

BUILDING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY WITHIN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGHOUT KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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ABSTRACT

There is a plethora of educational leadership theories as well as stories of individual leaders having an impact upon organizations and education systems. This paper describes how educational leadership at a system level was became the catalyst for large-scale public school improvement in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This has been a five (5) year journey and is ongoing. In this successful transformation of the system is a story with an emphasis upon balancing 'performance' and 'health' maintaining a close relationship between 'support' and 'accountability' at all levels. This paper highlights a priority placed on educational leadership and describes seven levers supporting on-going learning, improvement and innovation: (1) School, student improvement; (2) Creating and maintaining a culture of professionalism; (3) Leadership development and capacity building; (4) Re-designing organizational structures; (5) Parent and community learning, support and engagement; (6) Succession planning, including recruitment; and (7) Formal pathways and Cadre. Central to the success at a system level has been the transformation of leaders' mind sets and behaviours. We refer to this transformation as a 'commitment to action'; leadership is located within a quasi-decentralized model sifting from a MoE-centralized to a more school-focused model. This model encourages and empowers existing school leaders to shift their learning and leadership from administrative to instructional practices. This paper focuses on a case study: the Bahrain educational leadership strategy. This strategy links with Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 approved National Key Performance Indicators and Bahrain School Agenda.

Keywords: *education reform, educational leadership, educational leadership strategy*

INTRODUCTION

When a country's education system is committed to a major system reform it is making a genuine investment in the future of its people. Each year, countries experience a plethora of educational system reform, or improvement initiatives, in school, district, provincial, state and/or national levels. Clearly system reform is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and necessarily extremely complex. Nonetheless, all worthwhile reforms have a similar starting place, a comprehensive diagnostic survey

of the ‘current state’. Subsequently, key leaders and policymakers work collaboratively in order to plan and prioritise those areas through which targeted educational reform will be implemented.

Bahrain, a small country in the Middle East, with a population of just over 1.2 million has approximately 206 public schools. It started this journey in 2005. This paper will focus on one aspect of the education reform – educational leadership. The paper will discuss briefly the early diagnostic report findings and lead into what the Ministry of Education implemented as part of improving the quality of school leadership. Three key phases were identified for improving educational leadership at the system level in Bahrain – (1) Disturbing the status quo, (2) Influencing with impact, and (3) Enriching and embedding. As a broad roadmap we have seen these three phases at a local school level, shifting to a cluster level as part of the overall system design to capture all leaders. This paper will describe Bahrain’s shift in educational management emphasis through the vehicle of educational leadership and forecast changes for the next three years. In doing so it will emphasise ‘practical’ or ‘applied’ aspects of relevant theories and concepts, praxis no less, in guiding this innovative educational reform movement. Educational leadership is used to describe the leadership that occurs both in the school and also the MoE with direct impact and influence on the schools to inspire current and future generations.

There is no doubt educational leadership has an impact on student outcomes. Relevant research is emerging to suggest that after the important influence teachers have on student achievement, school leadership is the most significant (Hattie, 2003; Leithwood et al, 2006; Barber et al, 2010). At a system level, defined as the Ministry of Education (Bahrain) which has overall responsibility for education in the Kingdom, which is the landscape about which this paper is written, leadership involves creating opportunities, structures and mind-set shifts in existing policy makers, leaders and teachers to impact student outcomes in every school. Craig and Bentley (2005), reinforce this suggesting that system leadership (in this case within the central MoE) influences leadership across a system. It represents both a shift in the practice of leaders to ensure wider influence than other factors and in the system itself to make this possible. As will be illustrated, the education system’s leaders in Bahrain have made a huge personal commitment to support the transformation and improvement agenda, primarily by shifting educational leaders’ mindsets from ‘administrative’ and ‘institutional’. Our aspiration is for leaders to be seen and active in ‘instructional leadership’, ‘curriculum leadership’ and ‘transformational leadership’.

BAHRAIN AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Bahrain is a small archipelago located on the Southern side of the Arabian Gulf about midway between Kuwait and UAE and linked by a causeway to Saudi Arabia. Bahrain achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1971 and has very close ties with its neighboring GCC countries; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Today, there are 206 public schools and 58 private schools

that provide formal education to children, as well as approximately 130 privately owned Kindergartens. School leaders have been historically appointed (prior to the school improvement program's commencement in 2008), according to their year of experience. The pathway to becoming a school leader was not highly competitive and the selection process took performance management into consideration, of which 99 percent of all leaders were assessed as 'outstanding'.

