

A project of the Sasol Inzalo Foundation

**Developing knowledge resources to build
school leadership capacity in South Africa**

- Systems Framework for School Improvement

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Background

Over the past four years, members of the Sasol Inzalo's School Leadership Project team and the coordinators of leadership development programmes in different parts of the country have been working to develop and refine a set of tools that can be used to build the school leader's knowledge, skills, and capacity in order to strengthen educational outcomes for learners in South Africa. The development of these knowledge resources is the culmination of a process that began with a study to better understand school functioning in South Africa, and the effects of leadership interventions on principals and the schools that they lead. We collected data from 54 schools in 5 provinces during the initial phase of the project, and added 52 more schools in a subsequent round of data collection. This was followed by a process of analysis and "joint sense-making" of the data through a series of intensive work sessions and learning clinics that involved the leadership programme coordinators, members of the Sasol Inzalo Leadership Project team, academics, leadership development practitioners, and school principals.

Some of the emerging themes from these sessions underscore the point that schools are complex organizations to lead and manage. They do not function in a vacuum, insulated from the political, economic, and social influences at play in society – in fact, these influences have a significant effect on the schooling processes. The data also shows that school functioning is further compounded by both the historical legacy of unequal education in South Africa and the current contexts of poverty and social inequality within which the majority of public schools in the country have to function. The narratives revealed that the challenges arising from these contexts can be overwhelming at times, and that school leaders are often ill-prepared to address it in their efforts to enhance school functionality and effectiveness.

The Systems Framework for School Improvement

In response to the findings and lessons that emerged from the data, the team undertook to develop a **Systems Framework for School Improvement** that identifies and describes some of the more influential dynamics present in the schooling system. This framework has the following defining elements:

It has been developed in the *current context of schooling* in South Africa;

It articulates the link between the *school leaders' actions and their effects* in the school;

It provides *thinking* and *analytical tools* that will help school leaders to more deeply understand some of the complex dynamics at play in their schools and communities; and

It enables them to *develop mechanisms or actions* to deal with some of the educational challenges as they seek to strengthen academic outcomes for all learners.

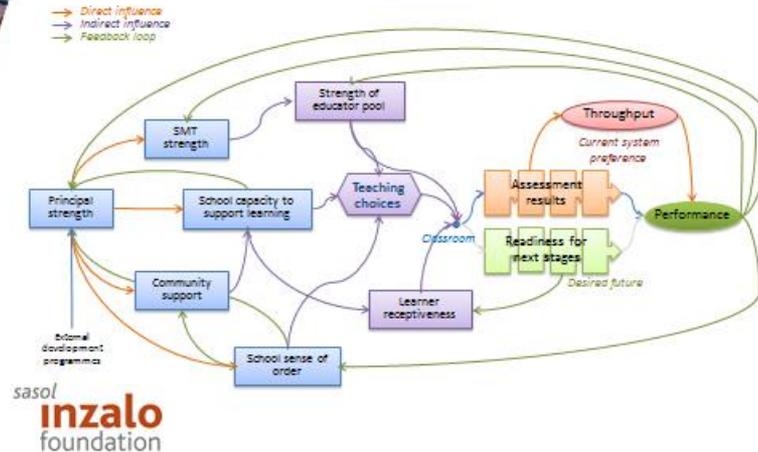
The project team is now in the process of disseminating the tools based on the Systems Framework for School Improvement. These tools can be used to enhance initiatives in school leadership development in South Africa.

2. The Leadership Development Tools

Case Study Handbook: is a compilation of real life stories and events in schools taken from the data that was gathered during the first phase of the project. The short narratives are used as a tool for facilitated discussions that allow participants to identify the dynamics at play in the schooling system; develop strategies for addressing some of the issues that emerge, and consider leadership approaches and roles in the process of change at the school.



Systems diagram



Facilitation guide: is a tool that outlines different process facilitation modes to strengthen the capacity of people who work with school development programmes and facilitate school-based groups. The guide will focus on how to facilitate an inclusive discussion; create safe learning spaces; and guide the learning process in a group.

Board game: is a game that demonstrates the effects of the decisions taken by the leader, especially as it affects the different components of the schooling system and what may happen when different choices are made.

