

LEADING AT THE “EDGE OF CHAOS”: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF  
NEPALESE SCHOOL LEADERS

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A Dissertation

Submitted to

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Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my original work and that it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree.

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July 02, 2013

## DEDICATION

To those school leaders who are striving for excellent work and giving children the best possible educational start in life.

To those school leaders who go the extra mile and find ways to extend their influence beyond classrooms.

To those school leaders who set a laudable example by rising out of their comfort zone and working diligently to become better leaders.

To those school leaders who courageously seek feedback from colleagues in their quest to improve their leadership skills.

To those school leaders who are continually looking for ways to make people more successful by coaching to the strengths, and encouraging confidence in their potential.

To those school leaders who recognize the people who are the genesis of countless good ideas and put them in the best position to learn, grow, and succeed.

*Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership* dissertation of *Rebat Kumar Dhakal*  
presented on July 02, 2013.

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## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of *Rebat Kumar Dhakal* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership* presented on July 02, 2013

Title: *Leading at the “edge of chaos”: Perceptions and practices of Nepalese school leaders*

Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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This study was theoretically informed by chaos and complexity thought and has explored the changing roles of the Nepalese school leaders by using a qualitative inquiry (interpretative phenomenological analysis) method. While the study was not designed to test the relationship of chaos theory to the educational leadership, chaos theory did provide a theoretical framework for the critical analysis of the changing role of the school leaders.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and practices of Nepalese school leaders in the changing leadership landscape, especially when their school environment is engulfed in socio-political chaos and uncertainty. Therefore, my research questions intended to solicit the perceptions and practices of school leaders in the chaotic situations, to identify the contemporary changes in the role of the school leaders, and to project preferred leadership strategies in coping with prevailing chaos in acadmia.

In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, I used an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology that involved open conversations with eight school leaders based in Kathmandu valley. I believed in subjective

epistemology and multiple realities as each school leader's internal context was typical though there were many commonalities in the external influences. Each conversation was iteratively explored (synthesized) with three themes (placing the chaos in perspective, leadership practices, and strategic moves ahead) eventually emerging from the data.

Using IPA, I identified three primary themes representing the lived experience and meaning found in the participants' experience of school leadership at the edge of chaos: (a) chaos is pervasive in Nepalese academia, (b) school leadership landscape has been more complex, (c) the way out is again leadership: leadership is the answer. The findings both support and contribute new aspects to the knowledge of this experience. Based on the open phenomenological conversations with the participants, the study concluded that the challenges facing school leaders continue to intensify. However, there is a little ray of hope since the declaration of schools as 'zone of peace'. The participants iterated that chaos exists and it has more negative influences than positive in the academia. With the challenges of leading through dynamic tensions, current school leaders are entangled in chaos. Moreover, the complexity is accelerating with the need for developing 21st century educational skills both in teachers and learners. This calls for capability building in school leaders. Despite all that may sound formidable; the study concluded that leadership is the answer. No other can help tackle the challenges of school leadership. Therefore, developing effective school leaders should be a priority in all school systems.

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Rebat Kumar Dhakal

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My thanks are extended to the school leaders who participated in this study. Their interest in the topic and their generosity and openness in providing insights into their work/life balance strategies made the data collection phase a pleasure. I would have loved to enlist their names, but for anonymity as a research norm (ironical – those to whom we owe the most, i.e. the participants, must remain anonymous), I could only offer them sincere thanks for heartily accepting to be my research participants. Those thanks still stand.

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To all the above individuals and to several colleagues whose names I cannot continue listing and who have assisted me one way or another, especially in challenging me with alternative views, I feel very much indebted.

I fervently hope this end result does not let any people down who have supported me all along. Thank you everyone who helped me on this amazing journey in any way. I appreciate it all.

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Rebat Kumar Dhakal

July 02, 2013

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANNISU-R	= All Nepal National Independent Students' Union – Revolutionary
ASCD	= Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
CZOP	= Children as Zone of Peace
DI	= Disciplin In-charge
DoE	= Department of Education
ETCH	= Education Theory Complexity Hybrid
GAoN	= Guardians' Association of Nepal
HISTAN	= Higher Secondary Teachers' Association Nepal
HoD	= Head of Department
ICT	= Information Communication Technology
IPA	= Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ISTU	= Institutional School Teachers' Union
ICT	= Information Communication Technology
IT	= Information Technology
NCCTQ	= National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality
NCTAF	= National Commission on Teaching & America's Future
NPABSON	= National Private and Boarding Schools' Organization of Nepal
OECD	= Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PABSON	= Private and Boarding Schools' Organisation, Nepal
SSRP	= School Sector Reform Plan
SZOP	= School as Zone of Peace
TQM	= Total Quality Management

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Each school day around six million students (DoE, 2012) walk into Nepalese educational institutions in the hopes that the experience and knowledge they gain will considerably enhance their chances of success in the modern world. Truly, whether a school operates effectively or not increases or decreases a student's chances of academic success. Therefore, the extent and nature of the challenges facing schools today cannot be underestimated, nor can the task of intervening in such school contexts be taken lightly. In recent years, due to a plethora of bandhs and strikes taking place, students have lost countless days of studies. Consequently, the strikes and protests are causing great harm to the study of those who are the future of the country.

In my frequent meetings with and visits to school heads and teachers, I have found them to be always grumbling over the uncertainties of the present day complexities in leading the schools. Moreover, I, myself, being a teacher and school leader over the last few years have gained much similar experiences. This led me to explore how our schools are leading their schools at such chaotic times.

#### **Setting the Stage**

Nepalese society has experienced unprecedented political changes since the period of modernization in the 1950s, through the era of Panchayat in the 1960s, and restoration of democracy in 1990s through the civil war 1996-2006, up to the overthrow of monarchy (2006) and the process of constitution drafting through Constituent Assembly. These constant upheavals in the Nepalese sociopolitical milieu



have had a direct impact in the education sector too. Strikes, protests, and bandhs called by different political parties, trade unions, and other uncertain forces have created havoc in the school system. School leadership in the face of this sort of adversity looks precarious.

According to Fullan (1997), “The hopeful “change agent” needs to participate in the politics of altering the structural conditions of schools so that reforms and quality have a greater chance of being built into the daily experiences of the majority of educators and students” (p. 217). In most of the schools, it is the principal who is regarded as the key educational leader and the one person in a school who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership. However, school leaders include “not only principals but also assistant principals, other administrators, and classroom teachers who informally or formally take on additional leadership responsibilities” (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality [NCCTQ], 2008, p. 2). Thus, school principals together with other school leaders are facing a challenging time at the present day Nepal.

In this era of social, economic, and technological changes, the education system as a whole has the greatest pressure of incorporating the 21st century values and skills. The 21st century poses many challenges to schools leaders. Globalization, increased competition, teachers’ professionalism, and technological changes, as well as teacher and student diversity, make the requirements of leadership increasingly complex. Senge (1990) held that leaders are "responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capacities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models--that is, they are responsible for learning” (p. 340). Similarly, Cookson (2009) advocated that “The 21st century mind will need to successfully manage the complexity and diversity of our world by becoming more

fluid, more flexible, more focused on reality, and radically more innovative” (The 21st Century Mind section, para. 2). Whilst at the individual institutional level, there is a greater challenge for schools to gain competitive advantage at these turbulent times. How do schools remain competitive in a business environment which is becoming more complex, more turbulent and more global?

Recently, frequent strikes and bandhs have hindered smooth running of the Nepalese schools. The leading political parties, who are the most accountable authorities, also seem to ignore these facts calling it a transitional phase. Upreti (2008) is sarcastic about the role of the political parties and says “They perceive that the power exercised by them is their reward for their past activities, with no responsibility to smoothly manage the transition and achieving political stability, democracy and peace” (p. 203). He further states that “The action and behavior of the actors in the current power sharing arrangement are creating enormous operational problems and make transition shaky and fragile” (p. 203) which is clearly attested by this state being prolonged. As this happens, the behavior of some ruling political parties has become unpredictable (Pyakuryal, 2008, p. 1), which has directly affected the schooling of our children too. Of course, after the success of people’s movement 2005/2006, Nepal has entered a transitional phase in its politics, which has actually made us linger at the edge of chaos.

The present day scenario is the edge of chaos, particularly, of political chaos. The politics, as a social activity, has direct influence on each and every sector of the society. Hence, the political chaos has created turbulent havoc even in the educational milieu. After the aftershock of the twelve-year long insurgency period and the turnover of the crown, we are nearing the edge of chaos with incessant dialogue and agreement making among each other. At this critical end, ‘transition period’, to put a

more popular term, educational leaders need to take adaptive systems and/or strategies to tear asunder this chaos and lead the academia effectively.

“The edge of chaos is where new ideas and innovative genotypes are forever nibbling away at the edges of the status quo, and where even the most entrenched old guard will eventually be overthrown” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 12). The term ‘edge of chaos,’ coined by Chris Langton from the Santa Fe Institute, refers to the dynamic of (between) stability and instability; turbulence and disequilibrium. According to Waldrop (1992), “Langton used every name for this phase transition ... "transition to chaos," the "boundary of chaos," the "onset of chaos." But the one that really captured the visceral feeling it gave him was "the edge of chaos" (p. 230). It is important to understand that the “edge of chaos is not an exact spot or an edge like the edge of a cliff, it is an area composed of flows of order and disorder” (McMillan, 2004, p. 94). Davies (2004) also sees edge of chaos not in fact as an edge, but a zone, a class of behaviours and that learning operates on the edge of chaos (p. 32). Similarly, Stuart Kauffman, a theoretical biologist, defines the term as “the regime of system behavior that exists between order and chaos, and where the system operates at optimal level” (Conrad, 2006, p. 334). With these definitions, we can deduce that chaos with its sensitive dependence and unpredictability exists in the socio-cultural setting, too.

Schools in challenging circumstances can be subject to a wide range of external interventions. Harris (2010) maintains that “The demands of such initiatives can prove to be counterproductive in securing improvement, particularly where there are multiple foci and changing priorities” (p. 698). Therefore, the increasing pace of complexity and unpredictability in the socio-political context has made the nexus between complexity and education a timely and purposeful subject for examination.

The present day world is experiencing rapid social, political, cultural and technological changes. Such changes present new challenges for the role of school leadership, call for a reshaping of educational content, and compel us to reexamine their impact upon the leadership capabilities of our school leaders. Growing confusion in the national scenario about education in the post conflict Nepal and also in reshaping education to suit federal structure has made the situation more complicated. School leadership among these adversities is precarious. Given the backdrop of these growing pressures on schools, increased attention to continuous learning and a deeper understanding of effective approaches to leading through challenging times have become even more demanding. According to Kayuni (2010), “Despite a seemingly chaotic and confusing scenario, there are patterns of order which are achieved in the zone of what is referred to as “edge of chaos”” (p. 6). Therefore, the focus of this dissertation is on unfolding the patterns of order, if any, in a chaotic situation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

More than a decade ago, Cilliers (1998) had claimed “Whether or not we are happy with calling the times we live in ‘postmodern’, ... the world we live in is complex and that we have to confront this complexity if we are to survive, and, perhaps, even prosper” (p. 112) and it has become more applicable in our times. A feature of the post-modern world is an increasing “sense of uncertainty” (Lash & Urry, 1987, as cited in Stevenson, 2006, p. 412). As education systems become ever more linked to socio-political imperatives and structures the environment in which schools function will increasingly resemble the rapid and volatile politics that drives the social world. Therefore, school leaders each day face situations which place them in tremendous stress and dilemma, whether they should consider the external competing challenges or face chaotic disturbances in everyday school practices. Thus,

our school leaders are already into a role bounded by ever-increasing complexity and uncertainty. The current task of school leaders, therefore, is to continue their work and take up the challenge of complex socio-political influences and uncertainty, ever advancing technologies and increasing competition among schools.

Education has for many years, been stable, dwelling quite comfortably in an ordered state. However, recently, there has been more and more interaction with the environment – more intensive media coverage, more concern from political and professional groups, more demands from society, more special needs to accommodate, and more impact from technology. All of these have *perturbed* the education system. Consequently, it is moving out of *stability* and into *disequilibrium* (Caine & Caine, 1997; Kiel, 1997, as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 100). Although the education system is becoming more dynamic, there is no guarantee that the system will proceed through this transition and then emerge to meet the needs of our society and therefore its children (p. 100).

Teaching and learning processes are clearly the prime concerns of a school. Any consideration of leadership in a school setting would see this dimension as essential. However, in rapidly changing circumstances “the goals and objectives to be achieved by schools and the ways to get there are not always clear and static” (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008, p. 20). In increasingly complex, globalised and unpredictable environment, are our schools leaders laying the foundations for lifelong learning while at the same time dealing with new challenges such as increased uncertainties of social patterns, changing teaching/learning methodologies, new technologies and rapidly developing fields of knowledge? Again, school choice settings have also put pressure on school leaders to compete. Therefore, they are required to lead strategically and discern a wide range of local and global

developments, threats and opportunities that may affect their schools. But there arises a question whether our school leaders are equipped to deal with all such nuisances.

Economic implications, societal considerations, operational strategy, reputation issues, value creation, and competitive risk are among the challenges to be addressed. But many of our schools are not performing well which is clearly reflected in the poor academic results, disciplinary problems, teachers' dissatisfaction and protests, and the overall learning achievement of the students. Why are they not performing well? Is it because of socio-political chaotic turbulence? But, why do some schools remain resilient in the face of chaos, while others nearly collapse? Is it because the school leaders are unaware of the chaotic situation? Why are they not able to manage such chaos in schools? Is this because of the weakness of the educational system itself? Are there any loopholes in the educational policies? Or is it because of our social structure? Or is it because our school leaders do not have necessary knowledge, skills, and capability to deal with chaotic circumstances? What is required of the leadership that may shoulder the responsibility of shining at the edge of chaos? How can our school leaders meet the demands of school leadership in a time of tumultuous change when the stakes are high?

With the twists and turns that school leadership has taken over the period and that it may take in the foreseeable future, it is imperative that leading at the edge of chaos be explored.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and practices of Nepalese school leaders in the changing leadership landscape, especially when their school environment is engulfed in socio-political chaos and uncertainty. Therefore, I intended to solicit the perceptions of school leaders about their own leadership

practices amid dynamic tensions and discuss preferred leadership strategies in coping with such chaos.

### **Research Questions**

To explore the challenges of leading at the edge of chaos, the following research questions have been set:

- a. How do Nepalese school leaders understand and perceive chaos in the context of Nepalese schools?
- b. How do they make sense of “Edge of Chaos” in the context of Nepalese schools?
- c. How does chaos influence the performance of leadership and how are the school leaders coping with the chaotic situations?
- d. What strategic moves are to be taken to cope with chaos in academia?

### **Rationale of the Study**

Recent years have witnessed rapid social, economic, and political changes both locally and globally. Educational leadership in general and school leadership in particular, cannot turn a blind eye to these facts. In these circumstances, when things do not turn out as planned, there has been a consistent call for school leadership to further school reform, and improve the effectiveness of the instructional programs. “In many countries, economic, social and political forces have amalgamated to produce a climate in which *schools feel continued pressure* [emphasis added] to improve and raise levels of achievement” (Harris, 2010, p. 693).

Today more than ever, a number of interconnected factors argue for the necessity of effective leadership in schools. But the world is complex and chaotic in that it is changing rapidly and thus, we must adapt. It implies that in rapidly changing societies, there is no royal road to achieving the goals and objectives of the schools. Due to rapid changes in the environment characterized by endless technological

innovation, the coming of the information society, and globalization, the intrinsic goals of schools and their roles are changing likewise. Therefore, school leadership is the most crucial catalyst for school improvement bringing innovation and/or adapting to the changes taking place around.

Leading at the changing scenario begins with being able to identify a school's current reality, and a firm understanding of where the school is headed. The emphasis of this research is therefore on inducing self awareness and reflection in school leaders concerning their leadership practices. By exploring the emergent leadership thoughts and practices and identifying some alternative strategies at chaotic times, this study has sought not only to contribute to the academic discussion of school leadership but also to say something that can promote creative leadership.

Furthermore, this study has tried to delineate the major school leadership issues and challenges confronting Nepalese school leaders and explored strategies for dealing with those challenges. It has also discussed the changing roles of school leaders and explored ways of supporting them so that they can deal with the new and emerging roles more effectively.

The importance of this study lies in its exploratory nature as it attempts to unveil the leadership perspectives and practices in the Nepalese schools. Furthermore, it is believed to induce self awareness and reflection in school leaders concerning their leadership practices at chaotic times. In light of this background, I hope this research can contribute to the field of educational leadership by extending the knowledge base in a sparsely researched area that has been identified as needing further exploration. This investigation also allows educators at all levels the opportunity to view and understand the prevalent leadership beliefs and practices, and what strategies are needed to go the extra mile. Likewise, this study can also serve as



a wake up call to school leaders to jump up, take the reins and gear up for gaining competitive edge. In this sense, this study will help leaders steer a course amid the dynamic tensions that exist within a school environment at the edge of chaos.

In view of the important role that school leadership can play in creating effective schools, this research provides insights into how schools are responding to the challenges of chaos and complexity. Moreover, it provides insights into the beliefs and attitudes about school leadership in challenging times and the strategic moves that they adopt in tackling them. In addition, this research draws some insights to explain how the Nepalese (private) schools still manage to survive and show resilience (at the “edge of chaos”) despite the apparent overwhelming challenges. Therefore, this study is (perhaps other studies with similar nature are) required to be conducted to address (at least partially) all the issues raised thus far.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study aims at exploring the perspectives and practices of school leadership at the edge of chaos. It has tried to explore the major issues and challenges confronting school leaders, particularly at the secondary school level, and come up with strategies for addressing those challenges. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this study has some important delimitations.

First, this study has utilized participants’ perceptions and their experiences of school leadership at challenging times instead of actual observation based leadership performance data. I have based my study on participants’ perceptions and sharing of their lived experiences, because “in a socially constructed intersubjective world, our direct awareness is the only thing we can really know, since all knowing depends on individual perceptions” (O’Leary, 2011, p. 120). Second, although the interviews capture what school leaders say they are doing — and how they think and talk about

their jobs – it does not include an independent analysis of actual leadership performance in their schools. Third, since the term chaos is quite general and vague, it may not be possible to study all the aspects and areas that are influenced by chaos. Therefore, this study is delimited with the two major sources of chaos: internal and external school environments. Moreover, external chaos has been delimited to the socio-political influences (bandhs, strikes, political commitment and policy declarations), and technological advancement (the need to incorporate ICT in instruction). Similarly, internal chaos has particularly been discussed in reference with the daily challenges school leaders face in running the schools. Yet, space has been given when the leaders pointed to their unique cases. And fourth, this research endeavour is a small-scale, exploratory study. It offers vivid experiences, and useful insights, but it should not be read as a definitive picture of what is happening among school leaders nationwide. One important caveat is that leaders in middle schools and high schools are somewhat under-represented in this research, and I believe the field would benefit from additional research with significant samples from both elementary and secondary schools.

Despite these delimitations, it could be noted that an educational study of this nature would hopefully contribute to the generation of new ideas and perspectives about educational administration and leadership practices at challenging times.

### **Organization of the Research Report**

This research report has been organized in seven chapters. The first chapter deals with introductory part of the study which includes the study background, statement of the problem, purpose and research questions, rationale and delimitations of the study. The second chapter deals with the relevant literatures that were crucial to the research issues in question. In doing so, it provides an important context and

theoretical framework for the later analytical chapters. The third chapter deals with the methodology which consists of the research design, tools and techniques, data collection procedures and conceptual framework of the study. Similarly, the subsequent three chapters consist of the analysis and interpretation of the data where the fourth chapter is related to the theme of understanding chaos in academia, the fifth chapter has explored the leadership practices at the edge of chaos, and the sixth chapter has explored some pertinent strategies to deal with those challenges. In doing so, chapter four presents, analyzes and interprets the data relating to the challenges and barriers they perceive in their leadership. Similarly, chapter five presents an examination of leadership practices, specifically focusing on their values, beliefs and attitude on the nature of leadership styles, teachers' professional activities, and the making of school environment. Likewise, chapter six is concerned with setting strategies for meeting the challenges posed by complexity. And finally, the seventh chapter presents my reflective conclusions with a discussion of the implications for policy and practices for effective leadership at challenging times.

The following figure illustrates the structure of this dissertation report:



*Figure 1.* Structure of the dissertation report

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There are multiplicity of concepts, theories, and models in the educational leadership arena – too many to cover in a brief overview of literature. Regardless of the nature of those theories and models, the key fact that must be borne in mind is their appropriateness and usefulness in this study. Therefore, to develop the argument outlined above, I sketched a comprehensive outline of literature that enhanced my understanding of the following concepts: statutory provisions, competitive edge, technological revolution and 21st century schools, effective school leadership, and complexity and edge of chaos. Furthermore, I have also reviewed some empirical studies that focus on leadership issues in challenging times, especially dealing with the complexities of the chaotic times.

In this literature, I brought together concepts that were rarely integrated, ideas from various branches of philosophy and disparate strands of intellectual inquiry, to develop an argument for a more robust way of thinking about (and boosting up) educational leadership at the edge of chaos – more particularly, in contemporary Nepalese context.

#### **Statutory Provisions**

This research is influenced by education reform challenges in different countries; nevertheless, it focuses on school leadership challenges in the Nepalese contemporary scenario. To initiate the discussion about Nepalese school leadership scenario, first I have reviewed some pertinent statutory provisions that typically deal with the concerns of the present day school environment.

## **Education Sector as “Zone of Peace”**

Although schools are not a direct target of political activities, school functioning in Nepal has experienced significant hindering as a result of political unrest and instability, which is disrupting the education of school children. School functioning is suffering through strikes and violence on the streets that make it impossible for children and teachers to attend school.

Realizing the frequent and forceful school closure, politicization in school as major threats on children’s right to education in Nepal, Save the Children supported the School as Zone of Peace (SZOP) campaign (Save the Children, 2012). This campaign brought together the major stakeholders involved in School as Zones of Peace initiatives as well as those involved in Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) campaign to raise awareness for promoting peace in schools and for supporting the education of children. The common issues dealing through SZOP are: “school should remain open even in bandha and general strike; no arms and political activities into school; no use of school premises and children for political purpose; and no direct involvement of school teachers into party politics” (Shrestha, 2008, p. 5).

Different organizations have been using the term School as Zone of Peace (SZOP) in their own ways. Shrestha (2008) assessed the focus of different organizations on SZOP:

While defining SZOP, the organizations and agencies like Department of Education, Advocacy Forum, NPABSAN and World Education focus on the smooth functioning of school without any disturbances. Moreover, the organizations such as Partnership Nepal, PPCC Network, CWIN, CSWC, BIKALPA Nepal and CARE Nepal specify their focus on the issues of de-politicization and keeping the arm activities away from schools. Similarly, the

focus of CARITAS Nepal is on initiating peace culture through the school; and PABSAN's focus is on children's rights and interests on educational activities. (Shrestha, 2008, p. 8)

Whoever defines it and in whatever terms, SZOP is “one approach to protect the right of children to access school in conflict and crisis-affected areas and to ensure that education can continue and is not affected by violence” (UNICEF Nepal, 2010, p. 1).

Though teachers commonly believe that schooling should be outside politics, school systems are, in practice, one of the most politicized areas of contemporary society (Macdonald & Hursh, 2006, p. 5). And our school system is no exception because thousands of students attending public and private educational institutes reach their schools many mornings only to return a few minutes later as the schools remain closed due to a strike call made by some political parties or their sister organizations or by some other groups without prior notice. The education sector is being adversely affected by strikes and protests. These have disrupted studies in schools, and colleges. “Despite repeated appeals not to close the schools and colleges, no effect seems to have taken place on the organizers of strikes and protests. As a result, students are being deprived of their basic right to study” (Editorial, 2011, May 27, p. 8). Taking this into consideration, the Government of Nepal has declared the Nepali education sector as ‘zone of peace’ on May 25, 2011 (Wagley, 2011, June 8, p. 8).

However, many people suspect its effective implementation. Because though SZOP has been declared and it has made quite a significant reference to school closures and vandalism, it has made only limited reference to bringing the culprits under book. Wagley (2011, June 8) also expressed his doubt stating that “... announcement of the schools as the peace zone is only one side of the coin, while the

implementation mechanism is the other” (p. 8). This fact is supported by Davies (2004) when she said “Peace agreements are signed and conflict breaks out in another place, or resumes in the old one” (p. 3). So has happened in the case of declaring school as zone of peace. Wagley (2011, June 8) for example, elaborated this with evidence that the following day, 600 teachers of the valley had defied this announcement by closing all the schools deterring children from going to school and thus he calls this announcement “immature and populist political decision” (p. 8).

However, whoever calls it by whatever name, this step is a good initiative from the government’s part. Yet, it would be more prolific if its implementation got strict policy since its early phase. Therefore, the effectiveness of ‘peace zone’ is susceptible to much condemnation in that the government seems indifferent to its implementation once it has been announced.

National and district level political parties and their sister organization leaders make commitment on the agenda of SZOP in public mass meeting as their own parties’ position, but their commitments are being as their individual commitment rather than their party. It is evident that the declaration and implementation of participatory SZOP code of conducts are means as of creating child friendly environment in school. However, they are difficult to implement, if immediate stakeholders in the district level including political groups are not supportive. UNICEF Nepal (2010, p. 1) has concluded that if children were not to miss out on schooling, through school closures and because of intimidation, then the resilience of the schools needed to be strengthened and political commitments needed to be made and kept by the political leaders to protect the right to education.

## **Institutional Schools Standard and Operational Directives - 2069**

The government of Nepal issued the Private and Boarding School Directives 2013 on February 15, 2013 “to regulate private schools” (DoE, 2013). These directives have tried to address the issues (both decade-long and currently raised) concerning institutional schools and their management. They have specifically made some provisions regarding permission to open or class upgrade, name and location transfer of the schools. The directives have also made some provisions on physical infrastructures, educational (instructional) facilities, school cauterization and fee determination, and scholarships. They have further included the provision on the implementation of the directive. However, the same directives, which were said to regulate and facilitate the successful operation of private and boarding school, have brought about some disturbances in the children’s right to go to school. It is clear to every one that the private school administrators are openly speaking against the directive and openly challenging the government by disobeying the directives. Educationist Prof. Mana Prasad Wagley also said that “private schools’ organizations like PABSON and N-PABSON have become stronger and more powerful than government bodies” (Republica, 2013, March 14, p. 9). Prof. Wagley further said that private schools are yet to follow the country’s education regulations, which is mandatory for all schools.

