

School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland

A case study report for the OECD activity
Improving school leadership

by:

Andrew Hargreaves, Rapporteur

Gábor Halász

Beatriz Pont

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This report is part of a larger OECD study exploring school leadership policy issues. It aims to provide analysis on the particular Finnish approach to school leadership for systemic improvement that contributes to their educational success. In a decentralised environment, Finnish municipalities are developing different approaches to school leadership distribution and cooperation to respond to pressures brought about by declining school enrolments and resources. Their reforms are geared to improve schooling for local children in a new environment by ensuring that principals are responsible for their own schools but also for their districts, and that there is shared management and supervision as well as evaluation and development of education planning. But this report goes beyond this remit and also explores key features at the heart of Finland's education miracle.

The report begins with an introduction, provides some theoretical background for understanding systemic leadership and its impact, and then analyses the key Finnish context and features that make for successful schooling outcomes. It continues with a review of their systemic leadership approaches and provides a discussion of lessons learned and some recommendations on how these approaches can be made sustainable in Finland.

1. Introduction: Some background to the report

School leaders in OECD countries are facing challenges and pressures with the rising expectations for schools and schooling in a century characterized by rapid and constant technological innovation, massive migration and mobility, and increasing economic globalization (OECD, 2001). As countries struggle to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in a rapidly changing world, the roles and expectations for school leaders are changing radically. Educational administrators are no longer expected to be merely good managers but leaders of schools as learning organizations. Effective school leadership is increasingly viewed as central to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes.

The OECD has developed an activity to provide policy-makers with information and analysis to assist them in formulating and implementing school leadership policies leading to improved teaching and learning. The activity has the following objectives: (i) to synthesise research on issues related to improving leadership in schools; (ii) to identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices; (iii) to facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries; and (iv) to identify policy options for governments to consider.

More specifically, the activity aims to support policy development by providing in-depth analyses of different approaches to school leadership, which can be summarised in the following key questions:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of school leaders under different governance structures? What seem to be promising policies and conditions for making school leaders most effective in improving school outcomes?
- How can effective school leadership be best developed and supported? What policies and practices would be most conducive to these ends?

Parallel complementary approaches have been developed to reply to these questions more effectively. On the one hand, all 22 participating countries are providing a country background report within a common framework (analytical strand). Additionally, a small number of case studies in a) school leadership for systemic improvement and b) training and development of school leaders will complement the work by providing examples of innovative practice. This approach permits the collection of information necessary to compare country developments while at the same time adopting a more innovative and forward looking approach to policy making.

The first set of case studies focusing on the concept of school leadership for systemic improvement has been selected based on a set of defined criteria (Box 1). As is suggested by the definition of school leaders guiding the overall activity, effective school leadership may not reside exclusively in formal offices or positions but instead be distributed across a range of individuals in the school. Principals, managers, academic leaders, department chairs, and teachers can contribute as leaders to the goal of learning-centred schooling. The precise distribution of these leadership contributions can vary. Such factors as governance and management structure, amount of autonomy afforded at the school level, accountability prescriptions, school size and complexity, and levels of student performance can shape the kinds and patterns of school leadership. Thus, principals can act not only as managers but also as leaders of the school as a learning organization. Additionally, teachers may work as curriculum advisors or department chairs and collaborate with other teachers, administrators and even students and communities in pursuing the overall goals of the school. In these communities, all can interact to constitute a productive, cohesive learning community.

This perspective suggests several specific areas on which to focus, keeping in mind the different governance arrangements under which schools in different systems operate:

- “System improvement,” where school leaders take responsibility for contributing to the success of other schools as well as to their own school; or where regional or local level teams engage leaders in re-culturing and working collaboratively to support one another in achieving common goals of student learning.
- Partnerships or collaborations of schools with other organisations in which the organisation and management arrangements distribute leadership across a combination of individuals, organisations and groups.
- School-level learning communities in which a combination of managerial and teacher leadership as well as sometimes student and parent leadership build “professional communities” and “collective efficacy” through shared commitment to challenging learning goals, collective responsibility for student learning and achievement, continuous improvement geared around collaborative data-based decision-making, and staff, student and community engagement.

Box 1. CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF INNOVATIVE CASE STUDIES

<p>Models of school organization and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways. The activities identified for case studies should:</p> <p>The final set of case studies reflects the diversity of education governance systems, financing arrangements, and political cultures of the countries represented in the activity;</p> <p>The full range of relevant stakeholders is involved;</p> <p>The practice has been in operation for a period of time sufficient to establish its operational viability;</p> <p>The practice focuses on educational results and reflects a clear theory of action grounded in the current literature with promise of achieving those results;</p> <p>The practice can demonstrate initial results that suggest that it is on track to achieve its intended outcomes;</p> <p>Full access to the site and to relevant data is afforded.</p> <p>The cases demonstrate models of school organization and management where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed in new ways;</p>

There is a systemic orientation that situates the leaders' behaviors and effects on student outcomes in the whole of the school or larger system or explores the interactions of the school with larger elements of the education or community systems.

1.1. The case study visit to Finland

Finland was selected by the OECD as an example of a systemic approach to school leadership, because of its particular approach to distributing leadership systematically. From reading the literature and in discussions with Finnish representatives, it seemed that their approach fit the criteria defined for the selection of the OECD case studies (Box 1) and would represent a model of system leadership cooperation for the benefit of student and school outcomes.

In a decentralised environment, Finnish municipalities are developing different approaches to school leadership distribution and cooperation to respond to pressures brought about by declining school enrolments and resources. Their reforms are geared to improve schooling for local children in a new environment by ensuring that principals are responsible for their own schools but also for their districts, and that there is shared management and supervision as well as evaluation and development of education planning. During our visit, we saw some municipal examples of reform geared to improve schooling for local children by ensuring that principals are responsible for their own schools but also for their districts, and that there is shared management and supervision as well as evaluation and development of education planning. These reforms are seen as a way to align schools and municipalities to think systemically with the key objective of promoting a common schooling vision and a united school system.

This report is based on a study visit by an OECD team to Finland, organised by the Finnish Ministry of Education upon request by the OECD. The study team was composed of the rapporteur, Prof. Andrew Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education in the Lynch School of Education in Boston College, Massachusetts, Dr. Gábor Halász, former Director-General of the National Institute for Public Education in Budapest and now scientific advisor in this institution and Professor of Education at ELTE University (Budapest) and and Beatriz Pont from the OECD Secretariat. The rapporteur took the lead in writing the case study report, with the support of the other team members. We take the opportunity to thank the Finns for their openness and discussions.

The visit provided the team with a national perspective on leadership policy and with some examples of leadership practices in municipalities and schools in different areas in Finland (Tampere and Jarvenpaa). In Helsinki, the team met with representatives from the Ministry of Education, from the National Board of Education, from the Association of Municipalities, from the Teachers and School Principals Union, from the Helsinki Municipality Education Services and from two school leadership development providers. We then visited two municipalities which provided useful examples of how leadership in education is practiced at the municipality and school level. We met the education representatives in both municipalities, a group of school principals and visited one school in each municipality, where we met with the principal and leadership teams, teachers and also some very inspiring students (Annex 1).

The purpose of this report is to provide information and analysis for policy makers and researchers on models of school organisation as well as management and leadership approaches that are aiming for systemic improvement. It aims to describe the way Finland has adopted innovative and successful initiatives and practices in order to distribute leadership in innovative ways. The report provides some theoretical background for understanding systemic leadership and its impact. It reviews the emerging literature on the development of Finland as an advanced and high performing knowledge economy, and on the reasons for its increasingly high standards of educational performance over the

past decade. It follows by reviewing their country's systemic leadership approaches and provides a discussion of lessons learned and some recommendations on how these approaches can be made sustainable in Finland.

2. Theoretical grounding on systemic leadership

This report examines the relationship between school leadership and system-wide improvement in one particular national setting - Finland. But before analysing this particular Finnish approach, we need a common understanding of what we mean by systemic leadership and why we think that there is an important relationship between schools going beyond their borders (shared and distributed leadership) and successful outcomes. In research and in practice, articulating the relationship between school leadership and improvement on a system-wide basis is a relatively new venture. Leadership has been found to have a modest though significant effect on school achievement (Mortimore et al., 1988; Silins and Mulford, 2002) though it is still the second most influential variable affecting achievement after teaching (Leithwood et al., 2006). Leadership effects are largely exerted within the school and mainly indirectly through influencing the adults who affect the children (Leithwood et al., 1999). Providing intellectual stimulation, supplying professional development and other support, developing a vision of and focus on learning with others, creating a strong professional learning community through team commitment to learning and achievement – these are the key ways that leaders have exerted their effects on learning, achievement and performance among students.

Despite this demonstrated potential of school leadership to exert positive effects on student performance, the degree of its impact has been and still is limited by a number of factors.

- In many countries, school leaders have served more as elected managers of their schools or been slowly promoted from within them. While this has served schools well in maintaining efficient coordination of operations during times of relative stability, it has hindered them in contexts of rapid change which call for administrators to behave more as leaders who are responsible for changing the practices, relationships and cultures of those who they represent (Bolivar and Moreno, 2006).
- The movement towards large-scale reform in the latter part of the twentieth century, with its accompanying emphases on more detailed government intervention and high stakes testing, turned leadership which inspired communities to achieve and improve upon their purposes, into management that emphasized delivering the short-term policies and purposes of others (Fink and Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006).
- In a number of countries, more prescriptive strategies focused on raising achievement in measured results through management of performance, have yielded some successes and tangible performance gains in the short-term, but in most places these have now reached a plateau (Fullan, 2006; Hopkins, 2007). Moreover, the gains that have been registered have largely been in easily tested basic skills more than in the high level competencies that are essential for developing knowledge economies (OECD, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003; New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 2007).
- The most substantial and significant effects on student outcomes continue to reside beyond the immediate school setting in which school leaders currently exert their influence, and these effects remain stubbornly persistent over time (Berliner, 2006).
- In many countries, almost half of the current generation of school leaders is due to retire within the next five years, creating significant challenges to leadership recruitment, stability and effective continuity and succession, especially where leadership effects overly rely on

the impact of single individuals (Leithwood et al., 1999; Hargreaves and Fink, 2003; The Wallace Foundation, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

- The replacement cadre of school leaders is bringing into the job different generational expectations, dispositions and skill sets than their older predecessors – especially in relation to exercising more collaborative forms of leadership, and managing work-life balance (Harris and Townsend, 2007).

The effect of these interlinked changes, pressures and expectations is to push school leadership in new directions so it can become both more successful and also sustainable. The limitations of top-down large scale reform in education, are now calling for school administrators to act as leaders who can develop and inspire their teachers' commitment to and capacity for producing higher-level learning – for all students. The use of collaborative styles and strategies is not only more suited to building higher order competencies and capacities among teachers and students alike, but it also enhances work-life balance by ensuring the burdens of leadership do not rest on one set of shoulders and it helps secure more stability and effective succession by creating larger pools of leadership and thereby making succession events less contingent on grooming or selecting particular individuals. Finally, the existing skewed distribution of school versus out-of-school influences on student outcomes can be shifted if the responsibilities of leadership extend to acting on and influencing the external variables that affect student performance – if leaders help their schools to affect the things that currently affect them.