We are now in the process of disseminating our work and the tools. If you are interested, please contact us and we will make arrangements to share these with you.

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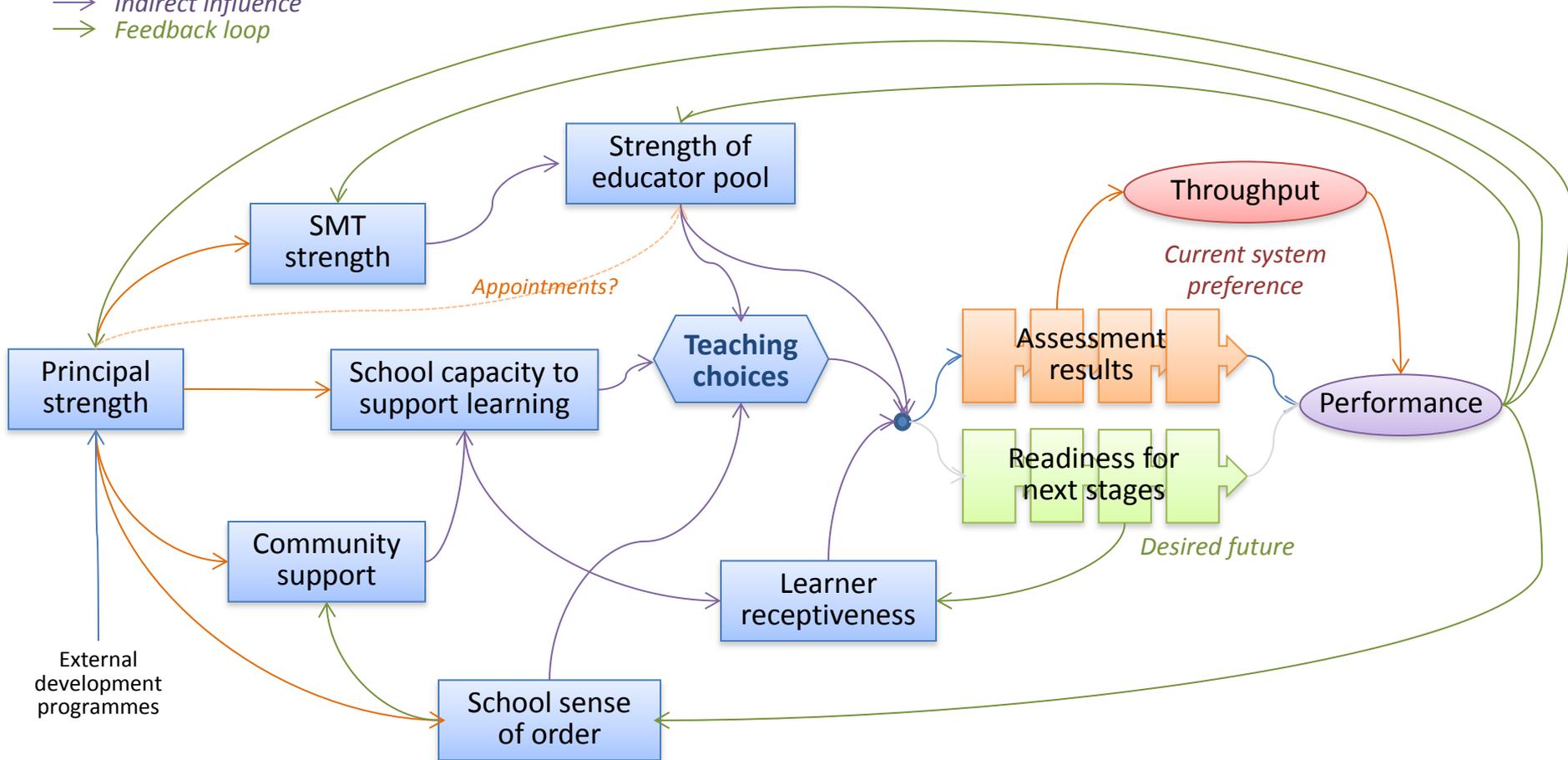