In 2005, a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report as well as a diagnostic evaluation commissioned by the Bahrain Economic Development Board awarded to McKinsey & Co. suggested the public education system was in need of urgent reform. The latter report identified key gaps in student learning across the Kingdom and recommended the quality of teaching and leadership needed to improve. Specifically with respect to students the report highlighted other areas in need of urgent development including: the need to increase the time for learning, need to develop critical thinking skills, and to improve student behavior. Perhaps the most significant shortcoming regarding educational leadership was a lack of understanding and application of 'instructional leadership' by incumbents. In short, a high percentage of senior teachers, assistant principals and principals were rather comfortable as administrators that are responding to faxes, writing reports and spending very little time on classroom instruction. For many existing leaders, administration was relatively easy and required little effort. Many of them simply did not have a basic understanding of what instructional leadership involved and had little idea of what their role was to support teachers and student learning. Unfortunately these leaders rarely had their professional performance challenged; there were no career goals and no means of obtaining professional learning and development. Clearly, for the sake of the country, educational change was needed, and soon.

In 2007, immediately after the release of these diagnostic summaries and after careful analysis and planning, the full education reform programme commenced. The Kingdom established a number of appropriate institutions such as the Quality Assurance Authority, Bahrain Teachers College, and Bahrain Polytechnic, all aimed at improving the quality of general and vocational education within the Ministry of Education. A number of international partners were engaged to support this reform movement; OfSted (United Kingdom), PINZ (New Zealand), NIE (Singapore), Department of Education (Victoria, Australia), McKinsey & Co. and a small team of international school-improvement consultants. Within the vocational and technical education improvement programme, a strategic decision was made to implement an apprenticeship programme supporting students with this learning pathway.

The Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) was one the institutions that were established as part of the education reform with a clear mandate to provide quality pre-service and in-service training programs. The BTC currently provides a number of quality leadership development programs for senior teachers, assistant principals and principals as part of the MoE's required pre-requisites before eligibility for promotion. In short, a senior teacher is appointed to a position in an 'acting' capacity of which he must attend and satisfactorily complete the *Educational Leadership*

Program 1 which is approximately 60 hours of in-class learning. This serves as part of his/her requirements before being eligible to be considered for permanency as a senior teacher. A similar process occurs with acting assistant principals who attend *Educational Leadership Program 2* and acting principals who attend *Educational Leadership Program 3*. Initially the BTC offered one Educational Leadership Program that consisted of 360 hours in-class learning along with a study trip. As part of the ongoing reflection embedded within the education reform program, a decision was made to segregate the program into three parts that target the competencies required of each of the three categories of leaders.

Perhaps what is unique about Bahrain's education reform is the fact that apart from engagement of international firms, it has been designed and grounded in the need to ensure Bahraini Nationals can continue to lead continuous education improvement. At all stages and phases of the 2007 education reform, educational leadership has been a primary focus. To achieve progress there was careful planning, calculated risk and a determination and commitment to 'do what's right' as opposed to 'doing what's easy'. Changing long-held mindsets held by existing personnel is never easy. In this instance improving educational leadership meant striking the right balance of support and accountability at each level and layer of the educational system. In Bahrain, leaders were unintentionally focusing on the wrong priorities in schools with significant investment of time, as opposed to focusing on the 'right' priorities and implementing them fully.

Lessons learned from other education reforms both in the region and internationally have provided rich platforms for reflection and analysis. Mehta, Schwartz, and Hess (2012) suggest that sensible best practices do have a place in the efforts of education reform, but in order to truly maximize such efforts we must recognize that the 'best practices' approach only addresses the tip of the iceberg and the failure of such efforts rests with the six-sevenths of the iceberg below the surface (p. 4). In Bahrain, there has been a concerted effort in formal training programs with leaders to explain the importance of knowing each leader's 'iceberg' where the visible behavior and actions is significantly influenced by the values, previous experiences and beliefs of the individual.