The key challenge of school improvement today, then, is for school administrators to become leaders who develop and raise high level achievement by working with, learning from and influencing the behaviours of others within and beyond their schools. Instead of being managers who implement policy, school administrators will increasingly need to become leaders of their schools who can also exercise leadership in the environment beyond their schools, and articulate the connection between the two. The educational leader of the future, therefore, will increasingly be a system leader as well as a school leader.

What do we mean by system leadership? Various contributions help us understand the nature and significance of this concept and strategy:

2.1. Leading learning organisations

Effective organisations are able to learn continuously, not just as an aggregation of individuals, but also collectively as a group. Leaders of and in such learning organisations grasp that their organisations are rapidly changing, complex and interconnected systems. They are able to have and articulate clear mental maps of where they are going, to see the “big picture” of their organisation, to understand how different parts of it are connected to each other and the whole, to connect their personal learning to the organisation's learning, and to employ processes that provide swift feedback and learning of how the organisation or initiatives in it are proceeding, so future action can be taken that is effective and appropriate (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 2000). When schools behave and are led as problem-solving learning organisations, then they enhance their effectiveness and improve their outcomes with students (Leithwood and Louis, 1998; Mulford, 1998).

2.2. Leading learning communities

When the intellectual processes and feedback mechanisms of learning organisations become embedded in the attitudes, behaviour and overall culture of people within it, these organisations

become learning communities. These communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), professional communities (Louis and Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001) or professional learning communities (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995; Hord, 2004), engage and inspire professionals to collaborate together to improve learning and other outcomes, by sharing and analyzing practice and by using data to inquire into and evaluate progress and problems over time (Newmann, King and Youngs, 2000). Successful learning communities are places where people care for each other as individuals, and commit to the moral purpose the organisation is pursuing, as well as pursuing technical tasks of analysis and improvement together (Hargreaves, 2003; Giles and Hargreaves, 2006). Schools that operate as strong learning communities have more successful outcomes in performance results (Rosenholtz, 1989; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995), and they deal with change more effectively (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2007a). Paradoxically, while learning communities depend on and develop leadership throughout the school, in Anglo-Saxon countries at least, this seems in turn to be a result of effective leadership by the school principal in building such communities (Stoll and Louis, 2007).

2.3. Distributed leadership

Within the overall sphere of school leadership, teacher leadership has more significant effects on student achievement than principal leadership (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). This has led to considerable advocacy for the development of greater teacher leadership in schools (Harris, 2001; MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001; Crowther et al., 2002; Hopkins and Jackson, 2003; Lieberman and Miller, 2004). Spreading leadership out in this way is referred to by some as distributed or distributive leadership (Harris, 2001), though in its more robust forms, this distribution extends beyond teachers to students (Levin, 2000), parents and support staff. Indeed, Bolam, Stoll, and Greenwood (2007) show that schools which include support staff within their learning communities are more effective than those which employ a narrower range of distribution.

Spillane (2006) uses distributed leadership less as a way to promote a particular kind of leadership practice, than to analyze how, and how far leadership is already distributed within schools. Others also recognise that distributed leadership assumes many forms with varying degrees of effectiveness, in different conditions – formal or informal, downward delegation or upward assertion, etc. (Hay Group Education, 2004; Hargreaves and Fink 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). In this respect, it is not just the extent of distributed leadership, but its nature and consequences that are important for school improvement.

2.4. Leadership succession

The contemporary challenge of leadership, in systemic terms, is not only to distribute and develop leadership across space, but also to develop and articulate it over time. Individual leaders must address the needs of and relationships between short-term and long-term improvement within their own tenure (Kotter, 1996; Hopkins, 2001; Schmoker, 2006; Dodd & Favaro, 2007), but must also consider how leadership effects will last beyond them, after they themselves are gone, so their benefits are spread from one leader to the next.

Highly effective schools are often characterised by high leadership stability (James et al., 2006). This can be achieved by individual leaders or leadership teams remaining in their schools for long periods, or by developing clear plans and effective processes for leadership succession. Especially at a time of high demographic turnover in leadership, thinking about and caring for the future is an essential aspect of systemic leadership. Lasting improvement depends on planned succession, leaving a legacy, mentoring new leaders and creating great leadership density and capacity from which future high level leaders will come (MacMillan, 2000; Gronn, 2003; Hargreaves and Fink, 2004; Fink and Brayman, 2006) within a common vision of institutional and societal progress.

2.5. *Lateral leadership*

If the magnitude of school leadership effects is to be increased, leaders will increasingly need to lead “out there” beyond the school, as well as within it, in order to influence the environment that influences their own work with students (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998). School leaders in small towns and rural areas have traditionally stood among the most important leaders in their communities. Indeed, Starratt (2004) argues that to be ethical leaders, school leaders are not just leaders of learning but also serve as community leaders, and as citizens within their wider society. Urbanization, immigration and increases in school size have tended to weaken these relationships between school leaders and their communities, but these and other pressures on families and family life make the wider community responsibilities of the school leaders even more important today. Indeed, leaders of the most successful schools in challenging circumstances are typically highly engaged with and trusted by the schools’ parents and wider community (Harris et al., 2006; James, et al., 2006). Policies that try to improve achievement and wellbeing for children in disadvantaged communities are increasingly requiring leaders to become more involved with other partners beyond the school such as local businesses, sports clubs, faith-based groups and community organizations (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007), and by integrating the work of the school with welfare, law enforcement and other agencies, sometimes on the school site (Epstein, 2001).

School leadership is also increasingly calling for what Michael Fullan (2006) and David Hargreaves (2004) describe as more *lateral leadership* across schools. Top-down policy strategies that turned leaders into managers, or tried to bypass leaders and teachers altogether through mechanical forms of tightly prescribed instruction, have largely reached their limit in raising performance results. At the same time, while the promotion of increased market competition among schools has increased performance in some cases by schools having more control over student selection or staff appointments, subsequent isolation of schools has restricted their opportunities for continuous improvement and professional learning.

Attempts to reduce school isolation and move beyond the limitations of top-down reform have led to the widespread growth of school networks (D. Hargreaves, 2004; Veuglers and O’Hair, 2005) that create improvement gains by schools helping schools, through sharing best practices and “next” practices, especially between the strong and the weak (Shirley and Hargreaves, 2006; Hargreaves, 2007b). More and more educational leaders – principals and teachers – are therefore becoming engaged in lateral, networked leadership, that promotes effective participation in networks, while ensuring that the networks remain tied to clear purposes that are connected to improved learning and achievement (Evans and Johnson, in press).

These various leadership engagements beyond the school, in partnerships with communities, businesses, social agencies, universities, policymakers and other schools on a local, national, and international basis, through face-to-face and virtual means, increase professional learning, enhance improvement through mutual assistance, and create greater cohesion among all those concerned with the achievement and wellbeing of every child. These wider engagements focus leadership beyond the people in leaders’ own buildings to the welfare of all young people in the city, town or region, and to the improvement of the profession and its work as a whole – but in ways that also access learning and support from others in order to provide reciprocal benefits for leaders’ own communities. This articulation and coordination of effort and energy across individuals and institutions and amid common purposes and improvement goals, is what Hopkins (2007) defines as *systemic leadership*.

2.6. Sustainable leadership

Systemic leadership should also be sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership includes the systemic development and articulation of leadership efforts, capacities and learning processes across space, and connects these to the articulation of leadership actions and effects over time through effective succession management as well as successful coordination of short-term and long-range improvement efforts. In sustainable leadership, the integration of leadership efforts within complex systems across space and time, is also anchored in sustaining moral purposes that promote achievement and improvement for all, especially the most disadvantaged, in relation to principles of social justice. Fullan (2005) defines educational sustainability as “*the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose.*”

In their original definition of sustainable leadership and improvement, Hargreaves and Fink (2003) argued that “*sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future.*”

As a result of studying the nature and effects of educational change over more than three decades in eight innovative and traditional secondary schools in two countries, they set out seven interrelated principles of sustainable leadership and improvement.

- *Depth* – sustaining what matters in terms of a clear and defensible moral purpose
- *Breadth* – ensuring that improvements benefit the many across a system, and not just a few exceptional instances within it and that they are a shared and distributed leadership responsibility instead of being dependent on heroic individuals
- *Endurance* – over the long term, across and beyond many leaders, not just within snapshot periods under any one leader’s tenure
- *Justice* – avoiding harm to and promoting active benefit and assistance for others in the surrounding environment
- *Diversity* – so that improvement efforts value, promote and create cohesion within organizational diversity, rather than developing standardised practices that do not allow cross-fertilization of learning and are neither adaptable nor resilient to change
- *Resourcefulness* – through prudent use and deliberate renewal of people’s energy so leadership initiatives and improvement efforts do not burn them out
- *Conservation* – which builds on and learns from the best of the past in order to create a better future

These principles of systemic, sustainable and successful leadership and improvement provide a set of orientating concepts to guide our analysis of the system-wide relationships between leadership and continuous school improvement in one of the world’s most remarkable, recently improved and highest performing national educational and economic systems: Finland.

3. Exploring the Finnish approach

The Finnish example is an interesting and unusual one for the study of systemic leadership and improvement. It provides a context for recent specific innovations in systemic change, which we shall outline later. At the same time, the entire country, its culture and its educational system itself constitutes a particular, prominent and high performing instance of systemic leadership and

improvement. In its distinctiveness and departure from the predominant global educational reform movement of the past 15 years, that has emphasised testing and targets, curriculum prescription and market competition, high performing Finland might in this sense be regarded as one of a number of outlier examples of *positive deviance* from which other nations can learn as they rethink their own reform strategies.

One way to analyze social and educational systems is through different, interrelated “frames” (Bolman and Deal, 2003) or perspectives. Six such frames are moral, learning, cultural, political, technical-structural and leadership frames (Louis, Toole and Hargreaves, 1999). The *moral frame* encompasses the vision and purposes of a society or organisation. The *learning frame* embraces the forms of learning that are valued within organisations and societies, as well as the processes by which people, organisations and societies improve over time. The *cultural frame* concerns the way of life of a people, their attitudes, belief and practices, and the ways that individuals treat one another. The *political frame* concerns the arrangements and distributions of power in relation to the moral vision and the means to achieve it. The *technical/structural* frame refers to the policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, and uses of time and space that express the politics and address the vision. Last, the *leadership frame* addresses the processes of influence and responsibility through which valued goals and identified changes are achieved.

Finland’s distinctiveness and effectiveness as an economic, social and educational success cannot be found in “silver bullets” – in particular practices that can be readily transposed to other countries so they too could experience the “miracle” of educational and economic transformation in the way that Finland has. Rather, it is the intersection and integration of the moral, political, structural, cultural, leadership and learning-based aspects of Finland, within a unitary whole that defines and explain the nation’s success.

