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Educational Leadership: What Can China Teach the West About Inclusive Decision-Making Practices

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This paper focuses on educational decision-making in a Chinese context, but starts from a critique of distributed leadership educational theory as an instrumentalist and Western device of analysis. It is based upon a 2012 research project which reports on the academic insights of 51 Chinese school leaders who were also students studying "Masters of Educational Leadership" at an Australian university. The project explored these Chinese school leaders' perceptions of decision-making in education settings. It considered who would make decisions and how those decisions would be made in various hypothetical education scenarios. A unique feature of this research is the significant number of female school leaders from China who were in the participant cohort, so this study offers a rare insight into their thinking. Overall, this research offers an important first step in broadening out the theoretical discussions on leadership decision-making into a non-Western education environment. It also shows how educational research in the 21st century is shifting away from Western—only analysis and instead broadening out to explore what the unique and important trends are in an Asian nation that is a global powerhouse.

Keywords: decision-making, leadership, Chinese education organisations

This is a paper about educational leadership and power and how China may have lessons to teach the West about 21st century education organisations. It is framed within a critical perspective, underpinned by an iterative methodological approach, and the data presented offer some perceptions of leadership from 51 Chinese leaders in Zhejiang and Beijing educational organisations[1]. Its focus on a Chinese case study is important, because so little has been written in English language, peer-reviewed academic journals about Asian nations' school leaders and how they enact leadership; especially when compared with the tomes dedicated to Western schooling and leadership.

The first section of the paper traces the recent history of academics calling for a transfer of emphasis in leadership theory to an East Asian rather than a Western context. This follows with an explanation of the case study which underpins this paper and the hybrid leadership decision-making continuum survey used to explore decision-making processes in schools. The third and final sections of the paper discuss the findings of the research and offer an important first step in broadening theoretical discussions on leadership decision-making into a non-Western education environment.

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[1] For the rest of this paper, the author will mainly use the term "school" as shorthand for "educational organisations" encompassing all other-named centres of learning across the education sector from early childhood through to tertiary.

The Move Away From a Western Focus on Education Leadership Research

There have been repeated calls in research literature (Wong, 1998; Hofstede, 2001; Wang & Chee, 2011) to address cross-cultural understandings of leadership. Certainly, leadership theory conceived in the West is underpinned by principles of liberal democracy (Woods, 2004; Woods & Gronn, 2009; Bolden, 2011), and this has led to the argument that this shared democratic societal underpinning may skew researchers' understanding of leadership concepts. Wong (1998), Oplatka (2006), and Canchu (2008) argue that there is a perceptual bias and overbalancing of research literature and theories for leadership that have been developed from investigations that have only taken place in Western nations such as the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, e.g., in the field of distributed leadership (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Crowther, 2010; Fullan, 2006a; Fullan, 2006b; Fullan, 2007; Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Harris, 2008; Harris, 2013).

In response to their calls for more non-Western research to be conducted, this research project was developed to explore whether one area of leadership theory can resonate in non-democratic societies. Mainland China does not practice liberal democracy, and its patriarchal, Confucian, collectivist, and Communist cultural traditions offer a contrasting society quite suitable for a comparative study in leadership (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Wong, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2012).

What has been termed as "distributed" leadership theory in the West is arguably an analysis of the levels of exclusive or inclusive power used in the leadership's decision-making practices. It is a theory that:

> In recent years, the Western discourse on distributed leadership has attracted increased attention in Chinese societies… have traditionally relied on highly centralized administrative systems in which power is located in the person of the school principal or other unit leader. (Ho & Tikly, 2012, p. 401)

Thus, it is timely to consider whether this "increased attention" is a suitable focus for research. Distributing leadership means sharing power with more than one person, and power is ultimately expressed through the enactment of decision-making, the way to examine this leadership idea is by considering whether "decisions should be taken using an inclusive procedure, so as to be encapsulate that society's consensus" (Emerson, 2011, p. 46).

Who makes decision in schools is a tangible concept that can be asked and answered in various contexts. If we assume that in a complex structural organisation, such as a school, power is wielded every time that a final decision is made then power may be "measured" by learning who makes the final decisions. A final decision can be defined as one that cannot easily be un-decided by others with either formal or informal powers in that school community. Power can also be examined by analysing how deciders (leaders) make those final decisions. How those decisions are made can teach us about the coercive or collaborative nature of the school's leadership processes. Therefore, the combined knowledge of "whom and how" decisions are made in schools can offer a quite vivid analysis of school leadership.

Linear Leadership Behaviour Continuums

In an attempt to examine whether great power is concentrated on the position of a principal (and other named leaders of educational organisations), what is needed is a mechanism that can articulate decision-making options in a school organisation. One such device is leadership behaviour continuums which have been influential in Western educational leadership theory and which implicitly focus on decision-making by

management. The perception shared by many Western scholars is that their leadership and management theories have universal application (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Wong, 1998), but this must not be the starting point for this research. However, Western management theories were very popular in China in the 1980s and 1990s (Littrell, 2002; Wang & Chee, 2013), and the fact that this researcher teaches Western leadership theories in China even today suggests there is still some appeal. So using a continuum may be an acceptable tool to discover if they resonate in a Chinese context.

