

# Strategies for effective school leadership and organizational development



Associate professor Morten Edvardsen  
Professor Trond Lekang  
Nord university, Norway



This presentation explores effective school leadership strategies based on qualitative research with school leaders in Ontario, Canada. Using transformational leadership theory as our analytical framework, we examine how school leaders foster professional learning communities and enhance organizational capacity.

## Understanding Leadership Frameworks (Mintzberg, 2009)

Leadership takes place at the intersection of art, craft, and science. Art brings ideas and integration, craft creates coherence through practical experience, and science contributes structure through systematic analysis of knowledge.





# Research Background and Context

## CANOPY Project

This study is part of the CANOPY Project (Canada-Norway for Education Partnership and Inclusion in Education, 2020–2024), a partnership between Nord university, Norway, and Queen's University, Canada.

## Research Question

What experiences do school leaders in Ontario have in developing leadership strategies at their own schools?

## Methodology

Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with four experienced school leaders from the Ontario region, analyzed through the lens of transformational leadership theory.

# Educational Research Methodology



# Understanding Leadership Approaches



## Transactional Leadership

Oriented toward performance and rewards through clear contracts, rules, and expectations.

Characterized by control and close follow-up, providing predictability but potentially limiting development and professional autonomy.

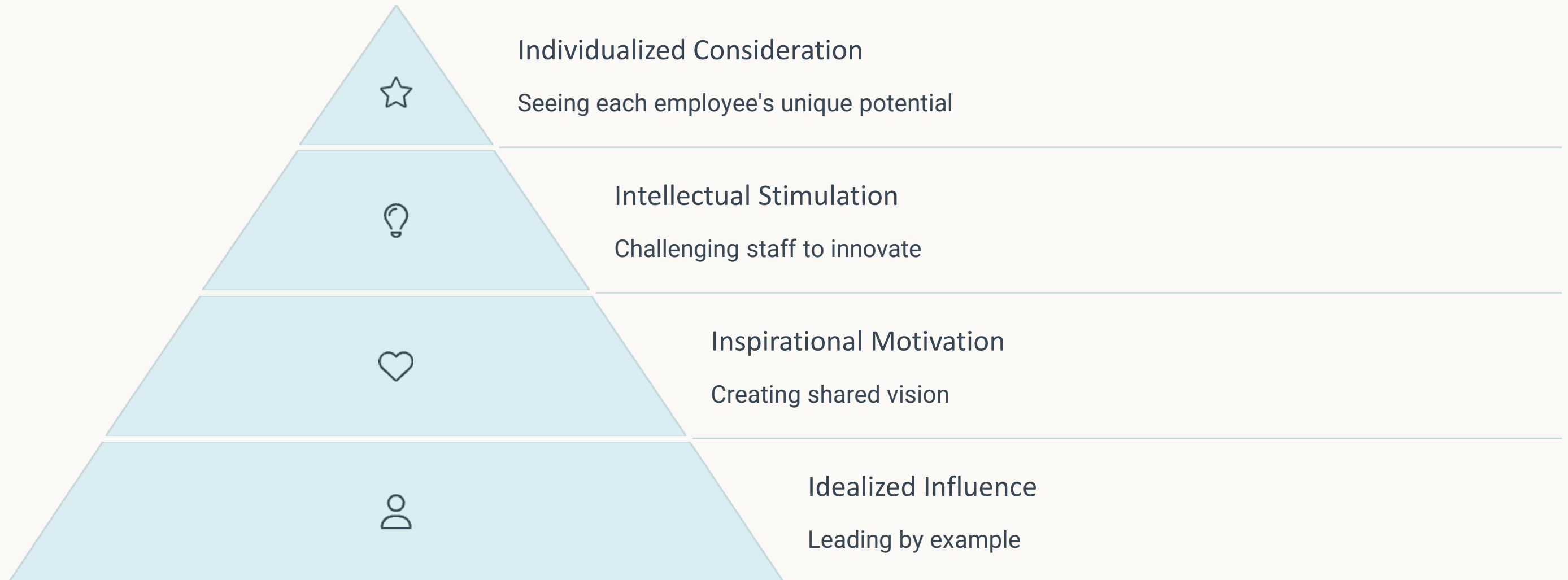
## Transformational Leadership

Based on inspiring and motivating employees through shared visions and values. Leaders act as role models, elevating employees to optimize engagement and willingness to contribute to organizational goals.

