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The Role of Educational Leadership for School Effectiveness System Theory and the National Leaders of Education Program in the UK

Cresantus Biamba

Department of Education, University of Gavle, Sweden

Abstract:

The importance of principles and headships of educational organizations has in recent years been raised more often, where international studies and research reviews argue for the significant role of leadership for school effectiveness and high performances. While the role of successful leadership is becoming more and more evident for organizations reaching their goals, a variety of theories and models have emerged within the field with the purpose to identify which factors of leadership that ultimately leads to success. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how system theory, more specifically system leadership, in education can lead to school effectiveness and improvement.

Keywords: *Effectiveness, management, school leaders, successful, system leadership, role*

1. Introduction

The importance of principles¹ and headships of educational organizations has in recent years been raised more often, where international studies and research reviews argue for the significant role of leadership for school effectiveness and high performances (Day & Sammons, 2013). While the role of successful leadership is becoming more and more evident for organizations reaching their goals, a variety of theories and models have emerged within the field with the purpose to identify which factors of leadership that ultimately leads to success. How should educational leaders be today, and what is their role? The different approaches range from universally applicable measures of one-size-fits-all character, to more situational and context bound ideas of what works in different settings. Countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom have all had a relatively long history of educational management developments, with national as well as international influence and significance (Bush, 2011). The national programs of prospective leadership in the United Kingdom have in many views been considered as promising models of good practice, and an overall advanced system (Day & Sammons, 2013; Bush, 2011; Hopkins, 2006). Therefore, it is in many ways an interesting context to look into.

Moreover, the characteristics of the changing discourse of assessment that took place in the UK during the last decades, where the focus of education and learning shifted from a competence to a more performance based model, is of further interest when looking into the emerging roles of leadership in relation to school effectiveness. The notion of increased testing and target setting through government imposed assessment practices, led to an increased framing of both the teaching and head teaching profession (Broadfoot & Pollard, 2006). While these views have dominated the educational culture in the country in the past decades, recent governmental changes may indicate a slight course change. For instance the regulations of statutory targets for performance of early years schooling was from 2012 no longer a requirement. The decision was mainly based on reducing bureaucracy for local authorities and increasing localism (Department of Education, 2013a).

Meanwhile, the role of educational leaders, and more recently successful leaders, is given more attention in the UK. A number of initiatives have been taken by the government to assure that all schools are given the same possibilities to improve and become successful, much of which indicates a direction towards an increasing systemic approach. Commissioned by the Secretary of State, through the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), the program of National Leaders for Education (NLE) was implemented with the mission *to raise standards by harnessing the skills and experience of our best school leaders, as well as their schools, to support those that need to improve* (Hill & Mathews, 2010, p. 11).

2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to investigate how system theory, more specifically system leadership, in education can lead to school effectiveness and improvement. The focus will be to examine a specific example of system leadership, which is the National Leaders of Education program in the UK. Further, the objectives are:

- To identify the criterions and requirements of the NLE program and examine in what way they may define a successful leadership role

¹ The term principle and head teacher as well as headship will in this paper be used synonymously in relation to educational leadership. All three refer to educational leaders on a school level.

- To analyze the role of NLE for school effectiveness by identifying strengths, weaknesses and possible challenges
- To firstly review and later discuss the concept of system leadership in relation to the practical aspect of successful educational management and leadership.

3. Key Concepts

3.1. The Concept of Educational Management and Leadership

The concept of educational management and leadership (EML) is in most educational institutions today a commonly recurrent and vital aspect that needs to be considered in order to reach the goals of the organization and, more importantly, the goals of education. Moreover, international research based on studies and surveys have raised the notion of EML as critical for learning outcomes and school effectiveness (OECD, 2013). According to the historical overview given by Bush (2011) the development of EML as a field of study have its roots in the 1960's American industry and business models. Many of these business related principles are to some extent still applied in different educational settings today. Recent debates however, argue about the importance of an established discipline for the educational context. This should be separated from the general management principles and include specific theories and concepts. Bush (ibid.) raises several arguments for the requirement of a separate, distinctive field, which he base on the specific need of the education system. For instance the aspect of how educational objectives are more difficult to set and measure compared to economic objectives and profit making (Bush, 2011). In light of this discussion, many authors and researchers start the conceptualization of EML by distinguishing management from leadership. This appears differently depending on the country and culture, but more commonly management is described as being concerned with the technical issues within a system and the maintenance of efficiency (Bush, 2011; Day & Sammons, 2013).