For instance, while one of the keys to Finland’s success appears to be high quality of its teachers, efforts to improve teacher quality in other countries through public relations and enhanced pay miss the point that Finnish teachers are drawn to the profession because of the regard in which it is held in relation to helping bolster and build a wider social mission of economic prosperity, cultural creativity and social justice that is central to the Finnish identity. The calibre of Finnish teachers is, in this sense, directly related to the compelling and widely shared nature of their nation’s broader vision.

The Finnish model cannot be copied wholesale, for it is a model or strategy that arises out of alignment between and integration of a deep set of cultural and social values, a particular kind of social and economic state, and a distinctive approach to educational reform. However, the political and cultural differences that characterise Finnish society along with other elements such as relatively small size or ethnic composition should not be used to excuse its relevance and importance for other settings either. Yet again, the temptation to “cherry pick” particular parts of the Finnish strategy for proposed adoption and transference to other nations is equally problematic if any preferred element is not seen in relation to all the others that make up Finland's complex social, economic and educational system. The challenge, rather, is to promote mutual learning and interaction across countries about the deeper principles and practices that underpin Finland's educational model - and adjust these through thoughtful adaptation within different cultures and contexts. It is these processes of intelligent interaction rather than direct transplantation that are indeed at the heart of *positive deviance*.

3.1. A clear and common purpose: competitiveness, creativity, and social justice

Finland is a country that has undergone a profound economic and educational transformation in the past half-century and particularly since a major banking crisis pushed unemployment up to 18% and public debt over 60% of GDP in the early 1990s (Sahlberg, 2007). From being a rural backwater

economy, Finland has transformed itself into a high performing economic powerhouse. In the few short years of the twenty-first century, Finland has already been ranked as the world's most competitive economy by the World Economic Forum (Porter et al., 2004). Educationally, in OECD's 2003 and 2006 PISA results (OECD, 2004 and 2007), Finland's 15 year olds ranked top in reading, mathematics and science, while in equity terms displaying the lowest variance between schools – just one tenth of the OECD average (OECD, 2004 and 2007).

At the core of Finland's remarkable transformation, is the nation's long-standing and also recently reinvented struggle to develop and be guided by clear objectives that bind its people together. After visiting and interviewing students, teachers, principals, system administrators, university researchers and senior ministry officials, a remarkably unified narrative began to surface about the country, its schools and their sense of aspiration, struggle and destiny.

Finland is a nation that has endured almost seven centuries of control by two nations (Sweden and Russia) between which it remains sandwiched– and has achieved true independence only within the last three generations. In the context of this historical legacy, and in the face of a harsh and demanding climate and northern geography, it is not surprising that one of the most popular Finnish sayings translates as “It was long, and it was hard, but we did it!”

Yet it is not simply stoic perseverance, fed by a Lutheran religious ethic of hard work and resilience that explains Finland's success as a high performing educational system and economy. At the core of this country's success and sustainability is its capacity to reconcile, harmonize and integrate those elements that have divided other developed economies and societies – a prosperous, high performing economy and a socially just society. It has also done this in a way that connects the country's sense of its history to the struggle for its future destiny. While some say that the knowledge economy has a weakened welfare state in many other societies, in Finland, a strong welfare state is a central to support and sustain a successful economy.

In *The Information Society and the Welfare State*, Castells and Himanen (2002, p. 166) describe how

“Finland shows that a fully fledged welfare state is not incompatible with technological innovation, with the development of the information society, and with a dynamic, competitive new economy. Indeed, it appears to be a decisive contributing factor to the growth of this new economy on a stable basis.”

They also contrast the Finish approach to other market oriented models, stating that

“Finland stands in sharp contrast to the Silicon Valley model that is entirely driven by market mechanisms, individual entrepreneurialism, and the culture of risk – with considerable social costs, acute social inequality and a deteriorating basis for both locally generated human capital and economic infrastructure.” (Castells and Himanen, 2007, p 167)

At the centre of this successful integration is Finland's educational system (Aho, Pitkanen and Sahlberg, 2006). As the respondents interviewed by the OECD team indicated at all levels, Finns are driven by a common and articulately expressed social vision that connects a creative and prosperous future – as epitomized by the Nokia telecommunications company whose operation and suppliers account for about 40% of the country's GDP (Haikio, 2002) – to the people's sense of themselves as having a creative history and social identity. One of the schools we visited was just two miles from the home of Finland's composer Sibelius. And the visual, creative and performing arts are an integral part

of children's education and lifelong learning all through and even beyond their secondary school experience.

Technological creativity and competitiveness, therefore, do not break Finns from their past but connect them to it in a unitary narrative of lifelong learning and societal development. All this occurs within a strong welfare state that supports and steers (a favorite Finnish word) the educational system and the economy. A strong public education system provides education free of charge as a universal right all the way through school and higher education. Science and technology are high priorities, though not at the expense of artistic creativity. Almost 3% of GDP is allocated to scientific and technological development and a national committee that includes leading corporate executives and university vice chancellors, and that is chaired by the Prime Minister, steers and integrates economic and educational strategy.

As Finnish commentators and analysts have also remarked, all this educational and economic integration occurs within a society that values children, education and social welfare, that has high regard for education and educators as servants of the public good, that ranks teaching as the most desired occupation of high school graduates, and that is therefore able to make entry into teaching demanding and highly competitive, with only one in ten applicants to teaching being admitted (Aho, Pitkanen and Sahlberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2007).

These interrelated emphases in Finland's overall educational and social vision were evident at all levels in the interviews we held with Finnish educators. Directors at the National Board of Education described how educators were "willing to cooperate for national goals" and that this was "a way for them to ...really have their voice heard at the national level." In forging future directions, while the National Curriculum Council is "very future oriented", it also tries to determine "what is the best we can learn from the past, (in order to) try heavily to look into the future and what is happening in the world and then analyze the present."

Staff in an upper secondary school we visited emphasized how both "culture and innovation are important for our kids nowadays." The district's leader stressed the importance of Finland's historic creativity as being essential to its goals and vision. Indeed, Finland has the highest number of musical composers per capita of any nation in the world. This is part of, not separate from the country's embracing of technological innovation and creativity – as we saw in discussions with the upper secondary school students and their commitment to innovative graphic design as well as traditional visual art work outside and within scheduled school time. As a member of Jarvenpää's education committee explained, all this is made possible within a strong welfare state where the school system is free for everyone, from daycare to higher education.

This bringing together of past and future, of technological innovation and traditional creativity, occurs in part through the setting of a strategic vision at national and also local levels. Through consultation and discussion, the National Board develops national guidelines that provide the support and strategic thinking which, in the words of its director, promote "intensive cooperation all the time". With the support of educational research, the National Board provides a "steering system" for educational policies in an evidence-based way, through small funding, evaluation, and curriculum content. Within this generally understood social vision, the state steers but does not prescribe in detail the national curriculum, with trusted teams of highly qualified teachers writing much of the curriculum together at the level of the municipality, in ways that adjust to the students they know best.

There is also strategic thinking and planning at the district level. Helsinki, for example, is setting a new vision for 2012 (with benchmarks after three years) with every school discussing what the vision along with desired objectives might mean for them. Emphasizing the principle of vision being

developed in a participatory rather than imposed way, this municipality uses the “balanced scorecard” method of including different participants and assessment perspectives (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Another municipality has similarly set its vision and values that inspire learning and creativity, and also undertakes a system-wide analysis of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. One of the district’s principals pointed out that “the vision here is so close to the national view. Only a few things have been added on in the history of Jarvenpää (famous artists, for example), so kids have some idea of roots and can be proud of the town”.

Adherence to vision and goals is often implicit and shared through daily cooperation, rather than explicitly developed through a strategic plan.

A District Director argued that within the national steering system, *We just pick things up, not in a systematic way. These values are easy to find at the national level – we are taking part in many seminars, etc... working together, managers and directors. (While our) values are quite similar, we have freedom in how we organize.*

An educator at a school in Tampere put it, *“every teacher asks what can I do to make this place better for the teachers and the pupils ... Why are we here?”*

To sum up: Finland has defined and defended a particular value system that connects contemporary innovation and traditional creativity within a strong welfare state that structurally and culturally supports high economic competitiveness. In doing so, Finland reconciles the information economy and the welfare state and connects the country’s history within a delicate balance between change and stability and future destiny. Through a financial, legislative and curricular steering system, improvement and development are achieved through shared values, high participation and widespread cooperation. Public education is seen as vital to the country’s growth and security, and the shared high regard for educators who are seen as central to this generational mission, draws highly qualified candidates into the teaching profession. In this sense, the high quality and performance of Finland’s educational system cannot be divorced from the clarity, characteristics of, and broad consensus upon the country’s broader social vision. Finland’s *systemic leadership* is in this respect, a fundamental kind of *moral leadership* that means much more than raising the bar and closing the achievement gap (Fullan, 2006; Hopkins, 2007). Instead, in Finland, there is compelling clarity about and commitment to inclusive, equitable and innovative social values beyond as well as within the educational system.

3.2. A commitment to learning: in depth and in breadth

Finland is a puzzling paradox of learning performance. This country – the world’s leader in measured student performance – places no emphasis on nor does it give any particular place to individual testing or measurement driven accountability. Though its scores are outstanding in reading and mathematics, it has no regular tests for reading and mathematics achievement, it does not consume large parts of the curriculum with the separate teaching of these skills and subjects, and it does not download structured reading and mathematics programs to younger age groups to enhance skill development.

Finland’s high performance seems more attributable to a conceptualisation, commitment to and widespread culture of learning in school and society more widely. Learning, and especially literacy, begin early, if somewhat informally in the home and in preschool within a society where learning and teaching are highly valued and where play as well as talk are emphasised. It was this that the Head of Jarvenpää’s Education Committee attributed to success in PISA.

The whole society is respecting teaching and schools. People are reading a lot (for instance, through) fairy tales. Mothers (with generous parental leave benefits) can be home for three years. There is a good library system. All teachers are studying in universities, so are highly educated.

With formal school starting in children's seventh year (later than all other developed countries), and then extending for nine years, Finland exemplifies the principle of *slow schooling* described by Honoré (2004) as leading patiently to sustainable success (also Hargreaves and Fink, 2006), compared to the rush to raise test scores quickly.

Valuing lifelong learning in the way that is characteristic of all Nordic countries, Finland has no system of standardised or high stakes testing and therefore does not expend time and resources on test development and test preparation (Sahlberg, 2006). Rather, it has a broad curriculum that is not preoccupied with tested basics. Maths and sciences are important for business and economic development, but so too are artistic and other forms of creativity that have long contributed to the Finnish identity – as we witnessed in Jarvenpää's upper secondary school.