Prof. Wagley said it was true that while preparing the Directives to regulate private schools, the government had invited representatives from PABSON and Guardians’ Association of Nepal (GAoN) for advice (Republica, 2013, March 14, p. 9). And they had initially agreed to government guidelines too. But following the government’s issuance of the Private and Boarding School Directives 2013, private school operators feel the odds have been stacked heavily against them. In an



interview, citing many reasons Prof. Wagley concluded that “The recent guideline is only a farce” (Republica, 2013, March 14, p. 9). Ghimire (2013) also opined that three weeks after the government formally endorsed the directives – with consent from all stakeholders—one of its signatories, PABSON announced that it would not obey the guidelines unless amended as per its own recommendations (p. 3). Their main objection is that the Ministry of Education (MoE)—the authority responsible for formulating the guidelines— ‘betrayed’ PABSON by failing to incorporate the concerns it had raised earlier on in the guideline development process. But Ghimire (2013) opined that the reality is quite different from the claim. PABSON’s protest was not a compulsion brought about by the MoE’s alleged betrayal, but the result of immense pressure from ‘small’ schools—those that have less than 22 students in individual classrooms and are thus categorised as ‘D grade’. The new directives require all private schools to have a minimum of 22 students in a single grade, and a minimum of 115 students for a primary school, 165 for a lower secondary and 220 for secondary schools. Since the new directives envision a merger or complete shutdown of small schools, and if the government were to implement it, some 4,000 private schools across the country would be affected. In this sense, PABSON leadership seemed to have been forced to bow under pressure and take into account the demands of small school operators.

Meanwhile, the Department of Education has also decided to amend a number of provisions of the directives issued recently following a mounting pressure from private school organizations when they raised concerns over their implementation. Speaking to a programme organized in the Capital, DoE Director Tek Narayan Pandey said that “some of the impractical provisions of the directives will be amended soon. The optimum number of students in a classroom and shifting of

schools running in rented houses or land to other places, among others, are the provisions that are going to be amended” (Post Report, 2013, p. 2).

This discussion shows that statutory provisions themselves are made with immature thoughts. They are not prepared consulting all the stakeholders, and if consulted, they are not held accountable for what they have agreed upon. Therefore, such tussles and grievances are often heard, which in turn leads to little or no implementation of such provisions. In another sense, the statutory provisions are prevalent but the commitment from the concerned stakeholders seems to be null. This indicates that the legal guidelines are not in favour of the school leaders, especially private school managers, or the government is not strong enough to strictly enforce the policies into practice. This standstill has also added much chaos in Nepalese academia.

### **Competitive Edge**

One common trend across the country is a move towards increasing school choice. Most of the private schools come up with new attractions for parents with scholarships and stipends. If the public schools cannot fulfill the demand of the sought type of education, a growing number of private schools have given them a range of options in terms of school fees and educational quality. Therefore, parents have these days a free choice of schools for their children in most of the city areas. This has been possible due to a fierce competition among schools, particularly among private ones, for their survival and excellence. Pont et al. (2008) wrote that “In some cases, school choice is deliberately used as a mechanism to enhance competition between autonomous schools. In systems where funding follows the student, parents are treated as clients who choose the school providing the best quality” (p. 24).

To be competitive at this time is very demanding. Many private schools are struggling for survival whereas some are gaining a wide ranging competitive edge over others. Those schools which are able to manage the environment and improve the student learning outcomes, in terms of their pass percentage and advertisement – which may not necessarily assure quality of education, are in the forefront of this battle. Therefore, school leaders are utilizing every strategy possible to attract more students and retain good teachers, speaking of their quality and facilities. In this connection, it is worth telling “The principal must use every opportunity to communicate with students, teachers, and parents that rigorous academic standards are essential for the success of the school” (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 4). Similarly, Leithwood (2001) stated “In some environments school leaders are more and more expected to market their schools efficiently, know what competing schools offer, develop niches for their schools and maintain good customer relations with students and parents (as cited in Pont et al., 2008, p. 25).

In fact, schools face a number of demands and pressures – both internal and external, that they have to address. “The challenges you face inside the school are connected to and compounded by things that are happening outside” (Hatch, 2010, para. 4). Moreover, without the connections, support, and expertise that come from interacting with a host of people, organizations, and institutions on the outside, schools cannot develop the goals, staff, or productive work environment they need to be successful. Hatch (2010) further stated that “Schools that distribute the work, scan and seed the environment, cultivate networks of allies, and thoughtfully work to reshape demands put themselves in a strong position to deal with changing conditions in the external environment” (How to Manage the Environment section, para. 1) and those which have been able to manage not only external but also internal environment

have gained more competitive edge. Similarly, Conrad (2006) talked about organizational nimbleness which is required not merely to survive but to surpass others in the competitive environment. Conner (1998) stated that “Nimbleness” is the ability for an organization to consistently succeed in unpredictable, contested environments by implementing important changes, successfully solve problems, and exploit more efficiently and effectively than its competitors, and thereby maintaining its desired return on change” (as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 354). Thus, any organization with high nimbleness will have more competitive edge.

### **Technological Revolution and the 21st Century Schools**

While the literature on educational leadership is far too extensive to review here, for the purpose of re-conceptualizing school leadership for the twenty-first century, it is important to understand the current state of play as a result of innovations and revolution brought about by technology. The world we know is changing. Hallinger (2001) noted that “the rapid change around the world is unprecedented” (p. 61). This arises from global economic integration and technological revolution leading to widespread recognition that education holds the key to becoming, and remaining, competitive. Inevitably, this has led to increased pressures on educational leaders, who have to deal with increasing complexity and unremitting changes. Hargrove and Prasad (2010) focused on how new technologies are being developed each day reshaping our way of life in the process stating that:

We live in the technological demi-paradise of the 21st century. Technology is growing in countless manifestations almost by the hour, and daily it powerfully affects our lives. A major task of schools is to equip students to manage technology and use it skillfully and responsibly. In fact, many of our

students are more knowledgeable and skilful in the use of technology than are their teachers. (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 45)

They further discussed the preparedness of the workforce to incorporate technology in the classroom. For that educational stakeholders need to set goals that they seek to achieve through the employment of technology in schools. The rapid expansion of digital technologies present schools with new challenges. One is how teachers might incorporate new technologies into their teaching in ways that enhance opportunities and capabilities to learn. This requires new radical ways of thinking that go beyond simply adding hardware to existing schooling structures. The second is how to bridge the digital gap which has begun to open up between different social groups; rich and poor; those social groups with cultural social and economic capital, and those without; those in rural communities with limited access to bandwidth compared to those in the cities; between communities whose mother tongue is not the same as the digital community, and so on.

Crow (2006) also noted the contribution of technological changes to the complexity affecting school leaders: "... changes toward greater complexity in educational work also involve responding to new and expanding technology" (p. 115) and comments that these changes must also impact on the nature of leadership preparation. "Once the goals have been established, the next step would be to ensure that teachers have adequate knowledge about and practice with the technology that they plan to use" (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 47). Many technological innovations of the late 20th century promised breakthroughs in the methods and effectiveness of teaching for the 21st century. Some of the most promising innovations include access to the internet and programmed instruction. Technological advances are replacing many jobs, such as ATM machines replacing the need for bank tellers. Thus, in line

with such advancement and changes, high schools will also need to change in order to adequately prepare all students. While the amount of technology that can be employed by teachers is almost limitless, it is also important to keep in mind that the use of technology needs to be focused on specific educational goals.

In this context, there exists a “need for scholarship to move beyond modernistic thinking” (Eacott, 2011, p. 135) and embrace the complexity of ever shifting cultural, social, political relationships and technological advances.

Highlighting the changing roles of educational institutions in recent years, Kim, Ee., Kim, K., Kim, D., and Kim, Eun (2006) stated:

Due to rapid changes in the educational environment characterized by endless technological innovation, the coming of the information society, and globalization, the intrinsic goal of schools and their roles are changing likewise. In the midst of the chaotic changes, the whole world has paid renewed attention to the role of the school principal as a component in helping schools achieve their goals. Particularly, as the expectation and challenges for the principals grow, societies fail to secure principals who possess the quality and skills necessary to satisfy such new demands. (Foreword)

At the beginning of the 21st century, educators and educational leaders are besieged by multiple pressures, conflicting goals, and diverse interpretations of the desired ends of education. Educational policies seem increasingly driven by economic rather than social goals, by a strong emphasis on the development of a skilled workforce, and by knowledge production for the global economy. It is evident that we are at the threshold of a worldwide revolution in learning and “a new electronic learning environment is replacing the linear, text-bound culture of conventional schools. This will be the proving ground of the 21st century mind” (Cookson, 2009,

Learning in the Electronic Age section, para 1). As the influence of market forces expands, educators are also faced with calls for “accountability, high-stakes testing, higher expectations for parental participation, and more opportunities for e-learning” (Shields & Sayani, 2005, p. 317). If we stick to our present school system, we will produce a workforce for an economy that will not be there. That is why, schools are often blamed for preparing young people for the world inhabited by their parents and teachers – not the world they will have to create and inhabit. Cookson (2009) opined that a child born today could live into the 22nd century and argues that it is difficult to imagine all that could transpire between now and then. He sees one thing quite apparently: “Technical fixes to our outdated educational system are likely to be inadequate. We need to adapt to a rapidly changing world” (The 21st Century Mind section, para 1).

A growing number of educators advocate the idea that students need "21st century skills" to be successful today. It is exciting to believe that we live in times that are so revolutionary that they demand new and different abilities. However, Rotherham and Willingham (2010) argued that the skills students need in the 21st century are not really new:

Critical thinking and problem solving, for example, have been components of human progress throughout history... If these skills were indeed new, then perhaps we would need a radical overhaul of how we think about content and curriculum. But if the issue is, instead, that schools must be more deliberate about teaching critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving to all students, then the remedies are more obvious, although still intensely challenging. (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010, p. 16)

If we discard the skills of digital literacy in the information and technology age, our discussion of 21st century skills will not be complete, which is not encompassed by Rotherham and Willingham in their above mentioned argument. They, on the other hand, pay keen attention to the implementation of three elements of the 21st century skills – curriculum, teacher quality and assessment.

We seek to call attention to the magnitude of the challenge and to sound a note of caution amidst the sirens calling our political leaders once again to the rocky shoals of past education reform failures. Without better curriculum, better teaching, and better tests, the emphasis on "21st century skills" will be a superficial one that will sacrifice long-term gains for the appearance of short-term progress. (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010, p. 20)

A scenario of the 21st century school education as seen by Hargrove and Prasad (2010) can be presented as:

Twenty-first century classrooms are likely to be quite different from those many teachers experienced themselves. For example, they are more diverse in a variety of ways. ... diversity is a reality, making it another reality that schools must be committed to becoming places where children from 3 to 17 have the opportunity to learn. In order to do this, teachers cannot teach as they were taught; they must update their current practices in regard to changing school populations, increasing technology, and new ideas about how children learn. (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 5)

In the last decade it has become increasingly clear that life today is global on many levels, both personally and professionally, and that the twenty-first century has necessitated the educators to bush the boundaries of schooling and break barriers so that global opportunities and challenges can be pursued. In this sense, school leaders



have an obligation today to prepare students to function as global citizens, to work and live people from other cultures and to learn within the multiple forms of technology.

### **Effective School Leadership**

There are many ways to complete the sentence, “Leadership is...” In fact, “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (Northouse, 2010, p. 2). For ages people have been looking for direction, purpose and meaning to guide their collective activities. Leadership is needed to foster purpose, direction, imagination, and passion, especially in times of crisis or rapid change. Although each of us intuitively knows what we mean by leadership, it can have different meanings for different people.

To organize the various practices of leadership into categories, Bass (1990, pp. 11-12) proposed two broad kinds of leadership perspectives: personality, and focus of group process. He suggested that some definitions conceptualize leadership from a personality perspective, which suggests that leadership is a combination of special traits or characteristics that some individuals possess. These traits enable those individuals to induce others to accomplish tasks. Another set of definitions view leadership as the focus of group processes. From this perspective, the leader is at the center of group change and activity and embodies the will of the group. He further suggests that other approaches to leadership define it as an act or behavior – the things leaders do to bring about change in a group. Beside these views, there are other views too. Some define leadership in terms of the power relationship that exists between leaders and followers. Others view leadership as a transformational process that moves followers to accomplish more than is usually expected of them.

Theories of leadership abound. They include approaches such as the “great man” theory, which suggests that, for example, without Churchill the British would have acquiesced to the Germans in 1940; trait theories, which contend that leaders are endowed with superior qualities that differentiate them from followers; and environmental theories, which assert that leaders emerge as a result of time, place, and circumstance. The trait theory contends that what makes someone an effective leader is her/his own personality and talents; i.e., leaders are born and not made. The consensus among those who accept this theory is that intelligence, initiative, self confidence and orientation towards achievement and interpersonal skills are important. The style theory states that it is people's behaviour rather than their psychological characteristics that determines whether they are effective leaders or not. Last, the contingency theory argues that what constitutes an effective style of leadership depends on the situation. More so, Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard at the end of the 1970's argued that for a leader to be most effective, their style should be adaptable.

Regardless of the theory used to explain it, leadership has been intimately linked to the effective functioning of complex organizations throughout the centuries. Since there are multitude of ways in which leadership can be conceptualized, staying focused on a particular style of leadership would sound outdated today. We need to screen the virtues of all approaches, theories, and styles of leadership and adopt them as the circumstances demand. This is more pertinent while leading at complex and unpredictable times.

Many theories of leadership have been influential in guiding school leaders. Similarly, there are multiple ways that people think about the work of school leaders (i.e. participative, democratic, transformational, moral, strategic, administrative, etc.).

School leaders lead many aspects of the school organization. Here I examine only three leadership theories: instructional, distributive, and strategic, which will be foundational to the analysis of this research.

Instructional leadership practice is constituted by the activities of individuals who either intend to bring about change in the institution or are perceived by others as intending to bring about this change. I borrowed from Spillane's (2006) definition of leadership which "refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members or that are understood by organizational members as intended to influence their motivation, knowledge, affect, and practices" (pp. 11-12). Similarly, Krug (1992) defined instructional leadership as comprising five key components which are "defining mission, managing curriculum and instruction, supervising teaching, monitoring student progress and promoting instructional climate" (as cited in MacBeath, n.d., p. 10).

Distributive leadership, on the other hand, is a framework to study leadership and is not a prescription for how to lead well but rather a way of looking at the complex phenomenon of leadership practice. MacBeath distinguishes between distributed leadership and distributive leadership. According to him, distributed leadership may imply that "this is something in the gift of a head teacher, allocating leadership roles magnanimously while holding on to power. While distributive leadership implies a holding, or taking initiative as a right rather than it being bestowed as a gift" (p. 7). In other words, it is a value or ethic, residing in the organizational culture.

Strategic leadership involves taking "a systemic view of planning, a firm hold on the present and a view of the future" (MacBeath, n.d., p. 5). It is at the root of thinking about school improvement planning. It may be seen as stemming from the

vision of the individual leaders or may be seen much more as a collaborative process. However, there are critics like Mintzberg (1994), who argued that planning can too easily become formalized, rigid, mechanistic, and unable to deal with spontaneity, and rapid change. While it is difficult to conceive of leadership that is not strategic, the secret is for it “to be seen as a servant rather than a master” (MacBeath, n.d., p. 5). Similarly, Davies and Ellison (1999) argued for a prelude to planning which they describe as ‘futures thinking’. Following from that strategic analysis allows the school to gain an understanding of where it sits strategically in the scheme of things, in the present, and what this implies for thinking about, and planning for, the future.

Leadership has long been established in the literature as a crucial element in effective functioning and improvement of schools and it is becoming an even more prominent element in the wake of social transformation which has led to intensification in the roles and responsibilities in terms of both scope and complexity pertaining to school leaders. Given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school. Effective school leaders (including teacher leaders) are the cornerstones of a successful school system. However, much expectation rests on the shoulders of the heads.

An empirical mixed method study by Goodwin (2002) described the changing role of the secondary principals in the American schools. Recognizing the complexity of the position, the study uses chaos and complexity theory to analyze the findings. The study identifies forty-five descriptors of the principal’s changing role. The findings demonstrate that principals perceive significant changes in their role in the following four areas: Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Organizational Leadership, and Political and Community Leadership. Stevenson (2006) supported the

role of principal as community leadership stating that we are asking principals to take on the leadership of schools that are more diverse and more complex than has ever been the case (p. 413). He further noted that this will increasingly require school leaders to become leaders within their communities, as well as within their schools. Crow (2006) demonstrated that the societal changes that impact the nature of work in general and the practice of school principals in particular can be seen in the distinction between industrial and post-industrial societies and argues that “identifying the move from industrial to post-industrial society suggests a way to highlight the increasing complexity that exists both in work generally and in educational work particularly” (p. 312). Although educational work is undoubtedly different from manufacturing work, these societal changes from conflict to post-conflict put pressures on educational workers in general, and on school principals in particular. These changes warrant a new understanding of the leadership dimensions of school principals who enact their role in this complex, post-conflict society, when still in transition.

An overview of recent literature on and models of successful school leadership identifies the need for successful educational leaders to be able to understand and act effectively on “why” and “how” (Mulford, 2007, p. 17). “Why” involves understanding, engaging and mediating the diverse, complex technological, economic, social, and political forces impinging on schools. The “how” involves educational leaders who are able to create, acquire, communicate, and use knowledge wisely. Mulford (2007) went on to suggest that this is best achieved through the ability to:

- choose and prioritize (for example, to “make” rather than “take” on the basis of evidence, social justice, and “deep” democracy);
- provide balance (for example, between leadership/management, designed/emergent);

- provide bridges (for example, between the professional and other communities);
- provide coherence; achieve shared understandings, ownership and responsibility;
- care for others, collaborate and negotiate (for example, in, with and for community and through distributed leadership and responsibility); and,
- most important of all, learn. Learning involves an ability to critique, assess and be accountable and, if necessary, constantly change. It can involve both development and transformation.

Recent studies of school effectiveness invariably identify the principal's leadership as a significant factor in a school's success. Unfortunately these studies provide only limited insight into how school leaders contribute to their school's achievements. In his address to the Symposium on School Leadership in Edmonton on February 22, 2008, Leithwood pointed out seven key comprehensive trends with “significant implications and challenges” for school leaders, these “to be found within many public educational systems at the present time” (p. 1). One of these trends he bluntly described as “surfing the ‘edge of chaos’ in the search for productive practice” (p. 3). Wheatley (2005) described chaos as “a state that always feels terrible” (p. 86), yet she insists that “the growth, the creativity, the opening up, the energy improves only if we hold ourselves at the edge of chaos” (p. 44).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) provided a comprehensive review of knowledge about successful school leadership based upon academically sound quantitative research studies, multiple case studies and systematic single case studies. Leadership is defined as “those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school’s goals” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 9). This definition includes people in schools other than principals. However, the position of principal is an

enduring feature of schools. Thus, the principalship has become a more demanding position. The concept of principalship is rooted in the industrial model of schooling, where “one individual bears the prime responsibility for the entire organization” (Pont et al., 2008, p. 19). Leadership is a broader concept where authority to lead does not reside only in one person, but can be distributed among different people within and beyond the school. Thus, effective school leadership may not reside exclusively in formal positions but may instead be distributed across a number of individuals in the school. Principals, deputy and assistant principals, leadership teams, school governing boards and other school-level professional personnel can contribute as school leaders. Therefore, schools can develop a collaborative culture that draws upon the skills and expertise of its members – a culture that differs from the individuality heavily dependent on the principal.

Leadership is not set in isolation but is set in the context of organisations and the wider society. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argued:

Most contemporary theories of leadership suggest that leadership cannot be separated from the context in which leadership is exerted. Leadership is contingent on the setting, the nature of the social organisation, the goals being perused, the individuals involved, resources and timeframes and many other factors. (p. 9)

In recent years, there has been a consistent call for school leaders to further school reform, and improve the effectiveness of the instructional programs. Within each individual school, leadership can contribute to improve student learning by shaping the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur. Beyond the school borders, school leaders can connect and adapt schools to changing external environments. School leadership does not operate in static educational environments.

As countries are seeking to adapt their education systems to the needs of contemporary society, the expectations for schools and school leaders have changed profoundly. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) observed that “as time changes, what works for leaders also changes” (p. 3). “Many countries have made schools more autonomous in their decision making while centralizing standards and accountability requirements and demanding that schools adopt new research-based approaches to teaching and learning” (Pont et al., 2008, p. 16), Nepal has also adopted similar kind of mechanism with the introduction of community-based school management. Given the increased autonomy and accountability of schools, leadership at the school level is more important than ever. For Fullan (2007), school improvement is an organizational phenomenon, and therefore the principal, as leader, is the key. He claimed that:

With all this confirmation from the research literature and with many current attempts to situate the principal as change leader, one would think that it would be a slam dunk to make progress. Well it is not, and here is where progress means digging deeper into the problem and its solution. (Fullan, 2007, p. 167)

Truly effective school leadership should not be the responsibility of one individual, however; it should be a cooperative effort involving a number of individuals-at least from the school head to the classroom teachers. Relating to the importance of distributed leadership for school effectiveness, Donaldson (2007) stated that:

Great schools grow when educators understand that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships. Strong leadership in schools results from the participation of many people, each leading in his or



her own way. Whether we call it distributed leadership, collaborative leadership, or shared leadership, the ideal arrangement encourages every adult in the school to be a leader. Administrators, formal teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders all contribute to the leadership mix. (p. 29)

The demands of today's leadership are practically impossible to meet. They have limited expertise. Danielson (2007) maintained that "The school administrator cannot be an expert in everything. Individual teachers, of course, have their own particular areas of knowledge, but a group of teacher leaders can supply the variety of professional knowledge needed for sustained school improvement"(p. 15). Given these factors, school improvement depends more than ever on the active involvement of teacher leaders. School administrators can't do it all. Today, a number of interconnected factors argue for the necessity of effective teacher leadership in schools.

Improved professional development for teachers and principals is central to the educational leadership agenda. "Principals struggle with the challenge of how to build school climates that improve practice in an era of heightened accountability and increasingly complex adaptive challenges" (Drago-Severson, 2011, para. 1). They need to keep themselves abreast of the total school environment. "The additional responsibilities imposed on school leaders, and the greater complexity of the external environment, increase the need for principals to receive effective preparation for their demanding role" (Bush, 2009, p. 377). Self efficacy has the potential to reveal insights into principals' judgment of their capacity in providing instructional supports for improved teacher performance. "The key role of the contemporary principal is to serve as an instructional leader who, in turn, promotes teacher growth" (Checkley & Checkley, 2000, Discussion section, para. 2). In this way, school leaders can cultivate

greater capacity by providing high-quality professional development that allows teachers to engage in collective explorations of different approaches, methods and techniques to teaching and learning. That constantly keeps even the teachers engaged in learning. As Hargrove and Prasad (2010) wrote:

Learning will always be the primary function of the school, the key for all the stakeholders. This emphasis on learning is significant. Students come to school to learn, and teachers who are not learning while teaching are not really teaching. If the teacher's role is merely to impart information, both the teacher and the students may become bored. A quality teacher will learn as he teaches.

(p. 3)

A teacher can only become a professional teacher if he or she continually learns – either together with students, on their own (individually or in peer) or by attending workshops and trainings. School leaders, mostly the principals, can play a vital role in developing professional growth of their teachers. Leithwood et al. (2006) categorized four successful school leadership dimensions that include “developing people”, together with “setting directions”, “redesigning the organisation” and “managing the instructional programme” (as cited in Kwan, 2009, p. 192). They argued that “developing people” will develop staff motivation and commitment in addition to building the knowledge and skills needed for accomplishing school goals. This aspect includes providing individualized support, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling important values and practices. Similarly, “setting directions” includes building a shared vision, developing consensus about goals and priorities, and creating high performance expectations. “Redesigning the organization” includes building a collaborative culture, creating and maintaining shared decision-making structures and processes, and building relationships with

parents and the wider community (Raihani, 2008, p. 482). And finally, “managing the instructional programme” has to do with teaching and learning which directly influences the students’ outcomes.

More teachers will strive for excellence when there's more reason for them to do so. In many schools, teachers are indifferent towards other school activities besides going to their classes. There will be a growing tendency of teachers just to remain in the job and draw the salary without taking much of a headache if there is no conducive climate for their efforts to be recognized. A report by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD] (2009) pointed out similar argument:

If we truly honor our teachers, we won't continue paying them poorly, disrespecting their professional opinions, and subjecting them (and our children) to unsafe or shameful working conditions in our schools. If we value our children, we will honor their teachers; we will give them room to excel.

(para. 2)

Although teacher quality has the greatest influence on student motivation and achievement, the quality of leadership matters in determining the motivation of teachers and the quality of their teaching, which subsequently affect student performance. On the whole, it is the primary responsibility of the school leaders, mostly of the principal, to create positive work culture for the school effectiveness.

Wheatley (2005) talked about the whole organization improvement.

According to her:

Once we stop treating organizations and people as machines and move to the paradigm of living systems, organizational change is not a problem. Using this worldview, it is possible to create organizations rich in people who are capable

of adapting as needed, who are alert to changes in their environment, who are able to innovate strategically. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 76)

It is no doubt in line with such thinking that the present day organizational literature calls for a dramatic reconsideration of educational administration's epistemological viewpoints. Based on the above review, it effective leadership is oriented towards handling chaos. Leithwood, Fullan and other leadership scholars have researched intensively in order to distill what ostensibly might be determined to be effective leadership methods for turning around school systems. In their six-component framework for the problem solving processes of transformational leader principals, Hallinger, Leithwood, and Murphy (1993) were pioneers in their inclusion of personal values and uncertainty into a cognitive science orientation or perspective of transformational leadership. Certainly, these educational scholars seem to be taking the "edge of chaos" aspect of school organizations into account in their research. Also very important, in their "goal" component, of the six components, is the principal's aim "to arrive at the best solution the group can produce" and to "more often establish staff development as a goal for group problem solving" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 103). It is important to note that all these scholars consider a richly nurtured collaborative culture as key to school leaders' success in enhancing school improvement.

