in the context of improving, not depleting, individual and organizational health and well-being.

The purpose of this book is to make a contribution to the embryonic literature on sustainability and, in particular, on sustaining leaders in the complex and challenging environment in which they work. There are two existing works in the field. Michael Fullan's (2004) *Leadership and Sustainability. System Thinkers in Action* takes a broad educational system view at national and state level with a perceptive section at the individual leader level. Second, Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink (2005) have published *Sustaining Leadership*. These authors develop their thinking further and contribute significant chapters with new ideas in this 2007 book. This book brings together some of the leading educational thinkers and writers to offer unique perspectives that will add to a field which is receiving increasing attention. The book aims to provide a diverse but coherent account written for the reflective practitioner.

The chapters in the book

In Chapter 1 I build on my research work in strategic leadership and expound the view that if strategic leadership is to be successful it has, almost by definition, to be sustainable. In this chapter I define sustainable leadership as follows:

> *Sustainable leadership is made up of the key factors that underpin the longer-term development of the school. It builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all.*

The challenge for leaders in schools is how to deal with the immediate running of the school and the demands of the current year while at the same time building longer-term capacity. The danger of imposed simplistic external targets, such as test scores and inspection outcomes, is that they are one-dimensional, measuring the school on tests that value shallow rather than deep learning and failing to appreciate the complexity of the school. It is both desirable and feasible to look at longer-term development and shorter-term targets as complementary rather than conflicting strategies. To examine the key features of building

longer-term sustainability, I outline nine key factors. These are: (1) measuring outcomes and not just outputs, (2) balancing short- and long-term objectives, (3) thinking in terms of processes not plans – the way that leaders involve their colleagues is more important than the documents that they write, (4) having a passion for continued improvement and development, (5) developing personal humility and professional will as a means of building long-term leadership capacity, (6) practising strategic timing and strategic abandonment, (7) building capacity and creating involvement, (8) developing strategic measures of success and (9) building in sustainability.

I hope that these factors will start a dialogue and develop perspectives on how we can, in the educational community, support schools as they try to build sustainable learning organizations. Core moral values and a discussion of the purpose of education cannot be separated from the 'how' of operating the school; they must underpin it. The deep values of success for all and being members of a caring community are ideals that need sustaining just as much as the fabric of the school.

In Chapter 2 Brian Caldwell writes about sustaining exhilarating leadership. Although I had read and admired his work before then, I first met Brian 16 years ago in San Francisco at an American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference. Since then I have been able to draw on his ideas and insights to underpin much of my own work and this support has been exhilaration in my professional development. It is an honour to be a Professorial Fellow with Brian at the University of Melbourne. Brian draws on research with headteachers to ask three key questions:

1. What aspects of your work as leader are exhilarating?
2. What aspects of your work as leader are boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?
3. What actions by you or others would make your work as leader more exhilarating and less boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?

For each of the first two questions, Brian draws out the key factors that either make work exhilarating for headteachers or those that make work discouraging or dispiriting. He then takes the significant step in building sustainable leadership by what he calls 'shifting the balance to exhilaration' where he takes the 'leadership voices' of headteachers in his research to establish six factors that would build in sustainable success.

These focus around personal factors, professional factors, resource factors, autonomy, community, recognition and networking. To add to his own analysis of the situation, Brian draws on the expert views of three leading educationalists to unpack the importance of exhilarating leadership. In the final section Brian develops a critique of the implications for policy and practice in education.

Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink have become a significant writing team that challenges current orthodoxies. I have had the privilege of working with both of them for over a decade and draw on their ideas as a key element in my professional life. In Chapter 3 Andy and Dean develop their earlier work on sustainable leadership by using three new concepts of energy restraint, energy renewal and energy release. With energy restraint they consider five factors that are working against sustainable leadership and four factors that could alleviate the problem. In considering energy renewal the authors argue passionately for the building of trust, confidence and happiness as a combination that is the source of human resourcefulness. The final part of their framework is that of energy release. They see that releasing the energy for productive educational change can only be achieved through the 'teacher as the igniting force' which is able to 'unlock students' energy'. However, it is necessary to release the vast potential energy of our teachers as a precursor of the process. They conclude: '*Improved achievement needs to renew the energy of the people responsible for securing it* through high-trust, confidence-building change principles that are undertaken *by* schools, *with* schools in transparent processes of committed improvement, that connect short-term success in immediate action to long-term transformations in teaching and learning.'