Interestingly, Finnish teachers have a reputation for “pedagogical conservatism” (Simola, 2005). In some classrooms we visited we did indeed see children listening to their teachers, undertaking individual seatwork and engaging in whole-class question-and-answers. We did not see explicit examples of, for instance, attending to students' multiple intelligences or learning styles; nor did we see sophisticated strategies of cooperative learning where children are allocated precise roles in their groupwork. However, we did observe groupwork of a different kind – in a middle school lesson where student groups were quietly and gently cooperating on researching and producing reports on different Finnish towns and regions in an informal manner. Thus, even cooperative work seems to be quietly conservative rather than technically complex or dramatic. One school principal captured the essence of this seeming pedagogical conservatism in these terms:

We have many, many good practices but we are not describing it and its theoretical basis and we just do it, in Finland. Unlike the USA, we just do, we don't make publications.

In bright and well equipped schools with small classes of less than 30 students, teachers care for their students and appear to know them well without the assistance of complex technologies of individual assessments or a sophisticated array of disaggregated test score data. Caring for children and for one another is a prime societal and professional value, especially for those who have the greatest difficulty. Educators at one school we visited explained that Finland performs well not by creating geniuses but by lifting up each child from the bottom. Their goal is for there to be “no social exclusion in (their) school, so that nobody is forgotten”. In their own school, they observed, if a child began to behave differently or unusually, the teacher would immediately ask the child why, talk to their parents perhaps, then swiftly converse with other teachers who taught the same child to share perceptions and strategies. There are teams that meet three times each week to discuss how to help children with problems. This somewhat informal but highly insistent pattern of early intervention then extends to the welfare committee if necessary, where teachers, administrators, nurses and counsellors address individual student problems before they escalate into major crises (Grubb et al., 2005).

This unhurried yet insistent culture of lifelong learning and attentive care is enhanced by high quality teaching. Other nations are experimenting with ways of rewarding differential performance within the established teaching profession. Teaching is already an attractive and desired profession in Finland. It has high status in a learner-centred society where it contributes to the wider social mission. In a society with high taxation and relatively modest income differentials, teaching is paid quite satisfactorily. Working conditions and resources are supportive, schools are well-equipped, and like other professionals, teachers enjoy considerable trust and autonomy. Teaching is highly competitive and attracts high performing secondary school graduates (Westbury et al., 2005). Professional entry also requires Masters' degrees. Teacher training blends theoretical and practical components, and continuing professional development is becoming more integrated into the collective life and needs of the school.

Thus, in Finland, a strong learning culture in school and society gives rise to and is supported by a strong teaching culture. Performance and quality issues and needs are therefore addressed at the point of professional entry through mission, status, rewards, respect and conditions. As a result, resources and energy do not have to be directed at rectifying poor performance later on.

The culture of learning that underpins Finnish school performance is also evident in the pervasive and increasing attention that educators pay to self-evaluation as a way to improve their schools. A group of Helsinki principals argued that “we are a learning organisation”. They worked together wanting to “share good ideas and practice”. An evaluation process, using teams of one principal and two teachers, helped them to achieve this. System administrators repeatedly referred to the method and importance of giving schools resources to solve their own problems. A small group of principals in Helsinki was beginning to use more quantitative data within self-evaluation processes, finding that teachers are “sometimes surprised by the data”. We will return to the use of self-evaluation in our later discussion of political accountability.

To sum up: learning rather than measured performance defines the focus and the form of systemic leadership in Finnish education. Learning and teaching are valued throughout schools and society, learning starts early but is unhurried and untested, and learning is broad and lifelong rather than concentrated on test preparation. Teacher quality and performance are addressed by establishing the appropriate conditions to attract high level professionals through good working conditions, clear purpose, status, autonomy and reward. Improvement of schools that employ these highly capable and trusted professionals is achieved by processes of self-evaluation within learning organisations that are allocated national and local government resources so they can solve problems for themselves. System leadership, in this sense, is leadership for learning, leadership by learning and leadership as learning – not leadership for performance and testing.

3.3. Culture: trust, cooperation and responsibility

Systemic leadership is also cultural leadership (Deal and Peterson, 1999). It involves inspiring, stimulating and supporting people to strengthen commitment, raise aspirations and improve performance through shared beliefs and purposes expressed in common practices and ways of life (Leithwood et al., 2006). Organisational cultures can be strong or weak, collaborative or individualistic, trusting or suspicious (Hargreaves, 1994). A key task of leadership is to create strong and positive cultures that motivate and mobilise people to achieve the organisation’s purpose.

At the heart of the human relationships that comprise Finland’s educational system and society is a strong and positive culture of *trust, cooperation* and *responsibility*. From the classroom to the Ministry of Education, this trinity of terms was reiterated to our visiting team many times as the key factor that explained performance, problem solving, improvement and accountability.

Finland’s highly qualified teachers have a palpable sense of responsibility to all students and their welfare. This responsibility is not just that of Lutheran hard work and diligence, but a concern for the welfare of individuals, as well as the community within the wider vision of Finnish society. We have already described the authentic emphasis on leaving no child behind, and on there being “no exclusion” as one principal put it. Teachers are not only concerned about the welfare of their own children during the time they see them, but of all students in the school, and at one of the schools we visited, they meet regularly to discuss these students’ welfare. Similarly, the principals who met together in the city of Tampere work together to benefit students in the whole city rather than concentrating on giving a competitive edge to the children in their own school.

Problems are repeatedly solved through cooperation. As a Ministry official explained, “if you give resources to them, they find a way to solve the problem”. Teachers work together to support students experiencing difficulty. If a school has a weak or ineffective principal, then, as one school explained, “the vice principal or some of the other teachers take responsibility for curriculum work at the school level”. If people in a school are not leading well, the strategy is not to fire them but, in the words of a Tampere administrator, to “try to develop them, actually”.

Principals are required to have been teachers, and all principals, even those in large secondary schools, do some teaching every week. With these preceding and continuing connections to teaching, along with affiliation to the same union, leaders do not see themselves nor are they perceived as “the boss” over the teachers. Relationships are not very hierarchical and in schools, it is often difficult to distinguish teachers from support staff. Good leadership, rather, is shared leadership in creating “an environment at school where people are happy doing their work (but not just what they want)”.

One principal with considerable comparative experience explained that relationships between principals and teachers are closer in Finland than in the rest of Europe. *(They are) not so theoretical but practical (in) working with teachers.* In that respect, *“PISA success depends on school climate and classroom climate”, rather than on authoritarian intervention.*

Team structures and processes, which we witnessed in our school visits, enact and enhance these principles of cooperation. In one of the schools we visited, long-term teams were concerned with issues of syllabus, planning and scheduling, professional development, subject organisations, school festivals, theme days, information and communication technology, and recreation/welfare. A key theme of cooperation and interpersonal communication within schools is the teaching-learning process itself, with a special attention to those needing extra support and special care. Special needs educators, who are present and have a distinct position in regular school life play a key role in this area. Short-term teams were also concerned with festivals as well as counselling, immigration and the role of school support staff. Team membership was rotated every three years or so to increase learning and understanding across boundaries.

Although a Ministerial Yellow Book written four years ago emphasised the importance of shared leadership, people commented that cooperation was not always put to the best use.

A key member of the National Board of Education expressed it as follows: *“We are individualistic people in schools. It is not genuinely collaborative. We make a team but it’s not real collaboration. We are responsible people. We go to a team and make use of it but still need to learn real collaboration. We are good at cooperation but still working with collaboration.”*

At a school we visited, for instance, cooperation was restricted to affairs affecting the managerial work, as well as welfare and social functions of the school. Teacher leadership seemed to involve delegation of managerial tasks rather than working together to inquire into and improve student learning. One or two teachers were distinctly unhappy about how these new managerial responsibilities infringed upon their teaching time and created additional workload for them that did not appear to assist their classroom teaching – a classic case of what is termed *contrived collegiality* (Hargreaves, 1994). Although cooperation might produce heightened effectiveness, continuous improvement and dramatic transformation in teaching and learning require more thoroughgoing within-school collaboration that currently seems less evident in Finland. As long as current effectiveness remains high, this may not be an important issue, but if changes threaten existing effectiveness, this limitation in *collaborative* rather than merely *cooperative* capacity could prove serious.

Beyond the school, as well as within it, cooperation and responsibility are part of a powerful culture of trust. There is increasing evidence that high trust educational systems produce higher standards (Bryk and Schneider, 2004). The National Board both expresses and attracts high trust.

According to a representative of the National Board “We trust the expertise of our principals and teachers. We respect that expertise and we try to understand what is happening in the everyday life of schools and what questions have to be worked with and we try to combine that with issues, interests and needs of the future at the national level.”

In return, as academics from the Centre for Continuing Education put it, “people in the field don’t hate people in this (Ministry) building. It’s more cooperative. It’s an informal way of distributed leadership”. A local authority committee chair emphasized that they “want(ed) staff to feel they have respect and have opportunities for training and to learn more”.

Administrative staff in another local authority echoed arguments we heard elsewhere about the importance of trust even and especially in conditions of failure and difficulty.

At these times, instead of removing staff, exerting control or imposing interventions, the local authority asks: “How can we help the school? What were the things that went wrong? ... The knowledge (of how to solve the problem) is in the school and we have very capable principals. You have to trust. Trust is the first thing. We try to help rather than count the budget. If there’s a problem, we are sitting together and thinking “what can we do?” Principals are highly valued in our society. We don’t want to fail. We want to support, give more training.”

Principals and teachers are trusted, to a degree, because of their high qualifications, expertise and widespread commitment and responsibility. And this trust is actively built through deliberately created structures and initiatives. This is evident in:

- *Networks*: adapted from business ideas and companies like Nokia as ways to spread knowledge and improvement across schools. National projects always have “very strong and big networks” for cooperating with national authorities, in forums where people “learn and work from each other”. Municipalities stressed the importance of all teachers participating in local and school-based processes as well as in curriculum development. Some commentators argue that networks spread good practices through disease-like processes of infection (D. Hargreaves 2004; Hopkins, 2007). But networks really spread ideas multiply, transformatively and interactively through deliberate though not linear processes of learning and experimentation – more like the spread of good health practices than ones of infectious disease.
- *Targets*: which are shared at the local level through action plans rather than imposed by political or administrative means.
- *Self-evaluation*: as the key to continuous improvement rather than imposed inspections or test-based accountability that rank schools competitively on the basis of their test scores.

To sum up: Through these relationships of responsibility, cooperation and trust, Finland exhibits a pattern of systemic leadership in strong cultures of lateral and vertical teamwork, networking, participation, target-setting and self-evaluation. Hierarchies are not feared, and interventions (as compared to cooperative problem solving) are virtually unknown. There are signs that cooperation may not yet have fully developed into more rigorous and challenging processes of collaboration focused more closely on teaching and learning, and this could prove problematic if Finland’s system is placed under stress. But for now, high performing Finland rests on a culture of high-trust, actively engaged and cooperative professional relationships.

3.4. Politics: subsidiarity and participation

The politics of systemic leadership in Finland involves a particular kind of subsidiarity, participation and empowerment. This empowerment is not contrived, but it is fundamental to the way participatory politics is undertaken in Finnish society. In conjunction with the culture of trust, cooperation and responsibility, these forms of political participation strengthen senses of involvement and security while encouraging people to innovate and take risks. Risk and security are therefore integral to rather than opposites of one another and are essential to the Finnish form of leadership.

