

July 2013

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## Recommended Citation

Canavan, K. (2013). Building Strategic Leadership and Management Capacity to Improve School Effectiveness. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 7 (2). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol7/iss2/2>

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## ARTICLES

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# BUILDING STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY TO IMPROVE SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

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*The building of leadership and management capacity with a focus on teaching and learning effectiveness has been a defining characteristic of the Catholic schools in Sydney, Australia, during the past decade.*

*During the 1990s, the leaders of the 150 parish primary and regional secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney adopted a common leadership and management framework that incorporates long-term strategic planning with an annual implementation cycle characterized by a sharp focus on teaching and learning outcomes. Principals and senior staff are involved in an ongoing performance management plan that is linked to the schools' annual curriculum goals and targets.*

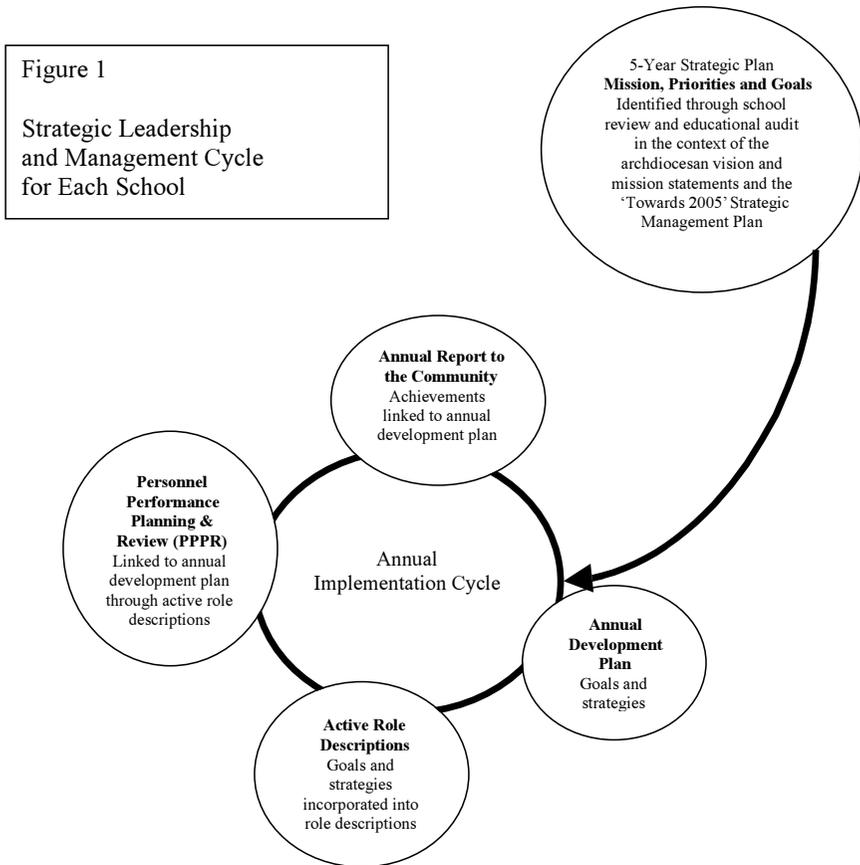
*This case study provides evidence of a culture of high level managerial leadership that utilizes recent developments in Europe to give validity to "the Sydney cycle."*

## SYDNEY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

During the past decade a particular leadership and management culture emerged within the network of 150 Catholic parish primary and regional secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This culture is characterized by cycles of school review, external educational audit, publication of strategic leadership and management plans, annual goal setting and reporting to the community on achievement, and a performance management plan for principals and senior staff.

Once every 5 years each school undertakes the formal processes of school review, educational audit and planning leading to the development and publication of the school's strategic plan. Each year, the school undertakes a set of processes that provides for the systematic implementation and ongoing evaluation of agreed upon goals and strategies. These processes, comprising the annual implementation cycle (see Figure 1), Annual Development Plan, Active Role Descriptions, Personnel Performance Planning and Review, and Annual

Reports to the Community, ensure the implementation of the 5-year plan in a systematic, purposeful, and managed way. The implementation is monitored through the Contract Renewal Process for Principals. The comprehensive *Resources Manual for School Review and Development 1999-2003* (Catholic Education Office, 1999) sets out the context, purposes, procedures, and intended outcomes of the linked processes used across the school system.