Linear leadership behaviour continuums first emerged from the managerial academy with a seminal work from Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973). They created, and later redeveloped, an oft-cited leader-follower continuum which has been commonly visually interpreted thus (see Figure 1):
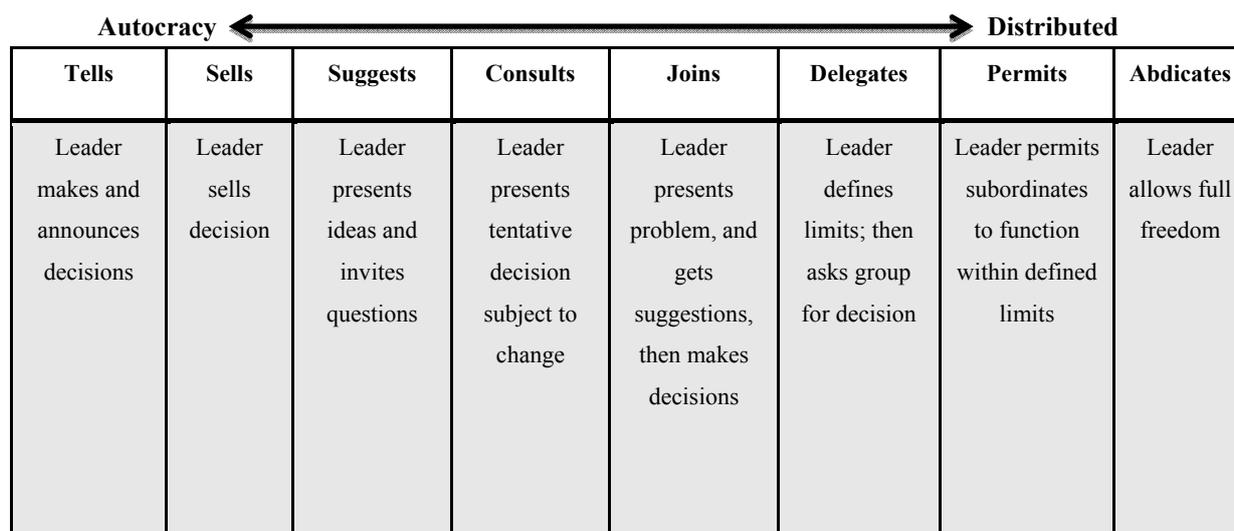
Autocracy ←						→ Distributed	
Tells	**Sells**	**Suggests**	**Consults**	**Joins**	**Delegates**	**Permits**	**Abdicates**
Leader makes and announces decisions	Leader sells decision	Leader presents ideas and invites questions	Leader presents tentative decision subject to change	Leader presents problem, and gets suggestions, then makes decisions	Leader defines limits; then asks group for decision	Leader permits subordinates to function within defined limits	Leader allows full freedom

Figure 1. Education based adaptation of the Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum (TSLC).

The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum (TSLC) was created within a functionalist framework which sees a working community as a hierarchically structured organisation. It considered how managers could share decision-making with:

> … subordinates and at the same time maintain the necessary authority and control in the organizations for which they are responsible. (The original TSLC offered) a range of possible leadership behaviours used by the boss… related to the degree of authority and the amount of freedom available to subordinates in reaching decisions. (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973, pp. 3-5)

Tannenbaum and Schmidt later developed a revised continuum which explicitly assumed that multiple forms of involvement occur in an organisation at any one time, and this concession re-energised the use of the TSLC into the 1980s and 1990s.

In the 21st century, education leadership literature began using linear leadership behaviour continuums and categorisations. In 2004 in England, a global educational management consultancy firm developed the following linear leadership continuum which has become an influential model in the UK school system (Hay Group, 2004) (see Figure 2):
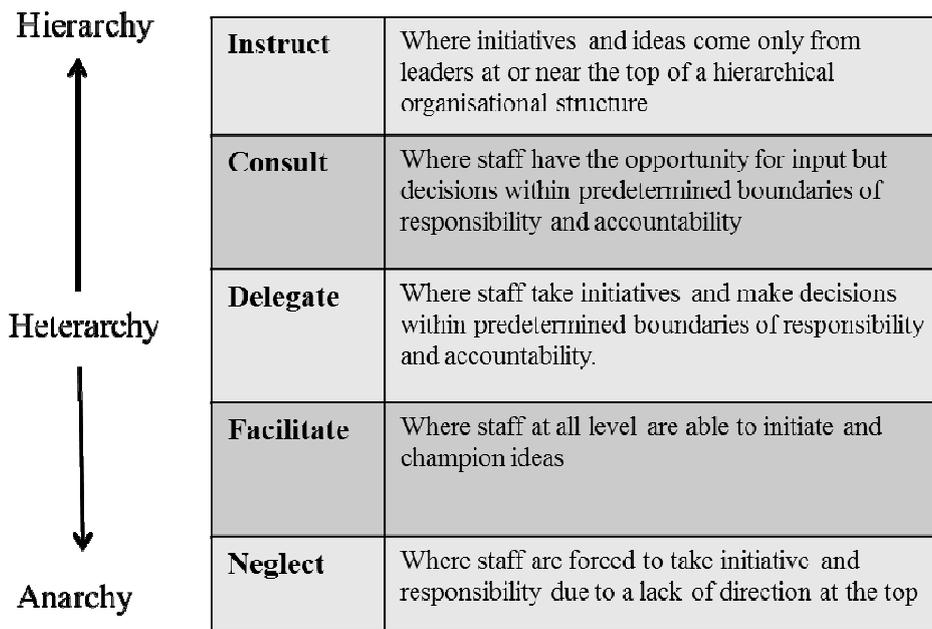
	Instruct	Where initiatives and ideas come only from leaders at or near the top of a hierarchical organisational structure
	Consult	Where staff have the opportunity for input but decisions within predetermined boundaries of responsibility and accountability
	Delegate	Where staff take initiatives and make decisions within predetermined boundaries of responsibility and accountability.
	Facilitate	Where staff at all level are able to initiate and champion ideas
	Neglect	Where staff are forced to take initiative and responsibility due to a lack of direction at the top