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Systems diagram

- Direct influence
- Indirect influence
- Feedback loop



System components

- Stocks
 - Principal “strength”
 - SMT “strength”
 - Individual “strength” of educator pool
 - School sense of order, purpose, coherence, cohesion (mindsets, culture)
 - School’s capacity to support learning (physical and structural aspects)
 - Learners’ receptiveness to learning
 - Community support for school
- 2 Chains of stocks – 4 linked phases (Gr 1-3 > Gr 4-7 > Gr 8-9 > Gr 10-12)
 - Each chain has 4 categories: Fail, Pass, Pass Bachelors (50%+), Distinction for each phase
 - Chain of Learners: actual physical movement of learners through phases (4 categories of learners)
 - Chain of Outcomes (linked to Learners) (2 outcomes per learner category)
 - Assessment results (avg “score” for each category)
 - Readiness for further stages (incl cognitive skills and character aspects) for each category
- Context block – contains settings, but does not accumulate or drain
 - Challenges from social context (kept separate as it impacts more than one stock)
- Decision block
 - Teaching choices
- Calculated outcome measures:
 - Throughput: calculated from overall promotion rates in Chain of Learners
 - Performance: calculated from combination of Throughput, Assessment results and Readiness scores

Principal “strength”

Initial value

- Commands respect and trust
- Has the knowledge of policies, tools, avenues open to the school to lead
- Has the skill to
 - lead, inspire and manage people individually and as a team
 - Diffuse conflict
 - Minimize SCARF threats to school members
 - build and maintain relationships
- Can develop his school as an organisation
 - Protect it from outside interference
 - Handle non-delivery by DBE, PDE, district
- Has networks and can access resources for the school
- Has the attitudes and values required to be an effective leader
 - Curiosity, agency, courage
 - Motivation, passion, vision
- Strong coping reserve, resilience

*Knowledge, skills, character,
attitudes and values, reserves*

Inflows (increase principal strength)

•Interventions (external, not driven by principal)

- Develop skills and knowledge (e.g. programmes)
 - Policies, tools, avenues to use
 - Leadership, confidence, relationships
 - Experience
- Support for motivation, advice from
 - District, SGB
 - Peer support, mentor
 - Community leaders
 - Personal support network

Social/healthy activities
Sense of control
Personal support network
Intellectual stimulation

•Own efforts - Self-development

- Build strong coping reserve
- Reflective practice

•Feed-back from (could be negative?):

- School and alumni performance

Outflows (decrease principal strength)

•Social challenges from context (draining if high)

•Other stocks – Could be draining on principal too

- School sense of order (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. conflict)
- School capacity to support learning (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. work load)

Presumed role of principal

(included in Principal Strength at the various stocks)

- Build SMT strength
 - Support, motivation of SMT members – enabling policies, collegiality and trust among team, enabling leadership style, appropriate delegation
 - Build right focus, cohesion in SMT
- Build School sense of order, purpose, coherence, cohesion
 - Set and maintain direction; continually renew purpose and coherence
 - Build and maintain order, purposeful processes, routines and rhythms
 - Manage diversity, conflict, trauma, SCARF threats
- Build school's capacity to support learning
 - Activate support from government, community
 - Guard standards of safety, cleanliness, facilities
 - Annual review and reflection – prune out the old and streamline the new
 - Mechanisms to deal with social challenges
- Build community support for school
 - Parent engagement
 - Nurture relationships with stakeholders, NGO's, etc
 - Provide barriers to keep negative influences out of school

SMT “strength”

Principal’s role in appointments?

Initial value

- Individual** “strength” of SMT members
 - Academic and pedagogical leadership, SMK, PCK
 - Ability to lead departments and mentor teachers
 - Command respect and trust
 - Strong coping reserve and resilience
- SMT **team** effectiveness
 - Accountability
 - Commitment
 - Don’t fear conflict
 - Results focus
 - Trust
- Common purpose to improve learning

*Individual: Knowledge, skills, character, attitudes and values, reserves
Functional team*

Inflows (increase SMT “strength” - boost)

•Interventions:

- Develop SMT team’s individual subject knowledge and PCK, leadership development
- Develop SMT team effectiveness

•Other stocks: Principal strength

- Support, motivation of SMT members – enabling policies, collegiality and trust among team, enabling leadership style, appropriate delegation
- Build right focus, cohesion

•Self-development, reserve building by SMT members themselves

•Feed-back from (could be negative?):

- School and alumni performance

Outflows (decrease SMT “strength” - stem)

•Other stocks

- Strength of educator pool (drains SMT strength if low)
- School sense of order (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. conflict)
- School capacity to support learning (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. work load)

Individual “strength” of educator pool

Principal’s role in appointments?