### **Complexity and Edge of Chaos**

Everywhere around us and within us we experience complexity and diversity  
 Everywhere around us and within us we experience change, death, and renewal; order  
 and chaos; growth and decay that becomes new life  
 Everywhere around us and within us we see pattern upon pattern, ever-deepening  
 levels of complexity and variety

Why do we resist the vision or blind ourselves to the beauty or fail to embrace the learnings?

(Wheatley, 1993, p. 2)

The above lines by Margaret J. Wheatley stand truer today when each of us continue to live in a rapidly changing world where little is certain and predictable. This has however given certainty to complexity, change and chaos.

An emerging leadership theory within the critical postmodern perspective is chaos theory, the notion that while events are rarely controlled, within those existing events lie patterns of behavior. Chaos theory developed from the 1960s work of meteorologist Edward Lorenz when he developed a meteorological model and discovered that a very small difference in the initial conditions led to large changes in the weather (Valle, 2000, p. 1). According to one definition, "Chaos theory is the qualitative study of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic nonlinear dynamical systems" (Kellert, 1993, as cited in Valle, 2000, p. 2). With this definition, Valle (2000) draws several conclusions about the characteristics of chaos. First, that the system is dynamical means that it changes over time. Second, that the behavior of the system is aperiodic and unstable means that it does not repeat itself. Third, although chaotic behavior is complex, it can have simple causes. Fourth, because the system is nonlinear (Nonlinearity means that the output of the system is not proportional to the input and that the system does not conform to the principle of additivity, i.e. it may involve synergistic reactions in which the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts.), it is sensitive to initial conditions. Fifth, because the system is deterministic, chaotic behavior is not random even though its aperiodicity and unpredictability may make it appear to be so. On the other hand, because of the instability, aperiodicity, and

sensitivity to initial conditions, the behavior of chaotic systems is not predictable even though it is deterministic.

Over the past few decades, chaos theory has been used widely in the natural sciences. More recently, it has also begun to be applied to the social sciences as well. In his seminal work, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (1987), Gleick brought popular attention to the widespread work being done in these varied fields and explained the commonalities of the theory in such diverse areas. He also suggested that the name chaos may be a misnomer since the mythological reference is to disorder and randomness, while chaos theory explores not disorder, but the relationship between order and disorder and the fact that “simple processes in nature could produce magnificent edifices of complexity without randomness” (p. 306, as cited in Goodwin, 2002, p. 19). Therefore, from the work of physicists Gleick and Lorenz, chaos theory grounds a postmodern science of management that is ambiguous, at best unpredictable, and hence unknowable to the degree of precision demanded by modern science. Chaos theory is about how very simple things can generate very complex outcomes that could not be guessed by just looking solely at the parts. Consequently, chaos theory explains why sometimes large efforts give no results and at other times a minor change leads to an organizational landslide (Conrad, 2006, p. 136). In other words, it helps clarify the limits of predictability of long term strategic planning, especially in the kind of environment created by the Information Age. Similarly, Barbour (2004) presented the idea of chaos theory in the following way:

While the theory predicts that complex nonlinear systems are inherently unpredictable, concurrently, chaos theory insures that often, the way to express such an unpredictable system lies not in exact equations, but in representations of the behavior of a system, that is, to watch a system over

time to find the patterns of behavior not immediately seen in the organization. Thus, chaos theory, which many think is about unpredictability, is at the same time about predictability in even the most unstable systems. (p. 5)

Bechtold (1997) also viewed chaos as “a system theory that attempts to understand the behavior of nonlinear, unpredictable systems” (as cited in Kayuni, 2010, p. 8). I found it interesting that chaos does not mean randomness; it is a different form of order, or a precursor to order, not its antithesis. Chaos can actually contain order (Davies, 2004, p. 32). Relating to the development of chaos theory into social sciences, Kayuni (2010) stated:

Originally, the concept was successfully applied in the natural sciences such as chemistry, biology and physics so as to enhance understanding of certain emerging trends in those fields. Over the years it was also noted that most social science disciplines tend to be confronted with characteristics of non-linear and unpredictable phenomenon. Consequently “this recognition has led to a surge of interest in applying chaos theory to a number of fields” (Levy, 1994) and these include international relations, economics, management, education and policy analysis. (p. 8)

This view supports that chaos theory can be utilized in analysing education and management perspectives.

Another kind of behavior closely linked to chaos is complexity. A complex system is one in which numerous independent elements continuously interact and spontaneously organize and reorganize themselves into more and more elaborate structures over time (Williams, as cited in Valle, 2000, p. 4). As with chaos, the behavior of self-organizing complex systems cannot be predicted. Complex systems can naturally evolve to a state of self-organized criticality, in which behavior lies at

the border between order and disorder. Again, the same system can display order, chaos, and self-organizing complexity, depending on the control parameters.

Complexity theory is a theory of change, evolution and adaptation, often in the interests of survival, and often through a combination of cooperation and competition (Stewart, 1991; Battram, 1999; Morrison, 2002, as cited in Morrison, 2006, p. 1). It breaks with straightforward cause-and-effect models, linear predictability, and a reductionist, atomistic, analytically-fragmented approach to understanding phenomena, replacing them with organic, non-linear and holistic approaches, in which relations within interconnected networks are the order of the day (Youngblood, 1997; Cilliers, 1998; Wheatley, 1999, as cited in Morrison, 2006, p. 1).

Complexity theory may provide a tool for tracing the emergence of simple organising principles from the complexity of social interaction and have implications for the study of schools and their communities (Cunningham, 2001, p. 1). Chaos and complexity are terms, which encompass a range of interconnected ideas and observable events. There is not yet a theoretical framework, which is well defined, under the umbrella of this area of study (Cunningham, 2001, p. 7). Although “chaos” and “complexity” present themselves as popular new science buzzwords that have appeared with increased regularity following the turn of the century, any detailed field-specific definitions of these terms do not appear in the management and organization literature before the second half of the 1980s. Before that date, “chaos in organizations” was mostly used in its common-sense meaning, i.e. “bedlam.” Liu (1999, p. 9) described classical chaos as: “recurrent, random-like, and a-periodic behavior generated from deterministic non-linear equations with sensitive dependence on initial conditions of the system” (as cited in van Eijnatten & Putnik, 2004, p. 419). “Chaos theory”, a popular pseudonym for dynamical systems theory, was originally



developed in mathematics, and spread into natural science, biology, and chemistry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. “From the 1990s onward, “complexity” instead of chaos is increasingly used to indicate an emerging field of study in the organization and management literature” (van Eijnatten & Putnik, 2004, p. 419). However, Barbour (2004) found “edge of chaos” lying between order and chaos. For him “edge of chaos” is another name for complexity. He states ““edge of chaos” is the point at which there is enough chaos for creativity, but enough order for appropriate patterns to endure” (p. 5). He further linked the implications of chaos and complexity to organizational management in the following manner:

As complex systems naturally go to more complexity, the focus of the manager or leader in a chaotic environment becomes one of managing change and the volatility brought by the change. A postmodern organization would include a network of diverse, self-managed, self-controlled teams with many centers of coordination that fold and unfold according to the requirements of the tasks. The teams are organized in a flat design, employees are highly empowered and involved in the job, information is fluid and continuous improvement is emphasized throughout the organization. (Barbour, 2004, p. 5)

Complexity theorist, M. Mitchell Waldrop (1992) in his treatise on complexity theory wrote about the multiplicity of interrelationships and interactions within and between systems and their components. According to Waldrop:

... complex systems have somehow acquired the ability to bring order and chaos into a special kind of balance. This balance point – often called the edge of chaos – is where the components of a system never quite lock into place, and yet never quite dissolve into turbulence, either. ... The edge of chaos is the constantly shifting battle zone between stagnation and anarchy, the one

place where a complex system can be spontaneous, adaptive, and alive.”

(Waldrop, 1992, p. 12)

Heylighen (1996, pp. 1-2) also suggested that there is some communality in the different concepts of complexity: Both “distinction” (variety, heterogeneity; leading to chaos) and “connection” (redundancy, dependency; leading to order) go hand in hand. He is positioning complexity: “in between order and disorder, or, using a recently fashionable expression, ‘on the edge of chaos’” (as cited in van Eijnatten & Putnik, 2004, p. 420). Wheatley’s (1993) comment was remarkable when she stated that “One of the great gifts that chaos science provides is that order is found in chaos. A system in chaos is defined as a system that from moment to moment is totally unpredictable” (p. 5). She further suggested three key sensibilities about chaos: first, in the heart of chaos, order is available; second, chaos is the root to creativity; and third, complexity can be understood as some very simple patterns or rules of interaction that, over time, create wonderfully complex forms (Wheatley, 1993, p. 7).

Moreover, complexity theorists are interested particularly in systems, which operate on the 'edge of chaos'. These are characterised by a fluid structure, which is sensitive to changes. Such edge-of-chaos systems are referred to as ‘complex adaptive systems’, or as exhibiting ‘self-organised criticality’ (Cunningham, 2001, p. 8). Cunningham (2001) further stated the words ‘adaptive’ and ‘self-organising’ highlight the fact that organising rules, which govern the behaviour of these systems, are local and often simple, and that they can readily adapt to change. Similarly, Waldrop (1992, p. 11) stated that complex systems are characterized by: (1) a great many independent agents who are interacting with each other; (2) systemic interactions which can lead the system to spontaneous self-organization; and (3) learning which takes place through feedback. For Davies (2004), in complexity and chaos theory, a central

feature is the study of 'complex adaptive systems' (CASs), otherwise called dynamic or non-linear systems (p. 20). She further elaborated that these can be physical systems such as the weather or the brain as well as social systems such as the economy. This is more than just saying that institutional systems such as schools, or global systems such as economic relations, are complex - this would be a truism. Thus, complexity considers that organizations are “complex adaptive systems” (McMillan, 2004, p. 94) and thus the notions of edge of chaos are highly relevant. Educational systems, institutions and practices also exhibit many features of complex adaptive systems, “being dynamical and emergent, sometimes unpredictable, non-linear organizations operating in unpredictable and changing external environments” (Morrison, 2006, p. 3). McMillan (2004) further said that:

When a system is poised on the edge of chaos it is neither too rigid so that it ossifies and dies, nor too chaotic such that it disintegrates into disorder and anarchy. When a system is in this situation its systems are neither coupled too tightly, nor too loosely. This is highly important, for if a system is too tight then any major change in one part of the system will impact significantly on the rest of the system. ... On the other hand, if couplings in the system are weak then there is little chance of change and the whole system is unable to respond when necessary. (p. 94)

For Waldrop (1992, pp. 294-299), ‘Complex adaptive systems’ scan and sense the external environment and then make internal adjustments and developments in order to survive in those changing external environments. The processes that contribute to such changes involve self-organization and autocatalysis, wherein the catalyst of change is the organism itself. This is a theory of activity, proactivity and reactivity all together, not simply of passivity. The system –the collectivity of the

organism and its environment – evolves itself, from within. To this discussion, Morrison (2006) added:

When self-organization operates effectively the organism is characterized by adaptability, open systems, learning, feedback, communication and emergence (Prigogine & Stengers, 1985; Cohen & Stewart, 1995). Closed systems – those in stable equilibrium – die or move towards entropy; systems need disequilibrium in order to survive (Stacey, 1992). Change, disequilibrium and unpredictability are requirements for survival: the tadpole must become a frog if the species is to survive. (p. 2)

In order to craft an argument in support of engaging in the process of leadership based on complexity theory, it will need to address the difficulty of defining complexity science and demonstrate that this approach has something new and significant to offer to the field of leadership. As Richardson and Cilliers (2001) stated, “Although a number of conferences have been held to explore the potential of complexity science within the realms of management and organization science, there still appears to be little agreement on what complexity science actually is” (as cited in Fels, n.d., p. 5). Many systems appear simple, but reveal remarkable complexity when examined closely (e.g. a leaf) while others appear complex, but can be described simply, e.g. some machines, such as the internal combustion engine. Because complexity results from the interaction between the components of a system, “complexity is manifested at the level of the system itself. There is neither something at a level below (a source), nor at a level above (a meta-description), capable of capturing the essence of complexity” (Cilliers, 1998, p. 2-3). Thus, complexity is the “result of a rich interaction of simple elements that only respond to the limited information each of them are presented with” (Calliers, 1998, p. 5). When we look at

the behaviour of a complex system as a whole, our focus shifts from the individual element in the system to the complex structure of the system.

Complexity theory proposes that any minute change in any dynamic system has a generative impact on a multiplicity of inter-related relationships. “Who would have anticipated that a typhoon would have been the result of a butterfly’s presence in a distant land? This explains why forecasting the weather remains a knuckle-biting act of science” (Fels, n.d., p. 76). In this respect, complexity theory allows educational leaders “to acknowledge and engage in the multiplicity of complex relationships and interactions that simultaneously embrace and disturb conventional expectations” (Fels, n.d., p. 77). Thus, complexity theory compels us to investigate the interplay between different agents and relationships inside and outside the organization. Fels further states that the role of the teachers, classroom management, and lesson plans must be released from their structured order of surety. “Complexity deals with the nature of emergence, innovation, learning and adaptation” (Santa Fé Group, 1996, as cited in Tosey, 2002, p. 6).

The pedagogical ambition is to initiate generative engagements in search of possible new learning “on the edge of chaos”. Therefore, school leaders are finding themselves at the edge of chaos, a necessary condition for stimulating significant and enduring change. Lewin (1999) stated “the periods of chaos allow the exploration of many different possibilities in an innovative manner” (as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 131). However, they need to develop the educational wisdom that is needed in this dynamic and challenging global age of living and learning.

A complex system, such as a living organism or a growing economy, has to develop its structure and be able to adapt that structure in order to cope with changes in the environment (Cilliers, 1998, p. 12). Caine and Caine (1997) described systems

at the edge of chaos as being in states of disequilibrium, where change is constant and cannot be controlled, and outcomes are often unpredictable (as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 150). Forecasting what will happen tomorrow, next week, next month, let alone next year is becoming more and more complex. In fact, with forecasting we can only have one of two outcomes, we are either wrong or lucky and most organizations need to build a lot of safety nets to cover themselves for the risk of being wrong. Changes at the edge of chaos can only be propelled by energy from within people who willingly make a commitment to a continually learning system (Conrad, 2006, p. 154). Coping with complexity requires complexity thinking. Davis and Phelps (2005) believe:

Complexity thinking provides a means around this apparent impasse, and it does so by emphasizing the need to study phenomena at the levels of their emergence, oriented by the realizations that new stable patterns of activity arise and that those patterns embody emergent rules and laws that are native to the system. (Davis & Phelps, 2005, p. 2)

Chaos theory interprets nonlinear, dynamic systems and is concerned with nonrandom behavior that is difficult to predict. “Nonlinearity – a central concept in Chaos and Complexity theories–means that response is disjointed with cause” (Marion, 1999, p. 6, as cited in Goodwin, 2002, p. 19).

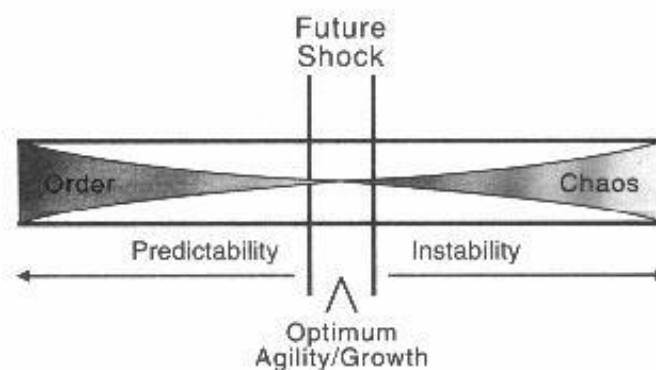
Historically, a compelling distinction between chaos theory and complexity theory can be noticed when Lewin argues that “chaos and complexity are chasing each other around in a circle trying to find out if they are the same or different” (Lewin, 1992, p. 10, as cited in Goodwin, 2002, p. 19). While it is recognized that distinctions between chaos and complexity are being made, in educational

administration and leadership the distinctions are unsubstantiated, and therefore, the terms chaos and complexity are used synonymously in this research.

Chaos literature refers to these change points as bifurcation points, “the critical points in time when organizations and systems are both on the edge of chaos and subject to dramatic change. At its most spectacular, it is at these times that organizations may grow exponentially or die altogether” (Haynes, 2003, p. 33). The concepts of chaos theory (i.e., butterfly effect, onsets of turbulence, dissipative structures, strange attractors, etc.) are intuitively attractive in considering the nonrational, nonlinear world of the principal, and they provide “new metaphors, new theoretical frameworks and new directions for research in educational administration” (Griffiths, 1997, p. 377, as cited in Goodwin, 2002, p. 22). Considering the difficulty of managing change in an environment of uncertainty and turbulence, school leaders need to focus on developing a self-organizing system. Stanford (1996) summarized the basics of self-organizing systems into four characteristics. The self-organizing system is (a) responsive to its environment, (b) created by choices made by its components, (c) resistant to change, and (d) adaptable and able to change when a bifurcation point is reached. It is what Senge (1990) calls “a learning organization.” Considering the latest pressure of the knowledge society on teacher leadership, Crow (2006) recounted that “... knowledge society puts new and increasingly complex demands on teachers and principals. They not only must keep up with a rapidly increasing knowledge base but also create school environments that are focused on continuous learning and building learning capacity (Crow, 2006, p. 314).

The edge of chaos (future shock) is the behavior state on the continuum that separates predictability (order) and instability (chaos) as shown in Conner’s Figure below. “Although this state is filled with possible danger, systems naturally gravitate

toward this region between predictability and instability. The edge of chaos provides the greatest hope for survival and prosperity during turbulent times (times of change)” (Conner, 1998, as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 208). Waldrop (1992) maintained that “order and chaos intertwine in a complex, ever changing dance of submicroscopic arms and fractal filaments, ...nothing ever really settles down” (p. 230). One of the five theses of Baofu (2007) advocated “both order and chaos are vital in the process of change in the world” (p. 239). He suggested in the process of change, both order and chaos co-exist in their recurrent interactions for the dynamics of change in the world (p. 240). He further suggested the chaos scholars to “study the change in the initial conditions of a complex system in order to learn the patterns of order emerging over time” (p. 239).



*Figure 2.* Conner’s order/chaos continuum (as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 208)

Conner (1998) described the above figure as:

Higher levels at the edge of chaos (future shock) are the most destructive because not only will the current project fail to meet its objectives, but the higher levels erode the organization’s overall capacity to engage in future change efforts. ... At mid-range of the continuum, the edge of chaos (future shock) produces a greater loss of productivity and quality than any single change effort is worth. At the lower end of the future shock continuum,



however, there exists a dangerous, but nonetheless potentially beneficial, amount of dysfunction. Leaders who seek the elasticity of a nimble operation know that as risky as high levels of change are for an organization, they must flirt with the rim of chaos if they are to keep their organization competitive in today's markets. (as cited in Conrad, 2006, p. 347)

Writers in leadership and organizational studies have accrued a long history of interest in assorted complexity ideas, ranging from the pseudo-scientific and almost evangelistic (Wheatley, 1994; 2006) to the more scholarly and empirical (Stacey, 1995). The real trick, and the winning organizations of the future will achieve this, is to work in a focused manner to create the future you want. Leading businesses take proactive steps to ensure an outcome that will place their organization in a position of competitive advantage. The winning organizations of the future will be those that understand and capitalize on uncertainty and chaos through a strong capability to adapt and change on a continued basis.

Complex systems at the edge of chaos are inherently evolutionary. Order emerges out of chaos; stability is punctuated by rapid change (Cunningham, 2001, p. 10). Balance and harmony are the bases for smooth operation of a social organism, yet they are rarely felt in our times. Consequently, we often live in a state of "too much" or "too little". In today's world, these gross discrepancies are reflected in the socio-economic, political and even educational arenas. Just saying that the world is complex and chaotic, we cannot escape, rather we must adapt. School systems today have to grapple with a changing environment. Depending on the severity of the changes, great demands can be made on the resources of the system. To cope with these demands, Cilliers (1998) suggested that the system must have two capabilities: "it must be able to store information concerning the environment for future use (process of

*representation*); and it must be able to adapt its structure when necessary (process of *self-organization*)” (p. 10). Conrad (2006) demonstrated that “Highly resilient, agile individuals in organizations at the edge of chaos are empowered and are both malleable within its existing boundaries of operation and capable of redefining those boundaries so it can shift its success formula whenever necessary” (p. 155). Leaders who realize that organizations often need to approach the edge of chaos tend to create environments where most changes are introduced to highly competent individuals who are able to wrestle with various paradoxical extremes chosen by organizations.

A major problem for school improvement researchers is to explain how schools under special measures can most effectively move forward. An understanding of mechanisms using complexity approaches may suggest less rather than more planning and more focus on learning and teaching (Cunningham, 2001, p. 13). I do not envisage that a complexity approach will conflict with the work already established in the fields of school improvement. Complexity and chaos may provide a framework for connecting findings from these fields, for example linking our present understanding of highly effective and ‘failing’ schools.

The implication of chaos and complexity theory to leadership is that it takes the contextual approach of contingency theory and extends it to argue that since the leadership context is governed by the sheer uncertainty of chaos, the leader has only two choices: to adapt to the chaos as it arises, or to attempt to impose order upon that chaos.

### **Empirical Studies**

Goodwin (2002) carried out a Delphi study in the American context of the changing role of the secondary principal on the edge of chaos. The study examined the contemporary high school principalship and described changes in the

principalship, the role of the contemporary principal, and the preferred future for the principalship. Recognizing the complexity of the position, the study was theoretically informed by chaos and complexity theory to critically analyze the findings and to discern if the theory provided an understanding of these changes and their impact. It has described the nature of the secondary principalship, identified specific changes that have occurred in the secondary principalship during the careers of the identified experts, and projected a preferable future for the principalship.

The findings of the study showed that principals perceived significant changes in their role in the following four areas derived from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration standards: Strategic Leadership (Professional and Ethical Leadership; and Information Management and Evaluation), Instructional Leadership (Curriculum, Instruction, Supervision, and the Learning Environment; Professional Development and Human Resources; and Student Personnel Services), Organizational Leadership (Organizational Management; Interpersonal Relationships; Financial Management and Resource Allocation; and Technology and Information Systems), and Political and Community Leadership (Community and Media Relations; and Educational Law, Public Policy and Political Systems).

Through this study, I also got some implications that the current role of the secondary principal are in the area of strategic, instructional, and organizational leadership. The study implied that the increasing complexity would require a commitment to continuous professional growth of school leaders and they need to be more cooperative and collaborative in working within the school and with the community, moreover, the autonomy of the position must be increased.

Similarly, Conrad (2006) carried out a research on the education reform at the “edge of chaos” for an optimal learning education environment. For him, the

theoretical foundation that inspires education theory is based on three key interconnected, interacting underpinnings – mechanism, reductionism, and linearity. His research explores this theoretical underpinning including its fallacies and inconsistencies, and then frames an alternative educational theoretical base – a hybrid complex adaptive systems theory model for education which he claims more effectively meets the demands to prepare students for the 21st century. His Education Theory Complexity Hybrid (ETCH) differs by focusing on the systemic, autopoietic nature of schools, the open, fluid processes of school system as a dissipative structure, and nonlinearity or impossibility of completely predicting the results of any specific intervention within a school system. In addition, he showed how ETCH principles, when applied by educational system leaders; permit them to facilitate an optimal learning environment for a student-centered complex adaptive system.

Conrad's (2006) ETCH was derived from Complexity Theory and he claimed that it is a coherent, valid and verifiable system's framework that accurately aligns the education system with its goal as a student-centered complex adaptive system. The science of complexity provides an encompassing theoretical skeleton or a new design for education – one that is primarily on evolution and adaptation in which the activity of system participants is facilitated rather than directed. He further stated that the function of leadership (the facilitator) in his proposed theory is not to push for change but to remove the shackles that are imprisoning the organization's natural inherent capability to renew itself through self-organization. His study revealed that when important initiatives are announced, staff listens, understands the urgency, and executes tasks on time and within budget. The facilitator creates the conditions that nurture creativity, moving the system to the phase transition at the edge of chaos. In other words, the role of facilitator requires a dedicated focus to building and

constantly updating the processes to reflect rapid response in how staff thinks, feels and behaves during the school's continual adaptation and evolution. Moreover, his study suggested that raising the understanding of an optimal learning environment "should" nudge education theory to both align with the 21st century technology and vision, and create an environment where students thrive in a global, knowledge-based economy (Caine & Caine, 1997).

Likewise, Cvetek (2008) conducted a research study exploring chaos theory and its relevance for lesson planning and teaching in the context of Slovenia. In his research, some of the ways in which thinking about chaos theory could help teachers and student-teachers to accept uncertainty and randomness as natural conditions in the classroom were considered. Building on some key features of complex systems commonly attributed to chaos theory (e.g. complexity, nonlinearity, sensitivity to initial conditions), and using examples from student teachers' descriptions of problematic classroom situations, Cvetek found these features of complex systems highly relevant for language teaching.

Cvetek also suggested that teacher educators should help students to accept the complexity and unpredictability of teaching as natural conditions and become 'agents of chaos' in the classroom. In order to accomplish this task, teacher educators should accept the complexity and unpredictability in their own teaching/learning environments not only by responding to problematic situations in novel and unpredictable ways but also by 'chaotising' (Cvetek, 2008, p. 253) their classrooms according to the principles of chaos (complexity) theory.

Arthur (2011) also conducted a study on chaos and complexity using a case study method. More specifically, his study examined the leadership aspects of an institutional merger between a Church College ('River College') and a post-1992

university ('Parkview University') in England, focusing on leadership. The data from this case study indicated the practical problems facing leaders in planning for the 'turbulent' changes of a merger (Arthur, 2011, p. 18). His study explored three key themes which emerged from the data. The themes included:

- (i) the chaos and confusion at the time of the merger, which led to the development of a complex system;
- (ii) the long-term impact of the appointments process on both leaders and staff; and
- (iii) the leadership style during and after the merger.

According to his analysis, in the confusion that followed the merger, the institution developed the characteristics of a complex system, in which there were multiple, interacting variables. People's feelings, particularly the need for a sense of efficacy, led them to behave like 'self-organising agents' in complexity theory. They achieved 'fitness of purpose' in relation to work outcomes and emotional needs by reducing their participation in organisation-wide activities and focusing on students. As a result it proved difficult to shift from a directive to a more participatory leadership style and to re-engage staff at an organisational level.