Figure 2. Hay Group Continuum.

Then came Hargreaves and Fink and their thermometer metaphor for a linear leadership behaviour continuum (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008, p. 113) (see Figure 3):
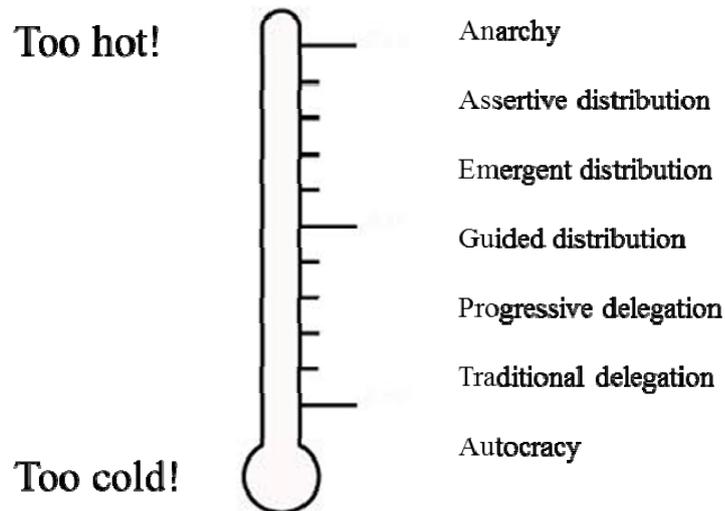

Figure 3. Thermometer continuum.

The previous three leadership continuums are functionally insightful as they can tell us how, and how much, leaders allow decision-making to be delegated to staff lower in an organisational hierarchy. However, each author's extreme option on the collaborative end of the scale is either anarchy or neglect. These pessimistic categorisations read as exaggerated, because even while they are not overtly saying, it is conveying the meaning that once a staff becomes assertive in their opinions and actions, a dreadful revolution within the hierarchy will occur and the leader will find it "too hot" to handle, and chaos will be the inevitable result. This

reads into a leadership narrative trapped in a "zero sum game, where giving power to another decreases one's own". It also cocoons continuum analysis within a leadership hierarchy framework where "preferences of the dominant group may appear so normal, so every day to themselves and others, that their dominance and their contestability do not even occur to people" (Lumby, 2013, pp. 584-585).

In 2005, Gunter developed a critical linear leadership behaviour categorisation to counter the functional continuum frameworks. Gunter's "Critical Categories of Distributed Leadership" framework moves the extreme point of the collaborative axis from an anarchical vision to what she terms a deeply democratic vision (see Figure 4):
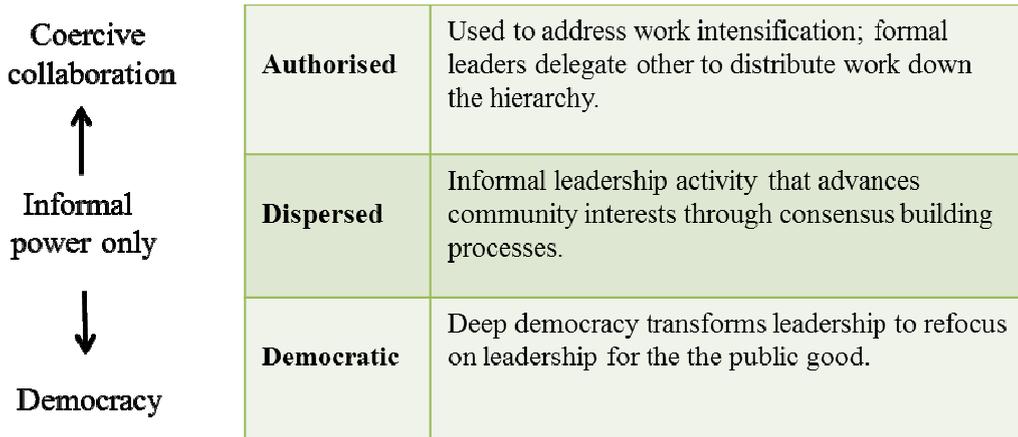
Coercive collaboration ↑ **Informal power only** ↓ **Democracy**	**Authorised**	Used to address work intensification; formal leaders delegate other to distribute work down the hierarchy.
	Dispersed	Informal leadership activity that advances community interests through consensus building processes.
	Democratic	Deep democracy transforms leadership to refocus on leadership for the the public good.