The key components of the planning and review cycle (see Figure 1) are as follows:

## **REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLAN**

An internal review of the outcomes of the previous strategic management plan begins the review process. The principal is responsible for assembling the documentary evidence, including student learning outcomes data. Staff, parents, and students are involved through workshops and questionnaires, and contribute to the identification of issues for inclusion in the next strategic management plan.

## **EDUCATIONAL AUDIT**

An educational audit team comprised of the regional consultant (chair and representative of the Executive Director of Schools), the principal and up to two nominees of the Catholic Education Office, (CEO) Sydney, is established at each school and begins work upon the completion of the internal school review of the previous plan. The team engages a number of audit resource persons from other schools to assist with the examination of the evidence of effectiveness of Religious Education and each curriculum area. The audit team reports on the implementation of the recommendations in the previous report, on the school's self-review documents, and on compliance with the Education Act of 1990. The report contains specific recommendations for improved school effectiveness and is made available to the school community. The recommendations are incorporated into the school's next 5-year strategic plan and accountability is now being strengthened by a tracking mechanism managed by the principal and monitored by the regional consultant.

## **SCHOOL REVIEW**

The principal is responsible for the school review process, which builds on the work of the educational audit team, and includes extensive consultation with staff, parents, pastors, and students. Key questions focus on all operations of the school and can include:

- what does the school do best of all?
- what does the school need to do better?
- what are the most significant priorities?

The process concludes with a review of the existing mission statement. Most principals seek the support of an external facilitator to assist with the school review. The regional consultant, as the representative of the Executive Director of Schools, has responsibility for validating the outcomes of the review process.

## **STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The process of school review concludes with the development of a 5-year strategic management plan that includes the school's mission statement, a response to recommendations in the educational audit team report, areas for

development and improvement, and associated goals and outcomes. The endorsement of the staff is sought at the conclusion of this process and before publication. The school's strategic management plan conveys a comprehensive message about the students, school, and community and the mission of the Church. It highlights the Catholic identity of the school and focuses priorities and goals on enhancing student learning for the next 5 years.

An examination of school strategic plans reveals some common priorities, namely:

- religious and spiritual dimensions
- curriculum development and teaching practices
- students' learning, progress, and attainment
- pastoral care within the school community
- school, parents, parish and the wider community
- facilities, resources, and budgeting.

Most staff have now been through this planning process a couple of times and the more recent school plans contain specific goals to improve school effectiveness. The 5-year plan is published and copies distributed to the school community. A copy of the plan is forwarded to the Executive Director of Schools.

## **ANNUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The principal is responsible for the development, publication, and implementation of the annual plan comprised of goals selected from the school's 5-year plan. This is done in the context of the school system plan *Sydney Catholic Schools 'Towards 2005 Strategic Management Plan Mark 2'* (Catholic Education Office, 2000b). Staff are involved in developing strategies and in decisions as to who is responsible for the implementation of the various strategies. The regional consultant has responsibility for validating the appropriateness of the annual plan and its implementation processes. The annual plan is published and made available to the school community.

Many of these plans now contain specific targets and performance indicators and provide clear direction to the staff for the coming year. For example, one elementary school listed the following goal:

To further strengthen literacy and numeracy achievement across all years

- Literacy Year 3  
84% in Band 3 or above. We shall aim for a shift of at least 1% from Band 2 to Band 3 or above
- Spelling: Years 5 and 6  
At least 20% of Year 5 and 6 students will achieve 90% accuracy in the core word list of Strategic spelling

## **PERSONNEL PERFORMANCE PLANNING AND REVIEW**

The principal negotiates the role description annually with each staff member and clarifies who is responsible for taking forward particular goals and strategies in the annual plan. These role descriptions are a key component of the Personnel Performance Planning and Review (PPPR) process that is designed to ensure effective performance management, appraisal, and development processes for all staff within the context of the school's strategic plan. The PPPR process provides a forum for professional dialogue and constructive feedback in order to celebrate achievements, identify emerging needs, and plan developmental opportunities that focus on enhancing professional effectiveness.

The regional consultant is responsible for leading the PPPR of the principal, who in turn, is responsible for the PPPR of the assistant principal. Increasingly, coordinators are accepting responsibility for the PPPR of teachers. The PPPR process for principals also ensures the effective implementation of the strategic management plan.