Phase One: Disturbing The Status Quo With Respect To Educational Leadership

Educational reform means disturbing conventional patterns of how things get done. Senior educational personnel were presented with a Performance Management System (PMS) based on the three-track system prototyped by the Singapore Education System. It required setting annual targets with mid- and end-of-year appraisals for 20 leadership competencies placed within a number of key domains. School leaders were required to collect evidence of their achievement and they became responsible for principal performance too, by calibrating assessments. The responsibility for moderating the ongoing performance of school leaders was initially placed with Directors of Education (Primary, Intermediate, Secondary, Vocational),

but in 2011 it was allocated to the Chief of Schools. All leaders were exposed to professional learning and development, offered by the newly established Bahrain Teachers College as well as internationally appointed school-improvement consultants. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education announced that there was a need to review the entire Cadre system, in which it outlined the requirements needed for a leader to be eligible for promotion. In the Bahrain system, a Cadre is the formal process that human resources use to promote and determine the salary increments of employees.

To achieve consistency, a common perspective was adopted. For instance ‘system leadership’ embraced a wider view of education, including what went on beyond the school gates. In Bahrain, to improve educational leadership at the system level we needed to constantly adopt a ‘balcony’ and ‘dance floor’ analogy (as Heifetz & Linksy suggested (2002, p. 53). Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, even if only for a short period of time. So, our focus is to have leaders at all levels (central MoE and in schools) to be able to lead specific initiatives and see how things connect strategically. Additionally, adopting a system leadership perspective required a shift in thinking by existing leaders and thus a series of policy initiatives were made to ensure wider benefits of policy impacted on all Government schools. In Bahrain, in 2013 we initiated a full educational leadership strategy to further enhance the quality of leadership over the next three years.

Phase Two: Having An Influence With Impact

Because the previous culture had ossified educational leaders’ willingness and engagement, any shift in emphasis had to be handled tactfully and with respect. In an Arabian culture respect is fundamental; one cannot demand simultaneous change from hundreds of existing personnel. To preserve continuity and at the same time initiate change, it was decided to emphasise the interdependence of performance and health. This necessitated careful planning, change-team resilience and an understanding of the change management process in this culture. In effect, although the Ministry’s actions were informed by international literature on this topic, its application had to be home-grown, transplanted into prepared sites. In Bahrain, we worked hard to ensure we had a balance between ‘performance’ and ‘health’ where leaders’ ‘performance’ could be ascertained by, say, functional KPI’s and ‘health’ as corresponding socio-emotional aspects, such as how the leader was feeling throughout this change process. To ensure we had leaders make an impact in their schools and ultimately the system itself, we needed to work collaboratively and design systems which could assess both ‘performance’ and ‘health’, making sure support systems for both were adequate. This concept is referred to as empathic leadership (Reissig, 2007).

Educational leadership reform in Bahrain was developed from a shared vision and understanding of what effective leadership looked like at all levels. The PMS defined the required competencies and possible indicators, but we needed to get closer to the hearts and minds of all leaders thus emphasising respect and

commitment. The school improvement programme provided the ideal approach to field-test and apply best practices in a local context. The Ministry of Education (MoE) selected 10 ‘pilot schools’ to implement these approaches, including the Principal Leadership Academy, Educational Leadership Program, as well as ongoing coaching and mentoring. An accountability structure was created where principals and their school-improvement teams were challenged every eight weeks through ‘performance dialogues’; their emergent story.

A performance dialogue (PD) within this context is a structured and documented process where a team from the central MoE supplied school leaders with the dates and themes for each PD. Using this information, the school-improvement team responded with actual evidence. Following each PD a formal report is prepared. These reports outlined current status of the school using the Quality Assurance Authority assessment scale (inadequate, satisfactory, good, and outstanding). ‘Leadership and management’ is a specific focus for one PD. After the initial 10 pilot schools, the school improvement program scaled from 20, 40, and to 100 and later in 2012/13 all 206 schools are part of this programme. It is pleasing to report that PD’s provide one avenue for the school’s leaders to reflect as a team on their collective leadership and impact.