Figure 4. Gunter's democratic categorisation.

Gunter's use of the term "democratic" embeds her analysis within a culturally Western context. This makes analysis of her categorisation problematic because such a politically charged term can too easily be misinterpreted in a Chinese context where democracy is not synonymous with a pluralistic, liberal, and representative model.

In 2008, Youngs argued that previous leadership continuums had been designed "within a framework of authority" (Youngs, 2009, p. 6) and that a better conceptualisation is via his graph that measures concentrated to dispersed authority on one axis and either a managerial or holistic intention for pursuing distributed leadership on the other axis (see Figure 5):
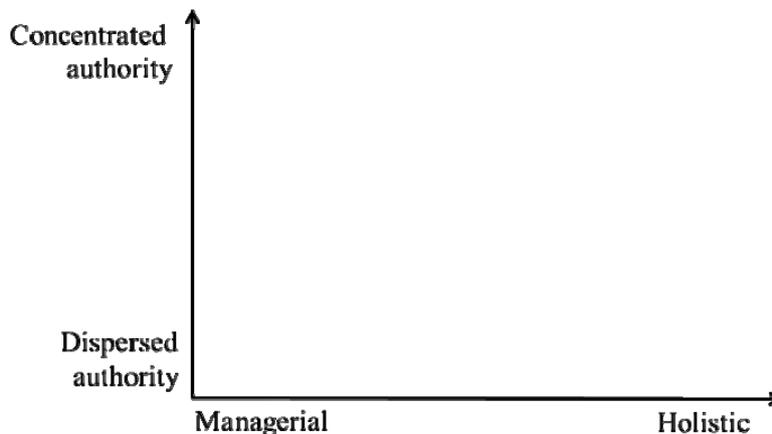

Figure 5. Intentionality continuum.

By adding in the concept of intentionality, Youngs argued that leadership practices derive from human agency and a leader's intentions should be examined to understand what framework they are operating toward. Then in 2009, Gronn pointed out the uselessness of all adjective based labelling of leadership practices. He opted for a "hybrid configuration" to "more accurately describe situational practice" (Gronn, 2009, p. 385) which acknowledged the blending of individual and team oriented decision-making in any organisation's structures. Gronn's notion of hybridity links well to the organisational phenomenon of heterarchy, which is an alternative model to viewing organisational structures from a linear perspective. Heterarchy is a concept that "provides a framework for understanding the kinds of reciprocal, multilevel, and non-linear phenomena" that operate at so many levels and layers within an education community (Crumley, 2005, p. 9).

The latter theorists' contributions address some of the instrumentalism criticisms of leadership behaviours by making overt underpinnings of earlier continuums that elevate the formal role of principal to indispensable in any school community. This was a needed first step. Now, it is perhaps timely to address an omission of leadership continuums, both functional and critical, which is that they articulate their various big picture visions of what is "good" leadership, but they do not directly address final decision-making processes. In fact, "to decide" is often mistakenly intermeshed with weaker processes such as consult and inform. These latter processes do not offer access to the privilege of having a say in the final decision that is made. However, final decision-making processes do show us tangible access to privilege and are therefore worth analysing. How a leader makes decisions and what decisions are put on the agenda of decision-making forums can add to what the previous continuums show us by allowing us to directly analyse the tactics school leaders use to command or collaborate in their school community.

Through the development of a hybrid decision-making continuum using the TSLC as a starting point, this researcher attempted to create a continuum perhaps suitable for the uncovering of leadership decision-making in an education context. It was worded for an education context and the collaborative end of the continuum was developed to show leadership practices more conducive to an emancipatory orientation than previous continuums modelled.

The Hybrid Leadership Decision Making Continuum (HLDMC) was the instrument used in the research project, which is outlined in the next section of this paper (see Figure 6).

Tells	Coerces	Consults	Shares	Delegates	Includes	Role Models
Principal makes a decision and announces it	Principal sells ideas behind the already made decision to staff	Principal consults about an issue and then makes a decision alone	Principal and other staff make a decision together	Principal hands over decision-making to other staff	All staff participate in decision-making equally	Staff and students participate in decision-making together

Figure 6. Hybrid Leadership Decision Making Continuum (HLDMC).

The Research Project

The research project was developed around answering two research questions:

(1) Who makes the final decisions in your school?

(2) How do the people who make final decisions in your school, make them?

The aims were to find out what sort of leadership the participants believed was currently happening in their educational organisations at the time of the data collection; and also to imagine their current organisation as a transformed, fully effective organisation and choose what sort of leadership practices should occur in that preferred world situation. These aims and the method deployed allowed participants to self-report their beliefs and opinions but that does not mean that we can infer they are akin to empirical observations of leadership being enacted.