## **REPORTING TO THE COMMUNITY**

The annual report is a document that provides the community with fair, reliable, and objective information about school performance, initiatives, developments, and achievements. The report addresses specifically the goals in the annual development plan.

In recent years these reports have included more student performance data on statewide tests (Basic Skills Test, School Certificate, Higher School Certificate). Some schools report achievement against targets for literacy and numeracy. The report is prepared by the principal and validated by the regional consultant. A copy is forwarded to the Executive Director of Schools.

In this way, the schools in this system have responded to the demands of the parent community and the education authorities for increased accountability.

The strategic leadership and management cycle (see Figure 1) evolved during the 1990s. Initially, the use of this particular approach to leadership and management was optional. It was modified over the years in consultation with principals, and by the mid 1990s, all schools were using the cycle. The early adopters of the cycle were helpful in developing positive attitudes among their colleagues. The use of this cycle enables Catholic schools in Sydney to satisfy the Registration and Accreditation requirements of the NSW Education Act of 1990, for the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, is the approved authority for a system of 150 non-government schools. The contract renewal processes for principals and assistant principals are also integrated with the leadership and management cycle and the leadership framework. Today, the cycle enjoys a high level of support among principals, assistant principals and, increasingly, among staff. Table 1 provides data on the implementation of these interrelated processes across schools in the network.

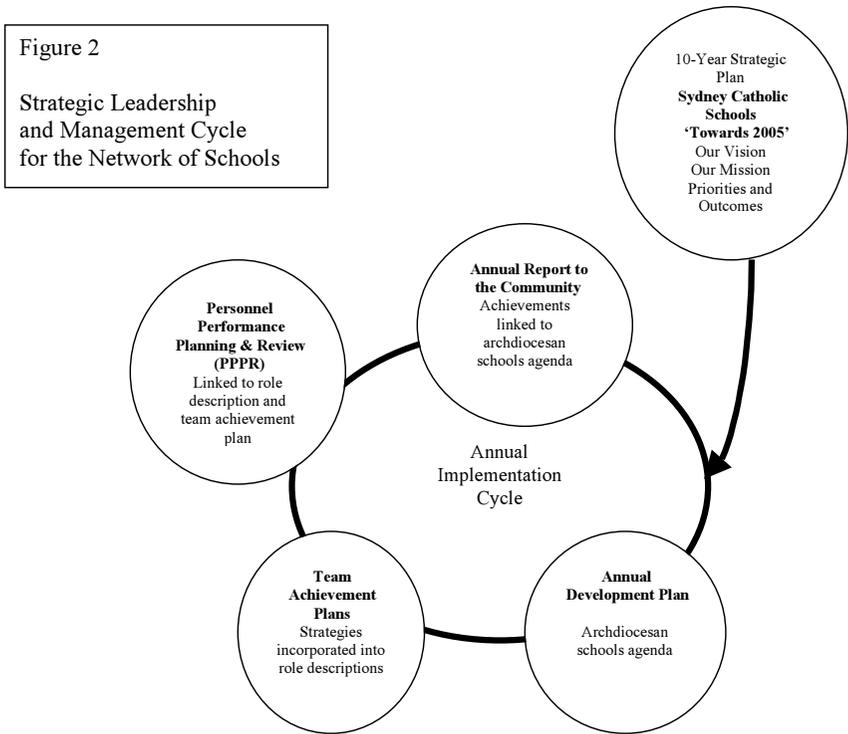
Table 1: Interrelated Leadership and Management Processes as Assessed by the Regional Consultant Attached to Each of the 150 Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney, December 2001

	<b>Yet to Begin</b>	<b>Initial Stages</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Well Established</b>
1. Strategic Management Plan - Distributed to parents	1%	3%	7%	89%
2. Annual Development Plan - Distributed to staff - Distributed to parents	2%	6% 7%	7% 12%	87% 79%
3. Annual Role Descriptions - Executive	1%	6%	12%	81%
4. Personnel Performance and Planning Review - Principals - Assistant Principals - RECs - Coordinators - Teachers - Support Staff				100% 98% 97% 92% 19% 17%
5. Annual Report - Distributed to staff - Distributed to parents		6% 6%	9% 10%	85% 84%

## CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE, SYDNEY

During the past decade, the Catholic Education Office (CEO), Sydney has used a similar strategic management cycle (see Figure 2) within its own organization, which has provided opportunities to model good leadership and management practice across the diocesan network of schools. Following much community consultation, 1995 saw the publication of the *Sydney Catholic Schools: Towards 2005 Strategic Management Plan* containing mission and vision statements and 10 priorities to focus the activities of the CEO for the next 10 years (Catholic Education Office, 1995). A mini review took place during 2000 and a Mark 2 plan was published. This plan details the outcomes

to be achieved by 2005. The CEO publishes an Annual Development Plan detailing priorities, performance indicators (with targets for literacy and numeracy), and various CEO staff members develop achievement plans with a focus on the strategies that will ensure the effective implementation of the annual agenda. All CEO staff take part in a PPPR performance management process that is similar in design to that used with and by school principals. An annual report to the community details achievements across each priority.