His study also made a number of practical implications for those leading mergers. He suggests that the leaders of mergers need to be prepared for the challenges of an organisation on the edge of chaos (Arthur, 2008, p. 22). Recognising that it is difficult to attend to the 'human side' when operating at a strategic level, the implication included creating a communications post to ensure rapid two-way feedback between staff and managers, and planning in advance for a prolonged period of chaos to ensure that key activities are maintained.

Similarly, Kayuni (2010) studied chaos-complexity theory and education policy in Malawi and drew some lessons from Malawi's Community Day Secondary

Schools using the lens of chaos and complexity theory and analyzing the education policy. Since the democratic dispensation of 1994, the education sector in Malawi seemed to be in perpetual transition with numerous facets of policies being introduced against a background of alleged poor management, understaffing and a poorly paid cadre of teachers. Despite this seemingly chaotic and complex scenario, the education system managed to survive introducing the Malawi Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) policy. This study also drew some insights from public policy's Chaos and Complexity theory to explain why the education sector still managed to survive and showed resilience (on the "edge of chaos") despite the apparent overwhelming challenges.

The above empirical studies showed some resemblance in topic with my research topic. Actually, my topic and study was influenced by Goodwin's (2002) and Conrad's (2006) studies, however, my methodology and area of focus are totally different from theirs. My methodology is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, which none of the earlier reviewed researchers had applied. Moreover, other studies dealing in chaos and complexity theories have also been reviewed thinking that they could support my theoretical framework. And since their methodology and area of focus did not show any closer match with my study, their methodology and specific findings have not been reviewed.

### **Research Gap**

Studies of leadership in different social and political contexts, despite their utility for a macro-comprehension of how schools operate throughout the world, are not the same as understanding how a school leader might address the diverse and competitive contexts and needs of teachers and students in a given school under certain circumstances. The need to deal with complexity and uncertainty as well as all

other competing demands seems overwhelming in our context. For school leaders, trying to understand all of the various socio-political and global perspectives of education appears to be an impossible task but it is the only option if they have to lead their schools effectively at turbulent times.

Many of the earlier studies have shed some light on the issues and challenges of school leadership at chaotic times. Their focus was more on the challenges to school reform and effectiveness. However, our problems at present heavily lie on effective school functioning in the midst of socio-political turmoil. Similarly, our part of the problem necessitates the discussion of the struggle of the schools for survival and/or being number one or two in the competitive market.

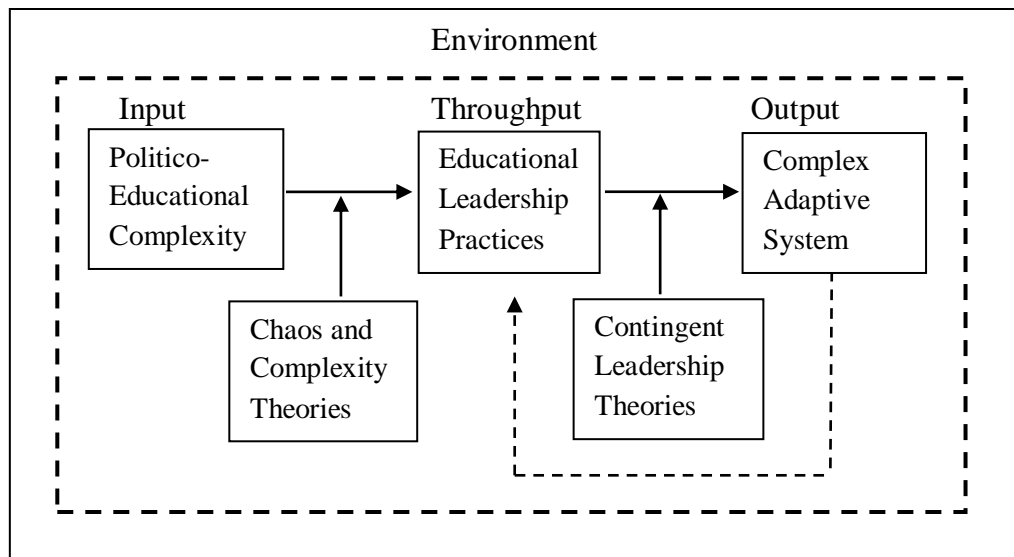
Though a plethora of literature on school leadership at challenging times exist in the global context, no single study has been found to have been conducted on the school leadership practices at the present state of chaos in the Nepalese local context. More particularly, I did not find any study that could be a perfect match with my study. Moreover, some studies focused on overall education system leadership while others focused on micro managing of a single school. Besides, only a few studies applied the theory of chaos and complexity in exploring the leadership practices in the school set up. Thus, this study intended to explore the perceptions and practices of school leadership in the Nepalese socio-political context.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Based on what has been reviewed and my own reflection of what leadership at the edge of chaos looks like, the following theoretical framework has been designed after the fashion of systems perspective. The key premise of this research lies in the fact that a school's leadership plays an unprecedented role in determining the school's success and there is a very strong belief in the ability of leaders to promote school



improvement. This is reinforced in the research literature, which consistently emphasizes the powerful relationship between leadership and school development.



*Figure 3.* Theoretical framework of the study

A school operates within a systemic environment where there occur lots of complexities both from outside and inside the school. Taking the impact of such complexities in mind, educational leaders should hold some contingent approaches to deal with them effectively giving out the best output. For that they need to adopt an administrative pathway which could be developed as complex adaptive system.

The framework presents the holistic approach to building or reviewing a school leadership at challenging circumstances. In an organizational set up, environment is ever changing and putting more pressure to the leadership to take adaptive and strategic steps to deal with it. Given that uncertainty and complexity are inherent in all situations, the essence of leadership must be in the proper response to them. The true sign of a leader is his or her ability to foresee, to react, and to innovate which are to be materialized in practice.

The most successful schools have leaders who guide them through this ever-changing environment, and are able to contribute to organizational objectives by

building structures that are resilient and able to adapt to change. Thus, it is the responsibility of the school leaders not only to shape the vision (of where they want to go and how), but also to turn it into reality which seems viable when they develop an adaptive system and put contingent leadership thoughts into practice.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims at discussing the research paradigm and method appropriate to my research project. Thus, it describes the methodology, research design, and methods used in this research. The research design has been set on the premises of qualitative inquiry. A case is made for a qualitative, interpretative research design. The design of the research has further been elaborated with the philosophical and methodological stances.

The study has employed a recently developed methodology (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) in qualitative research whose newness stands more in the field of educational management and leadership. The selection of sample, data generation, procedures for data analysis and interpretation, the quality standards and some ethical considerations are also discussed in this chapter. And finally, drawing from both the literature and the methodology, a clear conceptual framework of this entire study has been designed.

#### **Research Design**

Since my research goal was to investigate the perceptions of school leaders about their understanding and practices of school leadership, my research is phenomenological. Based upon the nature of my research, I operated chiefly within interpretive paradigm. Through qualitative interviews and reflective memos, I explored how Nepalese secondary school leaders with varying human, financial and technological resources respond to the present-day-world challenges they encounter in

shaping school climate that is supportive of teaching learning in the onset of the 21st century and at the edge of chaos.

### **Philosophical Stance**

It was revealed by the nature of my study that it was truly a qualitative research which studies “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). For Hatch (2002), “Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it. ... individuals act on the world based not on some supposed objective reality but on their perceptions of the realities that surround them” (p. 7). The aim of qualitative research is thus to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations (Porter, 1996; Smith & Osborne, 2003, as cited in Briggs, 2010, p. 67). In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to develop understandings of the phenomena under study, based as much as possible on the perspective of those being studied. According to Patton (1990), “Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (p. 13).

As any research is guided by a particular paradigm - a basic set of belief that guides action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183), my research was guided by non-positivism. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 24). This view of Denzin and Lincoln

has also been alternately put as interpretive approach by Merriam (2002), when she states that:

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context. Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an interpretive qualitative approach.

(Merriam, 2002, p. 4)

Since I was keen on understanding the meaning that school leaders make of daily occurrences and how they interpret them within the contextual social and natural setting, I opted to call my paradigm constructive interpretivism.

**Ontology.** Ontology deals with the nature of reality. “What is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 107-108) are the ontological questions. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) state that ontological assumption concerns the very nature of essence of the social phenomena being investigated (p. 7). My ontological assumption is based on the essence of school leaders’ understanding of the phenomenon of schooling leadership at the edge of chaos. Therefore, the reality is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist research. Instead, the world consists of “multiple realities rather than a single, unitary reality” (Given, 2008, p. 592) because people live and work in different places and consequently construct reality in very different ways. An interpretive or phenomenologically based text “would emphasize socially constructed realities, local generalizations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk” (Denzin, 1994, p. 502, as cited in Willis, 2007, p. 161). I fully subscribe to the

view that objective reality can never be captured and that we know a thing only through its representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5).

Non-positivists assume “a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, my ontological premise for this study was that there was no single reality behind both the challenges and the practices of successful school leadership. The realities depend on individual’s real world experiences, knowledge and the context. Thus, my participants’ realities formed my philosophical realities.

**Epistemology.** “Epistemology is concerned with what we can know about reality (however that is defined) and how we can know it” (Willis, 2007, p. 10). It is thus about knowledge. I believe that knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday world and thus, truth and understanding of life can emerge from people's life experiences. Moreover, “Experience is subjective because what we experience is a phenomenal rather than a direct reality” (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 181).

My epistemological position as an interpretivist guided me in understanding of the world through an examination of the interpretation of the world by the participants. Since no two school leaders faced the same challenges and adopted the exact strategies to cope with them, meaning making could not be an objective exercise and due considerations was given to the different contexts. In a phenomenological study, “the researcher and the researched create a narrative that is both descriptive and interpretive, and is often rich, poetic, and full of metaphor” (O’Leary, 2011, p. 121). Thus, in this study, I have tried to create meanings as lived by the participants

primarily through a two way in-depth dialogue process through which knowledge was co-created.

### **Methodological Stance**

The research approach of this study was qualitative and its method was phenomenological designed to reveal and understand the subjective experience of the school leaders as perceived by them. Phenomenology is sometimes considered a philosophical perspective as well as an approach to qualitative methodology. Eatough and Smith (2008) highlight:

Phenomenology is concerned with the way things appear to us in experience; the reality that we live is an experiential one and it is experienced through practical engagements with things and others in the world, and it is inherently meaningful. (p. 180)

Phenomenology is basically a school of thought that emphasizes a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. That is, the phenomenologist wants to understand how the world appears to others. Willis (2007) posits that "The purpose of phenomenological study is not to find out about an external reality; it is to understand the meaning a conscious person has developed" (p. 172). Furthermore, it is to understand the structure of that consciousness. Moreover, phenomenological researchers generally agree that our central concern is to "return to embodied, experiential meanings" (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). There is a general consensus that we need phenomenological research methods that are "responsive to both the phenomenon and the subjective interconnection between the researcher and the researched" (Finlay, 2009, p. 7). Similarly, Bednall (2006) states:

There are two conceptual propositions supporting phenomenological method within qualitative research design. The first is that the reality of a set of human

experiences will be uncovered through the detailed yet subjective descriptions provided by the people being studied (Creswell 1994) and second, that "establishing the truth of things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57) begins with the researcher's perception. The researcher is able to rely upon "intuition, imagination and universal structures to obtain a picture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52) of the experiences under study. (p. 126)

I was therefore attracted by the possibility that my own experiences as Coordinator and In-charge of some schools at different times could be used authentically to enhance the significance of the study.

Many different research methods and techniques are practiced under the banner of phenomenological research. While all phenomenology is descriptive in the sense of aiming to describe rather than explain, a number of scholars and researchers distinguish between descriptive phenomenology versus interpretive, or hermeneutic phenomenology. Finlay (2009), for example, postulates:

With descriptive (i.e., Husserl-inspired) phenomenology, researchers aim to reveal essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon. ... Interpretive phenomenology, in contrast, has emerged from the work of hermeneutic philosophers, including Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, who argue for our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding. "The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation," says Heidegger (1962, p. 37). Interpretation is not an additional procedure: It constitutes an inevitable and basic structure of our "being-in-the world". (Finlay, 2009, pp. 10-11)



Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the essence of experiences regarding a particular phenomenon, where the phenomenon or experience becomes the central focus of the study (Doyle, 2010, p. 114). For Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. vii), phenomenology is the study of essences; the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. The term *essence* refers to the essential meanings of a phenomenon; that which makes a thing what it is (van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological researcher seeks to reveal the essence of human experience by asking, “What is the nature of this phenomenon” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30)? Using a phenomenological framework allowed me to explore the phenomena of school leadership thematically by classifying certain essences of my participants’ experiences as they emerged.

This study employed phenomenological methodology for a couple of reasons: first, the research questions are concerned with the experiences of the participants, and phenomenology is concerned with “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” and “exploring the structures of consciousness in human experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Therefore, this methodology works to help find out how the school leaders have experienced the existence of chaos in academia. Second, phenomenology was chosen for this study due to its in-depth focus on personal experience, which in this instance, involves the perspectives of Nepalese school leaders on the impact of chaos on their school leadership practices and the meaning this experience has for them. Moreover, phenomenology enables the inquiry to be focused on descriptions of the experience of school leaders about the influence of chaos in their school performance.

In fact, this inquiry into the experiential aspect of school leadership unfolds as an ‘interdisciplinary’ project that weaves together phenomenological, hermeneutic,

psychological and other strands into the complex fabric of mediated experience (Sawatzky, 2011, p. 57). Moreover, to do justice to this study of complexity and leadership, I looked for a qualitative research methodology that would penetrate all these dimensions allowing me an in-depth engagement with the stories of the participants. A survey of various qualitative research methodologies led me to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a good match for an in-depth and open inquiry into the experiential dimensions of the practice of school leadership.

### **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as Methodology**

IPA is a recently developed and rapidly growing approach to qualitative inquiry. Emerging from the field of applied psychology, IPA was first formalized in a 1996 publication by Jonathan A. Smith in the *Journal Psychology and Health* (Sawatzky, 2011, p. 57). Although it was only articulated as a specific approach to qualitative research in the mid-1990s, it connects with much longer intellectual currents in phenomenology and hermeneutics and with a quiet and neglected concern in psychology with subjective experience and personal accounts (Eatough & Smith, 2008, pp. 179-180). It originated and is best known in psychology but is increasingly being picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social and health sciences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). The literature holds examples of the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a qualitative methodological approach in studies involving both medical and non-medical subject matters (Aymar, 2010; Brian, 2011; Hirst, 2010; Ketterer, 2010; Paulson, 2008, as cited in Rivituso, 2012, p. 33).

Because IPA is concerned with how human beings make sense of their important and particular life experiences, it offers a degree of flexibility and versatility to researchers spanning across a wide range of topics (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) further state that IPA has found its way into other fields of inquiry that seeks to explore “the human predicament” as it unfolds in experience (p. 5). In this sense, IPA has its roots in psychology, and recognises ‘the central role for the analyst’ in making sense of the personal experiences of research participants (Smith, 2004, as cited in Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011, p. 20). Kumar, Shenoy, and Voralu (2012) also state that “IPA is increasingly being adopted as the approach of choice by researchers in areas of education and health. In this study, IPA is concerned with the meanings which learning experiences hold” (p. 404).

IPA has three theoretical underpinnings that support research: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). It is this perspective that distinguishes it in part from more descriptive phenomenological approaches, such as those advocated by Husserl. Finlay and Ballinger (2006) described IPA as:

... a ‘variant of phenomenology’ that ‘aims to explore individuals’ perceptions and experiences. Taking an idiographic approach, the focus is on individuals’ cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being’. In this sense, IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of that experience. (as cited in Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 179)

It provides a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experiences. From this perspective, I sought to understand the leadership experiences of Nepalese school leaders in chaotic times. I wanted to know how they explained their leadership behavior and made sense of it in their own words, from their own experience.

The second theoretical underpinning comes from hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. IPA is concerned with examining how a phenomenon appears and the researcher is implicated in facilitating and making sense of the phenomenon along with the interviewee (Smith et al., 2009). IPA also involves a two-stage interpretation process through which the researcher tries to interpret the participant's sense-making activity. This is also described as a 'double hermeneutic' by Smith et al. (2009), referring to the twofold sense-making process. In this regard, IPA utilizes a double hermeneutic process in that the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborne, 2008, p. 53). "The participant's meaning-making is first-order, while the researcher's sense-making is second-order" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 36). Within the data analysis, it was my task as researcher to convey the interpretations that interviewees made regarding their school leadership experiences. The second tier of analysis was my analysis, categorization, and development of themes from their experiences; my interpretation of the interviewees meaning-making.

The third theoretical underpinning is idiography – concerned with the particular. IPA's commitment to the particular operates at two levels. Firstly, there is a commitment to the particular, in the sense of detail, and therefore the depth of analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). I managed the idiographic nature of IPA in the data analysis and reporting the interviewees' experiences.

Smith and Osborn (2008) argue that a suitable approach for investigating how individuals are making sense of their personal and social world is interpretative phenomenological analysis (p. 53). In this sense, an IPA study concerns itself with the meanings that particular experiences and events, hold for participants. Moreover, IPA is a methodology in its own right rather than, as the name implies, simply a means of analysing data (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & De Souza, 2009, p. 5). IPA has been developed as a distinctive approach to conducting qualitative research committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). However, IPA acknowledges that all experience is context dependent: social and historical perspectives colour the experiential narrative (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Therefore, IPA researchers do not attempt to produce an objective or definitive account of a phenomenon and only claim to access a version of the experience as the participant makes sense of it through their account (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA, when considered in relation to other forms of phenomenology, tends to interpret belief and accept participants' stories, albeit in a questioning way. This is again different from the 'interpretation of suspicion' (Smith et al., 2009) or critical analysis advocated by Langdridge (2007), which is in turn influenced by the phenomenological writings of the French philosopher Ricoeur (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 21). However, Pringle et al. (2011) further state that "although interpretation and increased understanding are important in IPA and a degree of 'questioning' (Smith et al., 2009) is considered beneficial to depth of analysis, IPA does not follow the critical interpretive framework discussed by Koch (1999)" (p. 21). Therefore, implications stemming from IPA need to be firmly rooted in what the participants are actually saying, with direct quotes being used widely to substantiate findings (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 21).

As a methodology in its own right rather than simply a means of analysing data, IPA involves the detailed examination of participants' 'lifeworlds'; their experiences of a particular phenomenon, how they have made sense of these experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Smith, 2004, as cited in Pringle et al., 2011, p. 20).

### **Rationale for Using IPA in This Research**

With the above discussion of IPA, I felt that qualitative method of IPA was appropriate for the research purpose of my study as IPA focuses on the "exploration of participants' experience, understandings, perceptions and views" (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, as cited in Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88) of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, IPA explores people's understanding and perceptions of reality of a particular phenomenon in greater detail.

Since the primary aim of IPA is to explore how people make sense of lived experiences in their social and personal worlds, this research explores the same of the Nepalese school leaders about their leadership practices in chaotic times. Moreover, Eatough and Smith (2008) stress that IPA recognises that an individual's experiences cannot be accessed directly by researchers. Therefore, researchers do their best to try and understand a particular experience by investigating how the phenomena was experienced and what meaning was given to it by an individual. Moreover, within IPA, participants are selected specifically because they have experienced a particular phenomenon and therefore can provide the researcher with insight into their experiences of that phenomenon.

Smith and Osborne (2007, p. 53) described the phenomenology approach as, 'attempting' to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event as opposed to an attempt to

produce an objective statement of the event itself. The objective is to get close to the participant's personal world and to identify an 'insider's perspective'. My approach echoes the type of IPA approach illustrated above in terms of the emphasis on the individual's personal perception of themselves, the perception of others about their leadership, the link between their thinking and their emotional state, their internal belief in themselves, the relevance of inter-subjectivity and the importance of describing their leadership experience in different contexts of their lived world as a leader. Stepping up successfully into leadership and sustaining that leadership well depends on the selfbelief, personal integration and awareness of the context around the individual which are central to interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Moreover, I have also been persistently standing to use IPA since my communication with Prof. Jonathan A. Smith, the founding father of IPA, and his expectation that:

IPA studies will continue to develop and appear in a range of exciting and stimulating subject areas, and indeed that the range of those areas will be ever increasing, and ...researchers will continue to find IPA to be an accessible, flexible and useful approach to understanding what something is like, from the perspective of the person who is trying to make sense of it. (Smith et al., p. 204)

All the above claims and processes of IPA are a best match for my study, both in terms of what it focuses and how it explores and makes an explication of the data.

### **Participants Selection**

Nepal maintains the 8-4 school system with the provision of SSRP 2009-2015, so participants of this study were the leaders of those schools that operate up to grade 12. Since the focus of the investigation was on the leadership practices of secondary

school leaders, I selected some information rich (based on my knowledge about their leadership behavior and my initial conversation with them) secondary school leaders purposively.

In the context of an IPA study, participants “are selected on the basis that they can grant access to a particular perspective on the phenomenon under study” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). Smith et al. (2009) suggest that IPA studies are conducted on relatively small sample sizes, and the aim is to find a reasonable homogenous sample, so that, within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail (p. 3). They further suggest that IPA utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated samples (p. 29). In order to ensure a fairly ‘homogeneous’ sample, I chose to focus this study on secondary school leaders who all live and work in the same urban location, i.e. Kathmandu Valley. Therefore, I selected those participants who could provide rich information as per my initial observations.

Highlighting the method of purposeful sampling, Patton (1990) argues that information rich cases are those “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 16). Further the number of sample was guided by the concept of ‘theoretical saturation’ which means “until (a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 212).

Actually, I selected only six school leaders in the first phase, but while generating the data, I interviewed two more participants (a senior teacher and an in-charge). Thus, the information rich cases for this study included eight secondary



school leaders from valley-based schools. And the participants were selected from five schools: two each from Kathmandu and Lalitpur, and one from Bhaktapur.

The rationale behind selecting the research site as Kathmandu Valley is that I have been living in Kathmandu for about a decade and have worked with many school leaders here around the valley. Similarly, selecting the three districts and the five schools was based on my convenience. Two of the schools have been selected since I had worked for them at different times in the past; another school was my workplace when the research was being conducted, whereas the other two schools had been selected in terms of easy access from where I lived. However, caution had been taken in selecting information rich participants. Thus, the participants in my study are presented in the following table.

Table 1

*Representation of Participants*

Participants	No.	Kathmandu	Lalitpur	Bhaktapur
Principal	2	1		1
Vice Principal	1		1	
HoD	1		1	
Coordinator	2		1	1
In-charge	1	1		
Senior teacher	1			1
Total	8	2	3	3

Later on, I came to know that my selection of eight participants has been justifiable as per the norms of a phenomenological inquiry since Creswell (1998) stated the appropriate number of participants for phenomenological inquiry may be upto ten people (Creswell, 1998, p. 65).

For my research, “senior teacher” referred to those teachers who were not in any formal leadership position but were the eldest members in terms of their service to the institution they belonged to. I selected this participant only when I had almost finished one round of interview sessions with other participant. By the time, I was about to interview two vice principals and HoDs each. But when I was interviewing one coordinator, he opened up that leadership is not only limited to position. Then I went on to select one senior teacher and an in-charge. Moreover, in one case, after I interviewed the principal for the first time, it was a lady principal but when I went to visit her after two months for another round of conversation, I knew that there was a new male principal. However, I decided to request him to be my research participant thinking that it would add some unique ideas by the experiences of a new principal. Nevertheless, I had to miss my only female participant, and the research has limited to male participants only.

### **Data Generation**

Naturalistic qualitative research methods are the data collection and analytic tools (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 15). As the qualitative research itself seeks multiple realities holding subjective truth in its heart, it calls for multiple techniques to derive qualitative data. Thus, I have employed multiple tools to generate relevant data. However, I used open (phenomenological) interviews as the primary tools whereas reflective memos (based on my observation and reflection of the interviews), observation and research protocols were used as supporting tools. These tools and techniques have been discussed along the following sub-headings.

#### **Open (Phenomenological) Interviews**

The key outcome of phenomenological studies is rich phenomenological descriptions. And the process of generating such descriptions generally involves

“sourcing people who have experienced a particular phenomenon and conducting one or more in-depth interviews with each participant” (O’Leary, 2011, p. 121). Thus, data generation in phenomenological studies often consists of “in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). “Interviews also help the researcher to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 85). Thus, the purpose of the interview is to probe the ideas of the interviewees about the phenomenon of interest. Thus, my study primarily relied on in-depth interviews to collect data.

Since IPA involves analysing in detail how participants are perceiving and making sense of things which are happening to them, it requires a flexible data collection method. While it is possible to obtain data suitable for IPA analysis in a number of ways (e.g. interviews, personal accounts, diaries), Smith et al. (2009) suggest using semi-structured interview where “an interview schedule is used flexibly and the participant has an important stake in what is covered” (p. 4) and this is the predominant method used in this study. In my research, semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted because in semi-structured interviews the “thematic direction is given much more preference” (Flick, 2006, p. 205) and thus the interviews were focused directly on the topic under discussion. This was a focused interview, meaning that there was an interview scheme to guide the researcher through the interview. An advantage of this kind of interview was that they allowed more focus and also probing and additional questions when an important issue was raised by the interviewee. The semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions to allow in-depth probing. Hence, it was focused on school leaders’ perceptions of and experiences with leading in the current turbulent and changing environment.

The data for this study were, thus, generated through open phenomenological interviews that were conducted with eight school leaders to explore their lived experiences of school leadership, by means of developing a conversational relationship with them. Interviews were in-depth in the sense of gaining rich and thick data from the participants. I went deep down probing into the ideas and reflections of the school leaders about their leadership practices. Furthermore, the depth of the interviews were guided by the concept of ‘theoretical saturation’: that is, “additional interviews no longer add new perspective” (O’Leary, 2011, p. 121). My purpose in the study was not to generalize its findings to a larger population, but rather to deeply understand a phenomenon. In this regard, I held interviews with the participants until the point of saturation was reached. The point of saturation was reached when the researcher ceased to learn additional data from participants.