The Chinese case study is actually from a larger and comparative research project conducted in 2012, which also involved a case study in Australia[2], but the scope of this conference paper is such that only the data collected for the Chinese case study are reported on. The Zhejiang and Beijing participants completed a survey which comprised three sections which had been translated into Mandarin from the original English version. The first section included demographic information about the participants. Section two used the author's HLDMC. The final section presented three different situational leadership scenarios and participants were asked to identify if their decision-making practices would change depending on varying circumstances.

The survey used deliberately generic leadership and organisation terminology, because the research participants worked in various organisations (e.g., pre-schools, primary schools, senior-secondary schools, normal universities, etc.) which use different titles for education leadership roles (e.g. principals, party secretaries, Deans, Heads, etc.). The language also had to be clear enough to create a good translation from English into Mandarin, but a definite limitation of the study is that Mandarin carries an additional dimension of interpretation which may have skewed the participants' understanding of the questions.

Section One: The Participants

There were 51 Chinese participants in this study who were volunteers from a group of "Masters of Educational Leadership" students who were studying through a cross-institutional teaching partnership between an Australian university and a normal university in China. The participants were self-selected from a discrete cohort of off-shore master's students. All had just finished studying four educational leadership units over the course of 12 months delivered by Australian academics (including this researcher) via an intensive bilingual teaching program. This shared experience of study made the participants able to be considered as expert participants, because all who completed the survey had studied, to a degree of competence at an internationally regarded master level, the theories of linear leadership continuums similar to that found in the research instrument.

Stringent ethical parameters were developed before proceeding with the study and all who chose to participate had it made clear to them that anonymity would be preserved and participants could be volunteer in the study but would in no way be punished or rewarded for participating in the study or not.

The following is demographic information about the 51 Chinese participants:

(1) The gender division was 31 females and 20 males, which is a 61:39 female to male participant ratio. This ratio is in stark contrast to the reality in China's education sector where "school leadership in China has been male dominant" (Law, 2013, p. 304) and remains so. Statistics from the first national study of principals in Chinese schools in 2008 show that there are 87.3% male and 12.7% female primary and secondary principals

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[2] See Cunningham, C. (2014). Decision-making processes and educational leadership in Australia. *Leading and Managing, 20* (1), pp. 11-31.

(Xu, 2009). In light of this statistic, the data in this paper will be quite unique as the data are generated from a majority female Chinese leadership participant cohort;

(2) Most participants were born in the 1960s and so were children during the Cultural Revolution. This was followed by those born in the 1970s who grew up in Deng's "Open Door" era and there were just a few participants born part of the post-1979 "Little Emperor" generation. To put these results in perspective, of the 536,000 principals in China, their mean age is 42 years old and the dominant age range of principals is 41-45 years of age (Xu, 2009);

(3) More than half of the participants were defined as senior leaders and just over 30% of the participants were middle managers. Taking these two groups together, this adds up to more than 90% of these Chinese participants having leadership authority and/or experience in their current school. Only four participants from the total indicated that they were currently in non-leadership positions within their school;

(4) The survey confirmed that all participants worked in the public sector, which is unsurprising given China's one party state;

(5) Participants worked across the learning levels starting from pre-kindergarten, but most participants worked in the secondary and tertiary levels of the education sector;

(6) Most of the Chinese participants had given a great many years of experience and service to their careers. Less than 10% of the participant cohort had less than 10 years' experience while 70% of participants have more than 20 years' experience.

In summary, the dependent variable for the participant cohort is their shared studies in a Master of Education Leadership. While the participants have many independent variables in their work lives, but there is a distinct majority of participants who share common demographic attributes which can be summarised thus: female leaders with extensive experience in their careers and who are aged in their 40s.

Section Two: The Hybrid Leadership Decision Making Continuum

Two questions pertaining to the author's HLDMC were in section two of the survey:

(1) The first question asked the participants to indicate where they think their school leadership's decision-making practices currently lie on the continuum;

(2) The second question asked the participants to indicate where they think their school leadership's decision-making practices should lie on the continuum.

When asked about real world school leadership behaviours, the participants indicated in Table 1 that there are few participants who believe their school leadership style is autocratic (tells, coerces), but there is a broad spread of leadership decision-making behaviours currently found in Chinese schools considered in this case study. The highest grouping—35% of the participants indicated the leader delegate's decisions to other staff. The second highest grouping, with 23% of the participants, indicated that leaders include all staff in decision-making equally.

Table 2 in this section asked the participants to indicate which leadership decision-making behaviours should be chosen, in their opinion, if their school was operating in a preferred world leadership environment.

Table 2 shows a substantial narrowing in leadership behaviour choice with all of the participants indicating their preferred world decision-making behaviour moving to the right end of the continuum. What is more, with 43% of participants opting for the most extreme level of the continuum, role modelling, this suggests a strong belief in the cohort that schools should include all staff and (some) students in

decision-making processes. This suggests a desire for very participatory decision-making practices rather than what already appears to happen currently.

