

Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success: Designing a Scenario Based Professional Development Model for School Leadership Teams

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21768616>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Educational leadership development is increasingly recognized as a determinant of institutional performance, yet many professional development offerings continue to privilege positional authority over the practice of leadership as an observable, learnable set of actions. This paper presents the design and pedagogical rationale of “Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success,” an eight-week professional development course developed for principals, heads of department, coordinators, and educators within a Lebanese educational institution. The course was developed in direct response to a formal needs assessment that identified leadership skills, team building, and emotional intelligence as priority development areas. Grounded in adaptive leadership theory and emotional intelligence frameworks, the course adopts a flipped plus in person format combining asynchronous preparatory resources with synchronous, scenario based collaborative sessions. Participants progress through a sequence of diagnostic, experiential, and reflective activities culminating in a Leadership Action Plan applied to a real institutional challenge. The paper situates the course within the institution’s strategic priorities — supportive educational programs, stakeholder engagement, and professional excellence — and discusses its anticipated contribution to distributed leadership capacity, team resilience, and institutional continuous improvement. Implications for the design of leadership development programs in similarly structured educational systems are discussed.</i> Keywords: educational leadership; emotional intelligence; team development; professional development; adaptive leadership; scenario-based learning.
Received: 06-06-2026	
Accepted: 10-07-2026	
Published: 03-08-2026	
Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Haidar, N. S. H. (2026). Exercising leadership: Driving team success: Designing a scenario-based professional development model for school leadership teams. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(8), 1-5.	

1. Introduction

Sustained school improvement depends less on the formal authority vested in administrative positions than on the capacity of individuals throughout an institution to exercise leadership — to mobilize colleagues around shared purpose, surface and address adaptive challenges, and build the trust that underlies high performing teams (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Educational systems undergoing strategic transformation require a cadre of leaders who can distinguish the technical problems that can be resolved through existing expertise from the adaptive challenges that require new learning, negotiation, and changes in values and practice (Heifetz, 1994).

Within this context, a needs assessment was conducted across a network of Lebanese K to 12 schools to identify priority areas for professional development. The

assessment identified three converging priorities: leadership skills, team building, and emotional intelligence. This paper responds to that assessment by presenting “Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success,” a course designed to translate these priorities into a structured, scenario-based learning experience for principals, heads of department, coordinators, and educators.

The remainder of this paper outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the course, describes its design and structure, details its learning objectives and components, and discusses its alignment with the institution’s strategic priorities and anticipated contribution to practice.

2. Theoretical Framework

The course design draws on three interrelated bodies of theory: adaptive leadership, emotional intelligence, and experiential and reflective adult learning.

2.1 Leadership as Practice, Not Position

A recurring distinction in the leadership literature separates authority the formal power conferred by a role, understood as an activity that can be exercised by anyone, regardless of position, who mobilizes others to make progress on difficult problems (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This distinction reframes leadership development from the transmission of positional competencies toward the cultivation of adaptive capacity: the ability to diagnose whether a challenge is technical or adaptive, to regulate distress within a team, and to give the work of change back to the people who must ultimately own it (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This framing is particularly relevant to school-based teams, where coordinators and educators without formal administrative authority are frequently called upon to lead initiatives, mentor peers, and drive collective problem solving.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Team Trust

Emotional intelligence the capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions and those of others has been widely associated with leadership effectiveness, particularly in contexts requiring the management of interpersonal conflict, motivation, and trust building (Goleman, 1995). For school leadership teams, emotional intelligence underlies the day-to-day work of sustaining morale, navigating disagreement, and modeling the self-awareness that professional growth requires. The course accordingly treats emotional intelligence not as a discrete module but as a lens applied throughout the sequence of scenarios and reflective exercises.

2.3 Scenario Based and Reflective Learning

Adult professional learning is most durable when it is situated in authentic problems, distributed over time, and paired with structured reflection (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The course therefore adopts scenario based learning and case-based role play as its primary pedagogical vehicle, allowing participants to rehearse leadership interventions in a low stakes setting before applying them to their own institutional context through the culminating Leadership Action Plan.

3. Institutional Context and Rationale

The course originates from a needs assessment that identified leadership skills, team building, and emotional intelligence as converging priorities across the participating schools. These findings indicated a need for professional

development that moves beyond generic leadership training toward a model that is scenario based, reflective, and directly tied to participants' current institutional challenges. "Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success" was designed as a direct response to this assessment, targeting principals, heads of department, coordinators, and educators the range of roles through which leadership is exercised across a school system, regardless of formal title.