The primary data collection device (i.e., semi-structured interview schedule) was examined with one school principal, and a coordinator. The interview schedule was designed according to my general research question and the theoretical framework. Based on the pilot study, the tool was modified and finalized with the help of the subject expert before actually going to the field for in-depth interviews. Prior to conducting interviews I spent an afternoon in each school building good rapport with the school leaders, familiarizing them with my research project, talking over students’ academic outcomes, discussing the proposed visit for interview. In the early stages of the research, clear sets of ethical and practical guidelines were also agreed with the participants. The largest part of the interview was guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and then I used probing questions for in-depth information. However, neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions was determined ahead of time. In total, eight participants were interviewed multiple times

– approximately three – over the process with each interview session extending about an hour, at the interval of at least a month between two interviews. In most cases, the school leaders also walked me around the schools, allowing for me to observe both the leaders' interaction with students and teachers during the school days.

I interviewed one participant each weekend. Before I interviewed the next participant I familiarized myself with the data collected thus far which enabled me to probe further in the next interviews. Similarly, participants were encouraged to share critical incidents, in the form of anecdotes, stories or experiences, about their leadership practices. Probing questions were used to encourage participants to discuss further illustrations and to lead to the saturation of the data for each area under discussion. The main and probe questions were asked at face-to-face interviews with follow-up questions being conducted by telephone interview or by email correspondence. The data interviews were conducted primarily in January 2012 (first phase) and March 2012 (second phase) and the results were analyzed in April 2012. Follow up email and telephone interviews were held till November 2012.

All interviews with five participants were audio recorded (for the purpose of transcribing and accuracy), whereas two participants wanted to give written reply to my interview questions. Moreover, one participant supplied the written reply via email. With these three leaders, further inquiry was made through telephone time and again and the telephone interviews were short hand written. Similarly, two participants who did not feel much comfortable while recording the interview (though they attended the interview) were again given the interview protocol which they returned after almost two weeks. Two of the audio recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim. Later I felt that since there was much irrelevant data in the audio cassette, transcribing everything was nothing more than wasting time and energy.

Therefore, other interviews were listened over and over again, marking the important and relevant data in a matrix with time tag, e.g., HoD: Chaos is pervasive... [0:02:16]. These interviews yielded some rich descriptions of principals' cognitions and perceptions of their jobs and their daily practices of school leadership. Transcribed interviews were returned to participants for correction and validation purpose. I then revisited the schools between two to three months after the interviews, to present some preliminary findings and to check the credibility of my analysis.

### **Reflective/Analytical Memo**

The other technique supporting data generation was memoing. Memoing is a process of recording the thoughts and ideas of the researcher as they evolve throughout the study. It is often discussed in the literature as a technique employed in grounded theory research, yet there is limited exploration of the value of memo writing in qualitative methodologies generally.

According to Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008), "Memoing serves to assist the researcher in making conceptual leaps from raw data to those abstractions that explain research phenomena in the context in which it is examined" (p. 68). They further highlight the significance of memoing in qualitative research stating that "Data exploration is enhanced, continuity of conception and contemplation is enabled and communication is facilitated through the use of memoing" (p. 68). Similarly, Goulding (1999) defines memos as "notes written immediately after data collection as a means of documenting the impressions of the researcher and describing the situation... which help to re-orientate the researcher at a later date" (p. 9). Therefore, it is the researcher's field notes recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. Likewise, Gardner (2008, p. 76) in a review paper opined that "notes written in the early stages of

research can offer an authentic or even naïve perspective, which might otherwise be lost as the passage of the work moves on”. Gardner further illustrated that:

Memos are more than, and different from, field notes – they are personal observations on relationships with people, with novel situations, with thoughts and ideas. During the research journey these relationships may change and develop, and alongside this, a memo can capture the moment; whether written on a computer, a post-it note or the back of an envelope. (Gardner, 2008, p. 76)

These considerations demonstrate that memos are vital as they provide wealth of ideas which can be revisited in order to map out the emerging theory. Thus, immediately after each interview, I wrote a reflexive and/or analytical memo to capture initial ideas and to provide a sense of reorientation for the future. In my understanding, the reflective memos were simply a journaling of thoughts and observations as a way of recording them for later analysis. Such memos were written as a means of reconstructing and reflecting critically on the experience of generating the data. Observations related to the interview context, the participants’ reactions, participant and interviewer interactions, emerging responses and my perceptions and reactions were also included in the memos. In this sense, I have specifically used memoing as a procedural and analytical strategy throughout the research process.

Though there is a debate on whether memos are the data in themselves, Cohen et al. (2007, p. 469) claim that “if reflexivity is part of the data analysis process then memos may become legitimate secondary data in the process or journey of data analysis”. For me, even though memos were not data in themselves, they were helpful in the process of data analysis. Thus, I used such reflective notes mostly for data substantiation and analysis purposes. Therefore, analytic notes were taken throughout

the interviews to aid in my efforts in identifying pertinent themes from the body of interview data.

### **Observation**

Observation is applied across many kinds of qualitative studies. It is therefore one of the most frequently used means of data collection in a study conducted in naturally occurring social situations. Observation is a process in which researcher makes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals in the research site. “The goal of observation is to understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants” (Hatch, 2002, p. 72).

Therefore, I attempted to see the world through the eyes of my participants. Some of the strengths of using observation in a research are: Direct observation of social phenomena permits better understanding of the contexts in which such phenomena occur. The researcher may learn sensitive information from being in the setting that informants may be reluctant to discuss in interviews. Getting close to the social phenomena allows the researcher to add his or her own experience in the setting to the analysis of what is happening (Patton, 1990, pp. 202-205). Similarly, through observation researchers can gather data about how participants behave in their natural setting and make meaning out of their experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

For my research purpose, I prepared the guiding observation tool to note the typical instructions of the school leaders, facts about school culture and physical settings of the school including the ICTs in the computer and lanagugage labs. To get a sense of schools’ atmospheres, I observed the school setting, customs and procedures repeatedly during school hours by mingling with teachers, which helped me to minimize some of the initial change of behaviour that people exhibit when an unfamiliar face enters their environment. Observation was applied during the field



visits and interviews. I made careful, objective notes about what I saw, recording all accounts and observation. Informal conversation and interaction with members of the study population were held. During my observation I recorded descriptive field notes where I wrote a description of the events, activities, and people. Moreover, I recorded reflective field notes in which I linked my observation with my personal thoughts that I have related to my insights, hunches, or broad ideas or themes that emerge during the observation.

### **Research Protocol**

Research protocol is also an effective tool in collecting qualitative data, especially when we require experiential descriptions from the participants. According to van Manen (1990) protocol writing means “asking individuals to write their experiences down” (p. 62). I found this tool very effective when some of my participants preferred writing down their experiences and sending them later rather than facing interviews. Therefore, I used this technique with four participants only who opted for submitting the answers to my interview questions in writing. I left the protocol sheets and collected them after two weeks.

Above all, rather than generating propositions ahead of time, I used inductive reasoning in my inquiry. I sought to explore the phenomenon of school leadership at challenging times, especially how school leaders are shaping themselves as educational leaders as they learned their roles and responsibilities in the schools as the professional practitioners.

### **Data Explicitation and Interpretation**

Though many researchers have used the term ‘data analysis’, I have used the term ‘data explicitation’ to refer to this process getting cautioned by Hycner that ‘analysis’ has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. The “term [analysis]

usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon... [whereas ‘explicitation’ implies an]...investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (1999, p. 161, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 17). Data explicitation is a way of transforming the data through interpretation. It is a process of drawing meaning from and making sense of the generated data. It is an ongoing part of the research process.

According to Cohen et al. (2007), “Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (p. 461). Similarly, Creswell (2007) puts the idea of data analysis more succinctly that it involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data (p. 190).

Data explicitation is inductive in IPA since IPA does not include a single step of data analysis, but must include the following characteristics: (a) movement from what is unique to a participant to what is shared among the participants, (b) description of the experience which moves to an interpretation of the experience, (c) commitment to understanding the participant’s point of view, and (d) psychological focus on personal meaning-making within a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). To take specific reference of IPA, there are 7 steps in IPA data explicitation (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). These steps include:

1. Reading and re-reading the interviews
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes

5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases
7. Writing the analysis

I read and re-read each transcript to get the general sense of the nature of the participants' accounts of their experiences. Notes/memos were made while reading the transcripts. I also (colour) coded the concepts that emerged from the data. Some codes were similar across many transcripts while others differed. The facility for highlighting unique perspectives as well as shared experiences (in studies with more than one participant) is one of the cornerstones of IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008). These themes were defined and developed in more detail focusing on the interrelationships. Three superordinate themes were generated with multiple subthemes of each superordinate theme. Steps 4 and 5 were performed out of sequence since it was difficult to search for patterns and connections "until one is examining all the cases together" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 106). Moreover, steps 4 and 6 were merged. And the last step was writing the analysis. Writing the research analysis involves summarizing, condensing, and illustrating what the researcher identifies as the main themes (Smith et al., 2009). This stage engaged the double hermeneutic process while moving from the idiographic to the group level of analysis. Smith et al. (2009) say that the writing focuses on the interviewees thoughts and experiences at a group level stating what "most of the interviewees reported" or "many of the interviewees reported." The group level statements are supported by individual quotes that represent the themes within the categories (Ewing, 2011, p. 54). The narrative is written in a way that links themes to categories and links categories to the overall phenomenon.

I drew from interview recordings and transcripts, memos and reflective journals to analyze data and identify emergent themes. I also reflected on the themes and experiences raised by participants in light of chaos and complexity theories, especially with ‘edge of chaos’, which was chosen to sensitize me to challenges experienced by participants. Moreover, appropriate literatures were also cited to confirm or disconfirm the experiences of the school leaders in the Nepalese context.

After transcribing the interviews, the data were analyzed by highlighting “significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). The themes were used to develop descriptions of what the participants experienced. This step is referred to as a “textural description” that included specific examples from the participant interview verbatim transcripts (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). The themes were used to describe the circumstances and background of the phenomenon that the participants experienced, also known as the “structural description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). The final step in my data analysis was to establish the phenomenon’s “essence” through a description entitled the “essential, invariant structure” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). This process was centered on the participants’ common experiences via thick description, which helped the researcher understand the core meaning of the phenomenon.

In fact, after textual data have been collected, read, and reviewed, a researcher may begin coding the data in order to reduce them into meaningful segments for interpretation. I read and checked each of the interview transcripts for accuracy and in preparation for further interviews with each participant. Following the completion of the data collection, a more detailed explication of each of the transcripts was used to isolate themes and concepts within each of the interviews. This process may be

termed 'coding'. In other words, coding is one of the elements in qualitative data analysis which involves a process of identifying themes or analytical categories in text.

Before I read through the interview transcripts, I created memos and recorded my reactions to the interview experience. Each of the transcripts was reviewed and the significant statements were color coded. I then began collapsing the codes. I did not use data management software, however, I color coded my data with the different colored highlighters to indicate the different themes. I assigned a theme to a color; for example, I assigned the color red to the theme "understanding chaos", the color blue to the theme "leadership practices" and the color green to the theme "strategies".

I employed a generic qualitative research approach to analyse the generated data. Anderson (1998, p. 158) explains that this approach is used to "organize the data into descriptive themes that emerged during the data collection and preliminary analysis" (as cited in Ipinge, 2003, p. 41). The interview data were first transcribed. Then I read through the data to search for emerging themes. After identifying the key themes I sorted out the data placing them under the relevant themes. As such, developing categories of meaning, i.e. themes, allowed me to establish a closer connection with each participant's personal narratives, to preserve integrity of their experiences, and to communicate their essence.

I engaged in continuous and ongoing data analysis. After the first interview I began transcribing and presenting the data generated so far. This helped me to work with the data easily because the data were not piled up. This approach also helped me to identify significant issues early in the process, and focus on what to look for in subsequent data gathering sessions.

The data generated from the in-depth and multiple interviews were analyzed utilizing a cross-case “inductive analysis approach” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). An inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in data where findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst's interactions with the data, in contrast to deductive analysis where the data are analyzed according to an existing frame work. This inductive analysis included identifying and connecting recurring patterns, critical events, themes, relationships, and narrative threads that captured the school leaders’ reports of their leadership experiences. The inductive approach was used in two phases: (1) a vertical analysis according to which each of the respondents’ interviews were analyzed separately, and (2) a comparative, horizontal analysis to look for common patterns and differences (Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009, p. 180). This procedure is called for in an interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Participant perceptions were clustered on common questions, whilst thematic meaning units were drawn from across all interviews. Thus, the extent of the interview data enabled in-depth, cross-case comparisons to be undertaken. The final stages of this analysis involved interpreting and translating the data into a conceptual framework, connecting the leadership phenomena with existing theory and literature, and communicating an account of the research that approximated the Nepalese school leaders’ experiences – the challenges, tensions, and coping strategies – as closely as possible. Thus, this analysis led to the emergence of a number of common themes and key findings which are presented, and discussed in the subsequent chapters.

### **Quality Standards - Ensuring Trustworthiness**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), in qualitative research, “terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity” (p. 24).

Thus, there are four key criteria for enhancing trustworthiness or rigor in qualitative research studies. These criteria, along with some other pertinent quality standards, are discussed below, together with a description of how they have been employed within this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participant’s original data. Here the question is asked of the study: ‘Do the results of the research reflect the experience of the Nepalese school leaders and the school contexts in a believable way? The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants in the research. The similar concept of authenticity is defined as the portrayal of research that reflects the meanings and experiences that are lived and perceived by the participants (Doyle, 2010, p. 156). Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results.

In my understanding, a research is credible when it presents accurate descriptions of interpretations of human experience that people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions. Therefore, the step toward credibility was followed with interview data along with views of experts and my memos. In addition to this, cross referencing of data collected from the field with reviews of literature helped me to enhance credibility of the research. Moreover, the credibility of my research is strengthened by the prolonged engagement with the participants, reflective analytical research memos, and member checks.

**Transferability**

Transferability is described as the ability of the reader, based on the final report of the study, to make a judgment as to whether the findings of the study may be transferred to another, similar context or group of people (Kuchelman et al., 2002, as cited in Doyle, 2010, p. 156). Therefore, transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. I have thus clearly described the research methodology that I have undertaken. Moreover, in the context of an IPA study, Smith et al. (2009) suggested that if the research account is rich and transparent enough, and sufficiently related to current literature, the reader should be able to assess and evaluate transferability. This has been highly maintained in this study.

**Dependability**

The idea of dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The research is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study. As the narrator in this study, I was legitimately to be an active agent in establishing with the participants the dependable research findings. In order to bring about dependable findings, a set of guidelines was prepared and probing points were included. As a result, participants from all schools falling under specific category, viz. principal, vice principal, coordinator, in-charge or senior teacher, were asked the same questions and their answers were judged against the same set of probing points.



### **Confirmability**

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others. There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can act as a critique with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. Similarly, after the study, the researcher can conduct a data audit that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgments about the potential for bias. Confirmability of the study was maintained by emphasizing recorded data and maintained proper referencing mechanisms. It involved reading the transcription of interviews, and field notes or memos. Necessary cautions were taken while translating interview data from Nepali to English.

### **Triple Crises**

In any qualitative research, “triple crises – crisis of representation, crisis of legitimating, and crisis of praxis” (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19) prevail. In order to address the crisis of representation, I included school leaders at different positions, not merely school principals. Crisis of legitimating is associated with the sense any text makes to being accurate, true and complete to the context, and the individuals it is supposed to represent. I tried to address the interest of those studied in this research by depicting their real-life experiences and meanings were co-created with incessant dialogue with the participants. Crisis of praxis is associated with coping the new and old voices with the present. To address this crisis, I focused on the reflection of their practices and how they had been planning their future programmes stepping on the past experiences. Therefore, I moved toward pluralism and adapted many

perspectives, heard many voices, and achieved deep understandings of school leadership at chaotic situations.

### **Bracketing or Epoche**

The fact that a researcher may have shared with participants certain experiences within the range of proposed research but this is entirely governed by the success with which a researcher applies epoche and bracketing. The literature has generally treated bracketing and epoche as interchangeable or synonymous. However, Patton (1990) has made an attempt in making a distinction between them. He described epoche separately from bracketing as "an-ongoing analytic process" (p. 408), which implies that it should be dynamically integrated into the sequential progress of the whole research method from the very beginning of the study. Acts of bracketing, on the other hand, would occur at those interpretative moments when a researcher holds each of the identified phenomena up for serious inspection. Similarly, for Bednall (2006) this relationship is in place at the very beginnings of a phenomenological inquiry. Instead of defining and/or differentiating them, he focuses on the challenge to the researchers stating that "The challenge for a researcher is to allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically in coming to an understanding of what essentially the research respondents mean in their personal accounts expressed through the data collection devices" (Bednall, 2006, p. 128).

This placed upon me as the researcher, the obligation to separate any knowledge or experience I might have of the phenomenon under attention, that is, school leadership but then to legitimize that experience by connecting it interpretatively to the meanings of the respondents. Such a connected relationship was only made possible by the concepts of epoche and bracketing. Bracketing is defined by Hycner (1985) as "suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher's

meaning and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed” (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 471). “Bracketing” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 471) also helps maintain the trustworthiness of the research. I thus set out to understand what the interviewee was saying rather than what I expected that person to say.

I found keeping my personal views and experiences separate from data collection more challenging than I had anticipated. Simply utilizing epoche as a habit of thinking appeared not to be enough. Since it was next to impossible to present an empty-me in the research process, I followed the norms of reflexivity (self-reflection process) maintaining reflexive attitude whereby seeking to understand the impact of my personal experiences on data interpretation rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate it. Therefore, I constantly engaged in personal and epistemological reflexivity throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing and interpreting.

Besides all the above mentioned quality measures, I also followed some other strategies for maintaining the trustworthiness of the study. I focused on prolonged engagement with the participants for saturation asking questions and probing deep down their perceptions of effective leadership at challenging times. I visited the participants and conducted at least two interview sessions, that is, I interviewed them until I felt that I got saturated data on the topic under discussion. Finally, there is referential adequacy in my research. I consulted different books, empirical studies, and theories and acknowledged them in the text and in the reference section as prescribed by APA (6th ed.).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are an important matter in qualitative research. I tried to conduct the whole research project being within the framework of research ethics, i.e.,

I was abiding by the research ethics from the participant selection to final report presentation. I presented the report in a balanced fashion including description, analysis and interpretation. I also made arguments, analysis, and conclusion with the support of data. I owed the sole ethical responsibility to myself as a researcher in the processes of data collection, analysis and dissemination. Above all, I had developed my own “Codes of ethics” (Madison, 2005, p. 109; Flick, 2006, p. 47), for my research and adhered to those ethics. Basically, the “code of ethics” included the following:

- i. Informed consent: All the potential participants were informed about the purposes, methods, and intended uses of the research. Similarly, they were informed about the procedures that would be used in the research, the risks and benefits of participating in the study, and their rights as research participants. Therefore, I got their informed consent to partake on the basis of information given to them about the research project.
- ii. Voluntary participation: The participation of the participants was voluntary. They were not coerced to take part in the research, rather they were provided the fullest possible information about the purpose and methods, risks and benefits, of the research, so that only those who wish to participate after being clear about the research project were selected as my participants. However, I did not go to those whom I think were not information rich cases.
- iii. Avoidance of any harm: Participants were treated in an ethical manner, not invading their privacy and not deceiving them about the aims of the research.
- iv. Autonomy: The participants were not coerced to partake in the research, they were not encouraged to provide some sort of biased data, and they had full right to

denounce their agreement to take part in the research. Therefore, their identity, values and decisions were highly respected.

- v. Confidentiality or anonymity: Confidentiality of the participants was highly maintained in the report. Instead of mentioning their real identities, I initially thought of using some pseudonyms. However, I realized that the pseudonyms may also resemble some other individuals (though non-participants), and which does not do justice to them. So, all the participants have been anonymised. Similarly, they were informed that the data they provided (recording and transcript) would be kept confidential, and their identities and that of their schools would not be revealed to the public.
- vi. Justice: In analyzing and interpreting the data, I treated all the data equally, also confirmed with them if any contradictory ideas came forth (in different sittings), and finally, before submitting the report to the evaluation committee, the report was sent to them to confirm that their lived experiences were represented and captured fully.
- vii. No plagiarism: I maintained fairness and originality in my research report avoiding any possible plagiarism. Basically, I gave the exact citations and references in case any ideas or theories were to be incorporated.
- viii. Fair treatment of data: Since I had no any forethought on what the research would bring forth, there were no leading questions. And thus I showed no trace of personal biasness toward a particular theory, idea, or conclusion.

And finally, the research report was written in the first narrative person. If the researcher and the researched as living human beings, reflecting together about shared meanings, are at the core of phenomenology, it seemed dysfunctional and illogical for

the research findings to be de-personalised by the use of the third narrative person (Bednall, 2006, p. 126). This was done to do justice to the researcher as well.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on all the theoretical reviews, methodological stances and interpretive theme abstraction, I developed the following conceptual framework of this study in which I have laid out some key ideas related to my key themes and indicated relationships between these themes.

Broadly, my research is qualitative and hence its ontological assumption stands for multiple realities and along similar lines, epistemological assumption holds subjective knowing. This study used qualitative research approach to understand, describe, and articulate our school leaders' personal and social constructions of their "lived experiences" as they are playing a crucial role in the school effectiveness during chaotic times. Furthermore, this study applied interpretive phenomenological analysis leading to co-creation of knowledge, hence the paradigm 'constructive interpretivism'. Procedurally, the field data were examined from the lenses of the leadership and complexity theories besides critically examining through the lens of legal framework. Since today's school leaders are deeply concerned about their present and future prospects in a time of uncertainty, these theories and provisions have shed some lights on the contemporary issues in school leadership.

I used IPA as the methodological framework for understanding the subjective dynamics that occurred within the professional practice of school leaders because only open phenomenological interviews could provide access to the individuals' lived reality, their internal constructions, and their personal worldviews. Conversations revolved around the challenges facing school leaders, creating and sustaining a competitive school, and leading instruction to meet the diverse needs of students in

the turn of the century. Finally, the school leaders were asked to characterize the leadership practices within their schools. This interpretive phenomenological discussion ultimately helped me generate the interpretive meaning of the school leaders' perceptions and practices which in turn provided some implications for successful school leadership at the edge of chaos.

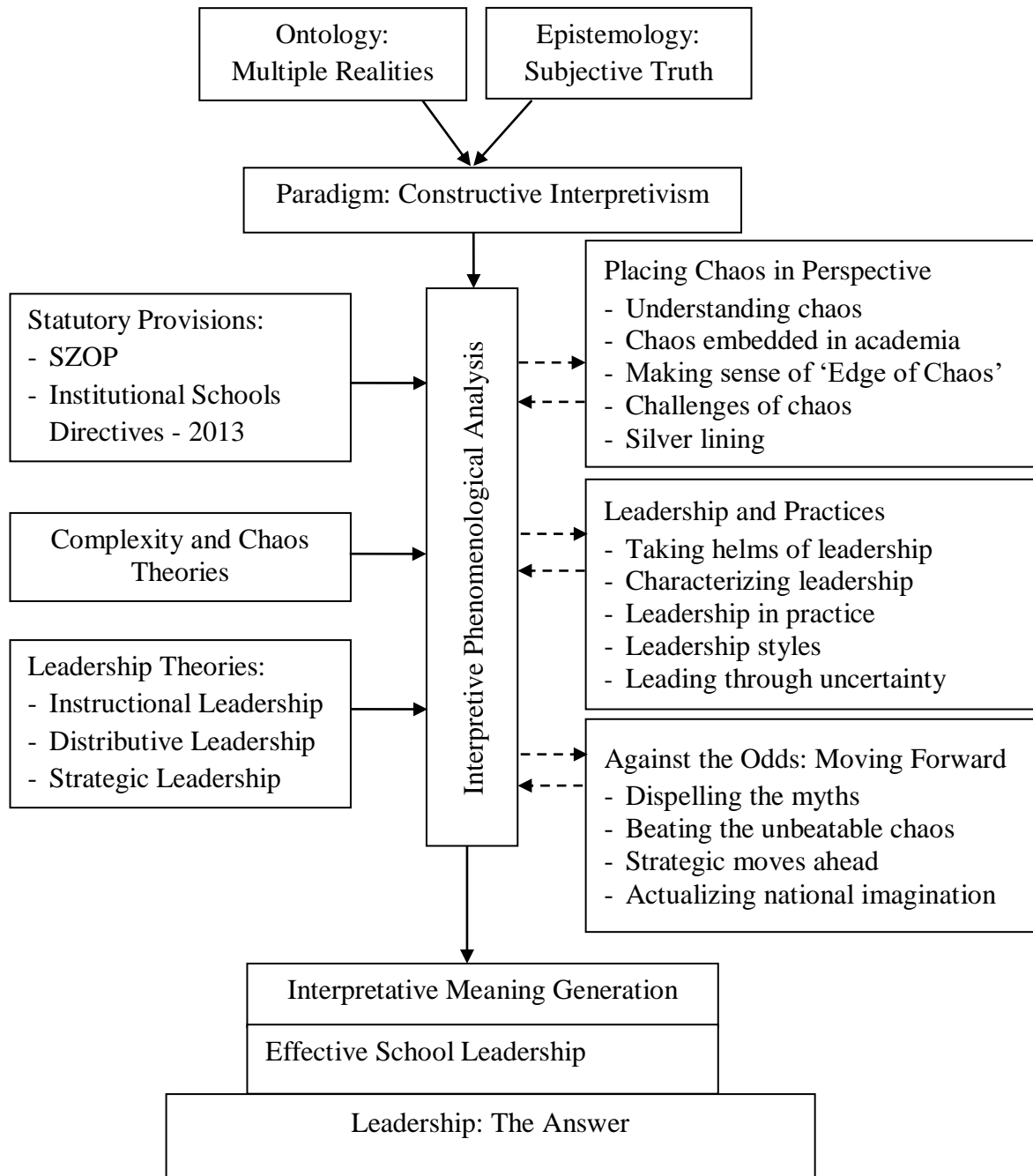


Figure 4. Conceptual framework of the study

## CHAPTER IV

### PLACING CHAOS IN PERSPECTIVE

This and the following two more chapters contain the presentation of the data and subsequent explicitation addressing the research questions posed in this study. Thus, in these chapters, I have made an attempt to demonstrate the data I generated and the meanings worked out. The interpretation and discussion of the data presented in these chapters were based on the emerging themes drawn from the interviews with eight school leaders from valley based schools. The major themes of the school leaders' perception and practices include prevailing chaos in academia; role of leaders as climate shapers, taking strategic moves for gaining competitive edge, and looking ahead for national imagination.