Table 1

Participants' View on Where Their School's Leadership Practice Fits on the HLDMC

Leader(s)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Tells	2	3.9
Coerces	2	3.9
Consults	7	13.7
Shares	5	9.8
Delegates	18	35.4
Includes	17	33.3
Total	51	100.0

Table 2

Participants' View on Where Their School's Leadership Practice Should Fit on the HLDMC

Leader(s)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Suggests	2	3.9
Consults	2	3.9
Delegates	8	15.7
Includes	17	33.3
Role models	22	43.2
Total	51	100.0

Summary comment. Section two of the survey corresponded with the first research question of this project—about the participants' perceptions of who makes, and who should make, the final decisions in schools in China? The two HLDMC questions established a base line; indicating where leadership decision-making processes are in the real world and preferred world of the Chinese schools in this case study. In sum, the majority of participants believe that in the real and preferred world, leadership practices are already on the inclusive decision-making side of the continuum. Nevertheless, they would like to see leadership practices move to include many participants in decision-making processes in their preferred world scenario.

Section Three: Situational Leadership Scenarios

Section three of the survey added situational leadership variables into the study to find out if participants would change their leadership decision-making preferences when exposed to different situations where variables of time, ethical risk and the importance of a decision have to be taken into account. Work occurred with Chinese colleagues to construct three different situations in the survey to ensure that they would be equally applicable in Australian and Chinese school contexts. These were:

(1) A crisis situation—a student death from an accident in the school stairwell;

(2) An ethically sensitive scenario—the bequeathing of a substantial sum of money by an alumnus to the school;

(3) A symbolic and reputational scenario—changing an outdated school motto.

For each of the three scenarios, participants were asked to first indicate who would make this decision in

their current setting. Then, who should make this decision be made in an ideal setting? The choices were:

a. Leader: referring to a single authoritative person in an educational setting who would make the final decision alone.

b. Leadership team: assuming a combination of multiple authoritative people who make the educational institutions' ultimate decisions together.

c. Some staff: representing senior teaching and learning staff members being a part of the final decision-making, along with the leadership team.

d. All staff: denoting final decision-makers as the leader(s), along with the leadership team and all teaching and learning staff members.

e. All staff and students: denoting final decision-makers as involving not only all staff but also including at least some students as representatives of all students in the school.

This section of the survey also focused on the project's second research question: How do the people who make final decisions in Chinese schools make them? This was to discover if power and authority were exclusive or inclusive at the point of ultimate action and responsibility in schools by knowing how final decisions are made at those times and by whom.

It was tricky finding specifics of decision-making processes in contemporary educational research literature. Instead, literature from outside of the education sector was explored and eventually decision-making mechanisms using language and concept perhaps more commonly used by political scientists were used. There is a risk using political concept in a survey for Chinese participants, ultimately though, a decision-making framework was developed which had four mechanisms which participants could choose from:

(1) Issuing a directive: A directive is given by the decision-makers to the followers and the decision-makers expect that the followers will follow the directive;

(2) Absolute majority voting: In an official forum, leaders and non-leaders vote as equal decision-making actors and when a position accrues 50% + 1 favour, it becomes the accepted decision;

(3) Negotiation to consensus or vote: In an official forum, leaders and non-leaders negotiate together to try and reach unanimity. But if that is not achievable in a certain timeframe (or other threshold) then the group, as equal decision-making actors, opt to resort to a super-majority vote and when a position accrues 66% + 1 favour, it becomes the accepted decision;

(4) Consensus: In an official forum, leaders and non-leaders negotiate together as equal decision-making actors and ultimately reach unanimity on one choice which becomes the accepted decision.

Scenario one: a crisis situation. Scenario one was an emergency situation. A student dies due to an accident involving a stair-rail breaking at the school and a decision has to be made whether to close the facility for a short period of time. Table 3 presents the findings on participants' views on who would make the final decision in such a case in their school.

Table 3 indicates that for 80% of all Chinese schools to which the participants were referring in this emergency situation, the decision to close the school would be made by the leadership team. The overwhelming choice of leadership team may reflect the unique school leadership structure in China where a single leader is less common than a two-person leadership team of principal and party secretary (Law, 2013, p. 314). Fewer than 10% of the participants believed all staff would be involved in making the final decision whether to close the school and the other options were chosen by a small fraction of the participants (the table also presents "missing" as a criterion which refers to when a participant omitted a response to the question).

Table 3

Participants' View on Who Would Make the Final Decision in a Crisis Situation

Who would make the final decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	3	5.9
Leadership team	41	80.4
Some staff	1	2.0
All staff	5	9.8
Missing	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 4 represents the participants' views on how the final decision would be made in relation to the closure of the school for a short period of time.

Table 4

Participants' View on How the Final Decision Would Be Made in a Crisis Situation

How would the decision be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Vote	6	11.8
Negotiation	14	27.5
Consensus	30	58.8
Missing	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

More than half of the participants (58%) declared that in this real world crisis scenario, the decision-makers would use consensus. The next highest choice was negotiation and just under 12% believed the decision-makers would use a 50% + 1 voting mechanism to decide a course of action. Taken together with the Table 3 results, the data suggest that the majority of Chinese participants in this study believe they would make decisions in a crisis situation by a leadership group after unanimity is reached by that small group.

Still in regard to this emergency scenario, Table 5 presents the findings of who should make the final decision in a preferred world school as stated by the 51 Chinese participants.

