Transformational and Distributed Leadership Approaches: Complementary or Conflicting?

Donnie Adams and Abdullahi Farah Mire

Transformational leadership is a contemporary model of leadership that emphasises raising the capacity and commitment of the organisation’s members (Bush 2007). As a result, personal commitment levels will increase with regulatory objectives, as well as capacity to achieve those goals and productivity (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach 1999; Bush 2007). Transformational leadership is considered as a response to the “top-down” hierarchical approach (Hallinger 2003). The concept has become popular as it emphasises an encouraging, harmonious, and ethical leadership relationship within the organisation, (Bass 1998; Bass & Avolio 1994; Hasanvand, Zeinabadi, & Shomami 2013). Transformational leadership in education can be summarised into individualised support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modelling (Leithwood et al. 2000; Silins et al. 2002).

Distributed leadership offers a redefinition of leadership as a practice that dominates the traditional concepts about the relationship between official leadership and structural act (Harris 2013). Distributed leadership is not an individual mode of leadership, rather it’s a collection of roles and behaviours which can be separated, shared, interchangeable and used successively (Jones et al. 2015). An important requisite for distributed leadership is a common purpose, social support and leader’s influence (Carson et al. 2007). Thus, distributed leadership is viewed as a team-wide phenomenon (Stewart et al. 2011; Anderson & Sun 2017).