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## Leadership Philosophies and Team Dynamics: A Qualitative Exploration of Lived Experiences of Educational Leaders in Karachi

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**Abstract:** *The study aims to understand the philosophy of leadership through the lens of school principals and to understand the strategies used by principals to foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork in their organization. The qualitative phenomenological study was utilized. The data was collected by interviewing the ten school leaders through a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The sample encompassed leaders from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to ensure comprehensive representation. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The major leadership approaches that emerged are the hybrid approach and the humanistic approach, and the emergent thematic strategies for collaboration and teamwork are shared vision and an empathetic ear. Based on the findings, recommendations were proposed for educational institutions to develop an environment of collaboration and teamwork for students. Additionally, strategies were suggested for educators to integrate these qualities into their teaching practices, fostering a supportive learning environment conducive to a teamwork culture.*

**Key Words:** Leadership Philosophies, Team Dynamics, Educational Leaders, Karachi, Education

### Introduction

Collaboration, according to Schrage (1990), is a "process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none of them could have come to on their own or had previously processed." Working together produces a common understanding of a procedure. (Arnseth, 2023; Scott, 2023). Collaborative learning allows students to develop their critical thinking, problem-solving, social interaction and communication, and positive attitude toward learning (Ibrahim, 2023; Qureshi, 2023; Pattiasina, 2024). Collaborative learning pushes learners to work together in groups to achieve common objectives (Sweet, 2023; Yildiz Durak, 2023; Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009). Learners participate in their knowledge development in collaborative learning by incorporating fresh data knowledge and networks into a community of learners. Students may experience a significant degree of anxiety despite the social and psychological benefits of collaborative learning (Lin, 2024). They show annoyance in group educational activities.

Students may become frustrated due to communication problems, a lack of shared experiences, and an imbalance in their degree of dedication (Solon, 2024; Kahveci, 2023). Relationship problems and inadequate problem-solving and decision-making abilities may jeopardize the effectiveness of the collaborative learning process.

### Role of Leaders in Teamwork Building

To reach a shared objective, leaders enlist the assistance of others in a reciprocal influence relationship known as leadership. (Bolden, 2023; Eddy-Spicer, 2023; Wang, 2022). A group's leaders are in charge of

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seeing that the agreed-upon goals and objectives are met. A leader needs to be able to articulate a vision that inspires others to work toward a common objective to be effective (Kouzes, 2023; Kohn, 2024). All team members' contributions are valued by effective leaders, and they engage with their colleagues in ways that encourage potential contributions. Effective leaders convey expectations, include people in the shared objective, establish the course for teamwork, offer direction and constructive criticism, inspire followers, and promote collaboration (VINLUAN, 2024; ERBAY, 2024).

### Implication of Collaboration in the Pragmatic Life of Students

Teamwork has a plethora of advantages to homework that go well beyond the classroom and become useful in everyday life (Cavazos, 2024). To improve both your personal and professional experiences, teamwork can help in improved Decision-Making and Problem-Solving (Kerrissey, 2024). People with various experiences, backgrounds, and skill sets come together when they operate as a team. This diversity makes it possible to address problems with a wider variety of concepts and methods (Gurung, 2023) (Brennan, 2023). Knowledge and experience from various team members can be combined to provide more comprehensive solutions and well-informed decisions.

When people collaborate, a creative atmosphere is fostered where ideas can bounce off one another, resulting in inventive solutions that might not have been conceivable when they worked alone. An organization's innovative culture can be fostered, and creative thinking is encouraged in a collaborative atmosphere (Ajayi, 2024).

### Problem Statement

The absence of a collaborative culture in Pakistani schools impedes the growth of students' teamwork and communication abilities, which are essential for success in the contemporary workforce (Naqvi, 2023; Panhwar, 2023). Students are ill-prepared for a changing world that necessitates cooperation and a diversity of viewpoints because of the emphasis on individual accomplishment and teacher-centered education (Mok, 2024) (Hill-Jackson, 2023). To provide Pakistani learners with the tools they need to succeed in the real world, this gap must be closed.

The globalization of society has led to a growing need for people with the ability to collaborate well, solve problems as a team, and interact with people from different backgrounds (Thornhill-Miller, 2023; Mukhtar, 2023). Students' capacity to prosper in the contemporary world is being hampered by the Pakistani educational system's failure to provide them with these fundamental abilities. This research addresses the crucial topic of teamwork by digging into leadership ideologies and collaborative strategies. This will lead to a cooperative and conducive learning environment for students, which can be productive for their socio-emotional well-being.