Leadership on the other hand is linked to purpose and people. Many authors of the field have attempted to define the notion of leadership, and what can be understood from their work is that there is no single correct definition (Bush, 2011). Instead one need to view leadership as a multifaceted process, similar to how Bush (ibid.) describes leadership using three dimensions; Firstly, leadership as *influence*, that is the process of influence from one person or group towards another group, in order to construct activities and relationships. The second dimension is leadership and *values*, where Bush claim that leaders choose either personal or professional and educational values as part of their role. In many cases the dominant values are handed down or imposed by governments, while others come from within and lead to self-initiated change. The third and last dimension involves leadership and *vision*. However, although a visionary leader is essential for an effective leadership, the author points out that a vision is only effective and efficient for educational management if it is articulated in a clear and sophisticated way. Hence, a vague and unclear vision will have the opposite effect.

The main aspect to lift here is that the majority of the literature within this field does accentuate the importance in considering both parts when applying it to the practice, both the manager and the leader. The nature of headship cannot be understood as either one or the other, rather it is complex where both sides are needed within an educational environment. Further, the complexity in defining the role of leadership becomes more evident when it is viewed in light of the challenges facing the educational leaders in the 21st century. These can be seen through a number of global forces which affects their daily work in different ways. The technological development, a growing knowledge-based society as well as an increasing diversity and mobility of world populations are all examples of a shift from a static nature to a more active, complex and dynamic context (Biamba, 2012). Within these emerging settings, school leaders are expected to do more in order to keep up with the growing trends and meet the requirements expressed through the increased educational reforms of this time. Meanwhile, their responsibilities and autonomy is further viewed in relation to the degree of decentralization, which in turn can take many forms (Bush, 2011). Therefore, as the context of leadership is constantly changing there need to be a similar development in the understanding of leadership roles. Ultimately, new perspectives and theories of educational management and leadership are continuously being identified and re-defined in order to adapt to the changing world (Razik & Swansson, 2010).

3.2. System Theory and System Thinkers

Within the previous century, where the scientific world was dominated by the physical sciences, the notion of system science or system thinkers was developed in light of the increased complexity facing different organized entities. Although the concepts and methodology of system theory has its basis in physical sciences, used in chemistry, system engineering, ecology, etc., the science of systems has evolved since then and become much broader. Unlike the traditional and rather narrow view of systems as aggregates of any existing units, or simply a group of individuals, the features and elements of system theory today involve the interaction and interrelationship of multiple factors. One definition given by Ackoff (1974 in Razik & Swansson, 2010) is that "[...] a system is a set of two or more interrelated elements of any kind, for example concepts (as in the number system), objects (as in the telephone system or human body) or people (as in a social system)" (ibid. p. 33).

Other than recognizing the relationships and interactions between multiple elements, the development of the concept can further be understood as a more holistic and hierarchical view of situations including the environment and different levels within the system. As this paper looks into education which is a social system, accepting that people will act according to different rationalities and purposes is also a key idea within the emerging concepts of systems (Mingers & White, 2009). Bush (2011) also describes the system model as a theory which emphasizes the interaction between its component parts and the environment; however the main focus is on the organization and the idea that every member pursuits in reaching the mutually agreed organizational goals. In an educational setting the system model recognizes the school as a prime institution in which members belong. Further, the notion of a system boundary is used to clearly define the organization from surrounding influences. In this, the discussion of open and closed system models is raised, which is another way to conceptualize the degree of systemic features

within an organization. The main point to raise here is that closed systems tend to limit the relationship between the organization and external factors while the notion of open systems is linked to the more contemporary understanding of system theory as described above. Finally, Fullan (2004) stresses the need to incorporate *action* in system thinking and promotes the practical aspect of system theory for organizations seeking progress. By this he means that the only way to actually change and improve the system effectively, the need to engage in the wider, full context is critical (ibid.).