Table 5

Participants' View on Who Should Make the Final Decision in a Crisis Situation

Who should make the final decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	1	2.0
Leadership team	28	54.9
Some staff	5	9.8
All staff	14	27.5
All staff and students	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

This table records a change from the real world scenario outlined in Table 4 but still has the majority of participants, 55% of them believe that the leadership team should make the final decision to close the school. The main change sees a quarter of participants move away from choosing the leadership team as the best option of final decision-makers to more inclusive configurations—with 27% choosing all staff as the best option.

Interestingly, in this crisis situation where time was of the essence, three participants opted for the most inclusive option and included students in their preferred final decision-making team when a decision to close the school needed to be made.

Table 6 illustrates the participants' thoughts on how the final decision should be made in their educational setting in an emergency situation.

Table 6

Participants' View on How Should the Final Decision Should Be Made in a Crisis Situation

How should the decision be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Vote	6	11.8
Negotiation	11	21.6
Consensus	34	66.7
Total	51	100.0

The findings in Table 6 are similar to the participants choices for the real world choices outlined in Table 4. The preferred world results are almost the same for directive and vote options. The negotiation option decreased and seems to have moved to the consensus option, thus strengthening the majority to almost 67% for consensus agreement on whether the school should close for a short period of time.

Scenario two: an ethically sensitive situation. Scenario two sees an educational organisation bequeathed a sum of 50,000 Chinese yuan to be spent on resources. This scenario involves the gift of a relatively sizeable sum of money (the trigger in this ethically sensitive situation) and a decision is required as to how to spend the money within the organisation.

Firstly, Table 7 indicates that the participants view on who would make the final decision in their school in this ethically sensitive scenario.

Table 7

Participants' View on Who Would Make the Final Decision in an Ethically Sensitive Situation

Who would make final decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	9	17.6
Leadership team	37	72.5
Some staff	2	3.9
All staff	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

Table 7 shows that 90% of participants have a clear belief that when it comes to this ethical scenario, the leaders of the school (singular or plural) would be the only staff involved in the final decision.

When identifying how the final decision would be made in relation to spending ¥50,000 on educational resources, Table 8 shows that the most commonly chosen option, from 37% of the participants, was reaching a consensus decision on how the money should be spent. The next 37% thought if a consensus could be reached by the decision-makers that would happen but if unanimity could not be achieved then the decision-makers would resort to vote where a 66% + 1 majority decides the issue. Taking this information together with what we learned in Table 8, it seems that most Chinese participants believe that in an ethical scenario, the leadership team will decide by consensus.

Table 8

Participants' View on How Should the Final Decision Would Be Made in an Ethically Sensitive Situation

How would final decision be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Directive	4	7.8
Vote	4	7.8
Negotiation	19	37.3
Consensus	24	47.1
Total	51	100.0

Table 9 demonstrates the participants' views on who should make the final decision if their school was bequeathed the sum of money in a "preferred world".

The major shift in choice by participants from the real world in Table 7 to the preferred world is a move away from leader (17.6% down to 2%) to some or all staff. The leadership team barely moved a percentage, while one participant believed students should be included as final decision-makers too.

Table 9

Participants' View on Who Should Make the Final Decision in an Ethically Sensitive Situation

Who should make final decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	1	2.0
Leadership team	36	70.6
Some staff	4	7.8
All staff	9	17.6
All staff and students	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 10 registers a combined percentage of more than 86% of respondents believing that decision-makers in their school should decide how to spend the ¥50,000 by consensus, or start by sincerely attempting to come to a consensus decision before resorting to a super-majority vote. These results indicate that many participants place a lot of faith in consensus decision-making as a good process to best resolve ethically sensitive decisions.

Table 10

Participants' View on How Should the Final Decision Should Be Made in an Ethically Sensitive Situation

How should the final decision be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Directive	0	0
Vote	7	13.7
Negotiation	9	17.6
Consensus	35	68.6
Total	51	100.0

Scenario three: a symbolic, reputational situation. Scenario three sets up a situation based on a reputational and symbolic decision that would have long-term significance but which could be decided through a slow, thorough, and inclusive process. In this scenario, the school wants to update its image by changing its motto. The choices are already narrowed down to five finalist mottos and the winning motto is now to be decided.

Table 11 shows an almost even split between participants choosing the leadership team or all staff as the final decision-makers in this reputational scenario. Unlike the previous real world scenarios, this time 6% of participants believed that in their school, students would also be a part of the final decision-making.

Table 11

Participants' View on Who Would Make the Final Decision in a Symbolic and Reputational Situation

Who would make the decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	2	3.9
Leadership team	21	41.2
Some staff	5	9.8
All staff	20	39.2
All staff and students	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

Table 12 registers quite a high percentage, 41% of participants who believed that consensus would be used in this reputational scenario in the real world. The next highest percentage at 29% is for negotiation so taking these two consensus-based choices together, then 70% of participants opted for consensus as the way to make the final decision. Interestingly, more than a quarter of the rest of the participants chose a 50% + 1 vote as their school's real world method of making the final decision—this is a much higher percentage than either of the previous two scenarios (where the "vote" choice only reached 11.8% and 7.8%).

Now turning to the preferred world situations for scenario three, firstly, Table 13 presents the findings on who should make the final decision in this symbolic and reputational scenario.

