Leadership for teachers’ action learning

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Abstract
Action learning can help teachers gain the necessary professional competence for making better judgements and taking effective action in ambiguous situations. It thus enhances teachers’ professional practice and performance in a changing and uncertain environment. This paper intends to propose a leadership framework for facilitating teachers’ action learning in school. This framework may not only bridge the theoretical gap between school leadership and teachers’ action learning but also enrich the knowledge base of school leadership. The framework comprises three dimensions – inspiring, social supporting, and enabling – and eight components. The inspiring dimension is composed of three components: building and institutionalizing shared vision, providing individualized job design, and modeling. The social supporting dimension encompasses another three components: reducing defensive routines, fostering learning culture, and mobilizing social support. The enabling dimension comprises two components: enhancing theoretical knowledge and repertoires of skills, and providing intellectual stimulation. A principal who exercises this framework has high potential to facilitate teachers’ action learning in school. A list of expected teachers’ cognitive/behavioral characteristics is incorporated in the framework as indicators for the occurrence of teachers’ action learning. Some implications of this framework for research and theory development, and particularly the knowledge base of school leadership, will be discussed at the end of this paper.

Introduction
In the past decades, the rapid changes in economic, social, political, technological, and cultural aspects of the world imposed changes on many countries’ educational systems. It was evident that numerous educational reforms occurred in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere. Internationally, there were reforms like the effective schools movement and school-based management movements. Internationally, there were reforms like the effective schools movement and school-based management movements (Banathy and Jenks, 1993; Sheeran and Sheeran, 1996). In Hong Kong, there were many educational changes launched by the Government in the past decade. Typical examples include the school management initiative (SMI), target-oriented curriculum (TOC), school administration and management system (SAMs), quality assurance inspection (QAI), and information technology in education. The main focuses of many of these reforms aimed to pursue effectiveness, continuous improvement and future excellence of the schools. Educational scholars tended to believe that, through educational reforms, schools would be more adaptive to both internal and external demands of the changing environment (Holly, 1992; Cheng, 1996). School reforms shifting to site-based management and the strategic management intended to set a framework in school for enhancing school effectiveness and education quality (Cheung and Cheng, 1996; Sackney and Dibski, 1994). However, there was little evidence that these reforms produced effective outcomes in teaching and learning or in students’ academic achievement.

Cheng and Cheung (1999) suggested that an effective implementation of site-based management often depends on how different actors (scholars, policy makers, school constituencies, etc.) perceive meanings and opportunities during the reform process. They believed that advancing the knowledge base of school actors, including teachers and school principals, helps to maximize all the potential benefits from the reform process. Other scholars also believed that the extent to which the potential benefits of school reforms could be realized depends much on the knowledge and skills of the school personnel (Louis et al., 1996). Many of them advocated that teachers’ continuous learning and development would be the key for successful school reforms (Sykes, 1996; Louis et al., 1996).

Parallel to this, some believed that principals’ leadership is critical for successful school reforms (Bolman and Heller, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996; Leithwood, 1998; Cheng, 1997, 1998). They can perform some functions vital in the reform process. These functions include the establishment of common goals and values, the building of collegiality, the provision of more control to teachers over events affecting them, and the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills. In fact, these leadership functions were found to be important and were supported by many empirical findings on reform processes (Rosenblum et al., 1994; Hallinger and Hausman, 1994; Hilosky and Watwood, 1997).

Regarding teachers in the reform process, they are in fact facing numerous challenges from complex educational goals, diverse educational expectations, great accountability, changing curriculum, and demanding educational tasks. In order to meet these emerging challenges, continuous learning and self-improvement can help teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for making better judgments and taking more effective action in an ambiguous situation. This contributes to the provision of school education quality in the reform process.

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Yuen and Cheng (1997) proposed an action learning cycle that may characterize teachers’ professional learning in school. The cycle depicts the processes through which a teacher could increase his/her own knowledge and skills by either generating new mental sets or modifying old mental models and/or designs for actions. The cycle originates from the concept of cybernetics. It incorporates important conceptual ideas in other areas including individual learning (Piaget, 1978; Bandura, 1986; Schunck, 1986), organizational learning (George, 1977; Argyris and Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1990, 1993), teacher education and learning (Elliott, 1993; Eraut, 1993; Appleton, 1996; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996), reflection (Schön, 1983; Day, 1993; Watkins and Shindell, 1994) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). It is believed that action learning can help teachers to increase their capacity for making better judgments and taking effective action for pursuing desired educational goals in different school reforms.