3.3. System Leadership

In the process of understanding which qualities and qualifications that are necessary for school leaders to possess in today's challenging landscape, the notion of system leadership has recently become more popular in international studies and reviews of successful leadership practices. With a background in the increased responsibilities of school leaders worldwide and a broader definition of their roles and tasks, the idea of schools and leaders supporting each other, with the purpose to create an overall stronger educational capacity was developed. In this, the main focus of system leadership, or system leaders, is how their expertise and resources will contribute to and support school effectiveness and improvement (Hill & Mathews, 2008). It can be seen as a way to create a self-sustaining school system which seeks to give all schools, and more importantly every student, the same opportunities to reach high attainment (NCSL, 2011). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) promotes system leadership, where they in a recent report about improving school leadership, encourage co-operation and collaboration between schools through systemic approaches. Similar to Fullan's (2004) view about system thinkers in action, system leaders are in the report described as caring for and working towards others, as well as one's own, success. The notion is based on the beliefs that in order to change the whole system the engagement and action put on each level is essential.

In other words, system leadership is described as "[...] a systemic attitude towards leadership which connects the classroom, school and system, and with the mission to improve the students' results" (Hopkins, 2008 quoted in Pont, Nuche & Moorman, 2009, p. 49). Although the concept is presented in a general sense, the authors notably lift a variety of approaches and methods of school collaboration and system leadership as it has evolved in a number of countries. Clearly the concept have taken many different forms and been incorporated to different extents within the different national systems presented (Pont, et al., 2009).

4. Educational Leadership in the UK

In the following section the UK education system, with focus on the role of headship and principles, will be presented. The first part about the country overview will be of a rather descriptive nature, bearing in mind that it is limited to the primary and secondary sub-sector. The following sections will however attempt to present the roles and domains of leadership, in relation to some of the policies and strategies in which school effectiveness and success is pursued through educational leadership.

4.1. Overview

The central governing authority of the education sector in the UK is the Department of Education (DoE) which formulates goals and priorities and determines most of the national policies for education, for instance the curriculum. The National College for Teaching and Leadership is one of the executive agencies. Further, the so called Local Authority (LA) on the municipal and county level, as well as the schools' themselves are given a great deal of responsibility in the decision making processes concerning budgets and staff (TIMSS, 2012). Based on the increased changes taking place to improve the quality of education, the balance between centralization and decentralization, regarding the governance of education, is going through further modifications. While the role of central authorities for the needs of education is given more attention due to the forces of globalization, recent national trends have shown a shift towards increased local authority and self-management of schools (Davies, 2011).

There are a number of school types within the UK education system, either publically and privately funded or maintained. Approximately 91 percent of the students are however enrolled in the publically funded educational institutions (Department of Education, 2013b). In recent years a growing number of academies, a new form of publically funded independent schools, are taking place within the education system, much due to the government's encouragement of the movement. The DoE describe the academies as institutions that provide a first-class education based on a more freely and self-governing work nature in relation to the LA's framework, curriculum and other administrative aspects such as salaries and conditions for lesson hours (ibid.). The financially and strategic planning of publically-funded institutions is, moreover, shared between the schools governing body and the head teacher, while the daily management tasks are included in the head teachers job. Although processes of decentralization have taken place, the system is still fairly centralized and as for the autonomy of head teachers, they face a high degree of accountability with much focus on performance and inspections. In regards to the inspectorate, the Office of Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills (Ofsted) is in charge of them as an independent and impartial agency working directly with the Parliament (Osted, 2013a).

4.2. Requirements and Recruitment of Head Teachers

According to the national legislation, every school is required to have a head teacher with the right to delegate and share job functions. There are no requirements for assistant head teachers or leadership groups; however this may also vary from school to school (Eurypedia, 2013). The role of the head teachers ranges from managerial tasks to leadership responsibilities of setting organizational objectives and the school ethos. In relation to the provisions and other regulations by the Education Act, as well as the authority of the specific school, the professional duties and requirements of all appointed head teacher are further divided into the following aspects:

- *Whole school organization, strategy and development*
- *Teaching*
- *Health, safety and discipline*
- *Management of staff and resources*
- *Professional development*
- *Threshold assessment*
- *Advanced skills teacher and excellent teacher assessment*
- *Communication*
- *Work with colleagues and other relevant professionals*