### Research Objectives

1. To understand the philosophies of leadership to promote collaboration and teamwork through the lens of school principals
2. To understand the strategies used by principals to foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork.

### Research Questions

1. What leadership philosophies help to promote collaboration and teamwork in educational institutes?
2. What strategies do the leaders use to build a collaborative and cohesive school community?

### Theoretical Framework

The study is based on two well-known theoretical models.

#### Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory

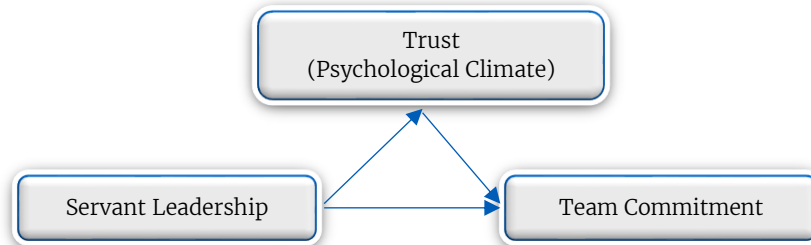
Robert Greenleaf's notion of servant leadership places a strong emphasis on leaders who put their followers' needs and development first (Johnson, 2024; Moore Sr, 2024) within the educational setting.

It gives instructors opportunities for growth and collaboration so that they can focus on their professional development and well-being. Teachers should share ideas and take chances in a safe, supportive setting. Give educators the freedom to take part in decision-making to promote engagement and ownership and eventually pave the way for student collaboration.

The theoretical framework highlights the growth of collaborative practices in educational settings impacted by leadership styles, as shown by the concepts of servant leadership.

**Figure 1**

*The theoretical framework of servant leadership*



### Karl Weick's Shared Mental Model

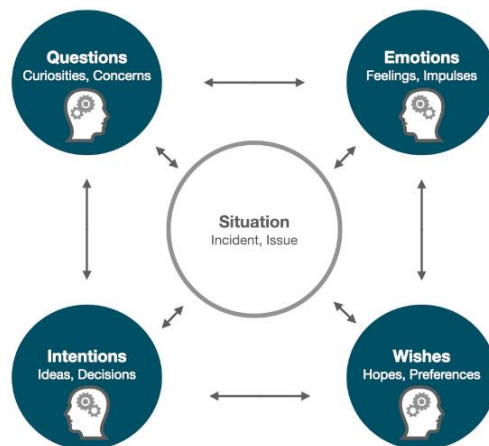
Karl Weick originally published *The Social Psychology of Organizing* in 1969 (MacNeil, 2024; Duan, 2024). In this seminal work, he outlined a process-oriented paradigm emphasizing human interaction as the primary organizing phenomenon. According to his argument, organizations are not real; rather, they are created by ongoing streams of structured human activity. For an organization to continue, its members must engage in the critical process of communication.

According to this theory, teams function more effectively when members have a common knowledge of the objectives, tactics, and overall circumstances. Leaders who are adept at creating a common mental model can promote cooperation by:

1. Promoting open dialogue among educators so they can exchange knowledge, concepts, and worries.
2. Promoting group decision-making and problem-solving techniques.
3. Establishing attainable, agreed-upon objectives inspires educators to collaborate toward a shared school vision.

**Figure 2**

*Karl Weick's shared mental model (1996)*



This study investigates how the use of servant leadership principles—especially those that emphasize teacher and student development and empower participation—can result in the adoption of tactics that create a mental model that is shared by all participants. Servant leaders are able to foster a collaborative school culture by emphasizing the establishment of a supportive environment and encouraging candid communication.



## Methodology

### Research Design

A qualitative research method known as "phenomenological research" aims to comprehend and characterize people's actual experiences with a certain event. Through the use of in-depth interviews, observations, and participant-written reports of their experiences, it focuses on understanding the content and significance of these experiences (Pitney, [2024](#)). The chosen schools were the sites of the research.

### Population

Ten interviews with school principals were included in this study as a part of the snowball sampling method. This strategy was chosen because, in this case, school administrators who have experience supporting their pupils' socioemotional development are a specific group of people with whom it works well. Researchers asked a small group of significant principals that they had spoken with to recommend other leaders who were working in similar environments. Snowball sampling naturally led to an increase in the number of participants. This allows insights from a targeted group of individuals that would be difficult to reach using traditional sampling methods. As the interviews progress, connections and similarities become apparent, offering a more profound understanding of the topic within the distinct context of these schools.