With respect to school principals, they should increase their own professional competence in the facilitation of teachers’ action learning in school. Unfortunately, very few studies can provide a comprehensive framework on how principals’ leadership can contribute to teachers’ action learning. Only some existing leadership conceptions are indirectly or partially related to teachers’ action learning. These conceptions include transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), multi-dimensional leadership (Bolman and Heller, 1995), cultural leadership (Schein, 1992; Trice and Beyer, 1993), and leadership for self-managing schools (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992) etc. But none of them was specifically developed for the leadership facilitating teachers’ action learning.

In Hong Kong, both leadership scholars and policy makers also recognize the importance of leadership to successful educational reforms (Cheng, 2000). A task group on training and development of school heads was set up in January 1999 (Education Department, 1999). The task group drew up a leadership training program that intended to equip and develop the school principals with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to become competent leaders to lead schools into the new millennium (Education Department, 1999, p. 3). However, it seemed that the content of this program did not obviously include the kind of leadership characteristics that are useful to facilitate teachers’ action learning in school.

Thus, if we believe that it is vital to facilitate teachers’ action learning in such a changing educational environment, there is an urgent need to develop a leadership framework that can contribute to the knowledge base of school leadership and be used by school leaders to facilitate teachers’ action learning in school. This paper aims to develop such a leadership framework to meet this crucial need in educational reform and development in both local and international contexts.

**Teachers’ action learning**

Teachers often have their own beliefs, values, assumptions, as well as knowledge about teaching and school education before they become members of a school. In daily school life, they may get new information, new experience, new knowledge, and even new ways of thinking about their work and schools. Particularly when teachers interact among themselves or with other people inside or outside their schools, they accumulate their experiences and learn new knowledge and skills. Based on what they have learned, teachers make judgments and take actions to deal with people (e.g. students, colleagues, parents, etc.) and perform their tasks (e.g. teaching, collaboration, administrative work, etc.) under different situations.

Based on Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) and Yuen and Cheng (1997), an action learning cycle can be used to illustrate the processes of teachers’ learning in their actions as shown in Figure 1. It is composed of four components: mental model, action, monitoring, and reflection.

A mental model or schema is an organized body of knowledge abstracted from experience (Rumelhart, 1980). Action refers to the intended behavior demonstrated by an individual. Monitoring refers to the process of detecting a mismatch between one’s intention of action and consequences. It involves sensing and scanning significant aspects from the environment and comparing the information with his/her own intention of action. Reflection refers to the process of explaining a mismatch between intention and consequence by inquiring into one’s own mental models. Action learning occurs when an individual alters his/her own mental models and/or designs for actions for correcting mismatches. Under this circumstance, new mental models and/or designs for actions are generated or old mental models and/or designs for actions are modified.
In addition to the behavioral aspect of learning (i.e. modification of actions), action learning can be understood as a cognitive aspect of learning in terms of a change in mental models. This cognitive nature of action learning is recognized by a number of researchers. They refer to learning, cognitively, as changes in schemes (Piaget, 1962), schemata (Schmidt, 1975), images (Denis, 1991), repertoires (Schön, 1983, 1987), or theories-in-use (Argyris and Schön, 1974, 1978).

As in Figure 1, action learning may occur when a teacher completes the following processes: process I – the teacher has the intention to achieve and to take the best course of action for achieving valuable educational goals; processes IIa and IIb – the teacher is able to detect and explain mismatches; and process III – the teacher is able to alter his/her mental models and/or designs for actions in order to correct their identified mismatches.

**Process I**
The teacher’s mental model affects his/her perceptions as well as actions when he/she is engaged in school environmental interactions. The mental model embeds the teacher’s internal goals, emotions, feelings, values and beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions about causal linkages between his/her actions and consequences. The mental model is an internal model of one’s world, which organizes and shapes one’s actions and behaviors (Denis, 1991; Senge, 1990). In school, teachers construe reality or the environment differently with their own mental models in mind. When they have the intention to achieve certain educational goals that they value, they make judgments and take necessary actions and they hope that matches between their intentions and consequences will result.