During the 1990s, the CEO continued to challenge and support schools, particularly in relation to student academic performance and in the achievement of their religious goals. The system processes were also used by the CEO to monitor the performance of schools and school leaders. These structures and frameworks have been used by the CEO to focus the energy of principals on teaching and learning and student outcomes. The 1990s saw a change in the culture of many schools, with the principals providing increased instructional leadership.

As the approved authority, the CEO holds principals accountable for the achievement of the goals and targets in the school's annual plan. These accountability procedures are linked to the contract renewal process for principals.

Every 6 years the CEO, having followed the agreed monitoring processes, seeks from the New South Wales Board of Studies further certificates for Registration and Accreditation for each school in the diocesan network. The integration of the government and diocesan accountability requirements has been popular with school communities.

Prior to the 2004-2005 academic year, a process will be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the 10-year plan, *Towards 2005*. This process of external scrutiny will, among other things, re-examine the annual review of achievements against published performance indicators, targets, and other criteria as well as look more broadly at the effectiveness of the CEO. Ideally, the framework for this CEO evaluation will have structures, features, and terminology that are similar to those used by schools and are recognized by principals, teachers, and the wider community.

This review will be followed by widespread consultation with the school community leading to the publication of a new strategic plan for the system of Catholic schools in Sydney.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

In the early 1990s, there was an increasing awareness across the Sydney Catholic schools network of the need to find more effective structures and frameworks to support those with management responsibilities, and to reduce the discontinuity flowing from changing principals and the use by schools of a variety of uncoordinated planning and goal setting tools. Time was wasted when recently appointed principals set about involving staff in yet another goal-setting exercise, or when key staff moved on.

However, the call to school leadership was not always accompanied by a corresponding call to management. Postgraduate leadership studies and visiting lecturers enkindled a desire to lead and make a difference, but some leaders lacking the managerial tools to be effective fell by the wayside.

The challenge for the Sydney Catholic school system in the 1990s was to strengthen management structures and frameworks that would build further leadership capacity. This involved the gradual development of planning, implementation, and review competencies that facilitated the effective management of continuous organizational change and school improvement within the Catholic tradition.

The leadership and management cycles (see Figures 1 and 2) are now supported by the Catholic Schools Leadership Framework, (see Figure 3) consisting of six foundational dimensions of leadership: religious, leadership for learning, strategic, human resources, organizational, and personal. The publication *Catholic Schools Leadership Framework: Core Competencies and Key Elements* (Catholic Education Office, 2001) provides a comprehensive analysis of the six foundational dimensions and lists understandings, skills, values, and indicators for each of the core competencies. This document grew out of a needs survey conducted with principals and assistant principals in 1997 and is the result of much consultation with stakeholders. All leadership development programs, including leadership succession, are now related directly to the strategic direction of schools and the school system. Applicants for principalship are required to demonstrate evidence of experience and understanding of these six dimensions.

The adoption of common strategic leadership and management cycles and frameworks across the network of Sydney Catholic schools has contributed significantly to the school system's educational effectiveness. In many ways these frameworks provide the bridge between the turbulent and changing educational environment and the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. Importantly, the frameworks provide school leaders with tools to manage change, develop staff, and improve school effectiveness. The frameworks also recognize that teachers are busy people who like to get the job done, and therefore give little support to activities that are not perceived as being related to teaching and learning.