Other accountability initiatives embedded in the PD include the mid and end-year PMS appraisal for all leaders. Principals who are seen by their line managers (Chief of Schools and Senior Chiefs) to be underperforming are placed on the ‘hot seat’, figuratively of course, and given a specific period of time to address specific areas and then present this evidence in front of a senior MoE leadership team. The MoE addresses the ‘health’ of leaders through bi-weekly quality cards (dashboard reports), and more importantly frequent visits from the Chief of School. In addition, any principal whose leadership is assessed as below average or seems to be stagnating will be closely monitored and supported through a Principal Improvement Plan (PIP). This PIP is designed to focus on a small number of high-leverage leadership areas and sets clear targets and supports available. The PIP is deeply embedded within the system-wide *Managing the Performance of Principals (empowering) policy*.

Phase Three: Enriching And Embedding: Sustainability

The MoE developed a five-year Educational Leadership Strategy to positive spiralling of growth and achievement: an educational leadership roadmap. There are seven levers to the Bahrain MoE Education Leadership Strategy (ELS, see Exhibit 1). Taken together they support and represent a holistic view. The aim is to understand each as unique and inter-connected. Within the MoE a number of initiatives are well advanced to strengthen these levers. Phase three is aimed at enriching leaders’ perspectives by, assisting them to see the overall view, the big picture as it were, from a general-system vantage and at the same time to set and achieve higher levels of performance.



Figure 2: Bahrain MoE Education Leadership Strategy (7 Levers)

The MoE ELS is designed using the latest international trends in successful system and school leadership that are anchored in the Bahrain context. The focus is on the ‘practical’ informing the ‘theoretical’ as we are able to apply the ‘lessons learned’ from the previous four years into the next phase of development. Whilst there are seven (7) core Levers underpinning the MoE ELS, some of our broad goals underpinning the success of this strategy are:

- Every school will have a high-performing principal who will focus the majority of his/her efforts towards instructional leadership practices that focus on improving student outcomes;
- There will be a gradual shift from centralized to decentralized school-based decision making when those schools and leaders have demonstrated effective leadership and responsibility;
- The best principals will be called upon to share their experience with some principals of the weakest schools to help them raise the performance in those schools;
- Every school’s leadership team (Principal, Assistant Principal, Senior Teachers and outstanding teachers) will focus their time towards instructional leadership;
- There will be effective professional learning communities and practices that help leaders learn from each other both within their own school, within their cluster and across clusters;
- Leaders in schools will be active in leading and conducting action research in

- The Ministry of Education will work closely with the Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) to provide a range of learning programs for leaders;
- A clearly defined framework for identifying, developing and selecting the best teachers and leaders for new leadership positions will be embedded throughout the system; and
- Underperforming leaders will have the opportunity to grow and develop and will receive the support from other talented leaders when their performance is not at the expected standards;

Lever 1 – School, Student Improvement

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Bahrain’s educational leadership strategy is its impact upon student outcomes. Leaders are held accountable through ‘performance dialogues’, where, apart from leadership and management, ‘student achievement’ is one of the key foci. Each school is required to have annual action plans, which are linked to their strategic plans and goals of the MoE’s strategic plan. Within these annual action plans (must be linked to school priorities), all schools are required to show progress and achievement as a school – of which ‘student outcomes’ is one of the agreed priorities. A significant amount of focus has been placed on shifting leader time and behaviour away from administration and directing more towards instructional leadership. Formal professional development programs, shadowing and coaching help leaders reflect on how instruction supports learning and their role in the process.

Within the next phase, the *educational leadership strategy* requires leaders to become increasingly more concerned with instructional leadership – actively making sure all leaders in schools, as well as those from the MoE supporting schools, are fully engaged with improving student and school achievement. Principals will lead learning after receiving targeted professional learning that is accredited and aligned to system needs and learning targets. Professional learning for principals, assistant principals and senior teachers in specific programs will become a mandatory requirement for promotion. Our engagement with our partner, Bahrain Teachers College, will support efforts to build instructional leadership capacity within the education system. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) reinforce the importance of positive partnerships between governments and teachers, ministries of education and school districts when creating high-performing education systems.