One of the principals put it, “if there is good leadership and strategy, people feel better, and if people feel better, leadership becomes better”.

Finland has reformed itself and its educational system since the 1970s, maintaining a strong reform impetus that has always carried with it strong public and professional consensus (Aho et al., 2006). From being a centrally planned and hierarchical system in the 1970s, the Finnish educational system has been transformed, following the economic collapse of the early 1990s, into a highly decentralised system of governance. The National Curriculum steers overall policy direction and sets a broad curriculum framework – for instance specifying a syllabus of 75 courses and 18 different subjects including six compulsory courses – at the national level. Within this broad steering system, considerable decision-making power is devolved to the country’s trusted municipalities.

There are 416 Local Education Authorities in Finland, most of them small communes, though the largest encompass whole cities. These municipalities have great powers – including allocating budgets between education, health and social services, designing and distributing curriculum specific to the schools and the municipality, determining the appointment criteria for principals, and conducting self-evaluations.

This means that municipal leadership takes on extraordinary importance, in the words of the Department staff, as it “tries to support every school to be successful.” Social and health authorities have to work together within municipalities and so do schools. Indeed, cooperation within municipalities is on the increase, as we will explain in the next chapter. According to the background report for this study (Ministry of Education Finland, 2007) in their own curriculum document, schools are obliged to present how they cooperate with other schools. Exactly how they do so varies, however, as there are different approaches across municipalities. In the city of Javenpää, for example, all comprehensive schools follow the municipal level common curriculum which has been created in a city-wide cooperative effort with the participation of several hundreds of teachers, led by the municipal department of education. In other cases, such as Helsinki and Tampere, although the municipality plays a very active role in supporting the preparation of school level curricula as well as encouraging intensive cooperation in this area among schools, this does not go as far as planning a common city-level curriculum.

Among education leaders, the heads of the departments of education in municipalities can exert strong influence on educational development in Finland, in general, and on the development of school level leadership, in particular. While there is a national requirement for selecting principals (management training qualifications or equivalent experience), municipalities for example can refine the criteria to choose whether principals should have managerial power or rather be pedagogical leaders. Some of the municipal leaders have explicit and pronounced concepts about how school leadership should be organised and improved and they take effective steps to achieve these ideas. We saw, for instance, a very strong commitment by the head of the education department of a municipality in favour of school-level collective leadership. She demands that all schools establish and operate *executive teams*. When meeting the leaders of the schools in order to discuss questions related with

their work, she prefers to meet the whole team instead of only with the principal. In this municipality, professional development is provided and purchased not only for the principal but also for all members of the executive teams. Leadership at municipal level is shared, among others, between professional administrators (e.g. the head of the educational section of the mayor's office) and elected politicians (e.g. the head of the municipal education committee). Through this linkage, education is connected to broader community affairs. This connection is reinforced by the integration of educational administration into overall local administration including urban planning, local economic development, health and social care, housing or culture. Educational leadership in this context is strongly influenced by the broader reforms of state administration or municipal governance. This includes economic and business reforms.

The municipal educational leaders we met in Helsinki, Järvenpää and Tampere all used notions and applied procedures coming from business management, such as the use of purchasers and providers and the *balanced score card* approach. This openness towards the world of business and its management approaches seemed to be in harmony with their commitment to pupils' welfare and to the improvement of learning. Being efficient public managers and playing the role of pedagogical leaders did not seem to create role conflicts for them. Compared to many other countries, Finnish forms of educational and social thinking see that efficiency and competitiveness are in synergy with notions of education, cooperation and creativity.

Because of the decentralised nature of the system, leadership practices vary between the different municipalities in Finland. In the municipalities we visited, systemic leadership rests on principles of subsidiarity: within a broad vision, legislative arrangements and funding structures, decision-making is moved to the level of those most able to secure implementation of them in practice. This approach is also evident in Finland's distinctive approaches to assessment, accountability and intervention.

Finland does not have a system of standardised testing or test-based accountability. It does not have systems of competitive choice between schools or order its schools in public performance rankings. In the words of school leadership training providers we met, "all schools must be good enough and there is no reason to have elite schools and bad schools". If schools have difficulty, the government does not intervene punitively but opts for self-correcting systems of support and assistance.

Instead, there is an emphasis on evaluation for improvement, especially through school self-evaluation which is incorporated into national evaluations. Through this system of self-evaluation, networking, participation and cooperation, the system is able to "build cooperative structures and hear the weak signals." The system then responds to these through training, support and assistance from the municipality and other schools in ways that are calmly cooperative rather than dramatic or crisis-driven. In terms of complexity theory, Finland, like its emblematic corporation, Nokia, is a self-correcting, complex system in which negative deviance is rectified through participation and interaction rather than public exposure and intervention.

There is a cost to this, for where those who are failing do not respond to being developed, or teachers do not cover adequately for ailing or failing leaders, there is almost no provision for rapid intervention and it can typically take two years, we were told, to remove incompetent individuals from the profession. But, in line with the OECD statistics on equity and school differences in Finland, these instances seem rather rare and the country is prepared to endure such a small number in order to maintain the overall high standards of learning and performance in its high-trust system.

To sum up: systemic leadership in Finland and its educational system rests on political principles of subsidiarity and decentralization, along with widespread participation and improvement within

complex systems of support and networking by self-correcting evaluation and interaction rather than punitive intervention.

3.5. Leadership: systemic but not yet sustainable?

Principals in Finland are required by law to have been teachers themselves and most continue to be engaged in classroom teaching for at least 2-3 hours and many up to 20 lessons per week. This lends them credibility among their teachers, enables them to remain connected to their children, and ensures that pedagogical leadership is not merely rhetoric but a day-to-day reality. How is it, we asked, that principals could still teach as well as lead in their high performing educational system? “Because”, one said, “unlike other countries, we do not have to spend our time responding to long lists of government initiatives that come from the top.” Indeed, principals and national government officials each explained to us their concern for moderating the number, pace and range of reforms so that schools did not spend excessive time reacting to initiatives from the outside.

These combined factors help explain how, at this time, distributed leadership is an emergent and endemic feature of Finnish schools, more than something which individual actors assign to or delegate to others as a way to get policy implemented. In the conception of key writers in the field, distributed leadership here is not a set of practices initiated and handled by principals or senior officials. Leadership, rather, is already distributed throughout the culture and organisation of the schools (Crowther et al., 2002; Spillane, 2006).

Principals and teachers are regarded by many in Finland as a “society of experts”. In one municipality, the upper secondary school was described as “an organisation of experts who know their subjects and teach them well.” This evokes one of the classic categories of the typology of organisations by Mintzberg (1979): the one in which operations are based on the autonomous personal decisions of professionals who might follow various protocols and standards but typically make independent judgments.

In the words of a member of the national Principal’s Council: *“Working in schools is easy because we don’t have principals acting like a big manager. It’s more like a society of experts. We really share things because principals also have pedagogical understanding and that’s important. They have to know how to do the job and they still teach during the week. You really know how the work is. You are not just sitting higher and acting like a big manager.”*

The operation of this “society of experts” is seen as being neither authoritarian, nor especially academic, but a cooperative and (according to Finland’s long-standing cultural traditions), practical craft-like activity. The system gets “good results from good people”. Innovations, we were told, can and do emerge from almost anywhere – not just from government strategy, but also, often, within and among the “society of experts” itself. One principal, for example, described how innovations can come from the principal, the teachers, or government projects – when principals and teachers then sit down together to discuss what to do about it. As a member of the National Board of Education explained, when teachers or principals have a “very devoted idea” they “get an idea, compose a group, develop an initiative and ask, is that ok in our school?” As many educators testified, there is “not a big gap” between teachers and principals, and as we saw earlier, teachers could, if necessary, assume the running of the school if for some reason, such as illness or crisis, the principal was no longer capable of doing so.

At an upper secondary school, we saw how this seemingly effortless, informal and endemic approach to distributed leadership also encompassed the students. The school operates an efficient network of student tutors. Learning is organized on a course basis, with students having greater autonomy to determine their own learning paths through them according to their individual interests –

including courses provided by other upper secondary schools. The student tutoring process allows the organisation to maintain the high levels of diversity and complexity that are favourable for change and adaptation.

The distributed leadership with and among students is not just a structural matter of roles and responsibilities, but a cultural issue as well. Leadership, these confident yet quietly spoken students said, was “shared”. They “always cooperate,” “can be relaxed and calm,” find the principal “easy to talk to” and regard some teachers “like friends” in a community where there is “always someone who can help you.” Yet, as is true of Finnish schools from the earliest years (Honoré, 2004), within their culture of distributed leadership students also have to “learn to be responsible” themselves.

Increasingly, however, while this informal, endemic approach to distributed leadership remains dominant, it is being supplemented by formal systems of teamwork and decision-making – cooperating together on self-evaluation, setting targets related to the school’s action plan, working on welfare issues with nurses and social workers, and spending time on students identified with special educational needs. We have already described how these systems are being extended into elaborate systems of team decision making in one school (Linnainnaa) to deal with social events, children’s welfare, management of the school timetable and related issues. It is the principal’s task to compose many of these teams, steer their work and pull them together.

In contrast to the widely articulated views of principals being one more contributor to a “society of experts”, these developments help explain why another view was represented with equal strength. For some, the principal is “responsible for nearly everything” – budget allocation (which is devolved to the school except in small municipalities), interpretation and implementation of legislation, staff appointments, human resource management, professional development provision, action plans and target setting, and also the “soft skills” of teamwork and team building. Principals are also responsible for dealing with parent requests and complaints in a system where parents are regarded as having considerable power. As one principal wryly observed, schools have to have a principal because “someone has to be guilty!” The extent of these responsibilities and associated influence varies according to school size – with leaders in small schools having to “do everything” themselves, while those in larger schools are more able to exercise leadership of and among colleagues.

Whether principals are becoming more prominent or whether they remain part of the “society of experts”, it is clear that pressure on principals and extensions of their responsibilities include:

- *Declining enrolments* requiring increased cooperation with other schools to provide curriculum or share other resources
- *Declining resources* due to the burden that impending retirements of the baby boom generation are already placing on Finland’s social state and its available expenditure for public education
- *Increase attention to special educational needs* in a society that compared to other OECD nations categorises and includes greater proportions of special education students, and that will see increases with rising rates of immigration impacting upon the schools
- More emphasis within schools and municipalities on *integrating educational provision with health and social services*
- *Self-evaluation and auditing* responsibilities that characterize Finland’s distinctive rather than standardised-test based approach to quality assurance

- Continued emphasis among principals on their teaching contributions as well as on their increased leadership responsibilities

The result of these pressures on the existing leadership role of principals is a feeling that the job entails “more and more work and responsibilities”. Shortage of time, increased pressure, expanded scope and accumulating senses of overload – these are the mounting burdens of the Finnish principalship. And, to take matters even further, these problems are taking place within a growing crisis of generational succession among Finnish school leaders. Four factors are responsible for this succession challenge.