**Process IIa and IIb**
Mismatches between a teacher’s intentions and consequences can be regarded as valuable learning experiences that may lead to the occurrence of teachers’ action learning. Appleton (1990) contends that these learning experiences influence which schemata (mental models) of the learner’s cognitive structure are used to interpret the experience, in terms of both which sensory input to attend to, and which memories are activated in order to construct meaning for the experience. Festinger (1957) and Piaget (1978) suggest that mismatches may induce dissonance, disequilibrium, or uneasiness, and then result in a desire to reduce them by correcting the mismatches. It triggers an individual to inquire into his/her own mental models for explaining the mismatches. Therefore, if teachers are capable of detecting and explaining the mismatches through examining their existing mental models, they have a high possibility of altering their mental models and/or designs for actions in order to correct the mismatches.

**Process III**
Teachers’ action learning occurs under the following situations. First, it occurs when a teacher alters his/her designs for actions to correct mismatches while maintaining old mental models which are unchanged. Second, learning occurs when a teacher reconstructs old mental models or creates new mental model(s) for correcting mismatches. Argyris and Schön (1978) refer to them as single-loop and double-loop learning respectively, whereas Senge (1990) and Foil and Lyles (1985) refer to them as adaptive/low-level and generative/high-level learning respectively.

It should be noted that both single-loop learning and double-loop learning are important because they have different contributions to teachers’ works. As Argyris (1993, p. 9) contends, “single-loop learning is appropriate for the routine, repetitive issue – it helps get the everyday job done. Double-loop learning is more relevant for the complex, non-programmable issues – it assures that there will be another day in the future of the organization.” In the context of school, action learning helps to illustrate how teachers’ experiences accrue through undertaking daily actions (e.g. classroom teaching) in school. It is such a practical experience that constitutes the requisite teacher knowledge for assuring quality teaching (Day, 1990). In single-loop learning, teachers learn a set of almost unthinking routines which helps them to get everyday jobs done. In double-loop learning, they create or modify mental models which help them to make better judgments and take more effective action in facing problems under complex and ever changing educational environments.
It is a common belief that, in teaching and in other professions which are characterized by complexities, uncertainties, and conflicting values, individual learning through daily actions/practices is more useful than what is acquired from formal types of education (Cervero, 1992; Bridges and Kerry, 1993).

Quit learning

Metaphorically, the occurrence of action learning requires teachers to “loop around” the action learning cycle. However, teachers may quit the learning cycle at any time due to different reasons. Some reasons can be listed as follows. First, since the identification of mismatches is regarded as embarrassing and threatening, especially when it occurs in front of others, teachers may feel unsafe and behave in a defensive way so as to bypass or cover up mismatches (Argyris, 1990). These behaviors hinder teachers from receiving feedback about the mismatches that is vital for the occurrence of action learning. Teachers who choose to bypass or cover up mismatches can be regarded as exiting action learning.

Second, when a mismatch is identified, many teachers, instead of actively seeking information and restructuring mental models to explain the mismatch, wait for “correct” information to be provided. In addition, some may choose to opt out of learning if they do not consider their efforts involved in correcting a mismatch to be worthwhile (Appleton, 1996). Under these circumstances, teachers also exit action learning.

Finally, there are situations in which teachers are more likely to exit learning. Some of them include a psychologically unsafe environment (Schein, 1993); role constraint due to a highly bureaucratized structure (Kim, 1993); lack of opportunities for experimentation, innovation, and risk taking (Garvin, 1993); inability to resolve conflicts in constructive ways (Rahim, 1992); and political pressure (Rait, 1995).

Facilitating teachers’ action learning

In order to facilitate teachers’ action learning, teachers should be helped to complete processes I, Ila, IIB and III of the action learning cycle (Figure 1). These processes thus provide the fundamental basis for exploring the leadership framework that can be used to facilitate teachers’ action learning in school. The desired leadership framework has the following functions. First, it can instill in teachers the intention to achieve, and motivate them to take the best course of action for achieving valuable educational goals. Second, it can provide a safe and socially supportive environment for teachers to identify and explain mismatches. Finally, it can enable teachers to alter their own mental models and/or designs for actions in order to correct mismatches. With these functions, we believe, such a leadership framework can facilitate teachers to complete the processes I, Ila, IIB and III of the action learning cycle.