(DfE 2012:00091, ch. 9, 56.1-56.19 §)

The recruitment process of head teachers differs somewhat depending on the authority in control, however in the majority of cases the overall responsibility of the selection lies with the school governing body. Based on the School Staffing (England) Regulations 2009 (Statutory Instruments, 2009:2680), this process need to include the advisory of the local authority, a selection of at least three governors for choosing suitable candidates and lastly an interview which may lead to the final approval by the governing body. Since 2012 however, prospective head teachers are not required to obtain any professional program for headship, although it is very encouraged that they do (Department of Education, 2013a).

4.3. Successful School Leaders for School Effectiveness

The UK's education system has had a wide background of support programs and initiatives with the function to boost the notion of school-based improvement and community learning. This, combined with the increased autonomy and significance of school leaders, has set the basis for a systematic approach that emphasizes school-to-school support (Hill & Mathews, 2008). The NCTL offers a number of programs, courses and modules with the purpose to support and develop teachers as well as the different types of leaders and headships within the education system. Since the merge of the National College for School Leadership and The Teaching Agency in 2011, the current role of the government agency is based on two aims. The first is to improve the quality of the workforce and the second is to help schools to help each other in improving.

Overall the agency expresses a monitoring and supportive role in relation to the initiation of teachers and leaders as well as their ongoing performance towards high educational outcomes. Noteworthy is their promotion of excellence and success which in turn is expected to improve the overall system by upholding a service that involves different types of actors; both those that can provide support and those that are in need of support (Department of Education, 2013c). With further regards to the agencies second aim, and the school-to-school support, one of the key aspects is the use of professional expertise through specialist leaders and partnerships, both on a local and a national level. In light of the vision of a self-improving system, the concept of system leadership is raised where the NCTL provides a list over the different system leadership roles that exist (NCTL, 2013a). The National Leaders of Education is one of these models, which is further described as having a prominent role for effective leadership support (NCSL, 2011).

4.4. The National Leaders of Education

As described, the NLE program consist of outstanding head teachers and principals that, with the help of their own expertise and skills in regards to their success, support schools that face different challenging circumstances. The school in which the NLE is positioned is further designated as a National Support School (NSS) which means that the NLE works together with the staff in the mission to support others schools (Department of Education, 2013c). The deployment of the NLE and the specific support needed is in turn negotiated by the appropriate authority as this depends very much on each specific case. Therefore the duties may differ widely. For instance, a NLE might have to take on a full-time role as the schools headship during a certain amount of time, or perhaps provide consultancy support once or twice a week. Once selected as a NLE, the duration of the post is ongoing until the criterions are no longer met (Department of Education, 2013c). The first group of NLE's was selected in October 2006 and consisted of 68 head teachers that fulfilled the requirements. In further review, these head teachers also possessed common characteristics, such as: having a strong and principled moral purpose, being thoughtful and systemic in their work, striving for excellence and success as well as supporting and creating confidence among staff (Hill & Mathews, 2008). Other than the development and further importance given to the program throughout the years, the number of NLE's have grown stably since the implementation (see Figure 1), and the National College has a long-terms goal to reach 1000 NLE's by the year 2014/15.

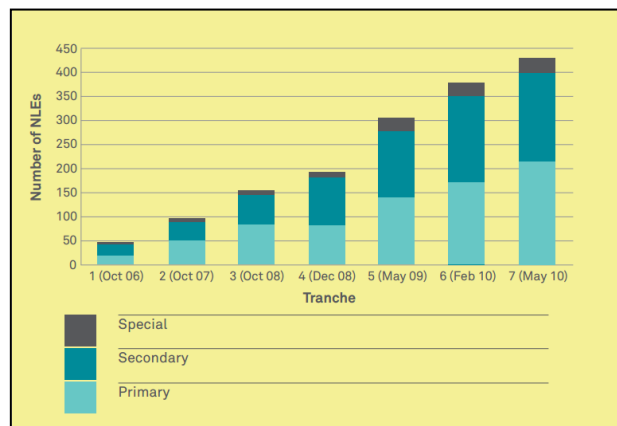


Figure 1: The growing number of NLE’s since program start
 Source: Hill & Mathews, 2010, p. 16