Studies have shown that leadership can make a difference in student outcomes and the capacity of schools for improvement (e.g., Osborne, 2008; Mulford, 2008; Covey, 2008; OECD, 2009; Hatch, 2010; Hargrove & Prasad, 2010; Yeo, 2010; McCarthy, 2011). However, many school leaders face challenges of leading and managing schools and of on-going uncertainties in the fast changing landscape of education. In this chapter, I have examined challenges and uncertainties that have impeded the effective practice of leadership in Nepalese schools. Here, I have presented the opinions, understanding and lived experiences of the school leaders about their leadership scenario, particularly challenges and complexities they have been facing. The major focus of this unit is thus to place the chaos in perspective, i.e. how Nepalese school leaders have perceived chaos in academia. In this way, this



chapter has made an attempt to answer the first two research questions posed earlier.

In doing so, this chapter has been divided into the following subsections:

- a. Understanding Inevitable Chaos
- b. Chaos Embedded in Academia
- c. A Complex Leadership Landscape
- d. Challenges of Chaos and Uncertainty
- e. Silver Lining in the Clouds of Chaos

### **Understanding Inevitable Chaos**

Before chaos is considered, we perhaps need to put it into perspective. There is a general assumption in organizations today that we are living in a volatile time, or at least we are going that way.

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When we met with the CEO of a major corporation recently, we asked him how things were going. Rather than giving us a typical response — “fine” or “good, except for problem x” — he responded with a sigh. He began talking about how his job never stops; how he’s under incredible stress; how there’s too much information to digest and too many decisions to make; how he feels as if the credit crisis, stock market fluctuations, and global economy are weighing him down; how it’s impossible to know the right thing to do. Obviously, we had caught him on a bad day.

We should add that this is a prominent CEO with outstanding business results, a global brand with huge equity, and a top - tier team around him. His complaints were revealing that day, but given his success we could only imagine how other leaders, less successful and well resourced, must feel. (Dotlich, Cairo, & Rhinesmith, 2009, p. 1)

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We might reasonably feel that this is an example of the growth of chaos and a top executive's reaction towards chaos. In my work with different executive teams, I have interacted with leaders in different positions, especially at academic institutions, about their perspectives on the complexities, diversity issues, uncertain situations, and challenging demands they face. I have found that the contradictions, challenges, and opportunities of the leadership role continue to multiply every day. Unlike yesteryear, each new day seems to bring new complications, and the expectations and demands of the stakeholders continue to increase with globalization and technology.

On this basis we might ask if we will ever see stability again. And the answer will obviously be 'No, never!' Actually, there never was stability and will never be in the strict literal sense.

How can school principals deal with the unpredicted incidence effectively without prepossessing the understanding of "chaos?" Referring to the changing and challenging scenario, Rowe (2008) argues that "The world does not stand still and models that require stability will not be usable in changing environments" (p. 62). In our case, the country itself is in a state of transition and so are the schools across the nation. Therefore, they are constantly battling to adapt to a changing environment.

As today's organizations are "highly complex, highly interconnected dynamical systems and one small fluctuation or change in the system will reverberate throughout" (McMillan, 2004, p. 86), the organizations are prone to many impacts on their operation, may it be in instructional level at the classroom or at the systemic level at large. One of the school leaders has perceived this scenario as follows:

*We are sure that chaos exists and we cannot avoid it. When we know that this is the norm, we now need to accept it as an inevitable part of our organizational life. I remember one of my favorite quote 'The ship in the port*

*is safe, but that is not what it is made for. ' If we need to grow, we need chaos. Innovation grows out of chaos. If everything remains the same, we will always remain in the same situation. We should have the guts to accept the challenges of chaos. Only then anything worth ... may be born. (Coordinator A)*

The coordinator has taken chaos as a norm of present day world and seems to be prepared to adopt it as a lifestyle. He also reflected that anything worthwhile may be born out of chaos. Another school leader has a similar view who perceives chaos as pervasive. He felt:

*Chaos is disorderliness, unpredictability and uncertainty that is omnipresent. There is chaos in your personal life, professional affairs, organization, society, politics, and so on and so forth. It is embedded in our life style now. We cannot ignore its rule over us, let alone escaping from the grip of it. Better ask 'where chaos is not'. (Vice Principal)*

The view of a principal was also similar. He views chaos as a norm of a volatile time. He put it this way:

*I don't know how to put it in words, but chaos simply means the situation where we are not sure of what affects what. It is actually the time we are never certain of what happens every minute now. The truth we hold now may be falsified an hour later. The plan we make today will be obsolete by tomorrow. Or sometimes, that may work perfectly well. You know, this is wonderful sometimes, yet dreadful very often. (Principal B)*

The principal perceived chaos as a dreadful word, but one will have to get used to it if they desire to hold leadership positions in today's organizations. Haynes (2003, p. 32) raises a question: "Is chaos a bad thing?" and answers negatively stating that it can be used to create a new order that will ultimately save an organizational

practice and allow for new solutions. But if chaos takes over, becomes unmanageable, so that a sense of having even minimal boundaries is lost, then an organization is in trouble. Moreover, every organization will not feel the same gravity of chaos as they differ in terms of their size, available resources, and above all, their resilience.

Referring to chaos as a catch-phrase in the business world today, another school leader opined:

*You may love it, or you may hate it but you cannot avoid it. Whether you are a child or a parent, a teacher or a business entrepreneur, whatever you are, you cannot just say that chaos doesn't matter you. It is easier said than having to experience, or having to deal with. It is more than ok tested that we are experiencing seismic changes in the world of work and consequently in the personal life. (HoD)*

Based on the conversation with Principal B and HoD, I reflected that whether we take chaos in a positive or a negative sense that is our personal perspective, what is common across all is that we (our surrounding has) have been engulfed in chaos.

The discussion led to to further reflection that:

*Chaos seems to be a quagmire into which we are willingly or unwillingly likely to fall. And since the present day world is characterized by constant change, may it be in socio-political or economic, or technological or even educational milue, we are left with the only option to adopt it. (Memo # 02)*

A school leader perceived chaos to be an integral part of human life and said that it has spread to organizational life. He said:

*Chaos starts from an individual. If a person brings his house's tension into the school, that creates chaos. If the member of the school have challenging demands, or if they have severe problems that gives birth to complexity. And*

*at an external level, political transition has given room for different complexities to have influence on school practices. (Coordinator B)*

Yet another school leader expressed his understanding of chaos as uncertainty stating:

*The present day environment takes us by surprise and orders us to move towards the unknown – even when we don't want to and when we think we don't need to. (Senior teacher)*

Whoever calls it by whatever name, everyone agrees that chaos is pervasive, challenging, frustrating, yet inevitable. It not only makes one feel overwhelmed and swept away by its unpredictability, but equally offers opportunities to adapt changes more courageously and grow continuously.

### **Chaos Embedded in Academia**

Chaos exists in social systems. So does it in academia. As Nepalese socio-political situation is in the ongoing process of transformation, many impinging factors contribute to creating chaos. As McMillan (2004) argued, “Many phenomena that were once considered chaotic are, in fact, part of an ongoing process of transformation and renewal” (p. 84). Thus, chaotic phenomena are but natural in the process of transformation. School leaders recognize that there are various factors that constitute chaos or that create chaos which in turn create adverse situations for leadership. One leader put it this way:

*As the leader of an academic institution, I feel myself as the forerunner of a mini society with a large number of opportunities and countless threats.*

*While seeking ways for academic excellence, a leader needs clearly defined goals and specific strategic plan to achieve the targeted objectives. I feel the adverse situation in the nation due to turbulent political condition, instability*

*in government, lack of long term education policy and self-centralized leadership practices. As a result, the entire academia is in chaos. (HoD)*

Among many challenges to school leadership, socio-political chaos directly attacks on the functioning of a school. And if a school does not function, there is a serious threat to school leaders. In this regard, one participant's experience was typical:

*Besides daily turbulence in the intra-school level including students discipline, instructional technology, and teacher effectiveness, our academia has experienced the chaotic impacts of socio-political transitions, increasing demands of the tech high generation, globalization, unionisms, need for the 21st century skills, and so on. And these things are so embedded in our education system that we can but only accept them. The challenge is how to address them. (Coordinator A)*

Though in-school level chaos is also challenging, most of the school leaders need to pay special attention to those external factors which affect their effectiveness. Talking about the factors that might be creating in and adding chaos to their workplaces, a leader expressed:

*The basic factors are politics, pace of social development, deterioration in teachers' professional ethics, rapid changes in curricular aspect; rapid globalization etc that can be regarded as the factors of creating chaos. (HoD)*

One school leader pointed out the impact of socio-political instability in academia in this way:

*There is more or less the effect of political instability, bandhs, chakkajams, and strikes, but it depends on the school structure (we have 80 percent students and about 50 per cent teachers and other staff in-house, so we feel a*

*little impact compared to those who have all day scholars), its strength to resist them, and the commitment of the community for school's improvement. Some societies resist any kind of strikes against schools. In our district we had that commitment once, and it was working in the beginning, but slowly it became dysfunctional. (Principal A)*

Talking with another school leader, who experienced some specific problems, I reflected:

*The problems surpass the prospects at the chaotic situation. The problems are many. The first problem our school leaders are commonly wrestling with is the bandh, the second is teacher management, the third student discipline, the fourth competition among schools, the fifth integrating ICT in instruction, the sixth teachers' professional development, the seventh which may be the most terrible is the financial crisis. Next is of course, the government policy of restructuring school education into basic and secondary. The list is limitless, however, prospects seems very bleak. (Memo # 04)*

Another principal spoke of the side effects of the socio-political chaos in academia. She illustrated that:

*The complexities born out of political instability has many side effects on school, such as declining morale, loss of innovation, an erosion of trust, and weakened teamwork. These unexpected negative consequences can devastate schools' competitive advantage. And management tools can hurt schools when implemented improperly. Therefore, the search for the best formula for success by trial and error will continue because a more effective method has not been discovered. (Principal Aa)*

The impact of chaos seemed to be evident in the principalship of this particular principal because when I visited her school after three months from the day this interview was taken, she had already left the school. When I enquired about her, a teacher in her school said that as the Head of the Coordinating Body of their schools changed, she was also replaced by a new principal.

The prime job of a school is to impart quality education to its children through new curriculum frameworks to suit the demands of the 21st century, improved assessment, and improved sharing of best practice in teaching and learning. Contrary to this, because of the prevailing chaos, particularly, disturbing political climate, strikes and protests by different wings of the political parties, teachers' and students' unions, the schools are not able to make children realize that education is their fundamental right. As one participant wrote on the protocol that:

*Schools today are not able to do their primary job, i.e., enhancing student learning, let alone allocating resources and providing world-class education, preparing students to compete globally. (Principl B, Protocol # 04)*

In a rapidly changing and more technologically oriented society, students will need to acquire the knowledge and skills that will help them achieve success in school and in life. The evolving nature of school environments has placed new demands on educational leaders. Therefore, the other challenge to leadership is to incorporate latest technology in curriculum and provide the 21st century education to our children. Looking at the global economy and our pace of education towards preparing students for the global market, one participant commented sarcastically:

*Our education system is designed to produce a workforce for an economy that will not be there. And this is already evident in that we have a large number of*



*educated unemployed workforces, and they are going abroad for employment.*

*It is a great tragedy.* (Vice Principal)

This participant is urging the government to make total education reforms to adapt to the changes taking place around the globe. He is also optimistic about the innovations and technological revolutions and their roles in enhancing teaching learning, promoting global education and developing the skills for the present century and the centuries ahead. But he expressed doubt if they could adopt these technological changes in education:

*Incorporating technology, at least initiating computer education was costly, is quite challenging. It is not only because of cost but also of teacher preparedness. First thing we need to do is to train teachers for that unlearning and relearning for teachers is necessary, which is quite painful for the teachers who had been educated in the traditional classrooms.* (Vice Principal)

We are at the edge of chaos, even at the edge of incorporating technology in education, and we are slowly accepting the tremendous impact of technology in education. If we cannot incorporate technology in education, we are not fit to teach the present generation. Haynes (2003) stated “Chaos offers opportunities, but it also offers threats. It is not possible to wait forever for things to change for the better” (p. 32), - the best is to be proactive and adapt to the changes.

Regarding the changes in the school system in general and in teaching learning process in particular, we have experienced a vast range of development. We have recently experienced the impact of ICT in education, and feel that unless we can adapt to the changes brought about by ICT in education, we are not serving the basic purpose of education in the twenty first century. However, meeting the twenty first

century school purpose is very challenging especially for the school leaders from the developing countries like Nepal.

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In the old story Rip van Winkle wakes and stumbles, bleary, to the street. He tries to cross. A nice young woman called Clara yanks him back to the kerb. ‘My god,’ she says, ‘that car could’ve killed you.’ Catching his breath, clutching Clara’s hand, van Winkle asks, ‘What is a car, exactly?’ So Clara – once she’s established that the man has been asleep for three hundred years – educates van Winkle by showing him around the city. It’s a tiring business. Everything is new: cars, trains, planes, radios, phones, mobiles, television, factories, and computers. It’s all too much. The old man stares, uncomprehending. He can’t understand how so much could have changed while he slept. He can’t understand what he is seeing. By the end of the day, both exhausted, they’re passing an institutional building. Van Winkle peers in a window to see a teacher, shouting at her class. For the first time he relaxes, and smiles. Clara registers the change of expression. ‘Why are you smiling?’ she asks. ‘Do you know what that is?’ ‘Sure,’ says van Winkle. ‘I went to one of those. It’s a school.’ (Macdonald & Hursh, 2006, p. ix)

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In considering the notion of change and our dealing with it, the above story serves to engage the thinking of complexity and in some cases chaos not as a special case but the reality of the world in which we develop our strategies to cope with the changing demands.

Coming back to the discussion of the government effort in managing school system, one participant’s comment was typical:

*Though the government is in the process of making some reforms in the school education with the implementation of SSRP, there is a serious doubt in its*

*effective implementation. Not long ago, the government has declared the school sector as “zone of peace” but there have been disruptions (3 cases of strikes in valley based schools within the first 6 weeks or so). (Coordinator B)*

This reflected his worry over the fact that schools are not operating according to their annual calendar, nor are they functioning well even on working days. One of the school leaders had his say:

*We don't know when the school is closed, and our plans are almost dysfunctional. Today we run the classes effectively, go home with no bad news for tomorrow, but when we come to school tomorrow, or only when get up tomorrow morning, we come to know that there is a strike called by a teacher union, student union, the like of a sister wing of a political party. And we have to rush to finish the syllabus during the days when we can run the classes.*

(Vice Principal)

The Vice Principal blamed the political parties since they are the ones at the top level who form the educational policies and are recently committed to making school sector ‘zone of peace’. Unfortunately, they are not able to manage this transitional period and thus the chaos is heightened by political protection and impunity in the country. Sometimes, the school leaders feel that there is a kind of anarchy in the society and everything is beyond their control. But the true fact is change is upon us, and we can neither run nor hide it. The only answer is, though it will not be easy, to create new nimble schools capable of adroitly responding to the chaotic conditions produced by constant change.

According to Schratz (2003), pressures have been building on school leaders on a range of fronts: politically (new tasks, school programmes, evaluations); economically (stricter budgets, reduction of expenditure); socially (image of teaching

profession, civil servant status); globally (global competition, inter-school rankings); on a didactical-methodical level (individualization and a demand for more dynamic teaching); and on a multi-media level (new forms of media and communication). As a result, “schools and their principals are confronted with new challenges for which no centrally defined solutions are offered” (Schratz, 2003, p. 395, as cited in Notman, 2005, p. 1). A school leader commented it more succinctly:

*Trying to balance all of the responsibilities of being a school head, both a manager and a leader, or to say, an administrator is the biggest challenge. Prioritizing and determining what is most important is critical during rough times for a successful Principal. (Principal B)*

Principal B was found to be overwhelmed by the challenges he has been facing in maintaining the balance in his role. This led me to reflect that principals having multiple roles to perform are struggling to prioritize what is most urgent and important in turbulent times.

Now let me scrutinize the discussion about the prevailing chaos into the subheadings: internal chaos and external chaos.

### **Internal Chaos**

In order to simplify the study of chaos, it has been categorized as internal or external on the basis of whether it is created within the school or out of school – initiated by external agencies. However, there remains hardly any clear boundary between them. Often they are overlapping.

I observed that chaos is but prevalent whether it is created within school or out of school. “When the defining characteristic of a school is the volatility and turbulence of its local communities, the impact on the internal culture is evident in every aspect of school and classroom life” (MacBeath et al., 2007, p. 47). Thus, every

school, big or small, well-resourced or poorly resourced, has been facing the internal chaos much like the external chaos. However, the nature and impact may be different.

The politico-economic concerns are not of much interest to most school leaders, especially when they are struggling to manage the in-school environment.

Macdonald and Hursh (2006) pointed out that:

Teachers and educators shy away from such issues. Reasonably enough, they concentrate on the domestic affairs of school, and on the everyday business of classroom discipline, satisfying parents, fighting for better salaries, minimizing bureaucracy, reducing contact time, having roofs that don't leak, and lightening workloads. (p. 6)

The issues raised by Macdonald and Hursh hold true in our context too. I observed and reflected:

*Some schools face the challenges of classroom management, teacher development, ICT incorporation in instruction, while the others have teacher retention, student dropouts, resource constraints, student discipline, poor instructional pedagogy, and many more problems. May it be anything, today's school leaders are under more and more pressure to create value for their schools and identify ways to optimize their financial and operational resources. (Memo # 01)*

Relating to the internal chaos (but regular), one school leader pointed out the problems they have been facing because of people and resource dynamics inside the school. He expressed:

*In my experience, staff movements, groupism, resistance to change, inadequate resources, complexity in evaluation, high rate staff turnover etc. are the internal influences. (HoD)*

Most of the school leaders felt that one of the severest problems our schools are facing is the resource constraints: both human and physical. Because of resource constraints the challenge is particularly acute for small and medium sized schools. It is evident that many small schools are running short of resources and they are facing the challenges in running the classes, let alone thinking about bringing innovation in teaching and learning. In this regard, Barley and Beesley (2007) showed the problem of school leadership in hard-to-staff small-sized schools stating that “Not only must school leaders find qualified teachers and provide sufficient resources to deliver education but they might face potential school consolidations, closures, and a declining economic base for their communities” (as cited in Enomoto, 2011, p. 10 ). This implies that school leadership is especially challenging in poorly resourced schools. Having experienced such kind of scenario, one principal shared:

*Ours is a small school and the problem of this school is lack of fund to do anything. We can do nothing without financial resources, and we are running short of them. We also have several examples of teachers leaving school with salary matters. To be honest, we have the problem of providing the teachers with their minimum salary, we have not been able to pay them the standard salary base and which often leads to teacher turnover. We have been desperate about it. (Principal B)*

He also explained the salary matter as low payment, even no payment and when payment, not in a timely manner. This shows that if the schools cannot pay the competitive salary to the teachers, a great many teachers become job-hoppers. We also know it very well that a dissatisfied teacher cannot perform well. In this regard, Ingersoll (2003) coined the notion of the "revolving door" to describe the detrimental effects this teacher movement has on schools and students. The “revolving door” of

educators is costly, both in the financial sense, and in the way it is hurting our children's chances of receiving high quality educational opportunities in classrooms staffed by effective teachers (Greninger & Chambers, 2011, p. 4). They went on to add that the costs associated with teacher turnover stem from "time and money spent on activities associated with teacher leavers including: recruitment, hiring, administrative processing, professional development, and separation" (NCTAF, 2007, p. 4).

Teacher attrition is most prevalent in schools with low-income and at-risk populations, but it is an issue that does affect all types of schools in all parts of the country (Greninger & Chambers, 2011, p. 4). More than ever before, private schools are struggling to recruit, prepare, support, and retain high quality teachers. Since problems with teachers are the most serious, they sometimes have a negative effect on the overall success of the school. Along similar lines, Greninger and Chambers (2011) claimed:

Hiring and attrition can be a greater problem for specific subject areas, such as math, science, and special education (Ingersoll, 2000). Due to the fact that teacher retention problems generally plague the hardest-to-staff schools, it is necessary to investigate the internal forces at work in those schools. With a greater understanding of the causes and effects of teacher attrition at the school level, we may begin to craft solutions to this human capital problem. (pp. 4-5)

Besides high teacher turnover, another most telling manifestation of the challenges facing such poorly resourced schools is declining student enrollment. One of the leaders shared:

*When the teacher turnover is high, that negatively impacts the study of the students. And it forces parents pick alternative school. As parents go for alternative schools for their children, some are selecting schools that are consistently high performing despite the cost. (In-charge)*

Due to all of these, it is but natural that the quality of education in schools remains unacceptable and the pace of improvement inadequate. On the other hand, Covey (2008) pointed out yet other concerns besides salary in regard to teacher turnover. He said “Teachers also have some personal wants that go beyond issues of pay for performance. Teachers want to enjoy a sense of dignity and pride in their profession. They want to be treated with respect. They want good collegial relationships” (Covey, 2008, p. 36).

Very often, it is not the students who drive a teacher out of the school, but the crippling inflexibility of his/her administrator or principal. A coordinator shared:

*One of our teachers who quit the school only last month said that he still enjoyed teaching, but it was a constant battle with the administration that compelled him to quit. Stressful working conditions, inadequate job incentives, and increasingly formidable expectations for success are deterring good teachers from moving on with their jobs. (Coordinator A)*

The coordinator showed that there was no collegial relationship between the teachers and the administration. The principal of the same school also shared that there is a gap between them, though he focused more on salary matters rather than relationship. He experienced that:

*Some teachers are negative towards the school itself because they want more pay. Since I have been paying them as per other schools here around, I think I am not exploiting them. I have tried to do the most for the teachers as much as*



*the resources allow. I pay significant attention to maintaining personal and professional relations with the teachers. Yet, I found them not following the authority. (Principal B)*

Another leader also shared his experience in regards to teachers' behavior. He reflected on the informal groups (grapevines) prevalent in his school:

*There are different groups of teachers who have their own micro- politics in schools and out of school. They bargain more when they have set up ISTU (Institutional School Teachers' Union). Their conflicts with the management impinge upon the teaching and learning process. Some teachers show no regard to rules and conventions, professional ethics and the rights of other teachers. I have tried many times to talk with them to discuss the agenda and maintain good relationship, but in vain. (HoD)*

This shows that although principals value the human side of the school, they still give a lot of importance to rules, authority and structure which are dominant concepts in the Nepalese schools. It is very telling that some schools lack sufficient flexibility with regard to staffing, funding, resource allocation, management decisions, scheduling, school calendar, and overall school autonomy. It is fundamental that friendly discussions and dialogue must occur frequently to avoid misunderstandings. When we hear stories of schools that are thought to be underachieving, often it is our instinct to lay the blame on the students or the teachers, yet we seldom ask if the education we are offering our children is out of keeping with their needs and the realities of their day-to-day lives.

Besides the challenges depicted above, other often neglected problems are student and teacher misconduct. These problems are also less discussed by the participants. Even when they were asked to share some typical incidents with such

problems they did not specifically talk about one or the other incident, rather they talked about these matters in wholesome. They said that they have to tackle such problems very often and they have become their daily life activities. Besides, they have discipline committee, and if any disciplinary actions of the students are to be considered, the committee recommends the actions and they follow it. Referring to the students' misconduct and behavioral fallacies, a coordinator shared:

*It is very common and taken as normal when students do not complete their work, become unpunctual to their classes. But sometimes, they head for school from home and go to movies or somewhere, play truant from classes, indulge in smoking and drug related behavior, disobey teachers, tease and/or embarrass friends of opposite sex, etc. The latter cases give us more headaches. (Coordinator B)*

He further cited the reasons for such behaviors:

*In my observation, I have found that children with behavioral problems come mostly from broken families, some are single children, and some from the lahure families whose fathers are away and they do not obey their mothers. (Coordinator B)*

Although he illustrated the problems of students in general and cited some reasons for them, he did not like to talk about any particular incident regarding student problem in his school. However, such problems are in fact too big to ignore.

Pretty much the same as student behavioral problems are the teachers' misconducts. However, blowing the whistle on teacher misconduct is not considered good both by the students, and the teachers. And many times such cases are overlooked. Unless the problem becomes intense, the cases of teacher misconduct are not brought into light. One coordinator explained:

*The cases of teacher misconduct as I have observed are frequent absences, unpunctuality, molesting children, sexual harassment to students and coworkers, corporal punishment to children, even smoking in front of students (especially in the canteen), not obeying school rules like school uniform, etc.*

(Coordinator A)

One leader shared one incident of a teacher's misconduct:

*A math teacher who looked after students in the hostel was caught in one evening in a corner of a classroom with a tenth grader hostel girl. When asked to the girl about the teacher's behavior, she said that he was molesting her for a week or so and she could not share that with anybody citing the fear of her teacher. And we counselled the girl who was about to quit her study and a lady teacher was substituted for the male teacher. The male teacher was sacked. (Vice Principal)*

He also shared that there are many incidents of teachers thrashing the students citing their indiscipline and misconduct. Even some teachers beat the students for not completing the homework. Such things are not taken that seriously unless they become severe.

From the theoretical lens of complexity theory, 'on the edge of chaos' change is far from being a managed process. In this world things happen that cannot be predicted and people (teachers and students) behave in ways that are neither rational nor totally irrational. Tosey (2002) maintained that:

As educators, I believe we encounter this apparent irrationality any time we have done something for the best of the programme or for the benefit of the students, but are misunderstood; or we are attacked and accused of having bad intentions; or things simply don't work as we intended – especially if the

effect is the opposite of whatever we planned. Some explain this as the vagaries of life, or as 'sod's law'. Complexity Theory can help us to conceptualise this type of experience, to see it differently, and to understand it as normal not irrational. (p. 6)

Complexity Theory suggests that the 'edge of chaos' (the dynamic between stability and instability) can be the most effective and most creative place to operate. I aim to explore what this might mean in practice, and also how school leaders may militate against this. Tosey (2002, p. 6) went on to explain that:

Complexity Theory would apply to many aspects of this professional context, from the 'micro' behavioural level of teacher-learner interactions to the 'macro' level of national policy and system change. All these levels are learning systems.

