NCSL
National College for
School Leadership

Network leadership in action:

Sharing leadership tools and templates

**Development tools and templates
designed to collaboratively explore
sharing leadership in action**

Sharing leadership tools and templates

This booklet provides a practical development tool designed for groups to collaboratively explore together the practice of sharing leadership in action. This tool can be used to enable staff groups within a school or network to reflect together on leadership in their particular school or network setting.

The tool is designed as a card sort activity which focuses ways of distributing leadership. A way to understanding distributed leadership in schools and networks is to view it as a developmental process. This process may be described as falling into six categories of distribution: formal, pragmatic, strategic, incremental, opportunistic and cultural. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

In this activity, participants are asked to use these identifiable stages of the process to categorise a set of statements about leadership practice as a means of exploring understandings about the ways in which leadership can be distributed. By reflecting on the outcomes of this activity, participants are encouraged to think about the ways in which leadership is distributed in their setting, and to consider together what action might be taken to provide further opportunities for distributing leadership in their school or network.

Ways of distributing leadership: activity guidance

Step 1: Group activity

30-40 mins

- Invite participants to work in groups of four.
- Give each group a set of 24 quote cards which describe a number of views on leadership in action.
- Ask participants to consider each card in turn and, using the category descriptors on the base board, decide as a group the category into which the card should be placed.

Notes...

✓ Ensure that each group has a 'Ways of distributing leadership' base board which can be copied from the template provided on pages 4-5.

✓ Ensure that each group has a set of 24 quote cards which can be copied and cut out from the templates on pages 6-7.

Step 2: Refection activity

20 mins

- Individual reflection – ask participants to take 10 minutes to complete the 'Reflection for action' record sheet provided, recording their thoughts about the ways in which leadership is distributed in their context.
- Paired reflection – ask participants to take five minutes 'air time' each to share and discuss their reflections with a partner.

Notes...

✓ Ensure that everyone in the group has a copy of the 'Reflection for action' record sheet which can be copied from the template provided on page 8.

Step 3: Whole group plenary

15 mins

- Invite feedback from each group – providing an opportunity for a quick-fire brainstorm on the actions (identified in the reflection activity) which might be taken to provide further opportunities for distributing leadership in their context.
- Establish agreement in the group as to the means by which proposed actions will be carried forward following the activity.

Notes...

✓ Use flipchart paper to record the outcomes of the group brainstorm.

✓ Reproduce these outcomes using the template provided on page 9 – and circulate to participants following their involvement in the activity.

Ways of distributing leadership
Base board

Formal distribution	Pragmatic distribution	Strategic distribution
Leadership is structurally delegated. Distribution carries an expectation of delivery. There is a recognition that others have expertise. The headteacher's role is to support and provide.	Often a reaction to external events. Responsibility is distributed to ease the log jam and spread the workload. Decisions about leadership are made in response to external demands or internal pressures.	Has a goal orientation focused on longer term improvement. Expressed in a considered approach to new appointments. Appointing team players to fulfil future roles rather than on the basis of individual competencies.

Photocopy these pages on to A3 card or paper

Incremental distribution

Heads recognise the authority of others, extend the compass of leadership and are able to 'let go'. There is 'sponsored growth' within a model of professional development. People are given more leadership opportunities.

Opportunistic distribution

Leadership is assumed not conferred. It is opportunistic not planned. Teachers willingly extend their roles to school-wide leadership. There is a natural disposition to take the lead to make sure things get done.

Cultural distribution

Leadership is expressed in activities not roles. Initiative is exercised spontaneously and collaboratively. Leadership is not tied to status/position but rather exists in a culture that authorises a shared sense of agency.

Ways of distributing leadership
Statement cards

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"People must have high self-esteem because people need the confidence to engage in distributed leadership. I feel there must be a safe environment where people feel secure enough to venture, where they know they'll be encouraged."

"The role of examinations officer or network manager for example, you can see that you need those positions to be filled but you don't want the expertise to be concentrated in just one person, because we would be weaker as an institution once those people leave."

"I think it's still important to have structure in leadership but distributed enough so that everybody feels that they've got ownership of something and that they feel empowered to be able to do something that's their own. I keep coming back to subject leadership."

"When people come into school, they want to see the headteacher. That's fine, I'm glad to be the head figure. But internally, within the school, I've got a hierarchy of staff – deputy heads, year group leaders, subject co-ordinators – and I expect those people to lead."