4.4.1. Criteria of NLE Eligibility

In order to become a NLE the DoE has developed a specific and well-structured framework in the form of eligibility criteria directed, not only towards the head teacher, but also towards his or her school in order to become a NSS. The development of the criteria was based on the notion that they should be challenging and keep their high standards (Hill & Mathews, 2008). The criteria are divided into six points, whereof the first three points (see Figure 2) and the sixth point are directed to the head teacher, while the remaining two are related to the performance of the whole school, including staff and students². As mentioned before in regards to the deployment of NLE’s, the selected leaders and schools are expected to meet all criteria throughout their positioned period. Further, as demonstrated in Figure 2, in order for a leader to obtain the role of an NLE the support of external actors is necessary.

Criteria	How this should be demonstrated
To be considered as a NLE, you must:-	
1. Be judged to be an outstanding serving headteacher with at least 3 years headship experience and expect to remain at current school for at least 2 years following designation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> headteacher has been a substantive headteacher for 3 years² or more (at point of designation) in which time they have been legally responsible for the management of a school and accountable to the governing body, and headteacher is named³ on a recent Ofsted inspection⁴ where 'Leadership and Management' has been judged as 'Outstanding' either at current school, or at previous school if the applicant has changed headship within the last 3 years and is yet to receive an inspection at current school, and Confirmation within the application that the headteacher expects to remain head of applicant school for at least 2 years following designation.
2. Be accountable for 1 or more schools which meet the NSS criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headteacher is accountable for at least 1 school that meets the 'Eligibility criteria for national support schools', and Confirmation in the application that the headteacher has the authority to deploy staff from the proposed national support school and enter into contractual arrangements to undertake national support school activity
3. Have the full support from the school's Governing Body and DCS/Senior Educational Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declaration within the online application that your chair of governors (or equivalent) supports the application, and A supportive reference from a DCS/Senior Educational Professional

Figure 2: Eligibility criteria for NLE (Nr. 1-3)
 Source: NCTL, 2013b

The aspect of the school-to-school support, which is the main purpose of the NLE program, is further emphasized in the last criterion where the expectations of the actual support are described in more detail (see Figure 3). Unlike the first three criteria that were viewed in Figure 1, the last criterion raises, for the first time, the aspect of an evidence-based success in leadership practice. While this evidence requirement is related to the support of schools in challenging circumstances, it further indicates that the head teacher is expected to have lead school support before.

²As this paper focuses on the role of leadership, the specific school requirements for becoming a NSS, as described in the fourth and fifth criteria, will not be discussed.

6. The proposed national support school has outstanding senior and middle leaders who have demonstrated that they have a strong track record and on-going capacity to:	
6a. Provide significant and successful support to underperforming schools within a school-to-school support partnership, federation or chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear evidence of providing significant support to at least 1 school in challenging circumstances⁷ over the past 3 years, and that the • Support has involved, and has capacity to continue to involve senior leaders in the support of schools in challenging circumstances, and that the • Support provided has had a positive impact both in the school supported and your own school; such as impact on pupil performance or improved Ofsted judgements
6b. Be able to commit to the 'minimum time expectation' for NLE/NSS deployment ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to provide support to schools in challenging circumstances for a minimum of 1-2 days per week

Figure 3: Eligibility criteria for NLE (Nr. 6)

Source: NCTL, 2013b

4.4.2. Quality Assurance

In addition to the presumably challenging nature of the criteria that must be met, the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) also produced a list, the so-called *NLE/NSS Criteria of De-Designation* (Hill & Mathews, 2008, pp. 129-131). For instance, the *misconduct* criterion states that if the leader behaves in a manner that is not appropriate within the framework of NLE then their role will be revoked (ibid.). In addition to the different lists of criteria, another aspect that is raised is how the requirements and the on-going work of NLE's and NSS's are monitored. According to a national evaluation of the program, the selected leaders and schools go through annual reviews by the NCSL in order to maintain the quality of the programs. The reviews can in turn lead to NLE's being withdrawn of their designation (ibid.).