### **External Chaos**

We are all aware of the fact that "our country is passing through troubled times fraught with political and economical uncertainty" (The Himalayan Times, 2013, February 16, p. 1) and therefore, there is no denying that school leadership in such a situation is a ceaselessly tightrope walk, requiring a fine balance between what goes outside and what should go inside despite the influences of the external happenings.

The headlines like: Teachers, student union vandalize school buses (Himalayan News Service, 2013, February 25, p. 2); College bus set ablaze in city (Himalayan News Service, 2013, March 1, p. 2); Parents body appalled by educational shutdown (THT Online, 2013, March 3); Schools, colleges shut; 2m students hit (Post Report, 2013, March 4, p. 2); Education strike affects 7.5m students across nation (RSS, 2013, March 3); Radiant Academy in Sanepa vandalized

(Republica, 2013, March 4, p. 3); ANNISU-R activists attack schools, talks at 4 pm (Republica Online, 2013, March 4); No fees for strike days: Guardians (Himalayan News Service, 2013, March 4, p. 2) are a few examples that depict what is going around Nepalese schools in the recent times. However, we have been unfortunate to hear anything worthwhile about the use and integration of cross-cutting technology in Nepalese education, though some private schools and colleges are doing so (at least for the sake of name and for competing with others to attract more students). The above sample headlines were taken covering a time period of only ten days from the Nepalese national dailies all having a wider coverage.

So much of what happens inside the school is the reflection and influence of what goes around outside. This is so since schools are considered microcosms of the society. Schools mirror what is happening in the society and their character is shaped by their cultural environment (Treston, n.d., p. 1). A school leader shared that:

*Too many people do not understand the realities of being a school administrator. An average person does not realize how problems outside the classroom affect student performance. The parents become content when they can send their children to school despite the fact that their children are not safe on the way or even at school. Moreover, many external factors are causing constant problems in school operation these days, namely the consequences of sociopolitical context. (Principal A)*

The school leader indicated that many compounding factors are externally putting pressure to school administrators in (not) conducting schools. Hatch (2010) also elaborated on this point stating:

The challenges you face *inside* the school are connected to and compounded by things that are happening *outside*. In fact, schools face a number of external

demands and pressures that they have to address. Moreover, without the connections, support, and expertise that come from interacting with a host of people, organizations, and institutions on the outside, schools cannot develop the goals, staff, or productive work environment they need to be successful.

(para. 4)

From the above literature, it is clear that today our academia is engulfed in chaos: environmental, political, social, technological—we can name any. External forces such as increased accountability, high stakes testing, changing family needs, the technological age, and society's demands upon schools have left educators searching for leaders to help them negotiate through the maze of change and reform. But the demands of managing the environment mean that principals need to be strong external leaders as well; they need to serve as the liaison to those outside the school and act as spokesperson, negotiator, and champion of the school's interests (Hatch, 2010, Distribute the Work section, para. 1).

Similarly, Nepalese schools are hard hit due to many external factors like bandhs, and strikes. Moreover, teachers, too, go for strike raising issues of pay, class sizes, the length of the school day and standardized tests and so on. All schools have experienced these. These challenges prevail against the backdrop of government's commitment to school as zone of peace. A school leader put his understanding of chaos and its impact on school education as:

*Besides the complexities of political turmoil, teachers' and ...., today more than ever, expectation of parents are very high, tougher competition among schools have created a kind of focus on the students' achievement in terms of quantity, rather than quality, and of course, the age of ICT has put forth a bigger challenge for the developing schools to integrate them and adapt 21st century education*

*(subjects are not relevant, and that's what the government is negligent about).*

(Coordinator A)

One of the most frequently cited chaos in the academia has been the case of external influences. A school leader shared his idea on the external influences as chaotic to the school operation as:

*Basically national politics, educational policy, pressure group, unionism, demand of donation and technology are external influences. (HoD)*

Among many of such influences as call for strike, economical and political uncertainty, technological advancement, weak political commitment to proclaimed policies, the first causes has been the most impeding factor in the smooth functioning of the Nepalese academia in the recent times. Because of which the prime job of the schools, i.e., teaching-learning has turned sluggish.

**Socio-political context.** “An integral element of the social reality is the political reality, generated to a large degree by the attitudes and decisions of politicians. When reflecting on this sphere, school leaders can come to see themselves as victims rather than players with influence” (Rowe, 2008, p. 144). The political context in our country seems to be most volatile and therefore the most difficult to analyze, both because of its unrest and because of its counter-effects on the other contexts, including education. Moreover, the political environment is constantly changing, sadly, however, not necessarily to the path of stability. Rowe (2008) further stated “When reflecting on this sphere, school leaders can come to see themselves as victims rather than players with influence” (p. 144). The political turmoil in Nepal has impinged on most social activities, including educating children. Referring to the recent happening as a consequence of such political unrest, a principal said:

*The most frightening part of the day for us is when the children are coming to school and going back home, traveling on the open road. At least in the school, we know that they are within 15 seconds of shelter. Outside, anything can happen when they are on the busses, waiting at the bus stop. We have recently been more terrorized when the school buses belonging to Secondary School and Public School (both pseudonyms) parked within the school premises were vandalized by the bandh enforcers. (Principal B)*

He further elaborates on this sad consequence and relates to the imminent necessity for being prepared to face such realities any time. He stated:

*This is part of the reality today in Nepal - we always have to be prepared for every possible protests and strikes causing school closures and attacks on school buses. However, we will continue to function as best as we always do. (Principal B)*

A Head of the Department related to the sad incidents many schools are facing in current times. He said:

*These days, schools are not direct targets of conflict-related activities, but they have been hit by closures and vandalism inflicted by various groups and parties. We do not need to look too far back in the past. Take the example of last week when schools across the nation were forced to shut their doors after various groups called for a Nepal bandh. (HoD, 2013, March 15)*

All of the participants had similar say on the detrimental effect of the socio-political uncertainty. However, one participant (Vice Principal) pointed to the need to collectively face the weaker political commitment. At the same time, he also referred to the anomaly between what the private school leaders agree with the government



and what they do after the directives were published. Based on his experience, I reflected:

*We are witness to such incidents as school closures and school vandalisms, yet we are not in a state of collectively resist them. This is a bitter reality. It is not that others are to be blamed. Even our private school leaders are to be. Why did they agree with the government directives while they were called for advice? And now when the government has issued the directives, on what ground are they refusing to obey the guidelines? (Memo # 03)*

The Vice Principal seemed to be critical of the roles leaders of the private schools are playinng. He further elaborated:

*Now, the private school leaders are in a state of calling school closures. It seems that everyone is looking for a cause to obstruct the operation of schools, including the bosses of the private school. They want to make huge money, not deliver service: quality education, as most of their school mottos say. The victims will ultimately be the students and the teachers, not the owners of the schools. (Vice Principal)*

Wagley also claims that private schools' organizations like "PABSON and N-PABSON have become stronger and more powerful than government bodies" (Republica, 2013, March 14, p. 9). Nonetheless, while preparing the Private and Boarding School Directive 2013, the government had invited representatives from PABSON and GAoN for advice. And they had initially agreed to government guidelines too. But following the government's issuance of the directive to regulate private schools, private school operators felt the odds have been stacked heavily against them. This incident has recently added much chaos particularly in the private school academia.

**Weaker political commitment.** Private schools are yet to follow the country's education regulations, which is mandatory for all schools, said Prof. Wagley. Yet in the same interview, Prof. Wagley citing many reasons concluded that "The recent guideline is only a farce" (Republica, 2013, March 14, p. 9). Expressing his concerns and dissatisfaction about the impact of the recent shut downs, and a lack of strong will on the part of the concerned authority, a school leader said:

*Education has suffered due to strikes and traffic blockades, which have cut the school year to nearly half. Children are deprived of their right to education. And the people in authority who cannot do anything to stop such malpractices still shamelessly say that we need to provide quality education to children. How funny of them? The government lacks a strong commitment to implement its directive and regulations. (In-charge)*

Regarding how the provisions made in the regulations have been ridiculed, Wagley (2011, July 5, p. 8) also illustrated:

Although the rule is to teach 220 days a year, most of the (public) schools run less than 150 days a year on an average. There are cases where the school days are even lower than 100 days a year. On top of this, several strikes, bandhs, and chakkajams add fuel to it, and force more school closures. The teacher-time-on-task as shown by past research report is less than 40 per cent.

This made me reflect that the government's initiatives and its efforts in implementing the directives and regulations seems nothing more than a transparent sham whereas the institutional school leaders are also not showing their wholehearted commitment in following the regulations. A Head of the Department also shared:

*This sorry state prevails because both the government and the school operators have not been able to determine and implement standard directives*

*to address all scrupulous activities affecting schools. Though a new directive has been recently issued, it has been rejected by the school owners. (HoD)*

There are so many anomalies of this sort prevalent in the policy and practice level. It is often easier said than done, so is the case with making policies and regulations and even (bare) commitments, but the test of such is so hard that neither of them pass successfully when they go to face the ground reality. A part of what has just happened is presented in the following text box, which is the reality of today.

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**Education strike affects 7.5m students across nation**

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KATHMANDU, March 3 (RSS): All educational institutions remain closed across the nation today due to the dispute between school proprietors and students unions over the establishment of students' union in the schools.

As a result, around 7.5 million students of private and public schools across the nation have been affected due to the educational strike called by the Association for Private Educational of Nepal (APEN), a network of private educational institutions. The APEN called the educational strike in protest against the arson carried out to a college bus of Golden Gate recently allegedly by the All Nepal National Independent Students Union (ANNISU)-Revolutionary and donation terror and threat at various educational institutions.

Vice-chairman of Higher Secondary Schools Association-Nepal, Ramesh Shilwal, said that the strike was called in protest against the ongoing donation terror and threat on private schools and against the Guidelines of the Educational Directorate. He said they were compelled to call the educational strike also against the different malpractices including pressure to open students unions and padlocking of schools by putting forth various undue demands. – Republica Online (2013, March 3)

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In May 2011, the government declared all schools (including school buses) “Zone of Peace” to ensure that schools remain safe for children and teaching and learning take place in a violence-free environment. Despite the attempt to assure there would be no political activity, bandh or protest in schools and school buses would move freely on the road everyday even during bandh as ambulances do, this declaration has served no purpose in the field since the act of shutting down schools by the people engaged in party politics or in providing education is rampant. That is why, Wagley (2011, June 8) called this declaration “immature and populist political decision” (p. 8) and Suprabhat Bhandari, Chairman of the Guardians’ Association of Nepal called it very condemnable that “the people who led the campaign in the past to get education sector declared a peace zone themselves are involved in calling the strikes” (Republica, 2013, March 4, p. 3).

It needs no reiteration that the educational institutions, especially the schools, should remain out of the political arena. However, the same academic institutions seem to be hardest hit because of the seemingly ever-present political interference. Moreover, to overlook such nuisances is tantamount to trying to lower the quality peg of the schools.

On the other hand, it is evident that the responsibility for this state of affairs has not been taken by any stakeholders in the forefront. Different organizations including UN have expressed serious concerns about frequent closures of schools across the country enforced by various groups and parties, most of whom have pledged to back the idea of schools as Zone of Peace. However, more than the teachers and wings of the political parties, “these dismal stats are a sobering reminder of how the state has failed in its responsibility to meet even the bare minimum health and education needs of its citizens” (Editorial, Republica, 2011, p. 8).

While such situation persists, we can only think of the hardship of school leadership and can hardly imagine of imparting quality education. Everyone accepts that Nepal has been undergoing tremendous political transformation, and it is pretty easy to lay the blame on the transition period and to make a recommendation that a strong government and political commitment is needed. However, Rijal (2011) expressed “By only advocating that only a robust government mechanism would help deal with such evils and attributing all such mischief to ‘fluid political situation’ and/or transition is a joke, which is only smearing ourselves” (p. 3).

**Unions.** An important issue the schools are currently grappling with is the unions’ pressure, may it be from teacher unions or students’. Though students unions as such targeting school students are non-existing, the impact of students unions belonging to different political parties is very high, not necessarily because they want to conduct their union activities in the school and involve students in unions, but because they make the schools easy prey may it be to protest the government’s price hike, or directly asking donations from the schools to conduct their programs outside. A teacher leader shared:

*It is always the tails of the political parties, so called student unions, who call school closures for any reasons whatsoever, not necessarily related with schools, teachers, or students. (Coordinator B)*

On the other hand, teacher unions are said to be professional organizations which mostly speak for the professional development of teachers in order to bring about better teaching learning in schools. The leader further spoke out:

*Though such unions call them professional organizations, they are mostly focused on their salaries and job security, rather than on their professional development. (Coordinator B)*

A school leader accused that teacher unions are currently engaged in collective bargaining with the school administration. He shared:

*It is true that some schools have very small classes, and they are lacking in financial resources to pay the teachers in time. And the teachers unions pressurize the administration to increase their salaries as par the government schools which they cannot. This creates havoc among the teachers and the administrators. (Vice Principal)*

It is shown by their actions that the teacher unions are most of the times bargaining for better facilities. And as a consequence,

Many principals put too much energy in resolving the conflict with the teacher union, therefore, their energy to help improve the quality of instruction and learning is being exhausted. It is urgently needed to make efforts at helping the principal and the teacher union to form a close companionship in order to secure students' right to education. (Kim et al., 2006, p. 108)

The discussion led me to reflect whether the teacher unions when they call themselves professional unions do their primary job. They are always bargaining for facilities and job security rather than promoting their capabilities in teaching, and developing professionalism. This means teacher unions are also oftentimes being part of the problems.

**Lack of collaboration.** These days, overtly seen problem among the private schools is their competition to outshine the others. There have been many publicity stunts among the schools these days just because they want to show that they are the best, though they are not, so as to attract more students. One Principal shared:

*This competition is very unhealthy and it will be detrimental in the long run. Everyone recognizes this, but is still focusing on competition rather than*

*collaboration. They collaborate only in some cases when they lack the resources or when the collaboration has direct and immediate benefits.*

*Some school also take the strategy that they take the teachers from other schools paying more than how much they had been paid, and in some cases, they do so on condition that they also bring some students with them from the previous school. We had such cases among the schools here around, but recently there have been a bit more collaboration these days. (Principal B)*

Similarly, highlighting the significance of collaboration, a Department Head shared:

*Through collaboration, schools can gain a wider perspective, and especially students can become familiar with the educational activities in other schools and can benefit greatly in their studies. Since a single school is hardly in a position to provide everything needed to develop the children holistically, therefore, cooperation and collaboration between schools is a field calling for sharing the resources, both physical and human. Many issues relating to school education concern various aspects of school departments, and that is why increased interaction is even more important among the schools. (HoD)*

This school leader reflected on the importance of collaboration across schools which not only gives children the exposure to wider community, but also develops resilience among schools to combat the emergent challenges collectively. To reflect on his experience, I understood that though the importance of collaboration and networking between schools is unanimously agreed upon, the level of interaction and collaboration among each other is quite low. More interestingly he said that very often the school network works when there is any strikes or shut downs. At least they ask each other whether they closed the school or not.

This shows that there is a strong need to improve collaboration and practices between schools (and of course, other education providers).

**Technological advancements.** Currently, students live in a world that looks different from the world of former times. Teachers and school leaders face the challenge of preparing youth to make decisions in all aspects of their school lives as well as their lives beyond school. According to Noonoo (2012), “These days it may seem like education is changing faster than educators can keep up ... but it’s not moving nearly as fast as technology. That’s par for the course though” (p. 4).

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### **Tomorrow’s people**

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Baroness Susan Greenfield, in her book ‘Tomorrow’s People’, suggests that the education system is in crisis as it struggles to respond to the changing ways in which people learn. Whilst we clearly cannot jump to the conclusion that the whole system of education should change on the basis of these arguments, currently it is clear that we are not witnessing any significant departure in the way buildings are designed and learning is organized and approached. However, the changing nature of learning and interaction in society surely needs greater attention when thinking about the future of education and the learning spaces we may need to design to account for such changes. If we take the time to listen to young people, it is not difficult to understand the chasm that is emerging between the way many of them learn informally and the technologies they use to do so in their everyday lives, and how this compares to their experiences in classrooms and lecture theatres across the country.

This presents an enormous challenge to how the current system of ‘schooling’ is organized and delivered at every level ... with the unprecedented sums of public money being invested in buildings and technology. (Harrison, 2008, p.18)

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Technological change is another component that has greatly influenced how we teach and student learn these days. In this way, schools are experiencing the impact of communication and information changes brought on by technological advances. These technological developments and the means for acquiring and sharing information have changed the classroom forever. Covey (2008) succinctly put that “The world has changed. I want my students to keep up with technology, to be more creative, to make better decisions, and to be able to team with people with varied backgrounds” (Covey, 2008, pp. 25-26). It implied that the role of schools in the changed context has also changed. They are to support the 21st century educational and professional needs of students. They need to provide high school students with opportunities to develop 21st century skills and apply them as they solve technical problems faced by their schools. They are thus supposed to facilitate the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Knowing that the new generation has become more tech-savvy than ever before, and they learn the technology way better, school leaders want better ways to incorporate ICT in education. The most common techniques now gaining greater use among schools is to introduce computer and internet. What will be some of the results of these advances in science and technology for school leaders? Advances in science and technology have resulted in pressures on both individuals and their organisations. These pressures have particular implications for schools and their leaders. Answers to several key questions need to be sought.

Today's knowledge economy demands a new kind of learning environment. Similarly, the role of school leaders must be redefined in the 21st century as schools struggle to boost student achievement and adapting technological advances at the same time. A senior teacher shared:

*Gone are the days when school leaders spent most of their time with class schedules, textual explanations, and general curriculum. Today's school leaders must keep abreast of the latest technologies and teaching practices.*

(Senior teacher)

Referring to the technology enabled teaching and learning, though it has not been practiced as much as what he has described, Dhungel (2011) stated:

The evolution in education with the introduction of technology over the past twenty years has in simple terms replaced the dusty blackboard with a projector screen, and has totally eliminated chalks and dusters, and teachers use marker pens wherever necessary. Previously, students jotted down important points from the lecturer in their notebooks with their pen, but now they can get all the lecture notes online. The internet facility has made it possible for the students to access and submit assignments online from wherever they wish. Many of the tests and quizzes are online, so they can access it from home itself. (Dhungel, 2011, p. 3)

It is evident in some schools that this technology enabled teaching learning system has made the teacher's life more convenient. This has also helped enhance the capability of the teachers and students. In this age of technological advancement, many more advanced techniques of teaching have emerged, and they are in practice worldwide. Dhungel also showed its dark side:

However, this technology has made the cost of these services even higher. In an economist's point of view, the cost of education is ever-rising compared to other goods, making it out of reach for many with cash crunch. Only the affluent can have access to such highly advanced technology. This has led to discrimination in delivering services in health and education. The government

should have to play an important role in providing these facilities to all the citizens. (Dhungel, 2011, p. 3)

There is no denying that private schools are better equipped with technology than public schools and I reflect that all schools should be equipped with these facilities. This helps to improve the quality of education and in turn it helps to create a competent and just society. Each passing year makes it clear that more, much more, is needed. “Education needs to prepare learners of all ages to be able to take advantage of the resources available to them: the people, the places, the information and the tools that can help them to learn” (Luckin, 2008, p. 13). The questions that need to be addressed in order to tackle this tension are central to educational transformation question of how we want education to be in the 21st century.

Our school leaders very often encounter that students are a way farther in the use of technology than their teachers. One principal remarked:

*The role of teachers has changed because of technology and the classrooms are to be changed to teach these technology-savvy students. We know that our students are far better at the use of technology than us. It is high time we trained our teachers to integrate technology in their instructions. If we cannot do this, it puts us at the edge and ultimately we fall deep inside from where we cannot imagine getting up and moving ahead. At least, by the time we get up, the world (other schools) would have taken a high speed, and we can never catch them up. (Principal A, Protocol # 01)*

When I asked him about how they have been following the trend of technological advancement in his own school, he said:

*I was coming to this point. In our school's case, to be down to earth, we have not been that much successful in adapting the technological advances. Though*

*we have recently managed a few technological stuff like multimedia projectors and online lab, we already had computer and language lab, they are not in operation now. At least they have been put up just to show off (chuckles...). We have yet to get our teachers trained on using them in daily classroom instruction.* (Principal A)

His idea of getting the teachers trained is well supported by Baird and Fisher (2005) who said that as new technology in the classroom emerges, teachers must be able to adapt and change teaching styles and strategies to incorporate this technology (as cited in Hebert, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, incorporating new technology and acquiring better teaching and assessing practices are necessary to meet the needs of students today. This change in classroom practices is realized through professional learning. In this regard, Flores (2004) underscored the role of leadership stating that “Effective school leadership is a key factor in determining the quality and processes involved in professional learning” (as cited in Hebert, 2011, p. 3). And therefore, transforming principals needs to empower others to engage in the type of continuous learning that will bring about these changes.

The rapid progress of technology and the globalization have narrowed the world into a small place. The 21st century has been regarded as the age of science and technology. Institutions lagging behind in technological sector are unable to face the pace of the world. Technology has been regarded as one of the vital change agents of education sector today. However, promoting creativity of staff to enhance twenty-first century learning is a fundamental challenge for school leadership today.

Referring to the type of learners in the 21st century, and how the educators handle them, Murray (2003) said:

In the Information Age, students must be able to purposefully access information from a variety of sources, analyze and evaluate the information, and then integrate it to construct a personal knowledge base from which to make intelligent decisions. To foster these capabilities, educators must reexamine their assignments and teaching strategies. (Murray, 2003, para. 10)

Murray (2003) further argued that “Contemporary literacy skills are too important to our students' future success to allow them to be ignored in the frenzy over high-stakes standardized testing.” He also recommended that curriculum should include an additional goal framed in terms of the information-based economy for which we are preparing our students.

### **Making Sense of Complexity and “Edge of Chaos”**

This subtheme exemplifies some of the challenges in defining or conceptualizing the term ‘edge of chaos’ in any succinct way. While the participants articulated the difficulty in defining the terms, there was convergence in a portion of their responses.

For them, the term ‘chaos’ meant disorder and the term ‘edge of chaos’ generally referred to as transitional period. A school leader put his idea of ‘edge of chaos’ this way:

*In my understanding, edge of chaos is the liquid or transitional period that our country is facing right now. May it be in politics or education, probably in every sphere of social life, we are at the edge of chaos. (Coordinator B)*

In the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary* (2006), the word “chaos” is defined as “a state of complete disorder and confusion”. Common thought in current Nepalese society identifies the meaning of “chaos” with this definition, associating it with mayhem, bedlam, confusion, disarray, pandemonium

and the like. All of my research participants had the same conception. In the field of leadership and management, however, the word “chaos” has come to mean something different, it describes a complex, unpredictable, and orderly disorder in which patterns of behavior unfold in irregular but similar forms (Tetenbaum & Laurence, 2011, p. 42).

Another school leader perceived the term ‘edge of chaos’ as the interplay between order and disorder. He said:

*I don't know exactly what the term means but discussing with you I have realized that it means the state between order and disorder. In the school context, management and mis-management, control and freedom, etc. There is a constant interplay of such things in the school setting. (Principal A)*

This view of edge of chaos has been discussed by means of a different phraseology by Marion (1999) who said, “Complexity is a hybrid state that lies between stability and chaos” (p. 23). He further stated “The region of dynamical system behavior has been labeled the Edge of Chaos by Chris Langston” (Marion, 1999, p. 27). One of my participants also equated the terms chaos with complexity and turbulence. For him:

*For an organization like school, chaos or complexity is an unpredictable and swift change in its external or internal environments. It thereby affects the performance of the system. Looking at the socio-political state, it seems that chaos has been established, and not settled. I think now we are in the middle of a turbulent period. (HoD)*

Complexity theory is an emerging field in which scientists seek patterns and relationships within systems. “Rather than looking to cause and effect relations, complexity theorists seek to explicate how systems function to rely upon feedback

loops (reiteration, recursion, reciprocity) so as to (re)frame themselves and thus continue to develop, progress, and emerge” (Smitherman, 2004, p. 11).

Theoretically speaking, the term ‘edge of chaos’ refers to the dynamic of (between) stability and instability; turbulence and disequilibrium (Tosey, 2002, p. 24).

Based on the interviews with the participants, I reflected:

*Currently, school administrators are very conscious of the pressure of changing social, political and professional expectations for them. Moreover, the pace of change and accountability is ever increasing. This presents a dilemma for school administrators. Addressing all of these issues seems to be a very daunting task. (Memo # 08)*

Fullan (1999) also asserted that for school administrators, the main problem is not the absence of innovations in schools but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects. He further asserted that school leaders are faced with “turbulent, uncertain environments and suffer an additional burden of having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations” raining down on them from hierarchical bureaucracies (Fullan, 1999, p. 109).

Consequently, school administrators find themselves managing and leading schools in a culture of change that directly places them on the edge of chaos (Walker, 1999, 2000, as cited in Normore, 2004, p. 71). This leads to a continually posed question in education, one that is a subject of (sometimes hostile) debate. How can a school leader guarantee that learning is occurring in the classroom?

Though school leaders take chaos as formidable, Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000, p. 6) stated that:

*In the face of threat, or when galvanized by a compelling opportunity, living things move toward the edge of chaos . . . the condition evokes higher levels*

of mutation and experimentation, and fresh new solutions are more likely to be found.

For Tetenbaum and Laurence (2011), “It is here, in the instability, that the greatest creativity comes about” (p. 42). Thus school leaders need to be strategic and tactful to get the maximum out of this volatile time.

### **A Complex Leadership Landscape**

The principal’s role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 5). Equally, everyone recognizes and cherishes the critical role played by school leaders. However, it is more important to note that the rapidly changing social, political, and economic environments in which schools operate have created new challenges for school leaders. For example, the Private and Boarding School Directives 2013 (as stated by the leaders of private schools’ organizations), frequent school closures and traffic blockades, and new accountability demands have made school leadership more and more complex. These demands require school leaders to be multi-skilled and more versatile, as they are called upon to make more complex management decisions, while at the same time providing the necessary pedagogical leadership in schools.