"The headteacher must believe in the principle and be willing to share leadership throughout the school. If the head believes that everyone has the potential to do something then distributed leadership will be possible."

"I think one person can only take so much. One person can only do so much. So therefore, distributing leadership to the right people helps everybody – helps the children, helps the teachers, helps everyone."

"Informally, when people come out with new ideas, I ask them if they're prepared to carry out the idea. If they are, I ask what I can do to make it work for them and then maintain interest. I try to make people feel confident about what they can do, because most people have the ability to lead."

"It can be seen in terms of how we relate to one another and the style we adopt. We've got job objectives, job descriptions; we've got roles but they're very fluid. We work less to job descriptions and prescribed roles and more to our attitudes – so by that leadership is distributed."

"You've got to be clear about those you can trust to do a good job. If all of them, that's great, but that's not always possible. Bring the positive ones up with you and tap their talents, talk to the negative ones if possible. If they don't change ignore them, because they can divert your energy."

"If I give someone responsibility, I expect them to get on with the job. I don't know what to do in English to raise standards. There are generic things I can do, but in terms of how to teach English better, that's the English specialist's job – so I distribute responsibility. If they tell me what they need then my job is to provide."

"When there's so much pressure on teachers in the school they'll definitely avoid taking leadership responsibilities."

"Staff who have only been in the school for a short time could also be leaders in that they show by their personality, by their vision, by their jobs, commitment, expectations and values that they've got the capacity to lead."

"Here we don't work to a formula, I don't work with that idea in mind. I do think that it is so instinctive as it's internalised. It's like conducting an orchestra. I don't go around thinking I need to distribute this or that, it happens instinctively because I trust people and have confidence in them."

"I think initially from top-down through delegation and as it progresses it becomes both bottom-up and top-down. People who show a willingness to take some initiative are really encouraged. I love to see it really happen and that's when I'm happy. I believe everyone has a role to play in the school."

"It's important that pupils can have a say and that they do actually feel involved as well, that it's not just all teacher directed but that they feel they can have a say. Sometimes they come up with a really good idea so it makes us think then, as adults, perhaps we ought to be taking this on board?"

"I've survived here through intuitive leadership, the person I am. I'm very keen on working together and having strength together. When we decide on something we're all behind it. I see myself as steering the ship. A lot of people exert leadership and have the confidence to do that. It's the way things are done here."

"Sometimes the business stops with me, but it can stop with someone else as well. Anyone in this school who has the opportunity to be the leader at some stage might be. That is what their job says, being a teacher involves leadership. Everyone should have the opportunity to lead, from the youngest child throughout."

"It might not necessarily be my initiative. It might be somebody, anyone with a suggestion about something to be tried out. My job is to support."

"Sometimes we delegate leadership roles, sometimes people find themselves in situations where they assume leadership themselves. It comes from the school culture where people can assume leadership roles. A lot of people exert leadership with confidence not because they've been told to, but because that's the way things are done here."

"Trust, confidence, a supportive atmosphere, support for risk-taking, a culture that says you can take a risk, you can go and do it. If it doesn't work, we learn from it. There's a range of cultural issues that support distributed leadership and create a climate – a climate that recognises and values everybody's opinion."

"In a sense, anyone can be a leader. Leadership isn't hierarchical. It's a process that a lot of staff can demonstrate."

"Leadership is distributed at every level and it's not delegated leadership. Equally there will have to be opportunities for anybody who has ideas that fit in with the purpose of where we are going. We've got leaders at every level, whether in subject areas, members of teaching assistant teams or the pupils."

"One of my biggest worries is the thought that if you give a particular specialism to any one individual, that the institution is weakened – not because of the way the person is fulfiling that role but due to the consequences of that person not being there next year or the year after."

"I don't think there are too many limits because, at worst, what you're doing by opening up to as many people as possible the different roles, is you're bringing on experience. You're encouraging contributions and I think you're benefiting. People feel empowered if they're contributing."

Ways of distributing leadership
Reflection for action record sheet

Photocopy this page

Please use this space to record your thoughts and ideas in response to the questions posed below. Be prepared to share your reflections with others.

What have you learned about the ways of distributing leadership considered in this activity?

What are the main ways of distributing leadership used in your context? In which category/ies would you place yourself, your school, your network?

What actions could be taken to provide further opportunities for distributing leadership in your context?

Ways of distributing leadership
Brainstorm for action record sheet

Photocopy this page

Please use this space to record the outcomes of the brainstorm on 'Distributed leadership in action' from the group plenary.

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