Chris Day has developed an enviable reputation as a researcher and I was delighted to work with him as a Visiting Professor at the University of Nottingham. Chris and Michelle Schmidt report on a research project that they have undertaken on successful and sustainable leadership in UK schools. Early in Chapter 4 they quote Michael Fullan, a quotation that is worth of replication: 'You cannot move substantially towards sustainability in the absence of widely shared moral purpose. The reason is that sustainability depends on the distributed effort of people at all levels of the system, and meeting the goals of moral purpose produces commitment throughout the system' (Fullan, 2005: 87). In building resilient leaders that are driven by moral purpose Chris and Michelle outline five major categories for their research:

1. Care, consultation and responsibility.
2. Justice and advocacy: the courage of conviction.
3. Being learning and learner-focused.
4. Activist leadership.
5. Sustaining resilience.

They consider that their research,

> *although small scale, suggests that despite pressures from multiple policy implementation accountabilities, social disadvantage and changing expectations, successful headteachers who demonstrate resilient leadership are those whose values cause them to place as much emphasis upon people and processes as they do upon product ... Improvement for headteachers in this research was broadly rather than narrowly defined. It included the academic achievement of the pupils against quantitative measures (for example, results of national tests and examinations) and qualitative indicators (esteem, relationships, expectations, behaviour, participation, engagement with learning). These heads demonstrated a clear and abiding concern for learning, care, justice.*

In Chapter 5 Terry Deal provides a thought provoking commentary on the 'sustainability of the status quo'. Terry is a remarkable writer, consultant and practitioner in the education and the business world in the field of organizational culture. His reflections on organizational culture are unique and compelling. Spending some time with him in his home overlooking a vineyard and the mountains in San Luis Obispo in California does allow detached reflection! Terry argues that most educational reform imposed from outside fails to use the talents and skills of the staff in organizations and fails to be fully effective because of this. As a result, he looks at the remarkable staying power of the established way of doing things and alternative approaches to sustaining organizational change. He concludes with an interesting analysis:

> *There are some interesting explanations for this remarkable staying power which this chapter attempted to highlight. To the extent that we can accept plausible reasons for maintaining things as they are we can capture the craft knowledge of those who labour in the trenches year after year. They know a lot more than we think they do.*

The real challenge is how to encourage local talent to draw upon lessons they have learned and harnessing it to renew and revitalize education. An acupuncturist assumes energy in the human body and then uses needles to reduce blocks and stimulate the energy flow. That notion may be more apt than we think in our efforts to improve schools from within rather than trying to reform them from outside.

This is very powerful insight.

Ken Leithwood has established himself as one of the pre-eminent scholars in educational leadership today. I have been delighted to have his perceptive contribution to this and other publications that I have organized. Ken, working with Scott Bauer and Brian Riedlinger, reports in Chapter 6 on research from the USA on developing and sustaining school principals. They draw together 10 lessons on how to develop a framework for this. The lessons are:

1. Dramatic individual change is possible.
2. One good experience can 'jump start' the adoption of a continuous learning ethos.
3. Ongoing support is needed if leaders are to influence student learning.
4. Training should encompass the team as well as the individual principal.
5. Direct, practical help in data-driven decision-making is especially critical in the current policy environment.
6. Practise what you preach (and be nice).
7. A little bit of money goes a long way.
8. For a long-term impact, build a community of leaders.
9. Use the community of leaders to retain successful leaders.
10. Use inspiring leadership models to recruit new leaders.

As the authors unpack each of these lessons they combine a clear analysis with practical leadership advice that will enable readers to benchmark their own leadership development practices in their schools to ensure that they are sustainable.

How do we build in sustainability? In Chapter 7 Michael Fullan and Lyn Sharratt take a research project and tease out the key factors that make change and development sustainable and the lessons for leadership. I first met Michael Fullan when we both addressed the New Zealand Principals' Conference in Sky Harbour Casino in Adelaide. Not only was his address inspiring, but his blackjack was impressive as well!

This piece of writing with his colleague Lyn Sharratt is equally impressive. They take a major curriculum initiative, that of developing literacy, and build four propositions that drive sustainable success. These are:

Proposition One: Sustainability is not about prolonging specific innovations, but rather it is about establishing the conditions for continuous student improvement.

Proposition Two: Sustainability is not possible unless school leaders and system leaders are working on the same agenda.

Proposition Three: Proposition Two notwithstanding, sustainability is not furthered by school and system leaders simply agreeing on the direction of the reform. Rather, agreement is continually tested and extended by leaders at both school and system levels putting pressure on each other. Sustainability is a two-way or multi-way street.