Lever 2 – Creating And Maintaining A Culture Of Professionalism

Reforming an entire education system is a complex and challenging process. Managing change ultimately requires using strategies and processes to manage mindsets and to support leaders making the necessary changes. Today educational leaders are generally not accepting full responsibility for their own leadership roles. Too often leaders look to blame others and are worried about the consequences for themselves if they make mistakes. The extended school day has been a positive

initiative within secondary schools because not only has it increased the amount of instructional time for students, but it has allowed schools to dedicate time each week to focus on planning quality instruction for students. Despite these efforts and initiatives, there are still some, senior teachers who need additional empowerment and training to be confident to lead learning as instructional leaders. Leaders need to be encouraged to think more about how they grow together, work and support one another. Leaders are often focused on competing with each other, rather than focusing on collaboration. In other words, become more like colleagues than isolated competitors.

There have been a number of incumbent leaders who have made huge shifts within their schools. The independent Quality Assurance Authority has reviewed all schools and there are a number of schools, which now have ‘outstanding’ leadership and overall performance. We are capturing their success stories, filming and sharing these with others to illustrate this journey is viable. This sharing of best practice from within Bahrain is important as part of the buy-in and showcasing local successes. As we continue to raise the standard of required leadership, we will co-create a culture of professionalism by establishing performance standards and expectations of all leaders. These standards will be placed within a comprehensive leadership framework guaranteeing all leaders are aware of what is now required for meeting promotion criteria. A key requirement for leaders is to build and maintain effective professional learning communities in their schools, where learning experiences are shared and mentoring assists the growth of new and existing leaders.

Lever 3 – Leadership Development And Capacity Building

Bahrain’s MoE has a very rigorous Performance Management System (PMS) that has been developed in consultation with Singapore’s National Institute of Education. The PMS has been introduced for a few years within schools and its key objective is to accurately appraise teachers and leaders at mid- and end-year based on a number of competencies. At a National level, the Civil Service Bureau is currently implementing a new whole-of-government performance management system, of which the MoE’s system is very closely aligned and will merge into smoothly. The PMS is not just an evaluative tool – it is an instrument to accurately identify the training needs of leaders in various positions. This analysis helps us to develop and identify suitable professional learning opportunities and programmes.

Capacity building at the system level requires a deliberate focus on ensuring pathways are clearly developed and communicated, where every employee who seeks promotion as a leader knows the professional learning opportunities available, selection criteria and performance indicators necessary to advance their careers. In order to guarantee successful implementation, the MoE is establishing a *Virtual Centre of Educational Leadership (VCoEL)* within the Ministry of Education. Rather than adopt a traditional (Western) approach where a new initiative requires a new section, recruiting a team of people and financing – we have decided to create a VCoEL, one which has clear structure and performance objectives, but which draws

on expertise from people in their current positions for a specific purpose in a short period of time to support. The VCoEL has responsibilities for quality assuring that all professional learning for leaders is continually updated to reflect the ever-changing trends and priorities within the schools and the MoE, where the improvement of student outcomes will remain our highest priority. It will play a coordination and quality assurance role within the MoE. Working closely with the Bahrain Teachers College, leaders will have access to some University-level programs that they can use towards higher awards if they decide upon such a path. The immediate focus of the VCoEL in the next few years is to ensure all leadership development programs are centered on instructional and transformational leadership.

Establishing new leadership roles (such as Senior Chiefs, Chief of Schools), has provided a high-level approach to supporting school-based leaders. Often, the Senior Chiefs and Chief of Schools are the leaders of professional learning for principals, who have responsibility to apply their learning within their school. In the early years of the education reform in Bahrain, a small number of expatriate education consultants provided all the training for principals and chief of schools. Fortunately, since 2012 there has been transitioning of expertise from MoE since Senior Chiefs and Chief of Schools are now heading up most of the school improvement efforts occurring in clusters and schools. Their role is providing a balance between support and accountability and is a healthy example of how a system has developed sufficient capacity so it has momentum and is now well positioned to sustain and maintain continuity of education reform.

In the school year 2013/14, a number of new leadership programs will further enhance the quality of leadership within the MoE. Using a ‘flipped instruction’ approach, a new leadership program that targets the principals of boys’ schools* will be implemented. This program will require all participants (principals) to watch a number of short video clips that present critical aspects of leadership and use this as a platform for the first few days of the program. The focus of this leadership will be an innovative action-learning school project where each principal must design and implement a specific program in which they will reflect on international vignettes as inspiration thought-starters for behavioral implementation.