1. Demographic turnover – in line with patterns in many other educational systems and in common with other work sectors, around 60% of Finnish principals are slated to retire within the next few years. By the admission of Ministry staff and senior members of the principal’s association alike, there currently seems to be no coherent national strategy to address this serious situation of generational leadership succession.
2. Increased overload –the autonomy of Finnish principals and the comparatively modest amount of reform demands to which they are subject may be the envy of counterparts in some countries. Yet the increasing demands of self-evaluation, auditing, action planning, special educational provision, and collaboration with health and social services; and now leadership of teacher teams, are real and seen as relatively onerous compared to the past. This increased scope of principalship in conditions where existing duties persist and where teaching responsibilities remain (especially in smaller schools), means that the traditional supply line of successors from within the school may be drying up because potential successors do not perceive the work and overload of their principals as being attractive. The current challenge of principal succession in Finland may be that the exits doors far outnumber the entrances.
3. Insufficient incentives – existing principals recognize and Ministry staff acknowledge that the current pay structure does not offer sufficiently attractive salaries to entice teachers into the principalship. Teachers in hard-to-staff subjects or in smaller schools (principals’ pay is linked to school size) can earn more than their principal – in these cases, movement into the principalship can at first carry an active financial disincentive. Local authorities make appointments within national salary frameworks of collective bargaining. However, participation of principals and teachers in the same union and collective bargaining process, along with a long-standing ethic that diminishes differences between the two groups who are seen as all being members of a “society of experts” – decreases the likelihood of preferential salary awards being made to principals, even though this might improve career paths, recruitment and succession.
4. Inadequate training – There is a National Qualification for principalship and most principals possess it. This provides training in policy planning, budget preparation, managing self-evaluation and leadership issues in terms of managing and developing relationships with parents, pupils and teachers. For existing principals, though, there is not a “strong tradition of good leadership training,” so national officials told us, because the high trust system of working with quality teachers largely enabled principals promoted through their schools to develop their own roles and their skills on the job. But falling rolls and school closures mean that leadership cannot always now be learned on the job. High turnover will necessitate greater mobility and more open recruitment processes, so that the incidence of learning to lead and manage one’s existing school is likely to decrease. Last, the increased management responsibilities in self evaluation and working with other agencies, for example, call for new

knowledge and skill sets that cannot just be acquired internally. External provision of in-service training however, is currently uneven at best. The “universities are very independent,” though they are cooperating more with the National Board. Some larger local authorities like Helsinki and Tampere are also developing partnerships with and purchasing services from local universities, but these opportunities are not nearly so accessible in smaller or more isolated municipalities. As a result of these inadequate and uneven forms of existing leadership support, National Board officials remarked that “principals call all the time to the Board” because the support system is insufficient.

A number of strategies for tackling this disturbing succession scenario were raised by the many educators we interviewed – some of them more prominent, and some more promising than others. Drawing on them and our comparative experience elsewhere, there appear to be at least seven possibilities.

1. *Work longer and harder:* The national default strategy at the moment is to get existing principals to work longer, beyond the expected retirement age. This stop-gap solution is obviously unsustainable. Many principles of retirement age are capable of offering only a few more years at best, the experiences of overload will increase as the aging process affects them, and they will be poor exemplars of effectiveness as their performance starts to decline. A better use of principal experience as leaders reach the end of their careers is not to extend it, but transfer it through processes of mentoring younger and beginning principals.
2. *Lighten the leadership role:* One way to increase leadership capacity, as in the case of water capacity, is to reduce demand (Hatch, 2002). This argument makes eminent sense in reform contexts that accelerate and intensify the pressures on principals. Less initiatives and leaner bureaucracy make sense (Fullan, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). But by principals’ own admission, Finnish educational reform requirements have increased only modestly compared to many other countries, and scaling them back might arguably undermine existing improvement efforts as well as adaptation to change.
3. *Improve training support:* In an era of increasing change, it is no longer viable for teachers to learn how to be principals mainly by watching, and then replacing their own principals in their own schools. Nor is a national qualifying course sufficient to carry principals through the subsequent, shifting complexities of their work. The existing unevenness of predominantly localised forms of inset provision of leaders, suggests a need to create a stronger, more coherent national system of leadership preparation training and development. This might be achieved through the National Board, the principals’ and teachers’ associations, a confederation of Local Authorities or a newly created organization. But the need for a national strategy of training and support for existing school leaders now seems evident.
4. *Increase the strength of leadership roles:* The Finnish principalship appears paradoxical. Principals are widely viewed as pedagogical leaders, but this role is exercised in a largely practical and informal way rather than a result of information about pedagogical science, or evidence of pupil achievement. Likewise, while principals are seen as part of a society of experts, they are also the ones who have all the guilt and who shoulder most of the school-wide responsibilities. In times of relative stability, this paradox is sustainable. Principals can be “first among equals”, working with and representing the community they have been part of and within which they have risen. But when the pace of change quickens, scrutiny becomes more serious, immigration increases and special needs expands, then some individuals, especially principals, perhaps need to lead more decisively. Members of the Centre for Continuing Education explained this is already occurring to some degree – since

the budget crisis of the 1990s called for strong leadership to orchestrate planning, set priorities and reaffirm values. Teachers, they explained, therefore increasingly recognise that “when one really has to push things”, then one needs stronger leadership.

5. *Redistribute leadership:* The demands on the principalship can be eased if responsibilities can be shared around or distributed among other adults in the school building. The existing culture of informal cooperation in Finnish schools provides fertile ground for deepening and widening the process of distribution to include other tasks and responsibilities. The team management structures at Linnainnaa were designed in part to ease the internal workload of principals at a time when external demands were increasing. Some teachers welcomed the opportunity, feeling the new system “gave a chance for every teacher to be heard”. One very experienced teacher conceded that she learned much about her school and the development of her own skills by participating in the team management process. Many teachers on these committees found themselves “leading for the first time”. Equally, though, other teachers complained of shortages of time, of responsibilities that drew them away from their own children and classes, and of tasks that seemed disconnected from the core responsibilities for teaching and learning. Such instances of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994) can create cynicism about the cooperative process and they serve as a warning that distributed leadership needs to extend beyond allocation of tasks to teams, and more into shared responsibilities for improving teaching and learning where everyone, not just the principal, becomes pedagogical leaders.
6. *Improve pay incentives:* Many of the foregoing measures can turn the principalship into something that is achievable and is seen to be so. At this point, the disincentives of the existing pay structure where some teachers earn more than their principals, need to be eliminated. Establishing separate bargaining units for principals might help achieve this, but should not do so at the cost of the cooperative “society of equals” that makes the existing system work so well. Linking rewards to criteria other than school size is also worthy of consideration. The challenge is not so much to increase the financial incentives that might draw people into the principalship, but to remove the disincentives that discourage them from taking this path.
7. *Develop systemic, cross-school leadership:* Last, leadership and improvement effects can be increased if leaders cooperate, share resources, provide mutual support and inquire into improvement together *across* schools, within and beyond their municipalities. Such innovative forms of lateral, systemic leadership are the subject of new initiatives in Finland, and the focus of the next chapter in this report.

3.6. Some conclusions on the Finnish success story

Finland contains essential lessons for nations that aspire, educationally and economically, to be successful and also sustainable knowledge societies – beyond an age of low-skill standardisation. Building a future by wedding it to the past; supporting not only pedagogical change but also continuity; incorporating education and educational reform into a common and compelling social mission; fostering strong connections between education and economic development without sacrifice to culture and creativity; raising standards by lifting the many more than pushing a privileged few; connecting private prosperity to the public good; developing a highly qualified profession that brings about improvement through commitment, trust, cooperation and responsibility; embracing principles of subsidiarity that maximize local freedom and responsibility within a broad national steering system; embedding and embodying principles of professional and community-based rather than managerial or market accountability – these are just some of the signs about possible reform pathways to high

performance beyond low-skill standardization that can be taken from Finland's exceptional economic and educational journey.

Finland itself, we have seen, is a large-scale example of an experiment in educational performance. No single part of the overall innovation can or should be extracted or transposed from this society-wide example, since the components are part of a complex system which is mutually self-reinforcing. It is hard to imagine how Finland's educational success could be achieved or maintained without reference to the nation's broader and commonly accepted system of distinctive social values that more individualistic and inequitable societies may find it difficult to accept. In this respect, one of Finland's lessons for other nations may be that successful or sustainable educational reform comes with widespread social and economic reform.

Leadership currently contributes to Finnish high performance not by concentrating or perseverating on performance outcomes, particularly measurable ones, but by paying attention to the conditions, processes and goals that produce high performance – a common mission; a broad but unobtrusive steering system; strong municipal leadership with lots of local investment in curriculum and educational development; teachers who already are qualified and capable at the point of entry; informal cooperation and distributed leadership; principals who stay close to the classroom, their colleagues, and the culture of teaching; and (from the principal's standpoint) being first among a society of equals in the practical and improvisational practice of school-based improvement.

The success of Finland's distinctive and innovative social and educational system is substantial and rightly deserves its international acclaim. But Finland is facing changes that threaten the sustainability of this system. In line with the literature on organisational learning (Senge, 1990) it is therefore, perhaps, at the very moment of its stellar success that Finland and its educational system might most need to engage with an agenda of change.

In an intuitive and informal way, Finnish teachers know their students well including the progress they are making in their learning, and they achieve more success than teachers in other nations in quietly and calmly raising all students to the level of the best. They appear to be able to do this without an apparatus of external intervention, inspection and disaggregation of performance data. Informally and practically, leaders also seem to be able to concentrate on knowing their schools, colleagues and communities well – unencumbered by external initiatives – and often promoted from among the people with whom they have taught.

But following EU membership, increased immigration that is already impacting on Finnish schools (Sahlberg, 2007) will make empathy with pupils less easy or automatic. Other kinds of data (including diagnostic test data) and skills of interpreting it may be needed to identify learning difficulties and track performance as effectively as teachers have been able to do by more informal methods up to now. In future, change may need to be pushed through the culture a little more and not just pulled from it. At the same time, increased interaction with welfare agencies and the special educational needs services is widening, and is adding to the responsibilities of principals, while the pension burdens arising from the society-wide retirement of the baby boom generation are already forcing economies on and reducing capacity within education and the wider welfare state. The consequences for sustainable leadership and improvement are significant.

- *Pedagogical leadership* for learning may need to become more informed by research and ongoing evidence of achievement (as well as being informal and practical) and to have a little more strength and direction if schools are to assist their increasingly diverse learners in the future.

- *Leadership succession* will require a coherent national strategy of recruitment, reward and support if the retiring generation is to be succeeded by eager and effective replacements.
- *Distributed leadership* can lighten the load of the principalship but it must be chiefly focused on learning and teaching more than managed tasks if it is not to be perceived and dismissed as contrived collegiality.
- *Systemic leadership* across districts or regions can provide lateral means for principals to share common resources and to assist, support and learn from each other, as they learn to lead together. Such systemic leadership is a relatively new departure in Finland and the subject of our next chapter.

