

Distributed Leadership In Improving Collective Decision Making And Organizational Effectiveness

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Abstract: Distributed leadership has emerged as an important paradigm in contemporary organizational studies, particularly within educational institutions that require collaborative decision-making and adaptive governance. This study examines how distributed leadership contributes to improving collective decision making and organizational effectiveness. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis in an educational institution implementing collaborative leadership practices. The findings indicate that distributed leadership enhances organizational effectiveness by fostering shared responsibility, increasing participation in decision-making processes, and strengthening professional collaboration among organizational members. Furthermore, distributed leadership creates an environment that supports trust, accountability, and innovation, which collectively contribute to improved institutional performance. However, the implementation of distributed leadership also requires clear communication structures, professional capacity building, and a supportive organizational culture. The study concludes that distributed leadership plays a significant role in strengthening collective decision making and promoting sustainable organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: Distributed Leadership, Collective Decision Making, Organizational Effectiveness, Collaborative Leadership, Educational Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Organizations in the twenty-first century operate within environments characterized by rapid technological change, complex governance structures, and increasing demands for collaboration. Leadership models that rely solely on hierarchical authority often struggle to address these complexities because decision-making authority remains concentrated at the top of the organization. Such conditions may restrict participation among organizational members and limit the diversity of perspectives involved in solving institutional challenges. Scholars in organizational and educational leadership increasingly emphasize collaborative leadership approaches that distribute responsibility across multiple actors within an institution (Spillane, 2006).

Distributed leadership has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks for understanding leadership as a collective practice rather than an individual role. This perspective conceptualizes leadership as an interaction among leaders, followers, and organizational situations. Leadership tasks are shared across administrators, teachers, and professional staff who collectively contribute to achieving organizational goals. The focus moves from a single leader's authority toward the patterns of collaboration that shape decision-making processes within the organization (Gronn, 2002). Leadership activities are enacted through interactions among individuals who bring different forms of expertise, professional experiences, and institutional knowledge.

Educational institutions provide a significant context for examining distributed leadership. Schools, universities, and training institutions often rely on collaboration among educators, administrators, and support staff to implement policies and improve learning outcomes. Distributed leadership supports this collaborative culture by encouraging active participation among staff members in planning, decision making, and institutional problem solving. Research indicates that distributed leadership contributes to stronger professional learning communities and greater teacher engagement in school development initiatives (Harris, 2013). Collective engagement in leadership tasks supports professional trust and strengthens relationships among members of the organization.

One of the central contributions of distributed leadership lies in its relationship with collective decision making. Collective decision making refers to participatory processes through which organizational members jointly identify problems, deliberate possible solutions, and agree on strategic actions. When leadership roles are shared across individuals, organizational members develop a stronger sense of ownership toward institutional goals. Participation in decision making increases transparency and allows multiple perspectives to shape organizational strategies. Empirical studies indicate that leadership distribution improves communication and fosters collaborative cultures that support inclusive decision processes (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Collective decision making plays a critical role in institutional performance because organizational problems rarely emerge from a single domain of expertise. Educational institutions frequently address issues related to curriculum, student development, resource allocation, and

technological innovation. These issues require the involvement of multiple professionals who possess specialized knowledge in different areas. Distributed leadership creates opportunities for these professionals to contribute meaningfully to institutional decisions. The presence of shared leadership structures also strengthens accountability among organizational members because decisions reflect collective agreement rather than unilateral authority.

The influence of distributed leadership extends beyond decision-making processes toward broader dimensions of organizational effectiveness. Organizational effectiveness refers to an institution's ability to achieve strategic objectives while sustaining adaptability, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction. Institutions that encourage shared leadership practices often demonstrate stronger collaboration, improved problem-solving capacity, and more responsive organizational structures (Bolden, 2011). Leadership distribution allows organizations to mobilize human resources more effectively because expertise is recognized and utilized across multiple levels of the institution.

Studies in educational leadership highlight a strong association between distributed leadership and institutional improvement. Schools that implement distributed leadership practices tend to develop cultures of professional collaboration where educators actively participate in shaping teaching strategies and institutional policies. Such environments encourage innovation and collective responsibility for educational outcomes. Research also shows that distributed leadership strengthens teacher motivation and promotes sustained school improvement initiatives (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). Leadership becomes embedded in everyday organizational practices rather than confined to formal administrative positions.