Leadership framework for action learning

Based on the characteristics of the action learning cycle and a review of the leadership literature, a leadership framework for facilitating teachers’ action learning can be conceptualized and summarized as shown in Table I. The leadership framework is composed of three dimensions and eight components. Each leadership dimension has its specific functions for facilitating teachers to complete one or more process(es) in the action learning cycle. In the framework, a list of teachers’ cognitive/behavioral characteristics has been provided as indicators for the occurrence of teachers’ action learning. The detail of how this framework is related to the teachers’ action learning process and associated characteristics is provided below.

The first dimension – inspiring

The inspiring dimension of leadership aims to instill in teachers the intention to achieve shared educational goals and to motivate them to take the best course of action for achieving these goals. It comprises three leadership components: building and institutionalizing shared vision; providing individualized job design; and modeling.

Building and institutionalizing shared vision

Educational goals, which are valuable to teachers, can often be found in a shared vision among constituencies in a school. Vision refers to an image of a future state that we want to achieve or care about (Senge, 1990). Shared vision, which is intuitive, imaginative, and insightful, embeds the desires and feelings of major constituencies in school. It is the holistic picture that can be regarded as the ideal of the school’s future that school personnel value (Bolman and Heller, 1995). When a vision can be developed and shared in school, teachers will be instilled with the intention to realize the vision and be motivated to take the best course of action for achieving the vision.

Shared vision could be concretized as school mission statements which reflect the
values of major constituencies in the school. These mission statements could further be elaborated into school educational goals, which guide the formulation of policies, program plans, activities, and daily practices of teachers in school. In other words, the values of major constituencies embedded in shared vision could be infused into school mission, goals, policies, and daily practices as well. Selznick (1957) refers to this process as institutionalization. Successful institutionalization of shared vision provides meaning and purpose to teachers’ work. These meanings and purposes could motivate them to take the best course of action in carrying out daily practices in school (Valli, 1992; Yukl, 1994). Therefore, building and institutionalizing shared vision is one of the important components of inspiring leadership – it can not only instill in teachers the intention to achieve valuable educational goals as embedded in the shared vision, but it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>The leadership framework</th>
<th>Teachers’ action learning characteristics</th>
<th>Action learning process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Building and institutionalizing shared vision Providing individualized job design Modeling</td>
<td>To instill in teachers the intention to achieve shared educational goals and to motivate them to take the best course of action for achieving these goals</td>
<td>Have intention to achieve the educational goals embedded in shared vision Understand the meaning and purpose of their own actions in work as related to the educational goals Take the best course of action for achieving the goals Feel responsible for the consequences of their own actions Be willing to improve their own actions for achieving the goals</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social supporting</td>
<td>Reducing defensive routines Fostering learning culture Mobilizing social support</td>
<td>To provide a safe and socially supportive environment for teachers to identify and explain mismatches</td>
<td>Feel safe to face up to their own mismatches in front of others Be willing to share their own experiences with others, particularly those related to mismatches Be willing to listen to others’ opinions and respect their views, especially those related to the identification and explanation of mismatches Be open to accept others’ opinions, including criticism, for identifying and explaining mismatches Display empathy with others and help them to face up to their own mismatches Feel responsible for explaining one’s own mismatches and for helping others to explain theirs Feel responsible for correcting one’s own mismatches</td>
<td>IIa and IIb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Enhancing theoretical knowledge and repertoires of skills Providing intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>To enable teachers to alter their own mental models and/or designs for actions in order to correct mismatches</td>
<td>Understand the underlying causes of mismatches Be critical and sensitive to the occurrence of mismatches Have rich knowledge and skills in work, especially related to the effective use of course of action under different situations Be able to judge whether a change in mental models and/or designs for actions would be a better way to correct mismatches Be able to use different mental models and/or designs for actions in a creative and innovative way for correcting mismatches</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
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</table>
can also motivate teachers to take the best course of action at work.

Providing individualized job design
This component focuses on providing teachers with different kinds of feelings through careful job design in school. These feelings include a sense of ownership (Fullan, 1991), a feeling of meaningfulness and responsibility (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), a sense of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1991), and opportunities for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

These kinds of feelings inspire teachers with a high level of intrinsic work motivation and commitment (Lawler, 1992). Also, these feelings motivate teachers to take the best course of action in work. Moreover, according to Hackman (1986), successful job design provides teachers with a feeling of responsibility. Under this circumstance, teachers are more likely to be responsible for the consequences of their own actions and be willing to improve their actions for achieving the shared educational goals.