### Data Collection Method

For the sake of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the offices of selected principals. The interviews were video recorded for the sake of transparency. The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to allow them the freedom to speak and to extract in-depth answers to the required queries.

### Ethical Considerations

To adhere to the ethical considerations, I followed all the guidelines of the BERA (British Educational Research Association) framework.

### Data Analysis

For sampling, I used a technique called snowball sampling. Initially speaking with a few significant individuals I knew, I asked them to suggest other school administrators who would be receptive to hearing their thoughts. I collected the data over the course of about a month. I made contacts, followed up on responses, and scheduled meetings to have a firm grasp of the viewpoints of school administrators. The data was analyzed by sorting, organizing, modifying, and modeling data.

(Mezmir, [2024](#)) defines data analysis as the systematic process of understanding, analyzing, and evaluating data to look at each part of the data collection and extract meaningful information from it. Applying logical and analytical reasoning is how this is accomplished.

### Thematic Analysis

According to (De Paoli, [2023](#)), theme analysis is a method for assessing qualitative data. It is typically applied to a collection of texts, such as transcripts, interviews, etc. The researcher carefully assesses the data to look for general or common themes—topics, concepts, and meaning patterns that recur. There are several methods for doing a thematic analysis, such as coding, topic generation, theme definition, and more.

Based on participant replies, conclusions from the data analysis were drawn, and the findings were grouped into themes.

### Figure 3

Visual representation of themes



## Findings

### Leadership Philosophies

A leader's personal ideas, values, and guiding principles influence their decisions, actions, and interactions with others (Artasya, [2024](#)) (Lim, [2024](#)). This is known as leadership philosophy. It outlines how they will guide people or groups toward accomplishing a common goal. This philosophy frequently covers topics like decision-making processes, motivational approaches, communication styles, and methods for encouraging teamwork and growth. It functions as a kind of compass for leaders, directing their journeys and influencing the people they lead. A leadership philosophy becomes more than just a guide for the individual; rather, it becomes a quantifiable blueprint through which one earns results within a company. It takes the form of patterns, such as the relationship between team morale and leadership behaviors, the influence of trust on collaborative innovation, and the relationship between communication tactics and decision-making efficacy. By examining these trends and following the links that lead from the actions of leaders to the effects they have on students' teamwork performance, we can analyze and comprehend the real meaning of a leadership philosophy—not just the words that are spoken, but the concrete actions, choices, and outcomes.

The purpose of asking about the leadership philosophy of the school principals was to find the connection between institutional collaboration, teamwork ethics, and the leaders' philosophies. The sub-themes that emerged from these major philosophies were hybrid and humanistic.

### Hybrid Approach

Hybrid leaders combine aspects of well-known leadership models, such as situational, servant, collaborative, or transformational, carefully choosing the aspects that best suit the needs of the team and the particular setting (Avolio & Bass, [2004](#)). Even as they manage a range of demands and personalities, hybrid leaders place a high value on developing solid, sincere connections with their team members and encouraging open communication (Manz & Sims, [2009](#)). This approach leads to learning and growth. Two of the main characteristics of hybrid leadership are ongoing education and introspection. To increase efficacy, leaders welcome criticism, try out novel strategies, and continuously modify their approach (Heifetz & Linsky, [2002](#)).

Despite the principals' differing viewpoints, hybrid leadership was a recurring theme. These people showed how to effectively navigate challenging roles by using flexible strategic planning and skillfully adjusting to changing conditions. Their focus on cooperation and teamwork demonstrated a commitment to building strong teams and utilizing group knowledge. As they put it, they went beyond the stereotype of stiff persons and chose to take on the role of dynamic personality, bringing learning, development, and community to life. This ongoing adaptation guaranteed the success of each individual, which in turn contributed to the overall success of the school. This speaks to the core of hybrid leadership, which is about leaders guiding communities toward shared success one harmonic step at a time by inventing, empowering for group action, and smoothly blending flexible techniques.