Implementation of distributed leadership requires supportive organizational conditions. Leadership distribution depends on trust, open communication, and shared professional norms within the institution. Organizational cultures characterized by rigid hierarchies may limit the effectiveness of distributed leadership because staff members may hesitate to participate actively in leadership activities. Professional capacity also plays a role since individuals involved in leadership tasks need appropriate skills in communication, collaboration, and strategic planning (Spillane et al., 2004). Institutional structures that facilitate collaboration, such as professional

learning communities and participatory committees, strengthen the practice of distributed leadership.

The growing attention toward distributed leadership reflects a broader shift in leadership theory that emphasizes collective agency and organizational learning. Institutions seeking to remain adaptive and innovative often require leadership structures that encourage collaboration across organizational boundaries. Distributed leadership provides a framework that aligns leadership practices with the complex and interconnected nature of modern organizations.

This study investigates the role of distributed leadership in improving collective decision making and organizational effectiveness. The research addresses three guiding questions:

1. How is distributed leadership practiced within the organization?
2. How does distributed leadership influence collective decision making?
3. How does distributed leadership contribute to organizational effectiveness?

The study contributes to the expanding body of literature on collaborative leadership by examining the practical implications of distributed leadership within organizational settings. Findings are expected to provide insights for institutions seeking to strengthen participatory governance and enhance organizational performance through shared leadership practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the role of distributed leadership in improving collective decision making and organizational effectiveness. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore leadership practices, interactions among organizational members, and contextual dynamics that shape decision-making processes within institutions. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for leadership studies because leadership is often embedded in social interactions, professional relationships, and organizational routines (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research used a case study strategy to obtain an in-depth understanding of distributed leadership practices within a specific organizational setting. Case study research enables the investigation of complex social phenomena within real-life contexts. Leadership practices cannot

be separated from institutional structures, professional cultures, and collaborative practices that develop within organizations. A case study design allows researchers to capture these contextual relationships in detail (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in an educational organization that applies collaborative leadership practices in its management and decision-making processes. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that individuals who had direct involvement in leadership activities and institutional decision making were included in the research. The participants consisted of administrators, department coordinators, and professional staff who regularly participated in leadership meetings and collaborative planning activities. A total of fifteen participants took part in the study.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding distributed leadership practices and collective decision making within the organization. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants. Observations were conducted during organizational meetings, planning sessions, and collaborative discussions to examine how leadership roles were shared and how decisions were negotiated among members. Field notes were recorded to capture patterns of interaction, communication, and participation during these activities. Document analysis included the examination of institutional policies, meeting minutes, strategic plans, and organizational reports that provided information about leadership structures and decision-making procedures.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Interview recordings were transcribed and reviewed repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated to identify significant patterns related to leadership practices, decision-making participation, and organizational collaboration. These codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the main dimensions of distributed leadership and organizational effectiveness. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to interpret how leadership practices influenced decision-making processes within the organization (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Several strategies were used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and institutional documents. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with several participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings. Detailed descriptions of the research context and procedures were also provided to enhance transparency and allow readers to evaluate the transferability of the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Distributed Leadership

The findings reveal that distributed leadership within the organization is implemented through collaborative leadership structures that involve multiple actors in institutional governance. Leadership responsibilities are shared through formal and informal mechanisms such as leadership teams, working groups, and participatory committees. These structures allow members of the organization to contribute their professional expertise to planning, problem solving, and policy development. Leadership practice emerges through interaction among individuals rather than through the authority of a single formal leader.

Participants described leadership activities as collective processes that involve administrators, coordinators, and professional staff in various organizational initiatives. Leadership teams meet regularly to discuss institutional goals, review ongoing programs, and determine strategic priorities. Working groups are formed to address specific issues such as curriculum development, organizational planning, or program evaluation. These groups operate through dialogue and professional exchange, which supports collaborative problem solving. Leadership practice becomes embedded in daily organizational routines and professional interactions.

