

Chapter 4: Dilemmas for School Leaders and Administrators in Restructuring

CLIVE DIMMOCK

University of Western Australia

Policies aimed at restructuring school systems in countries and states around the world are prompting change in traditional practices, roles and relationships within schools and between schools and their environments (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Leithwood, 1992; Murphy, 1993). Uncertainty and tension arising from such turbulent policy environments create problems, dilemmas and challenges for those involved. This is particularly so for established principals and school-site administrators, many of whom were selected for, and gained experience in, administrative positions in school contexts markedly different from those being forged by restructuring (Hallinger & Murphy, 1991). These leaders now face decisions as to which roles, relationships and practices to retain, forge and discard (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Similar decisions confront newly and recently appointed school leaders as they strive for effectiveness in fast changing educational contexts.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the administrative context created by restructuring. It then claims that a social cognitive approach is helpful in understanding and expressing the relationship between school leaders and restructuring in terms of dilemmas. This is followed by a clarification of the concept of dilemmas and by a description, based on interview data with school leaders, of key dilemmas experienced in restructuring. A question is then posed as to how leaders react to dilemmas and finally, suggestions are made as to ways in which the effectiveness of school leaders may be secured.

Underpinning the chapter is the notion that the ability of school leaders to transform dilemmas into resolvable courses of action, to convert seemingly irresolute situations into challenges and opportunities, depends on three competencies. First, an ability to analyse the dilemma. It is suggested that the conceptualization of dilemmas in terms of normative, institutional and resource elements, and differential rates of change within and between these elements, is a *sine qua non*. Secondly, an ability to view a complex problem through an

expanded range of frames or lenses, that is, multi-framing and re-framing, provides the school leader with a wider understanding of the issues and an expanded range of options by which to address them. Thirdly, through improvements in the preparation of school leaders, it should be possible to integrate dilemma analysis and flexible and expanded framing within a problem-based learning approach. Dilemmas to be found in school leaders' conceptualization of restructuring have the potential to promote professional growth leading to the development of transformational leaders.

THE CONTEXT OF RESTRUCTURING

Although there is at present no generally agreed definition of what 'restructuring' means, a burgeoning educational literature is beginning to clarify its origins, purposes and forms. At the heart of the concept of 'restructuring' lies the recognition of the need for fundamental reform. Elmore (1990), for example, claims there is general agreement that restructuring has three main dimensions:

- (1) changes in the way teaching and learning occur in schools, or the core technology of schooling;
- (2) changes in the occupational situation of educators, including conditions of entry and licensure of teachers and administrators, and school structure, conditions of teachers' work in schools, and decision-making processes; and
- (3) changes in the distribution of power between schools and their clients, or in the governance and incentive structures under which schools function (p.11).

He goes on to argue that while reform proposals typically address a combination of these dimensions, 'changes on one dimension are not necessarily consistent with changes on others. Furthermore, choosing one dimension over the others as a point of departure for school restructuring can have very different implications for both the process of reform and the results one can expect'. He concludes that, 'If school restructuring is to work, reformers will have to confront the tensions between these dimensions' (p.11).

Agreement over the comprehensiveness and complexity of the restructuring process is confirmed by a number of scholars. Murphy (1991) refers to the 'complexity involved in transforming schooling', and to efforts to restructure which 'can begin in a variety of places and employ a number of different strategies depending upon the specific

objectives sought' (p.17). In relation to comprehensiveness, Murphy (1991) refers to restructuring in America as centring on four strategies – school-based management, parental choice and participation in school decision making, teacher empowerment, and teaching for understanding. He argues that most efforts at restructuring have, to date, emphasized one or two of these, such as teacher empowerment, which became the focus of the restructuring movement at its outset and, more recently, school-based management and choice. Teaching for understanding and re-defining the teaching-learning process have received relatively less attention.

The comprehensiveness of the restructuring movement is also emphasized by Caldwell (1993), who describes the scope and pace of change in education in the 1990s as 'nothing short of breathtaking' (p.165). The key term, according to Caldwell, is 'restructuring' and it is 'being applied to curriculum, pedagogy, administrative structures, governance, teacher training and re-training, and to the teaching profession itself' (p.165). He argues that in the United States the so-called 'second wave' of reform is sweeping the nation, with almost every aspect of schools and their support systems under examination. In England and Wales, a national curriculum has been introduced for the first time with nationwide tests at the primary and secondary levels. Most schools now have total control of their budgets, with the ability to opt out of control by their local authorities on the majority vote of their parents. School-site selection of principals and teachers has been established for some time. A strong accountability process, based on evaluation of school performance by school review teams, is a mainstay of the system. Furthermore, school governing bodies, with strong parental representation, have had their powers substantially increased.

