

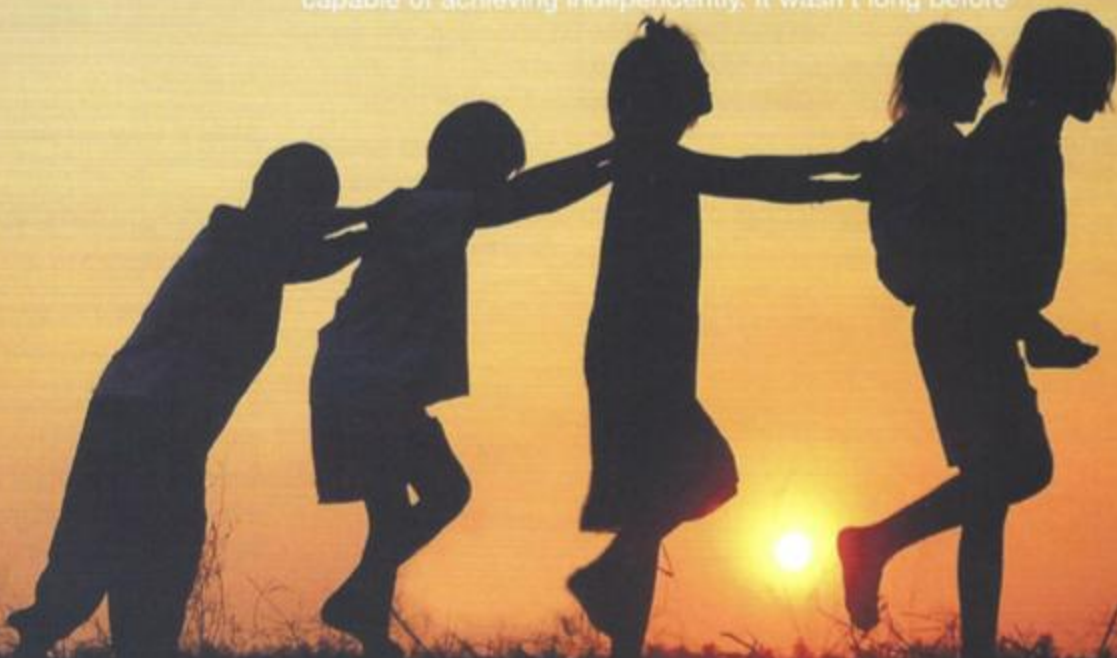
REDUNDANT LEADERSHIP, THE RECIPE FOR BLISSFUL GOVERNANCE

By Katarzyna Wieczorek-Ghisso

Redundant leadership is used metaphorically in this article, depicting a workplace environment whereby roles are clearly established by a leader who successfully drives the service vision from the back seat. Focussing efforts on developing skills in others, I explore the importance of transformational leadership, an approach that builds capacity and facilitates autonomy, without compromising quality Education and Care.

To highlight the importance of transformational leadership I reflect on an experience I encountered with a close colleague some years ago. At the time she had taken on a Non-teaching role as a Director in a 90 place Education and Care Centre. Highly skilled and equipped with many years of experience, I wondered why she regularly verbalised struggling coming to grips with everyday pressures. Given she didn't have to undertake many 'typical' Director tasks such as; managing enrolments, fee processing, developing policies, as these were managed externally, she often communicated how stressful things were and complained about working long days. Averaging roughly 70 hours per week, 3 months in to her role, she was on the verge of serious burn out. The straw that broke the camel's back was an incident I refer to as, 'The Toilet Paper Debacle'.

Having established a strong powerhouse team of educators, my colleague was optimistic that a brand new extensively resourced centre would run like a well oiled machine. What she didn't factor into the equation, was the role she played in ensuring that happen. She, like many Directors made the mistake of regularly 'helping out' with tasks, such as setting up areas for play in the morning, developing daily room programs, to doing general cleaning duties. Initially she thought this reasonable, given she was an off-the-floor Director. However, over the course of many weeks she found herself undertaking more and more jobs on the floor, and less and less of her own tasks. It became evident that in her quest to be helpful, she had developed dependency in her workplace, whereby she was relied upon for almost everything, even tasks others were capable of achieving independently. It wasn't long before



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she became tired and started resenting her job, regretting having taken it on in the first place. Her frustrations intensified when a delivery truck arrived one morning and no one seemed to know what to do, made worse by a panicked educator bursting into her office asking, “Where do I put the toilet paper?”. It dawned on her at that moment that she made a drastic error in judgement. Rather than enacting leadership in others, she developed a dependency culture by being too available and too helpful.

In any workplace, whether we like to admit it or not, we should operate according to the service hierarchy, where each person plays an important role. Much like pieces in a puzzle, each is shaped differently and each belongs in a certain place, hence each one plays a unique role. More often than none, there appears a perception out there that we all have equal roles and thus should share the load. If we take the puzzle as a metaphor for the sake of reference, can pieces be randomly positioned anywhere? If we took that approach we would end up in a rightful mess with pieces scattered everywhere, and in some cases that is exactly what happens. Confronting as it may be, lets also remember that we aren't paid equally. Imagine for a minute if we all were? How would any workplace function if at the end of everyday pay was split amongst people who were present that day, irrespective of what they did or how they were positioned?

In reality our pay is governed in accordance with levels of qualification and accountability, therefore it would stand to reason that each team member function with the view of contributing to achieving the overall vision of the service. We may not be accustomed to this way of thinking, however important we reflect on our workplace scenario in reference to the National Quality Framework, Standard 7.1 which clearly identifies hierarchical leadership as a determining factor to effective service operation; *Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community*, and more specifically in Element 7.1.1, *Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service*.

In the case of my colleague, she had a well-documented Governance Policy on paper, however her practice in no way reflected it. The solution to her dilemma was complex but certainly achievable. Firstly, she needed to break out of the habit of 'helping' and start focussing on identifying people's strengths, building their capacity and developing their skills in a supportive environment. Secondly, she needed to establish explicit measurable documented tasks which would guide their everyday practice, and thirdly, she needed to ensure she 'check in' or, in other words, regularly follow up with people ensuring that tasks were completed according to the service standards. Once she broke her habit of rescuing, which did take time, she not only felt rewarded in her role, but began to experience blissful leadership, a state of existence she never thought possible.