Proposition Four: We have a fair idea about what makes for sustainability within one district under conditions of stable leadership over a five or more year period, but we still do not know how sustainability fares when district leadership changes, or when state leadership changes direction.

These are powerful concepts and frameworks that make this chapter a valuable response.

In Chapter 8 Guilbert (Gib) Hentschke is one of the three final chapters that take alternative perspectives to examine sustainability. I first visited the University of Southern California to meet Gib in 1990 and, ever since, his ability to conceptualize the relationship of business thinking to educational leadership has made an outstanding contribution to my thinking. Gib correctly identifies the increasing impact of market forces in education. He suggests that leadership and organizational behaviour is a feature of the organizational environment. Given that schools are gravitating to that market environment, then an examination of sustainability in market environments give clues as to the future of schools and their leadership. He articulates the view that most businesses have not sustained themselves and, indeed, 'creative destruction' is a term that has come into the language. In this vein he makes an incisive conclusion to his chapter:

While sustainability may well provide a useful normative framework for improving education, its utility as a descriptive framework will likely be lessened as education gravitates more into a market environment. Large-scale studies of the continuity of (mostly very large, publicly traded, multinational) for-profit businesses provide significant descriptive understandings of the factors which enable a relatively small number of them to outlast their competitors, making the point that most do not. Although schooling is moving towards that market environment, it will likely be a very long time before the environment of the compulsory schooling industry could conceivably reflect the environment of those corporations.

Nonetheless, educators and their organizations will more frequently face some of the commonplace realities associated with organizational life in a market environment. Perhaps the more intriguing question at this point is, however, whether sustainability as a prized attribute and goal for education leaders and the institutions within which they labour will ever be replaced with the normative goals such as flexibility, responsiveness, adaptability, short time to market, innovative and productive.

David Hopkins brings a unique set of skills as someone who is a leading academic, a principal adviser to Secretaries of State at the DfES and a mountain guide! Although I have known David for over a decade, I have over the last two years been able to work with him, as a visiting professor, on his project to build an international leadership and learning framework through his iNET and HSBC Chair at the Institute of Education in London. In Chapter 9, building on his internationally renowned work on school improvement, David puts forward the powerful moral leadership point that you cannot sustain individual schools at the expense of others. I believe that you cannot be a successful school leader if the school next door to you is failing. We need to take responsibility collectively for schools in our area. David builds a case for system leaders in education to take responsibility and action to sustain high-quality education. His chapter on system leadership focuses on system leaders highlighting four dimensions, those of: (1) personalised learning, (2) professional teaching, (3) networks and collaboration and (4) intelligent accountability. He sees system leadership as the catalyst for systemic change. To use his words

At its heart, therefore, system leadership is about improving the deployment and development of our best leadership resources, in terms of both:

- *greater productivity: with successful leaders using their own and their staff's knowledge and skills to improve other schools; and,*

- *social justice: by using our most capable leaders to help deliver a national system in which every child has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.*

The final chapter, Chapter 10, takes the perspective of sustaining leadership by a coherent process of leadership succession, rather than of sustaining the individual leader. Geoff Southworth is well known as a researcher and more recently as Deputy Director of the National College for School Leadership. In this latter role he is charged with addressing the looming shortage of headteachers in the UK. Geoff outlines three causes of the shortfall. First, demographics mean that a large number of current headteachers are reaching retirement at the same time. Second, the post of headteacher is not always perceived as desirable by those in middle and senior leadership roles and, third, recruitment to headship is inadequate. In a response to this challenge, Geoff outlines five ways in which capacity might be built. First, there is an urgent need to increase the supply and flow of those ready to become headteachers. This can be addressed by working with those in middle and senior roles to see leadership as a desirable role. Second, there is a need to address how headship is perceived and to link this to supporting headteachers more effectively in their role. Third, key to the first two points is the need to remodel headship and see it in a number of guises from executive headship to shared headship. Fourth, increasing support is needed, especially for new heads, in terms of improved mentoring and other strategies. Finally, leadership learning communities must be developed in order to enhance a pool of talent. This is a perceptive chapter in moving on to sustain the flow of leaders.
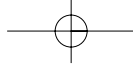
Conclusion

It has been a delightful experience for me working with such an out-standing group of educationalists. My learning journey has been immeasurably enriched by their ideas and contributions. I thank them all. It has been significant that many of them use the work of Jim Collins (2001), *Good to Great*. Sustainability is not about maintaining what we do but moving on in a way that supports and values leader-ship communities. In that context I hope that the leaders who read this book will be inspired by the ideas and that this will enable them to con-tinue on the 'good to great' journey for their school.

References

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