Successful individualized job design can be regarded as inspirational to teachers. It induces teachers’ emotional/mental attachment to feelings of ownership, meaningfulness, or self-determination as such.

Modeling
In the leadership literature, modeling has long been regarded as useful for creating inspirational influences on teachers (Sergiovanni, 1992, 1996; Leithwood et al., 1996). Research on transformational leadership (e.g. Bass and Avolio, 1994; Leithwood and Daft, 1992), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), and charismatic leadership (e.g. Shamir et al., 1993; House and Podsakoff, 1994) provide evidence for supporting this view. These researchers tend to believe that the occurrence of such inspirational influences is due to teachers’ emotional/mental attachment to idealistic images of school leaders. This emotional/mental attachment motivates teachers to imitate school leaders’ behaviors. When school leaders are perceived by teachers to have the intention to achieve and take the best course of action for achieving shared educational goals in school, teachers act accordingly.

For modeling to be inspirational, at least two important conditions should be addressed. First, school leaders’ theories-in-use should be consistent with their espoused theories (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Theories-in-use refer to the underlying values that can be deduced from the school leaders’ behaviors, whereas espoused theories refer to the values of actions that school leaders espouse. Consistency between school leaders’ theories-in-use and espoused theories reduces the skepticism of teachers towards the school leaders’ intentions behind modeling. It enhances the building of trust between teachers and their school leader. Trust is significant for modeling to be inspirational. Second, the values and beliefs of school leaders should be in congruence with that of the teachers in the school (House and Podsakoff, 1994). Such congruence provides a common ground for both teachers and school leaders to understand the meaning and purpose behind modeling, and then enhances the teachers’ emotional/mental attachment to the school leader.

In brief, the three leadership components of the inspiring dimension of leadership could arouse teachers’ emotional and/or mental attachment to the achievement of school mission and goals, feelings of self-determination or ownership, and idealistic images of school leaders. Exercising these components could help teachers to complete process I of the teachers’ action learning cycle.

The second dimension – social supporting
The social supporting dimension of leadership aims to provide a safe and socially supportive environment for teachers to identify, face up to and explain mismatches between the intentions and consequences of their actions. Three leadership components from the literature have been found and categorized into this dimension. They include reducing defensive routines, fostering learning culture, and mobilizing social support.

Reducing defensive routines
The occurrence of action learning requires teachers to detect mismatches, understand the underlying causes of mismatches, and correct mismatches. However, to admit mismatches in front of others is always regarded as embarrassing and threatening. Defensive behaviors of teachers may thus occur when teachers try to reduce embarrassment or uneasiness aroused by facing up to mismatches. These defensive behaviors include bypass, cover-up, distancing, or attributing failures to others. Over time, teachers may demonstrate these behaviors in a skillful and unconscious manner, which constitutes the profound idea of organizational defensive routines advocated by Argyris (1990). It is important for school leaders to reduce such defensive routines if they wish to facilitate teachers’ action learning. It requires a safe and socially supportive environment in school.
Providing a safe environment for teachers will not only help them face up to their own mismatches in work, but will also help to remove the roadblocks that hinder them from accepting others’ opinions regarding mismatches in school. It is reasonable that when teachers feel safe to face up to their own mismatches, they are more likely to be open to accept others’ opinions regarding mismatches and explanation of mismatches. In other words, it facilitates both processes IIa and IIb of the action learning cycle.

**Fostering a learning culture**

This leadership component intends, through social interactions, to instill in teachers the desired ideologies that could facilitate teachers’ action learning. Teachers’ ideology is regarded as a key component in school culture (Owens, 1995). Argyris (1990) highlights five aspects of desired ideologies, which may facilitate teachers’ action learning in school. They include help and support, respect for others, strengths, honesty, and integrity. With these types of ideologies, teachers would be more willing to listen to others’ opinions and respect other parties’ views, especially in relation to the identification and explanation of mismatches. Teachers would also display empathy to others and help others to confront their own mismatches. Moreover, they would feel responsible for explaining their own mismatches and helping others to explain theirs.

These desired ideologies have often been referred to as the learning culture by many organizational researchers (e.g. Lundberg, 1995; Beckhard and Pritchard, 1992; McGill et al., 1992; Schein, 1993), because they govern the patterns of social interactions, and facilitate learning among members.