Following are some responses of the participants

I promote collaboration, strategic planning, and continuous development. I create a dynamic, supportive learning environment through collaboration and adaptability. (P4)

I advocate for teamwork and ongoing improvement. By working together and being flexible, I establish a lively, encouraging learning atmosphere. (P1)

### Humanistic Leadership

Regardless of upbringing, skills, or views, every human being has intrinsic worth and dignity (Aiken, [1981](#)). Humanistic ethics place a high value on respecting each person's freedom and autonomy. Humanism promotes reason and critical thinking as methods for comprehending the outside world and oneself while also recognizing the importance of emotions and intuition (Dewey, [1938](#)). Self-awareness, introspection, and responsible decision-making are the keys to individuality. Emphasis on Emotional and Social Well-Being: Humanistic ideologies place a high value on emotional and social well-being in addition to



intellectual growth. They support fostering compassionate, empathetic, and constructive interactions (Gotsis, 2023)

All the principals depict student well-being as a whole. One of the principal advocates is creating a lively learning environment where educators and students may thrive. The other highlighted fundamentals and stressed the significance of personal safety and security as the cornerstone upon which learning can genuinely take root.

The development of students emotionally keeps in mind their well-being, social safety, security, and mental health. It is very important to safeguard when the child is coming to school, and it is a basic human right. When you are laying the foundation of a child, we have to keep in mind the settlement and the safety of that child and the mental health, which is very much focused, and we seem to care about it also, so we try to provide that, and that is the best philosophy of education. (P1)

The best principals and administrators build school environments that enable teachers to flourish and, in turn, students to excel. (P5)

School leaders do this by giving clear direction, cultivating the talent of teachers, and establishing high expectations for students and teachers.

From the outset of education, safeguarding a child's welfare and mental health must be the primary focus. Prioritizing their emotional and physical security lays a solid basis for their entire development and academic achievement."(P2)

I believe in establishing an atmosphere that encourages greatness for everyone by giving clear instructions, developing the abilities of their teachers, and having high standards for both students and teachers."(P3)

The fundamental significance of individual safety and security is the cornerstone upon which learning may thrive. They suggested that a stable and supportive foundation is necessary for achieving academic success. Every child deserves a sanctuary where they feel protected, loved, and emotionally prepared to learn (Mchenry, 2023). Humanistic leadership is committed to creating a learning environment that supports the success of both teachers and students. Their focus on high standards, talent development, and unambiguous direction is similar to Sergiovanni's transformative leadership paradigm (2000). Positive and humanistic leaders foster the professional development of their teachers, which benefits students by providing a supportive and productive lea

### Leadership Strategies to foster Collaboration and Teamwork:

A collaborative effort combines different perspectives, using innovation and shared accountability to achieve common objectives. Similar to a well-oiled machine, teamwork is centered on carrying out duties with precise roles and goals in mind. The two themes that emerged from the main theme of leadership strategies to foster collaboration and teamwork are as follows:

#### Shared Vision

A culture of collaboration is an environment in which individuals and teams come together to achieve common goals, share ideas, build on each other's strengths, and solve complex problems. (P5)

To cultivate a positive environment, it is essential to have open and honest communication with the staff. Cooperation, trust, safety, striving for shared purpose, value, and appreciation are the key pillars leading to positive change. (P3)

A common goal is more than just a clever tagline; it's the catalyst that elevates collaboration to previously unheard-of levels. A shared vision is an image of the future that the people in a company genuinely desire to create. (Senge 1994). Hackman (2002) states that the shared vision provides a common point of reference for team members' activities, helping them see how their contributions fit into the bigger picture. This emphasizes how a common vision may bring people together by making sure that everyone knows what their role is in reaching the overall objective. Performance teams have a clear, compelling, and common goal that sets direction, unites commitment, and energizes team members. This

demonstrates how a common goal can inspire team members to become more engaged and committed (Katzenbach & Smith, [2000](#)).

Everybody has different skills and viewpoints that we can contribute. However, when we come together in support of a common goal, we establish a lively and dynamic learning atmosphere where each person feels appreciated, and their contributions have a significant influence. (P2)

Every member of the team contributes something unique. Respect one another's opinions, regardless of how they differ from your own. Recall that valuing varied viewpoints is a key component of teamwork. (P1)

A shared vision involves more than just reaching objectives. It fires the spark of a common goal, fosters safety and trust, releases creative potential, and encourages consistent participation. It turns groups of people into a cohesive team, with each member playing a part in achieving a common goal and achieving a group goal. Productive teamwork involves more than merely cooperating; it also involves working with a purpose, building trust, and harnessing the power of a common goal. This is the secret to extraordinary teamwork, in which unique abilities work together towards innovation.