Figure 3

**Catholic School Leadership Framework**

**PERSONAL DIMENSIONS**

The personal dimensions of leadership underpin and relate to all areas of the Leadership Framework

**Personal Dimensions of Leadership**

- Faith/spirituality
- Human / personal dimension
- Relationships / communication
- Ethical/moral dimension
- Cognitive/emotional dimension
- Decision making/responsibility
- Leadership
- Leader as learner

**CORE PURPOSE**

The core purpose of the Catholic school is to take forward the mission of Jesus and the Church in partnership with parents and parish for the formation, education and development of the students entrusted to the school.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Religious Leadership</b></p> <p>Mission of the contemporary Catholic Church</p> <p>Religious Education curriculum</p> <p>Catholic life/integration of values</p> <p>Parish/school/parents partnership</p> <p>Ritual/celebration/liturgy/prayer/retreats</p> <p>Sacramental/eucharistic / scriptural life</p> <p>Pastoral care</p> <p>Service to community</p> <p>Social justice</p> <p>Christian leadership</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Leadership for Learning</b></p> <p>Educational vision</p> <p>Learning culture</p> <p>Student learning outcomes</p> <p>Student needs</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Teaching practice</p> <p>Assessment and reporting</p> <p>Quality assurance</p> <p>Learning resources</p>
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**SUPPORTING PROCESSES**

The core purpose is served by the support processes — Strategic, Human Resources and Organizational Leadership. It is important that these processes do not become ends in themselves, but that they are always seen to serve the core purpose.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Human Resources Leadership</b></p> <p>Employment processes/perspective</p> <p>Deployment of staff/workplace practices</p> <p>Performance management and review</p> <p>Employee relations</p> <p>Development of staff</p> <p>Succession planning</p> <p>Support staff</p> <p>Relationship with unions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strategic Leadership</b></p> <p>Leadership of vision/mission/goals</p> <p>Archdiocesan context</p> <p>Strategic direction</p> <p>Culture of change</p> <p>Annual cycle of implementation</p> <p>Culture of reflection, review and improvement</p> <p>Community leadership</p> <p>School marketing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Organizational Leadership</b></p> <p>Coordination of school processes and activities</p> <p>Legal/statutory requirements</p> <p>Technology</p> <p>Records management</p> <p>Financial management</p> <p>Risk management</p> <p>Property and facilities</p> <p>Enrollments/ forward planning</p>
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## EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action and, according to Kotter,

each has its own function and characteristic activities. Both are necessary for success...but strong leadership with weak management is no better, and is sometimes actually worse, than the reverse. The real challenge is to combine strong leadership and strong management and to use each to balance the other. (1999, p. 3)

The task in Sydney of strengthening managerial effectiveness across the school system mirrors similar developments in Europe. To help organizations improve managerial performance, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) launched the *EFQM Excellence Model* to facilitate the sharing of good practice across different sectors throughout Europe. "Regardless of sector, size, structure or maturity, to be successful, organisations need to establish an appropriate management system" (European Foundation for Quality Management, 1999a, p. 6).

The fundamental concepts of EFQM are:

- results orientation
- customer focus
- leadership and constancy of purpose
- management by processes and facts
- people development and involvement
- continuous learning, innovation, and improvement
- partnership development
- public responsibility.

This structured management system "is now being used by tens of thousands of organisations across Europe and beyond. Companies, schools, health-care organisations, police services, utilities and government offices all use it" (EFQM, 1999b, p. 11).

According to EFQM, "organisations perform more effectively when all inter-related activities are understood and systematically managed and decisions concerning current operations and planned improvements are made using reliable information that includes stakeholder perceptions" (1999a, p. 7). *The Quality Assurance Framework - Integrated Processes for Development and Accountability* (Catholic Education Office, 2000a) would appear to meet these EFQM criteria.

Against the background of a new statutory framework, the *Standards in Scotland's Schools Act* (2000), the authors of *Improving Leadership in Scottish Schools* (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2000) write:

Effective leadership and effective management are often found together. The Standard for Headship in Scotland (SHS) defines the key purpose of headship as: “To provide the leadership and management which enables a school to give every pupil high quality education and which promotes the highest possible standards of achievement.” Of course, a headteacher’s vision and leadership skills need to be complemented by well-developed management expertise if a school is to be successful. (p. 4)

In the Scottish system,

Leadership and management are closely related concepts. In much of the literature, leadership is regarded as a key part of management. However, (school) inspection evidence has suggested that, in some schools, managers tend to over-emphasise the day-to-day administrative functions of their roles rather than giving sufficient attention to the key aspects of providing more strategic leadership. In such schools, management may be associated mainly with planning, organising, deploying and monitoring the use of staff and other resources. Leadership is an essential requirement of providing a more strategic approach to management. Leadership has many aspects but involves developing, sharing and sustaining a vision based on shared values, providing clear direction and motivating others. (Scottish, 2000, p. 5)