Lever 4 – Re-Designing Organizational Structures

There are times in any education improvement or reform program where the organizational structure needs to be reviewed and adapted. Sometimes budgets will dictate the need for alternative structures, whilst in other situations reviewing the organizational structure may be sufficient to improve efficiency. In Bahrain, a few critical changes were introduced subsequent to the initial design, aimed at further improving efficiency and positively impacting upon educational leadership. An example is the introduction and availability of a ‘help desk’. Our diagnostic reports

* In Bahrain all public schools are single gender and not co-educational. However it is not uncommon for some primary boys schools to have a majority of female staff.

clearly illustrated that school leaders (and teams) were spending too much time on administrative issues and less on instructional priorities; they had reverted to customary practises. Multiple directorates and departments within the central MoE office were sending duplicate requests to schools and quite often these requests required the same information! As a result, school leaders were too busy collecting the necessary information, completing the paperwork and faxing/emailing the required report and were simply overwhelmed by the sheer volume of repeated requests for irrelevant details derailing the process. There was a clear need to change this trend and support schools. The MoE could not ask leaders to change their behaviour and leadership until there were some structural changes to divert these unnecessary demands. A practical solution was to create a 'help desk'.

The 'help desk' was established with a central dispatch and three main units: (1) teacher issues, (2) student and issues and (3) school issues. If the issue did not fall within any of these three categories, it would be referred to the 'administration section'. To clarify, within the central MoE many directorates would ask the same information from schools, such as student numbers. To help streamline, the MoE introduced a key policy stating at all directorates that wish to communicate information with schools must first communicate with the central dispatch section of the help desk. After the issue was classified by the central dispatch it was referred to one of the three units or the administration section where a decision would be made on whether the request is to be sent to the school or if another directorate had already asked for the same information.

The results from this simple and practical innovation have been very positive. From focus group forums, principals and assistant principals are describing increased available time at the school level and have been reaffirmed towards school and student improvement rather than time-consuming but less relevant administration issues. The MoE further strengthened the support for schools by establishing a new position called 'School Business Manager'. This position, although in the early stages, has been created to handle the majority of administrative matters that a principal has traditionally had to manage such as building maintenance, finance, preparation of letters and liaising with the central MoE's help desk.

In addition to the help desk, the MoE has established 'clusters of schools'. Each cluster consists of approximately 8 to 10 schools and is under the leadership of a 'Chief of School' (CoS). Five 'Senior Chiefs' positions were also created to support the CoS' and to provide higher-level leadership across the education system. The 'clusters of schools' is not a new concept in education –the United States has districts, United Kingdom has local authorities and Singapore has zones as three international examples. The implementation of clusters and the two new positions (Senior Chiefs and Chief of Schools), have been wonderful examples of increasing efficiency and performance through ensuring the support and accountability mechanism is in place.

In the future as we shift more responsibility and autonomy to schools that have demonstrated 'good' or 'outstanding' achievement, we will further enrich the

performance dialogues and ensure peer principal visits will place school leaders and their leadership teams in the 'hot seat'. Depending on a school's overall performance and assessment of leadership, schools (and leaders) may have greater autonomy in the near future. In Finland, one of the highest performing education systems, Sahlberg (2010) asserts that some schools experience relatively higher autonomy than other schools over their operations and budgets (p. 87). Principals will be required to take full responsibility of the learning outcomes of both students and staff within their schools and be actively engaged in this process. New professional learning opportunities, such as shadowing, intra-cluster and inter-cluster learning communities for principals will support their understanding and ability to lead their teams.

Lever 5 – Parent And Community Learning, Support And Engagement

In Bahrain, public schools are generally not seen as places where parents and the community are actively involved or engaged. It is as if there is a moat around schools and what goes on there has nothing to do with students' families or the community. Although many schools have parent councils, few provide parents with a genuine opportunity to share in the decisions or policies within the school. Parents generally see the school as the sole provider of education for their children and therefore have little engagement. Sadly, attending an 'open day' or dropping off and collecting their children are the extent of parental involvement. Embedded within the MoE ELS is a required commitment by all school leaders to seek active partnerships with parents and members of the community to make sure they play a complementary role in helping their children learn. Reason (2012) reinforces the need for transformational leaders to work hard to build a connected culture where leaders create safe, focused and collaborative working environments.