### **Empathetic Ear**

Participants emphasize the value of individualized instruction, open doors, and attentive listening. They think that safe spaces should be created where students feel heard and supported and that task assignments should properly take into account both their talents and weaknesses. This setting fosters mutual trust and a sense of accountability, which elevates cooperation beyond simple tasks. Productive cooperation and teamwork are fostered rather than forced. Schools may become harmonious ensembles where each student finds their voice and contributes to a supportive environment that actively listens, attends to individual needs, and fosters peer alliances.

I encourage collaboration by listening, keeping doors open, and providing advice. To balance workload, task assignments include strengths and weaknesses. Teachers in charge promote peer support and knowledge sharing. Regular team meetings and seminars foster idea exchange and problem-solving. Recognizing each team member's importance fosters professional progress and teamwork. (P4)

Teachers met with pupils individually to address their problems and give customized support. We also promoted peer assistance through study groups and organized recreation. The impact was clear: kids felt less anxious, more confident, and more connected. (P2)

An empathic ear does more than just listen. It involves making a conscious effort to comprehend the viewpoint, feelings, and requirements of the speaker. It involves placing oneself in their position, viewing the world from their perspective, and hearing not just what they have to say but also the sentiments that are hidden behind them. Members of a team are more likely to trust their leader and feel psychologically comfortable enough to share ideas, worries, and vulnerabilities when they feel heard and understood. This lays the groundwork for candid dialogue and teamwork (Edmondson, [2019](#)). Clear communication within the team is fostered, and misconceptions are decreased as a result of active listening. This makes it possible to collaborate and solve problems more successfully. Team members' sense of engagement and belonging is heightened when they perceive their leader to be understanding and valuable. More involvement and dedication to teamwork follow from this (Maslow, [1954](#)). Through deliberate cultivation and use of empathy, leaders may foster a cooperative and productive team atmosphere.

They think it's important to pay close attention to what students need, be available for ongoing help, and offer tailored counsel. This fosters a culture of shared accountability and trust, which enables teamwork to transcend tasks and evolve into a process of learning and development for all involved. This is consistent with Edmondson's ([2019](#)) study, which emphasizes the need for psychological safety—which is created through open communication and support—for productive teamwork and creativity. Strong peer ties are the main focus of the second principal, who is a master of positive social connections. They support educators who actively encourage peer support by setting up study sessions and planning leisure activities. Opportunities for information exchange, helping one another out, and forming deep connections are thus created. According to Topping ([2020](#)), peer-assisted learning has been demonstrated to improve social-



emotional health, academic achievement, and confidence. Participants are of the opinion that cooperation and teamwork are fostered rather than forced. Schools may harness the transforming power of cooperation by establishing a supportive climate that actively listens, attends to individual needs, and fosters peer alliances. " Students then experience a decrease in anxiety, an increase in confidence, and a sense of connectedness, as demonstrated by the second principal's observation. Eisenberg et al. (2013)'s research emphasizes the critical impact that social connections play in fostering emotional well-being and lowering anxiety in kids. Through fostering efficient cooperation and teamwork, driven by empathy, we can guarantee that each student discovers their voice and feels comfortable in collaboration and teamwork.

## Conclusion

This study emphasizes how important a principal's ideology is in creating a collaborative culture in a learning environment. Two main themes emerged: Leadership philosophies and Strategies for a collaborative environment. In the theme leadership philosophies, it was found that leaders who tend to adopt hybrid and humanistic approaches are more likely to have collaborative environments in their institutes. To develop a culture of collaboration and teamwork, leaders should have an empathetic ear. A leader who actively listens to the issues of his team and provides an environment where everyone feels heard escalates the motivation to work. Similarly, leaders who disseminate a concept of collective and shared goals to all the team members at the beginning of the task achieve positive results. Everyone feels like working for a shared vision, which eventually expedites the working of the team. The research accentuates the active role of a leader in creating a culture of collaboration and teamwork in an institute.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations can help to create an environment of collaboration and teamwork.

1. Leaders should be trained through SEL workshops.
2. Develop internal organizational policies to implement a culture of collaboration.
3. Keep track of current research that supports collaborative cultures in schools over the long run. And how external pressures, staff churn, and leadership transitions affect cooperation in a school.

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