In addition, since the Ofsted works closely to both the NCSL and the DoE, the school leaders will have to meet the requirements and specific framework set by the inspectorate. The role of the Ofsted varies in relation to the NLE program and is in many ways significant for both its development and quality assurance. First and foremost, as illustrated in some of the criteria in both Figure 1 and Figure 2, a NLE can never be designated if he or she does not fulfill the Ofsted criteria of head ship. These criteria, which apply to all types of educational leaders, are structured through three paragraphs and around ten descriptive qualities (Ofsted 2013:120100). The descriptions range from acquiring an ambitious vision, to providing continuous professional development for staff and assuring high quality learning based on the curriculum (ibid.). Secondly, the inspectorate is usually the actor that determines the degree of support required for the schools in challenging circumstances, as they conduct ongoing inspections of particular aspects in educational institutions around the nation (Ofsted, 2013). In regards to the latter, in many cases a NLE needs to be available on very short notice if a school has received very poor and alarming results by an inspection (Hill & Mathews, 2008).

4.5. Analysis

The following analysis is based on the contextual framework of educational leaders in the UK, with focus on the impact of the program of National Leaders of Education. Overall, the framework of the NLE program, including the requirements and the specific criteria, appears to be very well thought out and carefully developed. Based on the specifically structured elements as well as the advancement abilities of both the NLE program and the entire education system in which it is a part of, the systemic approaches appears to be noticeable successful. This is also evident in the rapid growth of the number of NLE since the implementation, which might reveal that more principals are willing to engage in improving the education system. Furthermore, the program is formulated in terms of success, excellence and high standards which further express high expectations and a certain quality assurance from the educational leaders around the nation. Additionally, in regards to how the criteria and requirements are formulated, and their purpose to create wide opportunities for leaders to engage in supporting schools in need, the long-term impact of the program can in many ways enable students to reach high attainments regardless of their schools challenging circumstances.

In further review, while the degree of decentralization does not directly determine the impact of the NLE program, it does indeed have a significant influence on leadership developments which thereby makes it a relevant aspect to mention in this analysis. The tendencies of decentralization that have been apparent through some of the liberating processes of governmental requirements in the UK, have allowed educational leaders to work a bit more independently. This, to some extent, increased self-management of schools can in a sense encourage leaders to strive for success, with the NLE program as one possibility.

On the other hand, the notion of creating a bank of successful school leaders, to support "weaker" leaders and schools, in light of the overall improvement of the system does also have its challenges. In first remark one should question whether the eligible head teacher with one or more successful schools, can actually apply this success in other contexts? In view of the increased diverse

population, which usually includes changing demographics, a wider spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds and different needs, the risk of one's own success actually benefiting someone else's challenging situation is not necessarily evident. Another aspect of possible concern is how the increased workload assigned to the designated NLE may impact their performance. Although the leader in question have proved to be successful in managing the school in various aspects, taking on a second or third school, in challenging circumstances moreover, or even being assigned additional tasks of consultancy might be time-consuming and stressful which in turn may negatively impact one's own school in the long run.

Finally, although the program has evidently stable growth with a strong foundation of various specified criterions, monitoring and evaluation practices, there is a thought on whether the program can actually reach its main goal to improve the whole system, school by school? This uncertainty is mostly related to the real capacity of the in-service leaders and if they are in fact prepared to take on and prioritize other schools workload, while still having to successfully run their own school.

4.6. Benefits and Challenges of System Leadership

In light of the increased attention put on system leadership and the wide range of countries and educational systems that have chosen to apply policies of system thinking for improvement, it is interesting to lift both the beneficial and challenging aspects of this approach. Based on the concept of EML as raised earlier, the importance of leaders finding a balance between the manager role and the leader role was emphasized. Today, there are still many educational leaders that struggle in maintaining this balance which results in many cases of imbalanced leadership (Bush, 2011). This in turn can be critical for organizations that may find themselves being over managed and under led, or the opposite, since the overall purpose and drive of their mission becomes unclear (ibid.). A systematic approach can in this sense, however, prevent this imbalance since a great deal of the support given through partnerships and co-operations is directed towards taking over some of the administrative tasks of the leader and thereby decreasing that burden. In return, the head teacher can be more participant and focus on leading the school and the students to higher learning attainments (Pont et al., 2009).