4. Redistributing Leadership in a Local Community

The final frame of analysis, as outlined in section 3, is the structural-technical frame. This concerns the organisation of personnel, roles, responsibilities, time, space and procedures within systems. Whenever there is an intention to bring about a deliberate change within an organisation, it is activity within this frame and also the political one that is most prominent – either creating new structures with the goal of achieving different purposes, or fulfilling existing purposes more effectively, by establishing new patterns of interaction and culture, through altered distributions of authority and responsibility.

Changes and challenges affecting Finnish society and its educational system are initiating structural efforts to respond in the form of reorganisations of the structures of municipal services and of the leadership arrangements for delivering these services. Four such changes and the structural means of responding to them are key to the success and sustainability of the high performance that currently characterises Finland's educational system and its economy. To recap, these are:

- **A pensions and social services challenge:** due to the impending retirement of the baby boom generation, creating increased pressures on the financial viability of the existing welfare state. This is leading to measures to rationalise and make economies in public services through reducing costs, sharing resources and integrating services.
- **Rural emigration:** to the cities, leading to loss of cost-effectiveness and a growing need to share curriculum offerings, school provision and related leadership responsibilities across shrinking municipalities.
- **Increased immigration:** as a result of joining the European Union and of the need to increase the taxpayer base to relieve the pensions crisis and support the welfare social state. This is leading to increased demand to serve the needs of many immigrant families in terms of special education services and coordination of education with health and social service provisions.
- **The challenge of leadership succession:** discussed in the previous chapter and the pressures this puts on leadership recruitment, continuity and renewal.

One way of responding to these changes and challenges in Finland has been to develop deliberately distributed, systemic leadership on a city-wide or municipality basis. We were able to examine a particularly innovative example in one Finnish city, Tampere. We are aware, however, that the approach to leadership taken by this particular municipality is one among many others. In recent times, we have been informed by Finnish Ministry officials, similar or variations of these systemic approaches have been adopted across Finnish municipalities.

One of the main features of educational leadership in Finland, (similar to other Nordic countries following decentralisation) is the strong role played by *local municipalities*. The more than four hundred municipalities (or, in the case of upper secondary vocational education, their consortia) are the *owners* of the majority of schools, they *finance* their schools (to a significant degree from their own revenues) and they are the *employers* of teachers (including school leaders). Furthermore, as we have seen, they also play a key role in *curriculum planning and development*.

The city we visited had adopted a new management model apparently influenced by business management approaches. The municipal leadership, for instance, has defined the role of the local community (or its elected delegates) as the *purchaser* of services that may be offered by either public or private *providers*, depending on which is more efficient. In the case of schools, the city management reform recognises that there is no significant customer demand for a range of alternative providers, but also stresses that *service contracts* with the providers will include both cost and learning outcome indicators. Here, leadership of the local school management reform is more in the hands of the *educational development manager*, who implements municipal governance reform, than in those of the director of the education department in the city municipality.

The management reform the city of Tampere adopted is part of the broader national reform process that aims to prepare the country to face the challenges of social, economic and demographic change. A background document to the Ministry of the Interior's (2006) project "to restructure municipalities and services" stresses that due to demographic changes, some resources will have to be transferred from the education sector to health and social care. As a result, the expenditure on comprehensive schools in 2010 will reach only 93% of 2005 funding levels. This makes it necessary to reorganize local public services. The reform of management structures and the strengthening of leadership in the city is strongly linked with and embedded in this process. In the words of the leader of the city management reform, "good leadership is needed when we are changing things". The school leadership reform we looked into - with its allocation to some school leaders of new district-wide coordination responsibilities and its associated development of new managerial functions within these leaders' own buildings to counterbalance and compensate for their own wider duties - is directly linked to the effort to meet these challenges.

The municipal reform redistributes school leadership at several levels and in several directions. The overall strategy is to share acting principals at the municipal level: five school principals were working as district principals, with a third of their time devoted to the district and the rest to their individual schools. This redistribution implies the following:

- First, leadership is redistributed between the municipal authority and the schools. Those principals who have been invited by the municipality to share their leadership activities and energies across their own schools in their areas are now taking on roles and functions that were previously dispatched directly by the municipal authority. Beyond leading their own schools, they now coordinate various district level functions such as planning, development or evaluation. In this way, the municipality shares some leadership functions with them that are typically territorial and that now move beyond the boundaries of their own school unit.
- Second, the new district heads are part of a municipal leadership team. Instead of managing alone, the head of the municipal education department now works in a group, sharing problems and elaborating solutions cooperatively.
- Third, district heads now distribute their leadership energies, experiences and knowledge between their own schools and others. While coordinating activities like curriculum planning, professional development or special needs provision in their area, they exercise leadership at both the institutional and local district levels.

- Fourth, leadership within the largest schools (that are also led by the district heads) has been redistributed internally between the principal and other staff in the school. This releases the principal for other area-based responsibilities and also develops increased leadership experience and capacity within the schools.

All these forms of distributed leadership reinforce each other in the attempted transformation of Tampere's educational and wider public services at a time of profound external change.

Redistributing leadership within the municipality, between municipal authorities and schools, between schools and within schools, all at the same time, significantly changes the way leadership functions throughout the local system. Everyone finds themselves in a new space of more intensive communication, receives new information, and interacts with new people in novel situations. This broadening of communication and the new forms of interaction necessarily leads to changes in the behaviour of all actors. Municipal leaders start to depend more on the behaviour of district heads as their success in solving local problems is increasingly influenced by what the latter do. District heads also increasingly depend on other principal colleagues in their area, as the evaluation of their work is based not only on what they achieve in their own school but also on what the community of the schools in their area achieves. They also rely on the behaviour of new leaders in their own school who have taken over parts of their earlier management and leadership functions. In this new web of horizontal and vertical interdependence, new behaviours also emerge. Principals start to consider and address broader community needs rather than competitively defending the interests of their own organisation. This interaction across schools opens new windows for mutual learning. In addition, as they devote less time and energy to their own school, they are obliged to delegate various management tasks to other staff, which leads to more open lateral leadership within the school, stronger development of distributed leadership capacity and therefore a more constructive approach to leadership succession and sustainability.

This local and institutional web of new interdependencies is systemic in several senses.

1. Leaders' attention shifts from just the school unit to include the broader local system.
2. Boundaries between the various parts of the local educational system and the internal parts of the schools as subsystems, become more permeable.
3. The strengthening of mutual interdependencies and interactions then pushes the system towards emergent principles of development and change in a complex system rather than acting as a top-down bureaucracy. What the district heads do in their own schools impacts other schools. Actions in each district affect others. For example, in the particular municipality we visited, when a district head developed a new computerised system of information regarding the resources available to schools in the area, this led to increased transparency throughout the municipality. Similarly, when one school applied a new approach to deal with pupils who had particular learning difficulties, this could quickly be transferred to other schools through the mediation of the special needs coordinator who is also a member of the team of district heads.
4. The inter-institutional communication created by the particular reform made it impossible for institutions to hide their resources from each other and exerted moral pressure to share them with those most in need. As one principal explained, "if one of the schools needs to do something but doesn't have enough resources, the principal will phone the other principals and one of them will say, 'we have a little extra – would you like some of ours?'" This management model is also used as an instrument to coordinate the curriculum in terms of interpreting national and local strategic goals and also creating coherence among the

different curricula developed across the city's schools. This is achieved through the new mechanism of district headship. Part of the job description for this position is “*guaranteeing an adequate coherence of the curriculum in the district*” and “*a smooth school path for the pupil*.”

5. More frequent interactions, stronger mutual interdependencies, increased communication and more permeable organisational boundaries not only improve problem-solving capacities but also generate space for further development. As the education development manager of the municipality explained, the new management model is expected to “*create new personal resources for basic education, which will also promote Tampere's ability to take part in nationwide development work and policy discussions*” in harmony with the ambitions of the region to be a flagship in Finland's knowledge economy. With the mobilisation of the new network of district heads, the municipal leadership hopes to acquire improved access to schools and to involve them more in implementing its future-oriented strategy. In the words of the municipal development manager: “*This way we want to keep alive the future orientation of schools*”. Accordingly, area principals have been assigned a number of key developmental tasks – for example promoting the sharing of good practices, enhancing evaluation practices as sources for mutual learning and supporting the professional development of teachers.

Redistribution of leadership across schools has led to and been closely connected with redistribution of leadership within them as well. In the absence of the principal, the staff has to take matters more into its hands. The creation of the post of the vice-manager has doubled the management posts at the level below the principal. In one comprehensive school we visited, the new vice-manager, the old deputy principal and the principal charged with district affairs comprised the management team of the school. When the group presented the school to us, it was the vice-manager who played the leading role, rather than his principal who also served as district head. The school has operated several teams and every teacher has been a member of one of them. All the teams address whole-school affairs, focusing on areas that have been perceived as crucial for the development of the school: recreation, educational development, special education, immigrant education, information and communication, and multicultural education and continuous development.

As other nations and jurisdictions might consider transferring some of the principles or practices described in this system-wide case, it is important to make some clarifications about the politics of this Finnish style of redistributing leadership. In other approaches, decentralised management has often taken the shape of increased responsibility combined with decreased authority, as measures to centralise authority over curriculum, standards and assessment in a context of often insufficient resources, are coupled with devolution of responsibility and indeed blame to competitive front-line managers for implementing or failing to implement policies adequately (Hargreaves, 1994; Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998). In the case we examined, however:

- The dangers of moving overwork and overload lower down the system may be less because Finnish educators don't have many external initiatives and requirements to react to, as can be the case for their counterparts in other countries.
- While rationalisation of resources through cooperative activity is one purpose of the Tampere systemic leadership initiative, there did not seem to be feelings of austerity or resource depletion that have occurred in similar approaches.
- Although, as we saw in the previous chapter, some teachers can experience their new responsibilities as being a form of *contrived collegiality* that distracts them from their core

purpose of teaching and learning, the clarity of and common commitment to Finland's wider educational and social vision reduces this risk.

- The market competitiveness that has characterised local management of schools in other jurisdictions appears to have been replaced in Finland by common local commitments to justice, equity and assisting one's neighbouring schools.
- Instead of individual interest and isolation characterising the leadership work of locally managed schools and systems, Finland's systemic leadership is grounded in principles of trust, cooperation and responsibility.