The presence of participatory committees strengthens the distribution of leadership across organizational levels. Members of these committees represent different professional roles and departments within the institution. Committee discussions allow individuals to express ideas, provide feedback, and propose solutions related to institutional challenges. This participatory

structure creates opportunities for leadership to emerge from individuals who possess relevant expertise or experience. Leadership becomes situational and relational, shaped by collaboration among members of the organization (Bolden, 2011).

Participants also reported that distributed leadership supports professional autonomy while maintaining coordination across departments. Staff members participate actively in planning activities and program development because they perceive that their perspectives are valued by the organization. Opportunities to contribute to leadership processes increase motivation and professional commitment. When individuals participate in planning institutional initiatives, they develop a stronger sense of ownership toward organizational goals and policies. Leadership responsibilities are no longer viewed as tasks limited to formal administrators. Professional staff contribute ideas and strategies that shape institutional direction.

Observational data indicate that collaborative leadership practices improve communication across organizational units. Meetings and planning sessions function as spaces where members exchange information, discuss challenges, and generate alternative solutions. These interactions support knowledge sharing and encourage collective learning among professionals. Leadership practice becomes distributed across individuals who coordinate activities, facilitate discussions, and guide collaborative processes. Such patterns align with the concept of leadership as a network of interactions rather than a hierarchical function (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Distributed leadership structures allow organizations to utilize the collective knowledge and skills of their members. Educational institutions often contain professionals with diverse expertise in areas such as curriculum design, administration, and community engagement. Shared leadership practices create opportunities for these forms of expertise to influence organizational decision making. Collaborative structures enable institutions to address complex challenges through interdisciplinary perspectives. Leadership practice becomes a dynamic process shaped by cooperation among individuals with complementary competencies.

The findings also show that distributed leadership contributes to a culture of trust and shared responsibility within the organization. Members feel encouraged to express opinions during discussions and participate in shaping institutional decisions. This environment strengthens

professional relationships and fosters mutual respect among colleagues. Organizational members view leadership as a collective endeavor that supports institutional improvement and professional collaboration. Research on leadership distribution indicates that shared leadership practices strengthen organizational capacity and encourage innovation within institutions (Gronm, 2009).

The implementation of distributed leadership also requires supportive organizational conditions. Clear communication channels, mutual trust among members, and shared institutional values create an environment where leadership can be distributed effectively. Institutions that cultivate collaborative cultures enable individuals to engage in leadership roles without rigid hierarchical barriers. Professional learning opportunities also contribute to the development of leadership capacity among staff members.

These findings demonstrate that distributed leadership operates through collaborative interactions that integrate professional expertise across organizational levels. Leadership becomes embedded in collective practices that support institutional learning, shared responsibility, and participatory governance. Such structures enhance the ability of organizations to respond to emerging challenges while strengthening cooperation among members of the institution.

Distributed Leadership and Collective Decision Making

The analysis of interview and observational data indicates a strong relationship between distributed leadership practices and the development of collective decision making within the organization. Decision-making processes are carried out through structured meetings, collaborative consultations, and professional discussions that involve actors from multiple organizational levels. Leadership roles are shared among administrators, coordinators, and staff members who contribute to identifying problems, proposing solutions, and evaluating institutional strategies. Decision processes are shaped through dialogue and interaction rather than unilateral authority. Leadership activity emerges from the collaboration among individuals who collectively interpret challenges and design responses that align with organizational goals.

Participants described regular leadership meetings as key spaces where collaborative decision making takes place. During these meetings, individuals present information related to ongoing programs, institutional challenges, and proposed initiatives. Discussions involve

questioning, clarification, and reflection that allow members to explore alternative perspectives before reaching agreement. Such practices reflect the social nature of leadership, where decision outcomes develop through collective reasoning and professional exchange. Leadership becomes embedded in the process of communication among organizational members who contribute knowledge drawn from their professional experiences (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

Participants emphasized that distributed leadership creates opportunities for staff members to express ideas and perspectives that might not emerge within hierarchical leadership structures. Staff members reported that the collaborative environment encourages them to share insights related to curriculum development, administrative coordination, and program evaluation. Participation in decision-making discussions increases their sense of professional recognition. Individuals feel that their contributions have meaningful impact on institutional direction. These experiences strengthen engagement and motivation among organizational members because they perceive themselves as active participants in leadership processes.