Within a system-wide approach, where all elements of a system are taken into consideration, the notion of cooperation and partnership is not only expected but it should also be encouraged by the educational leaders in the entire system, from national to school level. These co-operations involve several stakeholders and take different shapes such as, governmental agencies, public and private associations, universities etc. The wide range of stakeholders working together and towards the same goal of improving the overall system does not only create a strong basis for supporting those in challenging circumstances, but this also opens the opportunity for educational leaders to network and gain professional development (Pont, et al., 2009). Hopkins (2006) also raises the importance in taking the whole system into account, where he claims that the successful leaders as system leaders are a key factor. Based on the two following long-term goals, he further believes that the approach can improve the overall education system; First of all is the greater productivity as these leaders use the skills and knowledge of themselves and their own staff. Secondly, he lifts social justice, since the use of successful leaders within a system approach aims at every child's opportunity to achieve their full potential (ibid, p. 17).

In contrast to the positive view of system leadership, it is necessary to also raise some critical aspects at this point. In the process of writing this, one of the first remarks of challenges is related to the implementation of system theory in an educational setting. More specifically, it is about the challenge in making sure that all levels within the education system are prepared to work in the framework of system thinking. Prepared in terms of organizations being able to work flexibly and collaborative, considering the competitiveness still dominating many education systems, but also prepared in a sense that the majority of educational institutions are able to be involved, regardless of cultural differences and conditions. This last point is important in view of the schools in challenging circumstances, which evidently are the main targets of this approach.

Additionally, the forces and actual purpose behind the implementation of system leadership may further impact the outcome and effectiveness. For instance, if the decision was imposed by a centralized governmental authority in light of current trends, and without any consideration to the interest of school leaders, then the effectiveness will be limited (Pont et al., 2009). This in turn leads to the issue of whether the leader in question has a real engagement or not when supporting another school, which also sets the frame of how much support that is given, and its quality. On that note, the quality assurance of system leaders and their supposedly expertise in the field is of further importance. After all, a system leader cannot be authorized until he first and foremost becomes a successful school leader (OECD, 2008).

4.7. Successful Leadership and School Effectiveness

Trying to find a general definition to the notion of successful leadership or successful school is quite difficult and rather subjective in its nature. This paper has, in a sense, provided a definition through the criterions and requirements of the successful leaders and schools designated for the NLE program. Combined, the different personal and professional traits, abilities, behaviors as well as tasks and job functions, have shaped a very wide definition of what is expected from educational leaders in today's society. As raised in the introduction of the paper, the question that remains is what the role of educational leaders is, and which factors lead to success?

While this paper lift the theory of system leadership as a tool to become successful and reach school effectiveness, a number of research studies of both practical and theoretical basis focus on other more essential models for the role of educational leaders in the 21st century (Sujatha, 2011). Day and Sammons (2013) present in an international review about successful leadership two other models of leadership; the transformational and the pedagogical/instructional. Combined, these are viewed as a pathway for leadership success. Although some of the descriptions of the transformational/pedagogical approach can be found within system leadership, these models do not necessarily promote system thinking. Instead, the authors lift how the different focus of transformational leadership models and pedagogical/instructional models supplement each other when trying to attain both the

managerial side and the leader side. The transformational model of leadership is associated with setting the vision and guidelines, structuring the organization and staff and curriculum developments. The pedagogical/ instructional is however more focused on increasing the schools and students outcomes and enhancing teaching, learning and the overall quality through clear educational objectives, planning and evaluating (ibid.). Once again the importance of finding a balance between these two sides is raised, where these models are supposedly able to tackle this complexity in the role of leadership.

5. Conclusion

This paper have made an attempt to analyze the National Leaders of Education program in light of system theory and system leadership, with the goal to gain further understanding of what successful leadership actually is and how this in turn may lead to school effectiveness. In this final section, two sections will be presented in relation to the overall paper. The first will highlight the possible benefits and challenges of system leadership in view of its implementation for improving education systems. The second will look more into the notion of successful leadership related to school effectiveness to possibly identify alternative aspects that might have been overlooked in this paper.

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