Dramatic reforms have also taken place in New Zealand with the empowerment of boards of trustees at the school level, *inter alia*, to hire and fire principals. Remaining to provide a framework is a small central authority which has a powerful review and audit function (Caldwell, 1993, p.165). Noteworthy, too, is the pioneering system of self-management in Edmonton, Canada, which has been refining aspects of decentralized schools since the mid-1970s (Brown, 1990). For much of this period the Edmonton system has focused on school-based budgeting, but the system continues to evolve, with an intention for the future being to empower the student body.

Restructuring in the form of decentralization of responsibilities and devolution of powers, has been taking place in some, but not all, Australian states since the 1970s. The scope and pace of change has varied

considerably between states, with Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territories, leading the way. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia began introducing major programs of reform aimed at handing responsibilities from previously strongly centralized state bureaucracies to school level administrators and school councils. The responsibilities transferred to schools focus on decision making with respect to resource allocation (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988), including finance, maintenance of buildings and site and, increasingly in the 1990s, staff selection and appointment. At the same time, there are signs of an emergent national curriculum framework (Eltis, 1993) and a national initiative to restructure the teaching profession, both of which represent more centralizing tendencies.

Restructuring in many systems, therefore, involves more than transferring certain functions from the centre to schools. Although decentralization from centre to school is the predominant direction of transfer, there are important exceptions. The national curriculum framework in England and Wales, for example, constitutes a strongly centralizing trend in curriculum and testing (Thomas, 1993).

However, the transfer and movement of traditional powers and responsibilities between levels in a school system provides an incomplete picture of the scope of restructuring. Many of the more recent reforms associated with restructuring generate entirely new tasks and responsibilities for schools to perform. These are newly created functions. They include school development planning, new forms of school level review, evaluation and accountability and, in many systems, the introduction of performance management and appraisal.

Restructuring in some systems also requires the formation of new decision-making structures at school level, such as school councils, key task groups and planning and policy committees. These new structures are accompanied by new processes and ways of working (Beare & Boyd, 1993). Many of them necessitate more collaborative work relationships, requiring team perspectives and participative, decision-making skills (Chapman, 1990). Principals and teachers have to work more closely than ever with parents and local community members. Power and influence relations change between the major players – principals, teachers, students, parents and local community members, district and central office staff and politicians – as schools assume more responsibility and discretion while being held to greater account (Dimmock & Hattie, 1990). In short, restructuring changes both the culture and climate of schools (Hopkins, 1994).

Common to these accounts of restructuring are what might be termed macro and micro reforms. The former include those which are designed to change the whole school system and those reforms aimed at the school-environment interface, while the latter are those taking place within school, targeting work re-design and organisation, as well as change at classroom level. Both macro and micro reforms are interwoven, however, in the sense that changes at one level have inevitable repercussions at other levels. In this problematic environment of reform and change, the school leader occupies a key strategic position.

RESTRUCTURING, SCHOOL LEADERS AND A SOCIAL COGNITIVE APPROACH TO DILEMMAS

A formidable body of research literature confirms the importance of the principal in the achievement of school effectiveness, school improvement and restructuring (Fullan, 1991; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988). These research findings emphasize, *inter alia*, the vital contribution made by the quality of leadership to school effectiveness and reform. In particular, the idea of the principal as educational or instructional leader is promoted (Duke, 1987), as well as, more recently, the notion of principal as transformational leader (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Indeed, Leithwood & Jantzi (1990) argue that the concept of instructional leadership is no longer adequate for principal effectiveness in restructuring and that it should be superseded by the notion of transformational leadership.

Associated with each of these role descriptors is an impressive range of tasks and responsibilities, requiring seemingly heroic efforts for their fulfilment. The challenging nature of the role of effective school leader, as envisioned by researchers, has led some to question whether all but the most exceptional of school leaders is capable of performing it adequately. Rallis (1986, 1988), for example, argues a case for notions of heroic leadership to be dropped in favour of a more realistic and desirable emphasis on shared leadership. This anti-heroic view of leadership, together with the nature of restructuring, characterized by more democratic, participative and collaborative processes, has led a number of scholars to espouse a view of leadership effectiveness which empowers others in the organization to lead (Block, 1987; Fullan 1991).

There has also been no shortage of advice offered to school leaders as to how, and on what, they should most efficaciously spend their pro-

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