Initial value

- Knowledge: SMK, PCK
- Skills to engage learners and facilitate learning
- Individual “strength” to command respect and trust
 - Self-value
 - Emotional intelligence (EQ)
 - Self-mastery
 - Personal leadership, agency
- Has the attitudes and values to be an effective teacher
 - High expectations
 - Growth mindset (all can learn)
- Strong coping reserve and resilience

Knowledge, skills, character, attitudes and values, reserves

Inflows (increase educator “strength”)

•Interventions:

- Improve qualifications, formal training
- Classroom mentoring by external coach

•Other stocks - SMT strength:

- Develop teachers’ skills and knowledge
 - SMT support, coaching
 - Update knowledge as curriculum evolves
 - Peer support, professional learning communities

•Self-development, reserve building by teachers

•Feed-back from (could be negative?):

- School and alumni performance

Outflows (decrease educator “strength”)

•Other stocks – Principal works to keep these high to reduce negative impacts

- School sense of order (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. conflict)
- School capacity to support learning (the higher the level the lower the draining impact) (e.g. work load)
- Learner receptivity a draining factor???

School sense of order, purpose, coherence, cohesion

School acting as a collective agent

Initial value

- Norms, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets
 - High expectations
 - Responsibility
 - Growth mindset
 - Attitude towards time – are disruptions tolerated?
- Team effectiveness
 - Accountability
 - Commitment
 - Don't fear conflict – differences and conflict resolved productively
 - Results focus
 - Trust and respect
- Collective, shared-goal “project”
 - Improve teaching and learning
 - Congruence and alignment in decisions, consistency between classrooms
 - Professional, collegial behaviour
- Planning processes, diagnostic use of data, reflection cycles
- Routines, rhythms, predictability
- Good staff working conditions
- Social capital in school
- Trauma (in school and individuals) resolved

Inflows (increase school sense of order):

•Interventions:

- Alignment and team building, shift mindsets

•Other stocks - Principal strength

- Set and maintain direction; continually renew purpose and coherence
- Build and maintain order, purposeful processes, routines and rhythms
- Manage diversity, conflict, trauma, SCARF threats

Outflows (decrease school sense of order)

•Social challenges from context (lead to fragmentation if high)

•Decay over time

- Goals drift
- Relationships and trust erodes
- Team drifts apart
- Complacency sets in

Entropy!

“Agency” – mindsets, attitudes, conflict, people issues

Teacher knowledge moved to
teacher strength

School's capacity to support learning

Initial value

Enabling environment to support learning:

- Good learning conditions for learners
 - Physical safety
 - Physical condition of facilities
 - Class sizes
 - Ergonomics
 - Engaging, stimulating learning environment
- Access to and effective use of resources
- Administrative processes and systems
 - Staff turnover low, vacancies filled
 - Teachers' allocation to grades and subjects done well
 - Work load manageable
 - Protected against bureaucratic demands
- Mechanisms to deal with social challenges, e.g. hunger, drugs, gangs, etc
- Support services, e.g. psychologist, social worker

"Structure" – physical and legal world, resources, work load, organisation, etc

Inflows (increase school capacity to support learning)

•Interventions:

- *Use of multi-language classroom strategies ????*

•Other stocks:

- Principal strength
 - Activate support from government, community
 - Guard standards of safety, cleanliness, facilities
 - Annual review and reflection – prune out the old and streamline the new
 - Mechanisms to deal with social challenges
- Community support

Outflows (decrease school capacity to support learning)

•Increase in social challenges beyond what school mechanisms can cope with

•Decay over time:

- Resources become outdated (e.g. old technology, books)
- Skills to use resources become out of date as new resources are introduced
- Condition of facilities deteriorates
- Systems become bureaucratic and cumbersome
- School numbers outgrow facilities

Social challenges from context

- Socio-economic level
 - Poverty level
 - Physical environment
- Economic hardship, e.g. lay-offs
- Crime, drugs, violence, gangs, trauma
- Social cohesion
- Value placed on education
- Political climate, faction fighting

Community support for school

Initial value

- Parents involvement
 - How far from school do they live/work?
 - Involved in learning?
 - Who do learners stay with?
- Community infra-structure and facilities
- Stakeholder involvement, e.g. NGO's, industry
 - Provide school with resources

Inflows (increase community support)

• *Interventions:*

- Develop SGB into a working team
- Classes for parents

• *Other stocks:*

- Principal strength
 - Parent engagement
 - Nurture relationships with stakeholders, NGO's, etc
 - Provide barriers to keep negative influences out of school

• *Feed-back* from (could be negative?):

- School sense of order

Outflows (decrease community support)

• *Decay with time???*

Learner's receptiveness to learning

Cognitive ability (IQ)?
Or Growth mindset?

Initial value

- Health issues, hunger, nutrient deficiencies, alertness
- Time lost travelling to and from school
- Learning gap/advantage from previous year/stage
 - Literacy, numeracy
 - Threshold concepts, core ideas
- Learning capital
 - Parents education level
 - Books at home
 - Support for learning
- Language and communication skills
 - Fluency in LOTL
- Motivation, engagement, aspirations, eagerness
- Learner behaviour

Inflows (increase learner receptiveness)

• ***Interventions (add to school capacity to support learning, i.e. indirect effect)***

- Add more support mechanisms
- Add catch-up programmes to bring up to grade level
- Supplementary teaching for enrichment

• ***Other stocks:***

- School capacity to support learning
 - Food scheme, transport, psychosocial support etc – if required
 - Catch-up programmes to bring up to grade level if required
 - Enriched experiences, supplementary teaching
 - Reading and language skill development

• ***Feed-back from (negative or positive):***

- Readiness for next stages
 - Uncorrected learning gaps

Outflows (decrease learner receptiveness)

• ***Social challenges from context (draining if high)***

Assessed results (chain)

Initial value

- Every grade – internal assessments
- Primary school:
 - Grade 3 and 6 ANAs
- Secondary school:
 - Grade 9 ANAs
 - Matric results

Learner assessment results also drive promotion through the learner chain and drop-out losses of learners (throughput performance measure)

Inflows (increase results)

• *Interventions:*

- Deliberate change in teaching choices

• *Decision block:*

- Teaching choices
 - Options that prepare learners for assessment success
 - Practices that “decant” learners with low readiness

• *Other stocks:*

- Strength of educator pool
- Learner receptiveness

Outflows (decrease results)

• *Decision block:*

- Teaching choices that do not “teach to test”???

• *Other stocks:*

- Cumulative in the chain? – to what extent?

For further discussion

Readiness for next stages (chain)

Initial value

- Mastery of threshold and key concepts for that stage in all subjects
- Can complete higher order assessment tasks for that stage in all subjects
- Can cope with level of “intellectual pressure” required for next stage
 - Pace, volume, difficulty
- Academic literacy in LOLT for grade level
 - Operational literacy (reading, writing, speaking)
 - Subject discourses and cultures (stage level)
 - Critical literacy
- Social skills, EQ, team work
- Character development
 - School ethos
 - Resilience
 - Agency
 - Growth mindset
 - Learning agility
 - Independent thought and learning
 - Ability to “find your feet” in new situations

See last slide

Built through: Innovating, Performing, Reflecting, Risking, (Not) defending

Inflows (increase readiness)

•Interventions:

- Deliberate change in teaching choices

•Decision block:

- Teaching choices
 - Options that build readiness

•Other stocks:

- Strength of educator pool
- Learner receptiveness

Outflows (decrease readiness)

•Decision block:

- Teaching choices that favour assessment results at the cost of readiness

•Other stocks:

- Cumulative in the chain: low readiness leads to learning gaps, which reduces learning in the next stage if not corrected, which increases the gap and further reduces readiness