**Mobilizing social support**

This is also an important component of the social support leadership dimension. It intends to increase the opportunities for social interactions between teachers in school, that help to sustain the aforementioned learning culture in school by transmitting the kind of open ideologies to other teachers in either conscious or unconscious ways. Different scholars denote the idea of supportive social interactions in school by using different terminology. The key ideas of mobilizing social interactions often include collegiality, peer coaching, mentoring, collaboration, collegial support, teamwork, etc. Among them, mentoring or coaching has long been recognized in educational settings.

Meanwhile, exercising the two leadership components – reducing defensive routines and fostering a learning culture – provides a “frame” for teachers to interact, detect and explain mismatches in school. Mobilizing social support for teachers could further nurture this learning culture at school. Teachers may therefore perceive a safe and social supportive environment which encourages them to identify and explain mismatches. It helps teachers to complete process IIa and IIb of the action learning cycle.

**The third dimension – enabling**

The third leadership dimension – enabling – focuses on enhancing teachers’ capabilities to alter their own mental models and/or designs for action in order to correct mismatches at work. It includes two components: enhancing theoretical knowledge and repertoires of skills and providing intellectual stimulation.

**Enhancing theoretical knowledge and repertoires of skills**

This component intends to enhance teachers’ capability in terms of required knowledge, skills and thinking methods to identify, analyze, understand, and correct mismatches. Systems thinking as one important thinking method can help teachers become more sensitive to mismatches in action. “Systems thinkers”, according to Senge (1990), are more capable of understanding long-term trends and underlying causes of events. With systems thinking in mind, teachers are more capable of understanding the underlying causes of mismatches. On the other hand, creative thinking enhances teachers’ flexible use of mental models and designs for actions in order to correct mismatches.

**Providing intellectual stimulation**

This leadership component aims to harness teachers’ intellectual ability and potential for correcting mismatches. Intellectual stimulation could be achieved in a number of ways. It includes creating images of other possibilities (Bass, 1990); challenging the validity of teachers’ mental models or the consistencies between teachers’ theories-in-use and espoused theories (Argyris, 1990); or triggering teachers to self-examine the validity of their own values and beliefs, assumptions, and causal linkages between actions and consequences, etc. (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1990).

When teachers are unable to perceive different uses of mental models and/or designs for actions in facing problems under complex and ambiguous situations, providing intellectual stimulation helps to trigger them to re-examine their own mental
models and/or designs for actions. It may bring out their hidden knowledge and intelligence for dealing with challenges or solving new problems. In brief, it can help teachers to reduce their functional fixedness in facing ambiguous situations. Functional fixedness refers to the inability to perceive different uses of objects in a situation (Duncker, 1945).

Through practicing the above two components of enabling leadership, teachers can be facilitated to complete process III of the action learning cycle as shown in Figure 1 and Table I. It is expected that teachers will be more able to understand the underlying causes of mismatches and deal with them because they have the required knowledge and skills and are capable of altering their own mental models and/or designs for actions in order to correct mismatches.

### Implications for leadership research and development

From this new leadership framework, a number of implications can be drawn for research, theory development, and practice in school leadership.

The concept of leadership is often regarded as blurred (Maxcy, 1991). Researchers tend to believe that defining the purpose and context in conceptualizing leadership helps to resolve the ambiguity in the meaning of the term (e.g., Bass, 1990). A leadership framework conceptualized in this way may be referred to as middle-level or domain-specific theories of leadership (Leithwood et al., 1996). Since the leadership framework aims to facilitate teachers' action learning in school, the purpose and context of this framework can be regarded as clear and specific. Thus, the framework can contribute to the development of a domain-specific theory of leadership.

Leadership scholars often use different typologies to capture the characteristics or performances of leaders. These typologies are often based on the roles, functions, or behaviors of leaders. For example, Bass and Avolio’s (1994) conception of transformational leadership may be regarded as comprising four leadership functions: idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational influence, and intellectual stimulation. In the present paper, the leadership framework is conceptualized into three dimensions and eight components for facilitating teachers' action learning. This new taxonomy provides a new typology in the leadership literature.

Based on the framework, a spectrum of research can also be generated for investigating the complex nature of school leadership particularly in a changing educational environment. For example, by using the traits approach to leadership, researchers may investigate the traits and other related characteristics of school leaders who are most effective or ineffective in practicing this framework for facilitating teachers' action learning. By the use of the cognitive approach, research may be focused on examining the knowledge base, values, beliefs, thinking models, or cognitive process of school leaders as related to their leadership for facilitating teachers' action learning. Moreover, the contingency approach can be used to investigate the interactions between the practice of the leadership framework and the situational factors such as constituencies' characteristics and organizational characteristics, in order to maximize the leadership effects on teachers' action learning in school.