## Relational Leadership

Understands leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon, focusing on building trust and relationships among school actors to enable learning processes and mutual growth.

# Transformational Leadership: The Four I's (Bass, 1990)



Bass's transformational leadership model (1990) provides the analytical framework for our study. These four elements represent how leaders influence organizational development through modeling behaviors, articulating expectations, challenging assumptions, and providing individualized support.



# Findings: Idealized Influence - - Leading by Example



## Walking the Talk

Leaders build trust by aligning words with actions: "As a leader, you really must walk the talk. You can't just say, yes, yes, yes, we have this in our vision... but how do we go about defining it?"



## Distributed Influence

Recognizing that influence extends beyond formal leadership: "Sometimes it's not the principal who has the most influence... sometimes it's a colleague."



## Psychological Contracts

Fostering informal understandings of "how we do things here" through consistent behavior and mutual expectations.





# Findings: Inspirational Motivation - Creating Shared Vision



## Collective Ownership

"Getting people on board is about creating a climate and culture where everyone feels they are part of the solution."



## Metaphors as Motivation

"You need rain to see the rainbow" - Using simple metaphors to inspire staff and students, especially during challenging times.



## Modeling Desired Behavior

Leaders who maintain close relationships with staff and demonstrate commitment to development work inspire similar engagement.



## Building Collective Capacity

Establishing arenas where individuals and groups experience mastery, making visions meaningful and relevant.





# Findings: Intellectual Stimulation - Encouraging Innovation

## Questioning Established Practices

"Please, think outside the box... it's about language, it's about dialogue, it's about empowering people."

## Case-Based Learning

"We divide into groups and work through different cases... to develop professional flexibility and adaptability."



## Embracing Digital Innovation

The pandemic required leaders to enable exploration of new solutions like digital teaching formats and online student events.

## Co-Creation in Professional Communities

Emphasizing participation, trust, and collaborative problem-solving to develop new approaches.





# Findings: Individualized Consideration - Addressing Unique Needs

## Recognizing Individual Potential

Seeing each staff member as having unique strengths, needs, and contributions to make to the school community.

## Maintaining Active Presence

Following up with employees both professionally and emotionally, especially during challenging times like the pandemic.

## Providing Personalized Support

"Let me find a colleague for you... be available at all times." Leaders act as mentors and guides, creating environments where everyone feels valued.

## Celebrating Small Victories

Organizing creative well-being initiatives and recognizing achievements to motivate and lower thresholds for development.

# Digital Leadership during the Pandemic in the Ontario context

## Virtual Communication

Leveraging video conferencing for staff meetings and professional development.



## Online Learning Platforms

Supporting teachers in transitioning to digital teaching environments.

## Creative Well-being Initiatives

Sending surprise packages to staff during lockdown to maintain morale and connection.



## Remote Team Building

Creating virtual spaces for collaboration and maintaining school community.





# Building Professional Learning Communities

1

## Shared Values and Vision

Developing collective understanding of school goals and purpose through inclusive dialogue.



## Collaborative Culture

Creating structures for meaningful collaboration among staff, with time dedicated to professional exchange.



## Collective Inquiry

Encouraging staff to question current practices and explore new approaches through case studies and reflection.



## Focus on Results

Maintaining clear goals for student learning while supporting innovative approaches to achieve them.

# Key Takeaways for School Leadership

This study of Ontario school leaders offers valuable insights for educational leadership across international and Norwegian contexts.



## Core Elements

The four I's of transformational leadership provide a framework for effective school management

These leaders demonstrate that effective leadership combines trust, support, and vision. By modeling behaviors, fostering shared goals, encouraging innovation, and addressing individual needs, leaders enable professional learning communities to flourish.



## Leadership Styles

Balancing transactional and transformational approaches creates optimal conditions for growth



## Shared Vision

Collective ownership drives sustainable organizational development



# Conclusion and Future Directions



## Theoretical Contributions

Confirming the relevance of transformational leadership in educational contexts

---



## Practical Applications

Providing strategies for school leaders to enhance organizational development

---



## Future Research

Exploring cross-cultural applications of these leadership approaches

This study demonstrates how school leaders in Ontario successfully implement transformational leadership principles to foster development and engagement. Their experiences offer valuable insights for school leaders, education administrators, and researchers in both international and Norwegian contexts. Future research could explore how these leadership approaches translate across different cultural and educational systems.