Table 12

Participants' View on How Would the Final Decision Be Made in a Symbolic and Reputational Situation

How the final decision would be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Vote	14	27.5
Negotiation	15	29.4
Consensus	21	41.2
Missing	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 13

Participants' View on Who Should Make the Final Decision in a Symbolic and Reputational Situation

Who should make the decision	Frequency	Percent (%)
Leader	1	2.0
Leadership team	14	27.5
Some staff	4	7.8
All staff	27	52.9
All staff and students	5	9.8
Total	51	100.0

A majority of participants (53%) preferred all staff being final decision-makers in this reputational scenario and almost 10% now chose all staff and students as their preferred choice. Fewer participants chose

the leadership team as their preferred option in comparison to their real world option and there were minimal changes in the other choice options.

The final table in the survey sought the perspectives of the participants in relation to how should the final decision about the school motto be made in a preferred world (see Table 14).

Table 14

Participants' View on How Should the Final Decision Be Made in a Symbolic and Reputational Situation

How should the final decision be made	Frequency	Percent (%)
Directive	1	2.0
Vote	15	29.4
Negotiation	10	19.6
Consensus	25	49.0
Total	51	100.0

Although no participants indicated that in the real world, a directive would be used to make the final decision, one lone participant decided in this preferred world survey question to opt for directive as the best way to whittle down the five finalist mottos to the ultimate winning motto. An almost majority (49%) preferred consensus to be the mode of decision-making and another almost 20% of participants chose negotiation which is the other method that begins with consensus. Quite a sizeable group of participants (29%) believed that a 50% + 1 voting method would be the preferred option when choosing a new motto.

Summary comment. In section three of the survey, three situational scenarios were studied to see if an emergency situation, an ethically sensitive situation, and a reputational situation would alter both the choice of who would make the final decision in a school and how that final decision would be made. In all three scenarios, a leadership team using a consensus decision-making mechanism was chosen the most, except in the final preferred scenario. The findings also show that the situation does change participants' choices. In the data, decision-making is the most concentrated when ¥50,000 needs to be spent, followed by the death of a student scenario and the least so in the motto scenario.

Another pattern that emerged from the data in the real preferred world findings, there were reasonable similarities between the status quo (real world) and best practice (preferred world). Remembering that these Chinese participants are actual leaders within their schools, it seems that they perceive themselves as already functioning quite close to their preferred model. The data register a trend for participants to want to include more staff in final decisions. In terms of decision-making mechanisms, the data clearly show a preference for, as well as current enactment of, consensus decision-making in the participants' Chinese schools.

What Has Been Learned

What do all three sections of the survey data tell us collectively? We have now learned that this information comes from a Chinese participant cohort whose majority is made up of female leaders. When we look at the majority view for their current and preferred leadership practices, it is on the distributed side of the HLDMC continuum. In fact, the majority stated that they believed the best leadership practice permits all staff and some students to participate in decision-making together. This stands somewhat in contrast to the situational scenarios' findings which show in five out of the six real and preferred world situational scenarios, a small leadership team was the overwhelming first choice for the participants.

So, can a Chinese school have both a small group of leaders making final decisions and at the same time role model very inclusive decision-making? The results are uncertain as we cannot be sure whether these seemingly contrary stances have emerged because of instrument design fault; human beings capacity to hold two conflicting viewpoints at once; or that the Chinese participants were trying to answer in a way that they believed would please the researcher. Whatever the reason, further study is needed to consider these uncertainties and limitations.

What is far more certain from the data is the overwhelming preference for consensus decision-making as the mechanism for making final decision in all three scenarios. It is not simply the preferred choice, there is strong belief from the participants that consensus is also already the most common form of final decision-making in their Chinese schools. The obvious and tempering factors about these finding are: (1) it may be reasonably easy to reach consensus between a small leadership team; and (2) the data tell us nothing about the informal powers and relationships which might be influencing the consensus. Again, further study is needed if we are to know more about the enactment of Chinese consensus decision-making practices that the participants believe are happening. This would be very useful, because if it is found that Chinese schools are practicing consensus decision-making effectively, this is a specific area from which Western schools could really learn a great deal.

The intention of this paper was to find out if leadership decision-making theory resonates when transferred into a contemporary Chinese education sector and if there are lessons the West can learn from the findings. The data suggest that there is an appetite for using inclusive decision-making practices in the Chinese schools from which the participants came and this therefore infers that the concepts can be transferred across cultures. If this inference proves to be sound, perhaps in the next decade, we will see a growth in studies of "decision-making leadership with Chinese characteristics" and this can only be a good thing if the ultimate goal of education in all societies is to empower and engage students to be active and informed citizens in a globally connected planet.

As a final thought, a fascinating area to further study might be whether female Chinese leaders, rather than their male leadership colleagues, are more likely to absorb and enact the ideas underpinning distributed leadership theory. The *Athena Doctrine* (Gerzema & D'Antonio, 2013) argues that women will rule the future because so-called feminine qualities, such as openness, sharing, flexibility, and empathy are essential qualities in an inter-connected and socially networked world. Can inclusive decision-making leadership theory grow and be effective in such a future? This author believes so.

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