There is a strong tradition of using humanistic theories to understand leadership and organization (Bass, 1990; Owens, 1995). A human being is often regarded as a motivated organism who has a desire for responsibility and self-actualization, and effective organization can be developed by providing members with motivational influences. Along this tradition, many leadership researchers have attempted to investigate the motivational processes of leadership. For example, in charismatic leadership, Meindl (1990), Kets de Vries (1988) and Lindholm (1988) attempt to explain its motivational effects by using psychoanalytic and social contagion theories, whereas Conger and Kanungo (1987) and Conger (1989) suggest that identification and internalization are the most important motivational process in exerting charismatic influences. On the other hand, in transformational leadership, Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1994) use Maslow's hierarchical needs theory to explain its motivational effects on subordinates. Bass and Avolio (1994) argue that practicing transformational leadership motivates the subordinates to strive to satisfy their own higher order needs. To a great extent, the leadership framework proposed in this paper can enrich this important humanistic tradition and the knowledge base of school leaders’ motivational influence toward teachers in school.

From Table II, it can be found that the present framework captures the key emphases of some important leadership...
conceptions in the research literature. The leadership components in the inspiring dimension capture the established leadership concepts such as the establishment of commonly accepted goals and values (Schutz, 1961), the setting and clarification of school mission and goals (Bass, 1990), and giving more control to teachers over events affecting them (Sergiovanni, 1989).

The other three components in the social supporting dimension are consistent with the established leadership concepts such as group cohesiveness (Bass, 1990), the enhancement of teachers’ reflective practices, and the facilitation of mentoring and coaching practices in school (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992). Moreover, the two components in the enabling dimension seem to be closely related to established concepts such as development of teachers’ knowledge and skills (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992) and helping teachers in resolving problems in school (Schutz, 1961).

Such a comparison shows further that traditional leadership emphases have touched on only part of the teachers’ action learning processes. But the present framework would be more comprehensive with the clear purpose of facilitating teachers’ action learning in school. It seems that the framework can fill the theoretical gap between school leadership and teachers’ action learning.

<table>
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<th>Action learning leadership</th>
<th>Inspiring</th>
<th>Social supporting</th>
<th>Enabling</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Modeling</td>
<td>(4) Reducing defensive routines</td>
<td>(7) Enhancing theoretical knowledge and repertoires of skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Building and institutionalizing shared vision</td>
<td>(5) Fostering a learning culture</td>
<td>(8) Providing intellectual stimulation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) Providing individualized job design</td>
<td>(6) Mobilizing social support</td>
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**Schutz (1961)**
- Establish commonly accepted goals and values [1 and 2]
- Motivate members in work in order to fully utilize their ability [1, 2, and 3]

**Selznick (1957)**
- Define the institution’s mission and goals [2]
- Infuse mission and goals into structure, process, and activities in the institution [2]

**Bass (1990)**
- Set and clarify mission and goals of individual member, group, or organization [2]
- Energize and direct others to pursue the mission and goals [2]

**Bass and Avolio (1994)**
- Idealized influence [1]
- Inspirational influence [1, 2, and 3]

**Sergiovanni (1989)**
- Induce clarity, consensus and commitment regarding the school mission and goals [2]
- Allow teachers to gain more control over events and accomplish school goals and hence mission [3]

**Caldwell and Spinks (1992)**
- Clarify school mission [2]
- Restructure the workplace of teachers [3]

**Note:** the number in square brackets shows the leadership component of the framework in relation to the emphasis advocated by the traditional leadership conception.
Also, the leadership framework including three dimensions and eight components can provide a rather comprehensive frame for school principals and leaders to practice their leadership and help their teachers to pursue continuous action learning and improvement. Particularly with current educational reforms and the rapidly changing educational environment, the framework will be helpful. School practitioners and policy makers can use it to consider how to transform school leadership and the organizational environment to promote continuous learning and development among principals and teachers to meet the internal and external challenges of their schools.

It is hoped that this new leadership framework will contribute not only to research and theory building but also to leadership development in school education in both local and international contexts.

References and further reading


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