The MoE will work closely with school leaders to help them identify ways to support parents so they can engage with and support their children's education. School leaders will create effective parent councils, which are engaged with the school and share in the collective responsibilities for school and student improvement. As leaders develop these partnerships with parents, they will design and implement parental engagement plans. In the early stages of implementation, school leaders (initially through principal workshops), will receive ideas from best-practices within the GCC and beyond, of which they will be required to contextualize within their own school community and implement. Chief of Schools will make this parental and community learning a priority within their cluster of schools and capture innovative and positive examples to share with all schools.

Lever 6 – Succession Planning, Including Recruitment

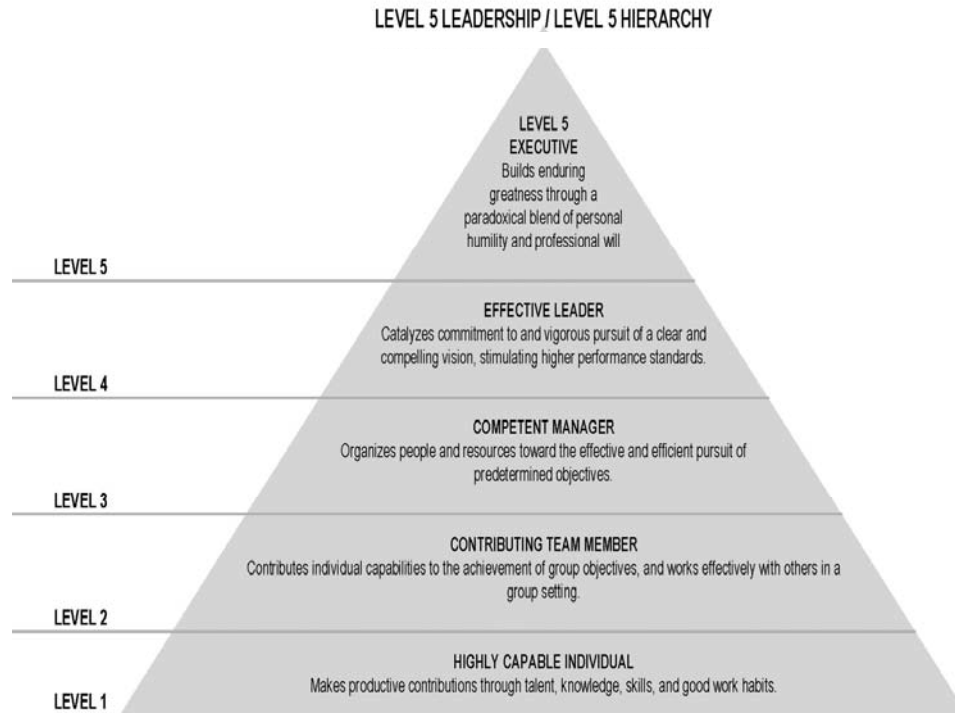
Although this paper has introduced recent and imminent structural changes, the MoE is focused on the next generation of leaders. In the absence of alternatives, the MoE has characteristically placed emphasis on tenure and testing as primary criteria for advancing. This has led to many problems where narrow band 'rote learning' to perform well in a leadership test has little transferability or generalisability within the

school for improving student outcomes. Like many education systems, Bahrain has some extremely talented teachers and leaders who are in need of opportunities and encouragement to be long-term and high-impact educational leaders able to hold their own on the international stage.

Often referred to as ‘leadership pipeline’, our priority is to create pools of talent available at every level of leadership where a rigorous selection process results in only the top performers being promoted to the next leadership level. The MoE’s Directorate of Planning and Human Resources develop staffing modeling projections where we can forecast the number of employees who will retire over the five to ten years, as well as potential vacancies as a result of new schools to cater for the increased population. Succession planning and recruitment for leadership positions has already commenced. For instance the Chief of Schools is currently working closely with principals to get a better estimation of potential leaders in schools. Additionally, individuals may self-select into professional development programs aligned to their needs and goals.

