

Preface

Leading a school has never been an easy job; however, current school principals face particularly complex challenges. The present era of accountability in education systems is characterized by high expectations from school leaders, alongside frequent changes in a variety of arenas. School principals are expected to demonstrate positive results in terms of their students' achievements, and align all aspects of schooling to support the goal of improving instruction in order to ensure all students' success. The main argument of this book is that school principals, who face today's educational leadership complexities, may benefit from the holistic perspective of systems thinking.

The full description of systems thinking spans an entire chapter below, but as an initial definition, systems thinking may be explained succinctly as an approach that puts the study of wholes before that of parts. This approach does not try to break systems down into parts in order to understand them; it concentrates its attention instead on how the parts act together in networks of interaction. Shifting to systems thinking as a holistic management approach can be disorienting for people who were trained exclusively in traditional, linear thinking. A fuller understanding of the intricacies of systems thinking may evolve gradually over time. Hence, readers are invited to continue to ponder its meaning as they progress in reading this book.

Today, systems thinking is still not afforded the attention it deserves in the domain of school leadership, even though the majority of school leaders contend that a systemic approach is fairly important to school leadership and even state that they espouse such an approach. Contemporary school leaders are unfortunately not yet sufficiently knowledgeable about the implications of systems thinking for their everyday work and are not entirely aware of its possible impact on schools' success. Against this background, our book presents an educational leadership approach—*Holistic School Leadership*—where school leaders employ a holistic perspective to lead schools through systems-thinking concepts and principles of action.

The current volume may be seen as funnel-shaped, starting from the general and moving to the specific, beginning with theory and moving on to practice. The first major part of the book (Chaps. 1–4) sketches the environmental and empirical backdrop culminating in the need for an enhanced systemic leadership approach.

The second major part (Chaps. 5–10) comprehensively presents the *Holistic School Leadership* approach and guidelines for its implementation.

Thus, in Chap. 1, we broadly describe the rationale for why the topic of school leadership profoundly deserves further examination from new perspectives, at the current crossroads of the twenty-first century. In particular, examination of holistic approaches is required. Next, Chap. 2 explains systems thinking in general terms, providing the reader with the essentials of systems-thinking “language.” We present some of the definitions for systems thinking that have been proposed over the years, and we trace its initial development in some important disciplines to contextualize its application in the education domain. Chapter 3 concentrates on systems thinking as a management approach, which comprises a focal point of this book. Specifically, this chapter reviews some of the main approaches that have been suggested for implementing systems thinking when dealing with complex real-world situations, pointing to their implications for school leadership. Chapter 4 focuses on the connections between systems thinking and school leadership, which have been relatively under-investigated to date. This paucity of prior literature on the connections between systems thinking and school leadership calls for an expansion of existing knowledge.

At the start of Part II, Chap. 5, which may be seen as the heart of this book, presents our proposed *Holistic School Leadership* approach, which involves school leaders’ regular applications of the systems view and ongoing performance at the systems level. Chapter 6 highlights four characteristics of systems thinking in school leadership, which comprise the practical ways in which principals can lead schools through the systems-thinking framework. Thereafter, the book turns to the subject of *Holistic School Leadership* development in school principals, which may be seen as consisting of two sub-domains. Chapter 7 presents the first sub-domain—the sources of *Holistic School Leadership*—which are the mechanisms that facilitate development of this approach among principals. Chapter 8 discusses the second sub-domain—the developmental process that school leaders undergo over the years—while acquiring the ability to perform at the *Holistic School Leadership* level.

Chapter 9, applications of *Holistic School Leadership* for policy makers are offered. Toward this end, we explore opportunities to apply *Holistic School Leadership*, ranging from the early preparation of future school leaders to on-the-job training of highly experienced principals. In addition, we suggest practical ways to develop *Holistic School Leadership* among aspiring and currently performing school leaders along their career lifespan. Chapter 10 concludes with detailed guidelines and practical uses for implementing the *Holistic School Leadership* in school leaders’ work. Hopefully, this book will be used by principal educators, policy makers, and especially school leaders themselves who wish to meaningfully improve contemporary educational leadership and thereby today’s schools.

School leadership is inseparable from the school context in which it is situated, and leadership frameworks are often adjusted to the specific characteristics of local needs. *Holistic School Leadership* is presented in this book as a global idea.

However, school leaders experience various challenges and opportunities and are required to adjust its principles to the context of the school organization and its environment, interpreting the framework of *Holistic School Leadership* according to their schools' circumstances.

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