4.1. Lessons and conclusions on systemic reform within Finland

The systemic reform in educational leadership and improvement that we analysed, while it is in its early stages, has already produced some positive results, with greater cooperation and cooperation between administration and practice. It shows early signs of fulfilling the key principles and purposes of:

- *Rationalizing resources* within a financially challenged social state
- *Integrating services* as a way of accommodating more diverse populations
- *Increasing transparency* of power and resources within the local system
- *Improving problem-solving* through intensified processes of interaction, communication and collective learning
- Enhancing a culture of *trust, cooperation and responsibility* in the pursuit of increased effectiveness and greater equity
- *Developing leadership capacity* and attending to succession and stability by increasing the density of and opportunities for local leadership in the school and municipality

In addition, after our visit, we have been informed by Finnish Ministry officials, that in recent times, similar or variations of these systemic approaches have been adopted across many Finnish municipalities to respond to the demographics and economic challenges they are facing.

This particular systemic innovation we analysed is inextricably embedded in the educational and social innovation that is contemporary Finland. Attempts to increase international understanding of and learning from this case therefore need to avoid the extremes of *either* transferring particular elements of Finland's systemic reform without regard for the social, political or cultural systems in which they are embedded *or* dismissing the relevance of the Finnish case (or indeed any other) because it seems too different and may be perceived as politically or economically inconvenient. The municipality's and the nation's approach to and success in systemic leadership and improvement in education is significant precisely because it demonstrates the importance of connecting educational to societal improvements across multiple, and internally consistent as well as integrated frames of concern and action – moral, cultural, political, structural-technical, learning-related and leadership-oriented. It is this ethical and organisational commitment and consistency within a coherent system that appears to be an essential and broadly transferable lesson of systemic educational reform within Finland and its municipalities.

5. The Finnish approach: what have we learned?

Across OECD countries, Finland represents an example of success in terms of education outcomes. The Finns have managed to marry past and future, to adapt to change while maintaining traditions, to care for equity while ensuring quality of education outcomes. All of this has been done in a context where leadership is shared across the board to ensure that goals and objectives are common across the country. There is a common purpose for teachers, for school principals, and for those participating in the education process that ensures high quality. These features make Finland the focus of international attention to try to understand what lies behind this educational success. Below is a list of considerations or recommendations of features found in the Finnish approach to education for systemic improvement that may be able to be adapted and adopted in other countries or settings:

- A broad and inspiring social as well as educational mission beyond the technicalities of achievement gaps or beyond lofty but vague goals like “a world class education”
- Recognising that the most important point of exercising quality control in relation to performance, is the point of professional entry where the motivating incentives of status, reward and professional as well as social mission should be most emphatic
- Increasing professional capacity by reducing and rationalising unnecessary demand in terms of the pace, scope and intrusiveness of external initiatives and interventions
- Addressing the development and exercise of professional and social responsibility as an alternative way of securing quality assurance compared to the widespread emphasis on bureaucratic and market driven forms of accountability
- Developing political and professional leadership that can build trust and cooperation as a basis for improvement
- Building greater lateral leadership not merely through loose and geographically dispersed professional networks but through area-based cooperation that is committed to the welfare and improvement of children and citizens within the town or the city
- Narrowing inequalities of opportunity and achievement by integrating strong principles of social justice into systemic leadership: "the strong helping the weak within and beyond schools' immediate communities"
- Clearly articulating the relationship of and continuation between needed progress and valued heritage
- Devolving sufficient core responsibilities such as considerable degrees of curriculum development to the local municipal level so that lateral leadership and cooperation become pedagogical and professional engagements, not merely administrative tasks
- Extending leadership teams and distributed leadership within schools to increase leadership capacity across them
- Paying detailed attention to learning (curriculum and pedagogy) as a basis for high performance, rather than priming measured performance in the hopes that it will serve as the main lever for improving teaching and learning
- Challenging the necessity for achieving improvement by employing expensive and extensive systems of high-stakes testing

- Exploring ways to integrate business principles in educational reform and the development of knowledge societies, with principles that preserve and enhance a strong and inclusive social state

5.1. Recommendations for Finland

But Finland's success needs sustainability. Even the Finns continue searching for ways to constantly improve their education system. They are themselves sometimes surprised about their PISA results and the interest it has generated around Finland and also want to understand what the key features to their success are and what they can do to improve. The OECD visit to Finland to analyse their systemic approaches to school leadership helped to surface some of the key challenges facing Finland in the coming years. Their systemic approach of sharing and distributing leadership at different levels is a way to counteract some of the problems that are reaching Finland in the coming years: reduced education budgets due to population ageing as well as a shortage of school leadership due to retirement. Some suggestions below may help Finland to address these issues more effectively:

- Develop a clear national strategy for leadership development and succession.
- Deepen principal leadership and lateral leadership so they move beyond administrative and social cooperation to encompass improvements of pedagogical practice. Support experimental projects aiming at organisational and leadership development focused on enhancing learning and based on cooperation between schools, local communities and teacher training institutions.
- Employ current principals now nearing retirement not by extending their service and contracts in relation to their existing jobs, but through enabling them to develop increased leadership capacity via coaching and mentoring and by releasing others to engage in this work together.
- Enhance school level evidence creation through initiating diagnostic testing so the development and performance of an increasingly diverse student body will not be managed only by intuition and interaction, but also monitored to detect early on those moments when intuition within the context of cultural difference may fall short.
- Articulate and share hitherto tacit knowledge about Finland's educational and economic success so that others can learn from it and it is organisationally more transferable.

5.2 Final reflections

The struggle for improved educational equity and achievement is essential and urgent across countries. Organisations increase their capacity for improvement when they promote internal learning about achievements as well as errors. Likewise, nations and states can also increase their opportunities for improvement when they open themselves to, engage with and learn from others' successes, struggles and setbacks. Teachers do not get better merely by copying the ones who taught them - especially when their own schools, subjects and students may be completely different. Acknowledging the successes of others, engaging with them, then intelligently adapting and continuously adjusting them to one's own situation - these are the ways in which we improve through learning.

Finland's success and its continuing struggles provide the opportunity for others' improvement. We have articulated our understanding of the Finnish experience to be treated as a source of open and intelligent engagement that might lead to adaptive improvements in a range of other national and statewide settings. At the same time, even if Finland sits atop many of the world's rankings of educational and economic performance, its present success and the means it has used to achieve it

should not undermine its capacity to improve under the changing circumstances of the future. Finland cannot settle with its existing success if its development is to be sustainable in the future. Ideological allegiance must not impair the ability and necessity to learn continuously, interactively and internationally if the educational and economic systems of OECD nations are to transform successfully into knowledge societies.

In the quest for improved educational equity and achievement, no-one holds all the ultimate answers, but we can learn from each other as we strive to move further forwards. With intelligent and open engagement, as well as sensitivity to varying cultural contexts, cross-country learning from cases such as this can lead to successful knowledge transfer, circulation and application that might benefit many jurisdictions. It is in that spirit that this report and its findings has been written.

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CASE STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME, JANUARY 16-JANUARY 19, 2007

Tuesday, 16 January, Helsinki, Ministry of Education, Sörnäistenkatu 1, Meeting room 3

<i>Time/place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Specialisation</i>
10.30-11.00	Mr Aki Tornberg	Ministry of Education Counsellor of Education	Statistics and Research Analysis
11.00-12.00	Mr Heikki Blom	Ministry of Education Counsellor of Education	General Upper Secondary Education
	Mr Jari Rajanen	Ministry of Education Counsellor of Education	Basic Education
12.00-13.00	Lunch		
13.00-14.00	Mr. Jorma Kauppinen	National Board of Education	Head of the Upper Secondary School Unit, General
	Mrs Irmeli Halinen	National Board of Education	Head of the Basic Education Unit
	Mrs Sirkka-Liisa Kärki or other person	National Board of Education	Head Of the Upper Secondary School, Vocational
14.00-15.00	Mrs Outi Salo	Town of Helsinki Director, Basic Education	
	Mrs Eija Säilä	Principal of Oulunkylä School	Principal of Primary Education School
	Mrs Mervi Willman	Principal of Helsingin Kuvataidelukio	Principal of General Upper Secondary School, Fine Arts
15.00-16.00	Mr Gustav Wikström Mr Vesa Laine Mr Jorma Lempinen	The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities: The Finnish Principals' Association:	Mr Wikström: Director, Swedish-speaking Mr Laine: Educational legislation Mr Lempinen: Director
16.00-17.00	Mrs Eeva-Riitta Pirhonen	Ministry of Education Director of Basic and General Education Division	Director

Wednesday, 17 January, 2007, Tampere

<i>Time/place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Specialisation</i>
8.00-9.00	Train from Helsinki to Tampere		
9.30-11.00	Mr Hannu Suonniemi	Director of Education in Tampere	Director
	Mr Veli-Matti Kanerva	Executive Director	Director of Basic Education
	Mr Jaakko Lumio	Executive Director	Director of Welfare services
11.00-12.30	Mrs Sirkkaliisa Virtanen	Deputy Mayor	Deputy Mayor, Chair of Education Committee
Lunch			
12.30-14.00	Meeting with principals, teachers and students and school visits (principals work in action) Arto Nieminen deputy mayor Tero Suni Head Teacher (north-eastern) Virva-Leena Masar deputy head teacher		
14.00-15.30	Mr. Erkki Torvinen	Principal	Areal principal
	Mr. Esa Parkkali		
	Mr. Markku Valkamo		
	Mr. Tero Suni		
	Mr. Petri Fihlman		

**Thursday 18 January, 2007, Järvenpää, General Upper Secondary School, address:
Lukionkatu 1**

<i>Time/place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Specialisation</i>
8.00-9.00	Train to Järvenpää		
9.30-11.00	Mrs Marju Taurula	Director of Education, Järvenpää	Director
	Mr Seppo Rantanen	Executive Director	Basic Education
	Mr Atso Taipale	Principal	Principal of General Upper Secondary Education
	Mrs Helinä Perttu	Chair of the Education Committee	
11.00-12.30	Meeting with principals and viceprincipals: Mrs. Marja Yliniemi, Mrs Hanna Saarinen, Mr Atso Taipale, Mr. Jukka Ottelin		
Lunch during the meeting 11.00-12.30			
12.30-14.00	Meeting with students at Upper Secondary level: Eevi Huhtamaa, Emma Åman, Johanna Halla, Heidi Leinonen, Nelly Jaakkola, Leena Nousiainen		
14.00-15.30	Meeting with teachers: Members of Upper Secondary School's Leadership team: Jukka Ottelin Deputy Principal, teacher, maths and computing Aino Härkönen teacher, Finnish language and literature Seija Aarto, teacher, philosophy. Antti Mattila teacher, religion and psychology Maija Mäntykangas, teacher, chemistry. Tuija Haapala, teacher, translator, English		
16.00	Train back to Helsinki		

Friday 19 January, 2007, Helsinki, Ministry of Education, Sörnäistenkatu 1, Meeting room 3

<i>Time/place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Specialisation</i>
8.00-9.00	Mr. Kauko Hämäläinen	Director	Director of Continuing Education Center PALMENIA
	Mr. Antti Kauppi	Executive Director	Executive Director of Continuing Education Center PALMENIA
	Mr. Jukka Alava	Director	Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Jyväskylä
	Mrs Elise Tarvainen	Head of Division	Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Jyväskylä
9.00-14.00 Conclusion: OECD review team meeting.			