4. Course Design

The design of "Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success" translates the theoretical commitments outlined in Section 2 — leadership as exercised practice, emotional intelligence as a relational competency, and adult learning as situated and reflective — into a sequenced program of professional development. Four interrelated design decisions govern the course: who is invited to participate, how instructional time is organized, how that time is distributed across the eight-week cycle, and which instructional components operationalize the underlying theory. Each decision is described below, followed by an account of the diagnostic, experiential, and reflective sequence that structures every session.

4.1 Target Participants

The course enrolls principals, heads of department (HODs), coordinators, and educators within a single cohort rather than segregating participants by administrative rank. This inclusive composition is a deliberate design choice, not an administrative convenience: it operationalizes the distinction between authority and leadership developed in Section 2.1 by placing position-holders and non-position-holders in the same room to rehearse the same adaptive challenges. Mixed-rank grouping is intended to model, in the learning environment itself, the premise that leadership is exercised across a school system regardless of formal title, and to give coordinators and educators direct practice mobilizing colleagues who may occupy more senior positions.

4.2 Format

The course follows a flipped-plus-in-person format. Before each session, participants engage with curated resources and structured reflection prompts delivered asynchronously, which preserves synchronous session time for collaborative activity, case discussion, and peer coaching rather than direct instruction. This structure serves two purposes. Pedagogically, it aligns with the situated, reflection-paired model of adult learning described in Section 2.3, front-loading content acquisition so that scarce shared time is reserved for the rehearsal of leadership practice under low-stakes conditions. Practically, it addresses a recurring constraint in school-based professional development: educators and administrators

have limited capacity for extended release time from instructional duties, and a flipped structure reduces the synchronous burden without reducing the depth of engagement with course content.

4.3 Duration and Structure

The course is organized as an eight-week cycle bracketed by an orientation and a capstone project:

- One pre-session orientation (online), introducing the course rationale, the needs assessment findings that motivated it, and the Leadership Action Plan participants will ultimately produce
- Eight weekly sessions of 90 minutes each, each organized around a diagnostic-experiential-reflective sequence (Section 4.5)
- A culminating final project, the Leadership Action Plan, through which participants apply course concepts to a live institutional challenge

This pacing is intentional. Eight weekly touchpoints distribute learning over time rather than compressing it into a single workshop, which supports the retention and behavioral transfer associated with spaced, reflection-paired adult learning (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), while the orientation and capstone anchor the cycle in participants' own institutional context from the first session to the last.

4.4 Course Components

Six recurring components instantiate the theoretical framework across sessions:

- Interactive scenarios and role-play exercises, through which participants rehearse the diagnosis of technical versus adaptive challenges and practice leadership interventions in a low-stakes setting
- Leadership self-assessment tools, which surface participants' baseline emotional intelligence competencies and leadership tendencies as a basis for goal setting
- Team dynamics simulations, which extend individual leadership practice to the collective work of building trust and resilience within a team
- Bilingual (Arabic/English) resources, ensuring that language does not constrain access to course content for participants working across the institution's two languages of instruction
- Structured assignments with peer feedback, which formalize the reflective component of the learning cycle and expose participants to one another's diagnostic reasoning
- A final assessment consisting of the presentation of a team leadership initiative, which functions as a

low-stakes rehearsal for the summative Leadership Action Plan

Taken together, these components map directly onto the three theoretical strands identified in Section 2: the scenarios and simulations operationalize leadership as practice, the self-assessment tools and team dynamics work operationalize emotional intelligence, and the structured, peer-supported reflection operationalizes the situated adult-learning model on which the course is built.

4.5 Session Sequence: Diagnostic, Experiential, and Reflective Design

Within each of the eight weekly sessions, activities are sequenced through three recurring phases. The diagnostic phase opens the session by asking participants to name and categorize the challenge at hand — distinguishing, per Heifetz (1994), whether it is technical or adaptive — using the self-assessment tools and case material prepared asynchronously beforehand. The experiential phase follows, placing participants inside a scenario or team-dynamics simulation in which they must exercise a leadership intervention rather than merely discuss one, consistent with the premise that leadership is best learned as a rehearsed, observable set of actions. The reflective phase closes the session, using structured prompts and peer feedback to help participants examine what the intervention revealed about their own leadership style and emotional intelligence, and to carry that insight forward into the following week. Repeating this three-phase sequence across eight sessions builds cumulatively toward the Leadership Action Plan, so that the capstone project is less a final test of retained content than the last iteration of a diagnostic-experiential-reflective cycle participants have already practiced eight times over.

5. Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

1. Distinguish leadership from authority and recognize how leadership is exercised through purposeful actions that support the institution's commitment to empowering educators as change agents.
2. Diagnose team dynamics and adaptive challenges using real world scenarios, aligned with the strategic goal of fostering collaborative problem solving and continuous improvement.
3. Mobilize team members around shared purpose, enhancing stakeholder engagement and reinforcing institutional identity.
4. Experiment with leadership interventions that promote trust, resilience, and professional pride, in direct support of supportive educational programs and staff well being.

5. Reflect on personal leadership style and emotional intelligence, contributing to professional excellence and self-directed growth.
6. Design and present a Leadership Action Plan that applies course concepts to a current institutional challenge, reinforcing strategic alignment and practical impact.

6. Assessment: The Leadership Action Plan

The course culminates in the design and presentation of a Leadership Action Plan, through which each participant applies the course's theoretical and practical content to a current challenge within their own team or institutional unit. This final project serves simultaneously as a summative assessment and as a mechanism of practical transfer, ensuring that the course produces artifacts of direct institutional value rather than knowledge confined to the training setting.

7. Alignment with Institutional Strategy

The course is designed to support key pillars of the institution's multi year strategic plan, particularly the strengthening of supportive educational programs, the enhancement of stakeholder engagement, and the cultivation of teamwork and professional excellence. By foregrounding emotionally intelligent, scenario-based leadership practice, the course is intended to contribute to a culture of shared purpose, continuous improvement, and institutional pride across participating schools.

8. Expected Outcomes and Implications for Practice

The course is expected to build distributed leadership capacity across roles that do not carry formal administrative authority, strengthen the emotional intelligence competencies underlying team trust, and produce institutionally embedded action plans that translate professional development directly into practice. More broadly, the model offered here needs assessment driven, scenario based and structured around a flipped plus in person delivery may be transferable to other educational systems seeking to develop leadership capacity among principals, coordinators, and educators without requiring extended-release time from instructional duties.

9. Conclusion

"Exercising Leadership: Driving Team Success" translates a needs-assessment-identified priority — the development of leadership, team building, and emotional intelligence competencies — into a structured, theoretically grounded professional development course. By treating leadership as an exercised practice rather than a positional privilege, and by anchoring learning in a repeated diagnostic-experiential-reflective sequence culminating in an institutionally

embedded action plan, the course is designed to build resilient, high-performing teams and to reinforce the strategic priorities of the institution it serves.

The course's principal contribution is conceptual as much as programmatic: it offers a worked example of how adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) can be integrated — rather than taught as parallel modules — within a single scenario-based design, and of how a flipped-plus-in-person format can reconcile the depth that adaptive leadership development requires with the limited release time available to practicing educators. In this respect, the model offered here speaks to a broader tension in school-based professional development between programs that are theoretically rich but logistically demanding and programs that are logistically efficient but conceptually thin.

This paper has presented the design and pedagogical rationale of the course rather than evidence of its effects, and that scope carries corresponding limitations. The model was developed for, and situated within, a single Lebanese K–12 school network, and its transferability to institutional contexts with different governance structures, staffing constraints, or language policies remains an open question rather than a claim made by this paper. Likewise, because the course has not yet been evaluated empirically, claims about its anticipated contribution to distributed leadership capacity and team resilience should be read as design hypotheses to be tested rather than as established findings.

Future work will address this gap directly. Planned implementation research will track outcomes across successive cohorts using a mixed-methods design: pre- and post-course self-report measures of leadership practice and emotional intelligence, a rubric-based evaluation of the quality and institutional relevance of participants' Leadership Action Plans, and qualitative interviews examining how participants' understanding of leadership as practice, rather than position, shifts over the eight-week cycle. A further strand of this work will follow the institutional uptake of completed action plans over time, asking whether the artifacts produced in training translate into sustained changes in team practice once participants return fully to their instructional and administrative roles. Together, this evidence would allow the design hypotheses advanced here to be tested against the institution's own strategic priorities and, potentially, against comparable leadership development models in other educational systems.

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