Observational evidence supports these perceptions. During planning meetings and committee discussions, staff members frequently propose ideas that influence the direction of institutional initiatives. Suggestions are examined collectively through dialogue that includes administrators and colleagues from different departments. Such interactions allow organizations to integrate multiple forms of expertise into decision-making processes. Educational institutions often contain professionals with specialized knowledge related to pedagogy, administration, community engagement, and program management. Distributed leadership structures enable organizations to mobilize these diverse competencies when making strategic decisions. Collective reasoning becomes a mechanism for generating more informed and contextually relevant solutions.

Collective decision making also strengthens the sense of ownership among members of the organization. When individuals participate directly in the development of policies or institutional programs, they develop stronger commitment toward the implementation of those decisions. Participants explained that shared decision processes encourage responsibility because individuals view institutional outcomes as the result of collective effort. Leadership distribution creates a

culture where responsibility is shared rather than concentrated in formal administrative roles. Research on shared leadership indicates that such practices foster stronger engagement and enhance group performance within organizations (Carson et al., 2007).

The collaborative nature of distributed leadership contributes to transparency and trust within the organization. Decision-making discussions allow members to observe how ideas are evaluated and how conclusions are reached. Open dialogue encourages individuals to ask questions and express concerns without fear of negative consequences. Participants indicated that transparent decision processes reduce uncertainty and prevent misunderstandings among departments. Trust emerges as members recognize that leadership decisions reflect collective reasoning rather than personal authority. A climate of trust supports constructive disagreement and encourages members to explore alternative viewpoints during discussions.

Collective leadership interactions also reduce the likelihood of organizational conflict. When individuals participate in discussions before decisions are finalized, they gain a clearer understanding of the rationale behind institutional actions. Members feel that their voices are acknowledged even when final decisions differ from their initial suggestions. This perception of fairness strengthens cooperation across departments and supports the long-term stability of organizational relationships. Studies of collaborative leadership show that participatory decision structures strengthen group cohesion and promote shared accountability within institutions (Raelin, 2016).

The findings suggest that distributed leadership strengthens decision-making capacity by integrating diverse professional perspectives into organizational deliberations. Leadership practices function through interactional networks where individuals coordinate activities, exchange knowledge, and contribute to strategic thinking. Collective decision processes allow institutions to address complex challenges through collaborative problem solving. Leadership becomes a shared practice embedded in communication and cooperation among organizational members.

Distributed Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness

The findings of this study indicate that distributed leadership contributes significantly to improving organizational effectiveness. Organizational effectiveness refers to the ability of an institution to achieve its strategic goals while maintaining adaptability, collaboration, and sustainable performance. Within the organization examined in this study, leadership practices that involve multiple actors appear to strengthen coordination, enhance professional engagement, and support institutional development. Leadership responsibilities are shared among individuals across different levels of the organization, which allows decision processes and operational activities to benefit from diverse expertise and perspectives.

One major outcome observed in this study is improved communication among organizational members. Distributed leadership encourages frequent interactions between administrators, coordinators, and professional staff through meetings, collaborative planning sessions, and professional discussions. These interactions create opportunities for members to exchange information, clarify institutional objectives, and coordinate responsibilities across departments. Communication processes become more open and interactive because leadership roles are not limited to a single authority figure. Members feel more comfortable discussing ideas and challenges within collaborative forums. Studies on leadership practices indicate that open communication networks are closely associated with effective leadership structures and improved organizational performance (Day et al., 2014).

A second important factor is the increase in collaboration across organizational units. Distributed leadership encourages individuals from different departments to work together in designing institutional initiatives and addressing organizational challenges. Participants described collaborative projects that involved professionals from multiple areas of expertise. These collaborative interactions promote mutual understanding among departments and strengthen institutional coherence. When individuals work collectively toward shared objectives, the organization develops stronger internal alignment and coordination. Research on leadership distribution suggests that collaborative leadership practices contribute to the development of collective agency and shared responsibility among organizational members (Tian et al., 2016).