*The Scottish Act* (Scottish, 2000) sets down managerial cycles and frameworks similar to those developed across the 150 Catholic schools in Sydney during the 1990s namely:

- the education authority publishes annual statements of objectives and targets.
- each school publishes an annual development plan containing a set of objectives and which takes account of the objectives in the authority’s plan.
- an annual report outlining achievements against the published objectives is prepared by each school and made available to parents.
- schools and local education authorities are expected to set objectives and targets for improvement that are challenging, realistic and achievable.
- schools are reviewed on a 6-year cycle.

Both the Sydney and European approaches emphasize the importance of all those with management responsibilities gaining a shared understanding of the concepts and frameworks that can contribute to the building of leadership and management capacity.

## **SOME EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS**

In 1997-1998 a major evaluation of the leadership and management cycles in the Sydney system of schools was undertaken by national and international researchers. The report *From Strength to Strength* (Catholic Education Office, 1998) indicated that in Sydney Catholic schools there is evidence that:

- Annual development plans provide recently appointed principals with immediate starting points for their leadership
- Role descriptions are adjusted annually to reflect the priorities and strategies of the Annual Plan

- Annual reports to the community are focused and relate achievement to goals
- Staff changes are accommodated and planning momentum and enthusiasm maintained through the school's 5-year planning cycle
- Working with School Review and Development and developing strategic plans were positive experiences for school communities.

MacBeath (1998), who reported on international best practice critique, wrote:

“The (Sydney) review ‘package’ is comprehensive and ambitious. Its heart is clearly in ‘the right place.’ Its head is very much in line with current thinking on school self-evaluation and school improvement” (p. 1). “The thought, care, and above all the vision which has gone into this approach, is a model for other systems to emulate. It is driven by values and conviction about the process of education and the central place of student learning” (Catholic Education Office, p. 7).

Following this review the Quality Assurance procedures were modified to reflect the outcomes of the report. A new *Resources Manual for School Review and Development 1999-2003* was published in 1999 (Catholic Education Office) and is now used by all schools as they move through another 5-year leadership and management cycle.

There is evidence from principals and school communities, Catholic Education Office staff, and external evaluators that this system-wide strategic leadership and management approach is increasing the educational effectiveness of schools, and is:

- enhancing student learning through a continuity of strategic goals focusing on teaching and learning and assisting with the identification of those schools and students needing additional support, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- helping to manage the pace, process, and direction of change more effectively and assisting teachers to cope with a decade of statewide curriculum reform and the change of focus from inputs to outputs and standards and associated testing requirements
- turning discussion and planning away from short-term problems toward longer-term and more significant goals
- focusing energy, attention and resources, both human and financial, on the more significant aspects of teaching and learning
- developing planning skills among staff, and enabling them to see more of the larger picture
- helping to unify staff and giving a sense of common purpose
- ensuring that professional development is focused and related to student needs
- minimizing anxiety about performance appraisal
- ensuring that evaluation is grounded in long-term goals, demonstrating to the parent community effective and efficient planning and commitment, at a time when the status of and esteem for teachers needs attention
- embedding a culture of review by encouraging the development of management structures which promote quality decision-making processes and shared leadership

- providing the means to demonstrate accountability to education authorities, governments, and the wider community
- helping principals provide confident and effective leadership, even in a changing educational environment.

While the quantification of this improved effectiveness needs further research, the Basic Skills Test results in Year 3 and Year 5 in Catholic schools in Sydney are already ahead of the 2003 targets. Principals setting targets across Years K-6 report increased student achievement in numeracy and literacy. Personal observations during class visits reveal more highly focused teaching and learning. More research in a variety of standardized measures is required to document significant gains.

Leaders need to be vigilant and ensure that the concepts, tools, and procedures of strategic management remain focused on the needs of students. The management cycles and frameworks must serve the interests of students and their teachers. The leadership and management cycles (see Figures 1 and 2) and the Catholic Schools Leadership Framework (see Figure 3) serve the core purposes of the Catholic school by providing leaders in the network with a structure to be effective, and to contribute to the development of a strong organizational culture that builds leadership and management capacity, improves school effectiveness, and helps leaders turn their dreams into reality.

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An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a meeting of Chief Administrators of Catholic Education in Savannah, Georgia in November 2001.

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