This concept of pipelining talent through accurate identification is part of the MoE’s focus on building executive leaders. Collins (2001) in his pioneering research around finding out the characteristics of high-performing companies suggests that there are five levels of leaders (see Exhibit 2). Level 1 leaders are described as highly capable individuals, through to Level 5 leaders as executive leaders who embody a paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will. Collins suggests that Level 5 leaders set up successes for even great success in the next generation as opposed to egocentric leaders who set up their successes for failure. In Bahrain, the design of leadership pathways and the importance now placed on talent identification, development and support is aligned with Collins’ (2001) thinking and scholarly research. Through empowerment, coaching and access to high-performing leaders in the MoE, talented teachers will be fast-tracked into leadership programs which don’t necessarily take them out of the classroom as a teacher, but provide them with new learning, skills and experiences to allow them to grow as an individual, teacher and leader for the future.

Figure 2: Collins Five levels of leadership (2001)



Lever 7 – Formal Pathways And Cadre

Although succession planning and talent pools are both important, the MoE has commenced the process of reviewing and amending formal pathways for teachers and leaders to be promoted, aligned with the contemporary approach. Part of this review is a clear mandate on improved access for motivated employees who achieve positive results within their current position to become eligible for promotion. A formal selection pathway which clearly defines the necessary minimum experience needed, required professional learning programmes to successfully complete at each level, as well as a heavy concentration on impact and achievement will form the basis of selection is to be implemented. Those experienced leaders who currently hold key leadership positions will be required to undertake professional learning to guarantee they are equipped with the required contemporary skills and experiences to lead schools for the future. This support will come from both the Virtual Centre of Educational Leadership within the MoE, as well as through the Bahrain Teachers College.

Whilst all leaders will be provided with opportunities to participate in and complete satisfactorily the required professional development, there will be a strong emphasis placed on their direct impact on their current leadership role. Talent identification of existing teachers will support the promotion of these individuals into

leadership positions without having to leave the classroom. In order to achieve these new aspirations, the MoE will work closely with the Civil Service Bureau to change the existing Cadre and increase the flexibility for promotion, whilst complying with minimum professional learning requirements and rigorous selection processes are in place to select the best and to create talent pools.

Changing approaches to educational leadership at the system level requires an understanding of how adults learn. So far our experience suggests there are some current leaders who will resist change and others who will embrace new opportunities and strive to make the necessary mindshifts. The development of policies to support required changes, such as challenging underperforming leaders, has already been supported by system-level change. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) provide valuable warnings suggesting that the hardest part of educational change is not how to start it, but to ensure it lasts and spreads. Whilst there is always a temptation to focus energy of those who resist, our experiences suggest capturing and sharing success stories of best practices impact upon an entire cohort since a felt sense of collaboration arises. Challenging long-held beliefs and practices such as asking leaders to reduce their administrative time by up to 80 per cent is not easy to achieve in the first instance. But when the system's leaders require a greater focus on instructional leadership in order to improve student achievement and engagement, there really is no other option.

IN SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Apart from relating this story of education reform in Bahrain and progress within educational leadership, there is a deliberate attempt to build professional learning networks and to enhance innovation across the entire system. In this regard the MoE is part of a much larger design and plan for Bahrain. The MoE has established clusters of schools where learning is socially created and shared. In the next academic year, clusters will implement formal reading circles to encourage professional reading by leaders and more importantly for them to discuss what these new insights can mean for their school and all schools. Principals will model reading circles as networks of principals within clusters and have responsibility for cascading and sharing within their own leadership teams. Professional networks will exist both face-to-face and asynchronously. Louis & Leithwood et al. (2010) highlight both the important roles principals have as central figures in leadership, whilst reinforcing the importance of collective leadership in delegating decisions and sharing responsibility.

Latest approaches to learning and leading have focused onto 'flipped instruction' - a practice where key resources (or homework) are distributed before the workshop or lesson and therefore allowing greater discussion time and activities during the session. Originally developed in 2000 in the United States by Wes Baker at Cedarville College, the flipped classroom model has gained widespread traction across the world in recent years as a means to integrate computer and online resources with day-to-day coursework. In 2013/14, the MoE will for the first time design and deliver a 'Leading Boys' Schools Leadership Program' which will use flipped instruction techniques to engage principals of boys schools and to ensure they arrive

at day one of the program with similar concepts. Our leaders will continue to be supported to innovate, through grants for their school and a sense of pride in their local community. At all times we will support, challenge and capture both successes and failures as opportunities to learn and grow. The modeling of required leadership behavior will be supported through policy development, professional development programs and learning networks.

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