The study also found that distributed leadership enhances innovation and problem-solving capacity within the organization. Leadership structures that involve multiple actors create conditions where diverse ideas can be explored during discussions and planning sessions. Staff members are encouraged to contribute suggestions based on their professional knowledge and experiences. This diversity of perspectives increases the likelihood that innovative solutions will emerge when addressing institutional challenges. Educational organizations often face complex issues related to curriculum development, resource management, and institutional improvement. Distributed leadership supports problem-solving processes that draw upon the collective intelligence of the organization. Research in leadership studies indicates that shared leadership structures strengthen creativity and adaptive capacity in organizations operating within dynamic environments (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016).

Another outcome identified in the findings is the stronger commitment of organizational members toward institutional goals. Participation in leadership processes creates a sense of ownership among individuals who contribute to decision making and program development. Staff members perceive that their ideas and contributions influence institutional direction. This perception strengthens professional motivation and encourages individuals to support the implementation of organizational initiatives. When leadership is distributed across multiple actors, institutional goals become shared commitments rather than directives issued by top administrators. Leadership practices grounded in collaboration contribute to the development of collective responsibility within organizations.

Distributed leadership also supports organizational learning processes. Members regularly exchange knowledge, reflect on professional practices, and evaluate institutional programs through collaborative discussions. These interactions allow the organization to learn from experiences and adjust strategies when necessary. Organizational learning occurs when individuals collectively analyze challenges and identify opportunities for improvement. Leadership distribution facilitates this learning process because knowledge flows more freely across departments and professional groups. Institutions that cultivate collaborative leadership cultures often demonstrate greater adaptability and continuous improvement (Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2018).

Despite these benefits, participants also identified several challenges associated with the implementation of distributed leadership. Differences in leadership competence among staff members may influence the effectiveness of collaborative leadership practices. Some individuals may require additional professional development to participate effectively in leadership activities. Role ambiguity may also emerge when leadership responsibilities are shared across multiple actors without clear coordination mechanisms. Unclear expectations may create confusion regarding decision authority and task responsibilities.

Another challenge relates to the time required for collaborative decision processes. Distributed leadership relies on dialogue, consultation, and collective deliberation. These processes require time and careful coordination among participants. Some participants indicated that extensive discussions occasionally delay the finalization of decisions. Institutions must balance participatory decision making with operational efficiency. Clear communication procedures and well-defined leadership roles help maintain coordination while preserving collaborative participation.

Effective implementation of distributed leadership requires supportive organizational conditions. Professional development opportunities can strengthen leadership competence among staff members who participate in collaborative decision processes. Organizational structures such as leadership teams, committees, and professional learning communities provide platforms where leadership practices can develop through interaction. Institutional cultures that emphasize trust, openness, and shared responsibility also support the sustainability of distributed leadership practices. When these conditions are present, distributed leadership can function as a powerful mechanism for strengthening organizational effectiveness and promoting institutional improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of distributed leadership in strengthening collective decision making and improving organizational effectiveness within educational institutions. Leadership practices that involve multiple actors encourage active participation, professional

dialogue, and collaborative problem solving. Leadership responsibilities shared among administrators, coordinators, and staff members create opportunities for diverse expertise to influence institutional strategies and policies. Decision-making processes conducted through meetings, consultations, and collaborative discussions enable organizational members to contribute perspectives and knowledge drawn from their professional experiences. These interactions foster transparency, mutual trust, and a sense of shared responsibility toward institutional goals. Collective engagement in leadership activities also strengthens communication across departments and encourages coordination in the implementation of organizational initiatives.

The findings also demonstrate that distributed leadership supports innovation, organizational learning, and sustained institutional development. Collaborative leadership practices enable organizations to respond to complex challenges through collective reasoning and interdisciplinary perspectives. Staff members who participate in leadership processes develop stronger commitment toward institutional objectives because they perceive themselves as active contributors to organizational progress. Several conditions influence the effectiveness of distributed leadership, including clear communication channels, leadership capacity among staff members, and organizational cultures that value collaboration. Institutions that cultivate these conditions create environments where leadership can function as a shared practice embedded in everyday professional interactions. Distributed leadership can serve as a strategic approach for strengthening participatory governance and enhancing organizational performance in contemporary educational organizations.

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Sulaiman: Journal of Leadership

ISSN(Online): XXXX-XXXX

Vol 1 No 1 (2026): March 2026

<https://journal.eduglobal.ac.id/index.php/sjl/index>

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