When asked what types of chaos they felt quite frequently in the present time in their schools, one leader expressed:

*Basically curricular aspects are adversely affected in our institution owing to the chaotic situation. Continuous political strikes, large number of public holidays, pressure of local organizations etc. affect the timely accomplishment of the scheduled academic courses. Rapid globalizations, advancement in*



*technology and teachers' professional values are some of areas of our concern.* (HoD)

Schools have always been seen as central to the project of nation building. However, since the advent of the 21st century, the purposes of schools have been placed even more directly under the microscope due to the impact of a number of trends, influences or 'forces', such as technological change, the increasing diversity of the students background, the growth of a knowledge-based society and the globalisation of the economy and cultures. They are causing educational organisations and systems around the world to broaden and personalise curricula and to rethink school structures (Mulford, 2008, p. 4). The question is not how they might be avoided, but what we must do to adapt. What are the chances that all or some combination of these forces will converge in ways that create a future fundamentally different from our past experiences and current realities? What will be the effect of these forces on schools and their leaders?

When uncertainty and ambiguity are the norm, school is in session and the subject is how to provide leadership during unpredictable and precarious times (Conrad, 2006). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) also argued that:

While none of us can know what the future holds, we can work to shape that future, to make sure that, as far as possible, what happens is what we want to have happen. Occasionally school leaders need to position themselves so that they are able to see 'the bigger picture'; to detach themselves from the hurly-burly of the moment, gain a more distant view of issues that are close by and pressing. (as cited in Mulford, 2008, p. 4)

Despite all those challenge, the school leaders have inadequate time for collaboration, learning, and leading. Besides, there is lack of incentives for engaging

in leadership activities. These have impeded the development of school leaders. A coordinator shared:

*We should take over extra-burden with almost zero incentive. We should go to regular classes nearly as much as other teachers, do the managerial and supervising job, report to the head, and yet, we get the similar pay as that of those who just come, take their classes and go. (Coordinator A, Protocol # 3)*

However, in another school, the scenario was different. The teacher leaders were superior to others in many respects. Their basic scale, portfolio allowances were more attractive and they had quite a little class load. Nevertheless, there was individualism within the teaching profession and the worst case scenario “crab bucket culture”. There was no good collaboration among teachers. Instead, they wanted to surpass the other by secretly making the principal and directors under influence. Actually this seemed to be the cultural norm in a private school, though that could slow the progress of school improvement. A senior teacher shared:

*I have seen overly hierarchical relationships with peers, where portfolio holders [teacher leaders] exercise authority instead of work collaboratively. Most of the time, they seem to be reporting of the trivial faults of the peers to the principal or vice-principal, even when they know that those were insignificant. I have also noticed that they sometimes entice teachers to do something and report to the bosses negatively of the teachers. In the cases of two teachers, I have found that the so-called haakims (bosses) retorted the information of the in-house teachers who wanted to do MPhil, and they were prevented from going to attend the classes since they were to be present in the house (hostel) any time the haakims visited them. And one teacher resigned and left the school, and following that the other teacher was allowed to go to*

*college in the evening. It is ridiculous that those who do not know the importance of education are the haakim educators here. (Protocol # 2)*

Relating to what he said, I asked another school leader about the leadership scenario, he said:

*It's all because of poor, or let's say, bad leadership of the principal. He should know what the score is rather than blindly believing one or two close hands. Though, I am also taking the position of leadership, I am not happy with our senior bosses. Both our principal and vice-principal are not qualified people, nor are they good at leading. They rely on the administrator (we have a distinct post of deputy administrator) whom I have never found standing for teachers and staff. All he talks about is reducing the cost. I don't know what we can do without investing on people. (Coordinator A)*

I got more curious, if that was really so, and went to the principal. He expressed his feelings and ideas that:

*Everything is smooth. We have department heads, coordinators, in-charges who look after all the regular activities of the school. (Principal A)*

Though there was no uniformity in the responses of the school leaders about the leadership scenario, whether true or otherwise the fact is that most problems besetting schools are due to weak leadership. Therefore, school leaders must be highly qualified, given the inconsistent demands and contradictions placed on the education system today. Such demands are because our society is dynamically complex, highly political and undergoing unprecedented changes (The Fiji Times Online, 2007, para. 1). Therefore, the search for highly qualified, dynamic and ethical leadership is paramount if the school system is to become challenging and worthwhile. In this sense, true, authentic, accountable and dynamic leaders are greatly needed.

### **Challenges of Chaos and Uncertainty**

School leadership has been identified among the most important factors associated with effective, high performing and successful schools. However educational leaders like principals and vice-principals face numerous challenges in achieving that aim.

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It is absolutely impossible to overestimate the turbulence and chaos that leaders now confront every day. If leaders are honest, they'll admit that they don't always know what to do; that they're constantly facing right - versus - right choices; that they are leading a growing number of people with whom they have little in common; that their businesses and industries are so unpredictable that even if everything seems to be going great, it can all go to hell in a handbasket overnight. (Dotlich et al., 2009, p. 15)

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Perhaps the biggest challenge of uncertainty is the scarcity of definitive answers (Dotlich et al., 2009). Dotlich et al. further illustrated:

It is difficult to know if a strategy will be effective, even if it has been effective in the past....It's entirely possible that in a fast-moving world, something will take place in the next day or the next minute that will render that research obsolete or make those resources insufficient. (2009, p. 23)

Before talking about the challenges of uncertainty and chaos, a school leader talked about the chaos that has affected his leadership performance. For him:

*External pressure, internal conflict, inadequate resources, unstable government policy, rapid social change, high expectation of the stakeholders etc are some of the challenging problems. (HoD)*

He further elaborated on the impact of chaos on his leadership practice. He expressed:

*Chaos imposes unnecessary moral pressure in leadership practices. So as to oppose the deterioration of the organizational performance, one needs to use extra energy and resources in leading the institution. (HoD)*

The demands of school leadership are many and complex. School leaders juggle instructional, managerial, and political functions. School leaders are challenged to ensure that their schools meet specified standards (i.e., demonstrable progress in student outcomes) in a climate of heightened expectations, and competition.

The roles of school leaders have changed and become more varied and more complex; they have a tough job, and it's only going to get tougher (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, it is a serious challenge to lead in today's climate of heightened accountability and limited resources. Dotlich et al. (2009) again showed the leadership challenges in uncertain times:

When grappling with uncertainty; some leaders make the mistake of pushing decisions upstairs. Others become enmeshed in the data, trying relentlessly and often unsuccessfully to unscramble a mammoth helping of information and find some certainty in it. Still others opt for the close - your - eyes - and - point method of making a choice, ignoring the data and figuring that one decision is as likely to be right as another. Still others ignore all the data and just tough it out based on past experiences. (pp. 24-25)

Though most of the private school principals were the founder themselves, a number of schools have principals as outsiders. Such principals are always being guided by the management team, director of the school, or one or the other active founding member(s). One of the participants highlighted a number of leadership related issues their school is dealing with. Some of these were no clear role division, less authority but increased accountability, etc. He also shared that:

*We want our roles to be clearly defined because we are usually required to do a lot of things. We also need adequate time to exercise pedagogical leadership as we are usually overwhelmed by administrative tasks.* (Vice Principal)

One leader recently said that in his job, complexity creates uncertainty and vice-versa. He further added:

*Despite all endeavors including the declaration of schools as zone of peace, uncertainty still rules here. School functioning in Nepal has experienced significant hindering as a result of political unrest and instability, which is disrupting the education of school children.* (HoD)

Similar to what he said, Dotlich et al. (2009) found that:

Leaders tell us constantly about the challenge of taking action in the face of *uncertainty*. Or, more specifically, they complain about the difficulty of doing so. The world is becoming a less predictable place, but the demand for action in the face of uncertainty is unrelenting. (p. 11)

The challenges faced in contemporary education were never faced twenty years back. Today, school leaders are beleaguered and disorientated when faced with new challenges, some beyond their comprehension while others too alien in nature to resolve and tackle (The Fiji Times Online, 2007, para. 4). This further stresses that it is not children's indiscipline which gives stress to leaders; it is their obsolete qualification which is unworkable with the challenges of the 21st century educational demands. Ischinger (2009) also noticed that:

The challenges facing education systems and teachers continue to intensify. In modern knowledge-based economies, where the demand for high-level skills will continue to grow substantially, the task in many countries is to transform traditional models of schooling, which have been effective at distinguishing

those who are more academically talented from those who are less so, into customized learning systems that identify and develop the talents of all students. (Ischinger, 2009, p. 3)

The above discussion pointed to the need to leadership capacity building. Yeo (2010) said, “Building today’s leaders requires a forecast of tomorrow’s challenges, an engagement in current problems and boldness to live forward in a world of unpredictability” (p. 128). Duignan (2007) also underscored the importance of leadership learning. For him:

Capable leaders need to have adequate knowledge, understanding and skills to manage their responsibilities and resolve complex problems. However, these ‘skills of doing’ can only be applied effectively if leaders also have the ‘skills of being’. The ultimate challenge for leaders is to develop their own and others’ capabilities so that their organisations can flourish in complex, uncertain, unpredictable and rapidly changing environments. (Duignan, 2007, Conclusion section, para. 2)

Similarly, the key to successful school performance is “heart and spirit infused into relationships among people, their efforts to serve all students, and a shared sense of responsibility for learning” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 7). Mulford (2008) succinctly presented the leadership challenge in the following way:

The major leadership challenge is for school leaders to be able to understand and act on the context, organization and leadership of the school, as well as the interrelationship between these three elements. Successful school leadership will be contextually literate, organizationally savvy and leadership smart. (p. 67)

However, to be successful on all these fronts is the biggest current leadership challenge our school leaders have been facing.

### **Silver Lining in the Clouds of Chaos**

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"Many of the most innovative breakthroughs occur during times of crisis," Thomas writes, and the current turmoil provides us with the opportunity to push the edges of innovation and seek better ways of doing things.

This is a time when school leaders--already willing and used to tackling new situations and acting on incomplete reformation--must develop an even higher tolerance for ambiguity. "Our circumstances in the public arena will no longer be stable--however, our work is still clear," Thomas writes. We must draw on the same willingness to face challenges head-on that inspired us to become school leaders in the first place.

While there are no simple, painless solutions to raising student achievement or maintaining quality programs with fewer resources, learning by trial and error is not an option for school administrators in this era of accountability. (Aceves, 2003, para. 2-4)

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Much has been said in the above section about the problems. In this section, an effort has been made to explore potential opportunities brought about by chaos. It seems that chaos has brought all the troubles, but that is not wholly true. For example, Martin (1997) suggested "The turbulence of the external environment stemming from political economic, technological and social developments has...brought a range of new opportunities and problems... (as cited in Rowe, 2008, p. 144). Literally, the "Edge of Chaos" is the middle ground between Stability and Chaos. At the Edge of Chaos the context is not so dynamic, non-linear and unpredictable that the



organization cannot survive; instead patterns of short-term predictability are present alongside unpredictable movement in the pursuit of fitness (McCarthy, 2011, p. 35). In such situations, Anderson (1999) maintains that leaders need to be versatile to the demands of their role, by being sensitive to changes in their environment (as cited in McCarthy, 2011, p. 35). Relating to how one organization or a school leader can thrive in such situations, a school leader put it this way:

*It is not the way, but the only way that we should take reins of the situation. To thrive in such a chaotic socio-political context demands much more on the part of the school leaders. They need to be multifaceted leaders who do not only adopt the changes, rather be the change agents themselves. You need to be proactive, visionary and ... to initiate the change process yourselves, so that all others may follow you. Still we have school leaders who are not even able to adapt changes; rather they are being driven away by them.*

*For me, thriving in such condition is possible only when we go for collaboration with the community members, other schools in the surrounding and of course, making a strong collective voice to appeal the government to be stern in implementing good policies. (Vice Principal)*

In my query on what more than ‘schools as Zone of Peace’ commitment, he responded with disbelief that:

*Declaration of school as zone of peace is not an achievement in itself unless it starts making sense. I haven't found it to hold any water. This is much too populist. Though this slogan provides room for optimism, doubts and confusion linger as to whether that commitment be actualized in real sense. (Vice Principal)*

However, another school leader saw some light in the government effort. He expressed his ideas on the declaration of 'peace zone' as:

*It is of course good news that the government has declared schools as zone of peace. (Principal B)*

The principal had stated that very optimistic note in the first interview session with him, however, after quite a long time, almost a year or so, I again asked him about his say on the declaration of peace zone. This time, he was seen to be more frustrated with the slack government .He poured his anger over the government as:

*When the schools were declared zone of peace, we were very hopeful that that would be literally implemented. We had been more hopeful because most of the political parties have also expressed their commitment on that. However, we were sad to hear about the vandalism of schools and their buses, school shut downs, educational strikes, and so on called by all including teachers, students unions, and school administrators following the week of the declaration. And the government has become nothing more than a passive onlooker. It has no concern about the children's basic right to education. Why should it make commitments when it cannot implement them? (Principal B, Protocol # 04)*

While elaborating further on the political commitment on SZOP, he expressed with much dissatisfaction:

*It was hypocritical of the political parties and the government bodies who, on one hand, declare and commit to SZOP, yet remain at the back door while it comes to actualizing their commitments. (Principal B, Protocol # 04)*

I do not think it will be an exaggeration when we say that our school leaders are having a rough time. The years in the last decade were their worst since they were

directly affected by the conflict-related activities and lack of political commitment to education, but even after the announcement of SZOP, the situations have not been much better. It is equally true that everyone acknowledges the complex challenges of school leadership at present; however, they are not in a position to respond to this in a meaningful way. If this persists, at any point in time a school can collapse completely. Therefore, school leaders cannot just fiddle with their advertisements and student enrollment in these times waiting for the government to respond to this situation in a better way. McCarthy (2011) also comments that “Acknowledging this phenomenon ultimately changes the underlying assumptions made about working environments and leadership; organizations are dynamic and so should their leaders be” (p. 35).

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I work with schools who are challenged in a number of ways, all working flat out to support their students, families and local communities. The underlying linking issue for most is that they have never got to the point of really understanding and knowing their school, to a level where they can predict or act immediately to internal or external change. In education we call schools with plans and processes and systems resilient, sustainable institutions. They are the ones who can capture the right initiatives for themselves and scale them up to innovate by doing things differently. These are the schools that are ripe to move to the next stage through a secure and managed transition. However, most of the schools that are in the academy programme or BSF are not reliant enough for the whole-scale change that the two programmes should bring. The point here is that you can only begin to change education at school or local level once you have got forward momentum through having a complete understanding of your school context, systems and processes. (Page, 2008, p. 10)

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The other part, yet more important these days, is the burning issue of incorporating ICT in instructional pedagogy. A school leader realized that the things as mentioned above like the political commitment and government's interventions are unlikely to be waited long. He said:

*Moreover, we don't have any control over them. They are beyond our capacity. So, what I feel these days is let's set them aside which we cannot do at our level. But we should do many other things that we can do. At least, we should realize the contribution of digital technologies in our social as well as academic life. They have given us new and better ways to teach and learn. The explosive growth of technology in every aspect of society offers us a unique opportunity to engage our children in social and educational life. Now our focus should be on incorporating technology in (school) education that makes us distinct from others in the present context, at least. (In-charge)*

We are at the threshold of a worldwide revolution in learning. A new electronic learning environment is replacing the linear, text-bound culture of conventional schools. There has also been in the last two decades a rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Murray (2003) said that “information and communication technologies are raising the bar on the competencies needed to succeed in the 21st century, and they are compelling us to revisit many of our assumptions and beliefs” (para. 3).

Hargrove and Prasad (2010) also cautioned that “While the amount of technology that can be employed by teachers is almost limitless, it is also important to keep in mind that the use of technology needs to be focused on specific educational goals” (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 47). To that end, they further said that school stakeholders need to set goals that they seek to achieve through the employment of

technology. Once the goals have been established, the next step would be to ensure that teachers have adequate knowledge about and practice with the technology that they plan to use. Despite this dire need to prepare teachers on the use of ICT, this tech-high time has also created new opportunities for schools. Thomson (2007) pointed to ways education benefits from ICT:

It is not simply that schools must educate children and young people for a vastly changed labour market and a different world. Education itself can benefit from ICTs which offer new possibilities for the storage, archiving, representation, sharing and processing of information. The challenge for schools then is not only to educate children for the knowledge society but also to educate in, through, with and about this new interconnected world.

(Thomson, 2007, p. 29)

A school leader also believed in the enormous potential brought by ICT in education. He said:

*There is a huge potential to excel in school system if and only if we could incorporate ICT in school system, right from instructional methodology to data driven decision making. We are already into that path and hope that it will give us better outcomes despite the challenges we face. Especially the use of technology in classroom teaching has a deep and positive impact not only in students' learning but also in parental perspective towards their children's schooling. Many parents have said this in the PTA meetings that the classes with multimedia were taken by the children with motivation. (Coordinator B)*

Fortunately, ICTs underpin this new form of learning. Though many struggling schools have not made much use of ICTs in their school context, now all of them realize that ICTs are a must for a school to prepare the students for and face the

challenges of the contemporary challenges, normally referred to as the 21st century benchmarks. Dotlich et al. (2009) also held that:

These changes create new possibilities and directions for improving overall processes of schooling. The current trends prompt the evolution and expansion of leadership roles and opportunities for others at the school, swelling the boundaries of responsibility and accountability for leadership action beyond the principal's office to include teachers and other school and community members as partners in decision making and leaders of instructional improvement. (p. 27)

Moreover, some leaders have felt the need to network with the like-minded individuals and schools with a common purpose and to form a "networked society" (Thomson, 2007, p. 29). A school leader expressed his ideas on the networking and collaborating with other partners and benefits of doing so in this way:

*We have such mutual collaboration with two other schools in the community. Recently, we have agreed on networking with [a renowned] school. We mutually benefit from sharing the resources. Our staff and children get the exposure we otherwise could not give them. They are happy. Besides, especially in troubled times (referring to strikes and vandalism), this collaboration is a boon. Everyone speaks for us collectively. (Principal A)*

The participant experienced that they have benefitted greatly through collaboration with other schools. From the conversation with this participant, I reflected that:

*Networking with others has been a powerful weapon for schools today. Unless we collaborate with other schools, we cannot do everything needed for our students in the mere capacity of a single school's resources. (Memo # 06)*

For Lippman (2013), “Collaborative settings can include all areas of a school, encompassing classrooms and adjacent areas outside them” (p. 35). Highlighting the significance of networking with others, Thomson (2007) also suggested that:

The ‘networked society’ also offers a new organizational form for schools.

Through the development of new strategic alliances which are local and global, staff and pupils can exchange ideas, undertake projects, develop joint programmes and add significantly to the learning available to all in the extended community. (p. 29)

Another school leader strongly felt the impact of chaos on the school system and felt the imminent need to tackle it collectively. He shared:

*Despite these troubled situations, we have not yet given up. We are rather building a collaborative system among the schools in the community so that we can face the challenges collectively.* (Vice Principal)

Another school leader was quite driven by chaos and saw almost no hope in the beginning seem to feel that he got some insight over time, and said:

*The other part, i.e. prospects seem very bleak to me. Yet, it depends on the leaders. It is high chance that some school leaders can set new standards, prove themselves innovative and gain a fair edge if they can address the challenges of the century. It is at this time (transition), some radical things can happen. You know a smooth sea never made a skillful sailor.* (Coordinator A)

All the discussions above lay the foundation that despite chaotic turbulence, it is possible to move on and thrive in school leadership. Commonly chaos is taken as a formidable word, but it is not so when we understand the facets of it. With chaos comes the need to excel, and I believe that the school leaders are all on a journey to

becoming accomplished leaders, nonetheless, it is also true that chaos can simply sweep away those who cannot build a resilient system. To conclude this section, I would again put forward the ideas as expressed by Dotlich et al. (2009):

Our descriptions of the complexity, diversity, and uncertainty trends are meant to foster awareness and understanding, not fear and trepidation. As challenging as it is to be a leader in the current environment, it is also possible to thrive. To do so, however, you must understand the impact of the dramatic trends in the external environment and develop leadership skills that allow you to deal with their impact effectively. (p. 27)

### **Conclusion**

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“Chaos” is a frightening word, but you will have to get used to it if you desire or hold leadership positions in today’s organizations. Snuggle deeper into the lexicographical security blanket. If you prefer “turbulence” or “unrest,” or “confusion” – fine. Whatever term you’ve chosen, my point is that stability is no longer the prevalent condition of our age. All that seems simple and comforting is certain to give way to complex and nerve-wracking substitutes. The very core of success is in the midst of transition. (Conner, 2003, p. 1, as cited in Curtis, 2009, p. 104)

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Chaos prevails. It exists in the school system so much as it exists in every sphere of social life. More often than not, it is viewed as a challenge which cannot simply be responded with ease. And that is true. It calls for school leaders to have the guts to balance external and internal change efforts, and to believe that the very core of success lies in the midst or at the edge of chaos.

Uncertainty and unpredictability have been the key features these days due to the consistent political meddling, unionism and unhealthy competition among



schools. Moreover, the teaching learning activities are massively affected though different kinds of agreements have been made in different time in order to make the sector peaceful and politics-free. Yet, the issue of ICT integration in education has been gaining momentum in the recent years significantly. But our schools are not yet ready to transform the school system digitally more because of the cost factor.

Leaders in schools are confronted by external and internal challenges and expectations that make demands on their time, expertise, energies and emotional wellbeing. The changing scenarios of our schools are reflected in the increasingly diverse mix of leadership problems. Our schools are facing a number of challenges that require committed and responsive leadership at all levels. This means that schools have to respond to different and greater challenges than ever before. The challenges become toughest when we lack the resources to support us. Therefore, channeling the resources should be the utmost priority of the school leaders.

My reflection shows that school leaders, in particular, are strategically positioned to ensure that their schools provide quality education by creating conditions for effective teaching and learning in their institutions. For this, school leaders must be careful in maintaining the balance between external and internal demands, and between providing leadership and managerial command. In many occasions, we see conflicts between the administration and the teachers and other staff. Even a small thing matters in leadership as in relationship. How we speak and treat subordinates may altogether change the way they perceive us.

The challenge for leaders is to develop open-eyed awareness of political realities without becoming overwhelmed by frustration and anger. Principals can do so by frequenting professional gatherings, reading education media avidly, and networking with other school leaders (Riley, 2009, Social/Political Reality section,

para. 8). Moreover, the policies and commitments should be more than lip-service, they should be operational overhauls. If we do not forge a radically different path (from the earlier declarations and neglect) now, the future of Nepalese schools and education system as a whole will be (or maybe it is already) in serious jeopardy. Moreover, in the more challenging era of perpetual unrest, finding meaning and direction while operating at the rim of chaos will be the hallmark of the...successful, nimble organization.

School leaders who participated in the study seemed mixed in their responses to the leadership challenges in chaotic times. Some school leaders said that facing the consequence of external socio-political turmoil can be a challenge; it is so for almost all schools. In contrast, the other leaders focused on the challenges inside the school – managing conflicts of interest, supporting and challenging teacher practices, and dealing with a range of challenges and situations including teacher and student behaviors. A school in-charge summed it all stating that *“Whether true or otherwise, the fact is that there is lack of co-operation between school administration, management and teachers. And the task for managing them all is very difficult.”*

The school leaders reported that the chaotic situations they confront are related to socio-political uncertainty, and economic crisis. They face challenges also due to rising expectations for schools and schooling in a century characterized by technological innovation, and globalization. These are simple, even simplistic, examples of the types of challenges leaders face every day in dealing with complexity, diversity, and uncertainty. Therefore, the daily work of school leaders can be best understood by chaos theory since the characteristics of these chaotic situations in this study were similar to the major concepts of Chaos Theory.

## CHAPTER V

### LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICES

This chapter is devoted to an interpretive discussion of school leadership practices common and unique to different schools in many different situations. I begin by acknowledging the diverse background of the schools in terms of location, size, financial and human resources, student success rates, and acclaimed fame. I have found that some schools were making a steady progress while others were just crawling onto the path of becoming established.

In an endeavor to explore the prevailing leadership practices, I focused on the individual and collective stories of the eight secondary school leaders. These narratives explored the personal, professional, and organizational dimensions of the leadership passage and the early strategies the school leaders used to map the administrative terrain of leadership. These stories were derived from open conversations with them at different stages of their career passage, and they described the motivations, dreams, and challenges which brought coherence and meaning to their journey.

This study aims to understand how Nepalese school leaders manage chaotic events happening in their daily activities through the lens of Chaos Theory. I argue that traditional linear modes of explanation fail to successfully address the situations that school principals face oftentimes since today's school leaders are faced with increasing demands for change, reform, and improvement against the backdrop of socio-political disturbances.

Each of the following topics brings to life the world of the school administrators, and teachers providing a pragmatic look at what it means to be a school leader in today's schools. A point in case to be noted here is that during the interpretation of the field data, especially when quoting the participants, and linking with relevant research literature, the term 'principal' or 'head (teacher)' has been very often used. But my intentionality is to understand the term as school leader (which is of course not restricted to the role 'principal' or 'head teacher'), and I have tried to do so in my discussion. Yet, the term may refer to as it is when it specifically makes reference to the post of a 'principal' or 'head teacher'.

### **Taking the Helms of Leadership**

Before jumping into excavating the leadership practices in and around Nepalese schools, I think it makes much sense first to put the concept of school leadership in perspective. What does it mean to be a school leader? Who am I as a principal or vice principal or coordinator? These questions perhaps more than any other confront each individual who enters the leadership position – though leadership is not always characterized by the position one holds. Jenlink (2010) held that there is not a clear answer to these questions, nor should there be, particularly given the evolving nature of the leadership in today's schools (p. xi).

Though there is no universal definition of school leadership, there are of course some commonalities in the understanding of what leadership constitutes in the school setting. The participants in this study talked about the experiences they had about being a school leader. A school leader gave particular importance to principal leadership and shared that:

*It is about the job of a principal. The leader of a school is its principal. Since, everything including the vision and school culture is determined by the quality of the principal. (Coordinator B)*

It is generally considered that educational leadership focuses on the effectiveness of the principal. “There is no guessing or wondering if this is true. It simply is” said Tareilo (2010, p. 5). Tareilo further argued that “The success of the children, the culture of the campus, and even the cleanliness of the school are a direct result of the leadership influence of the principal” (Tareilo, 2010, p. 5). However, there are plethoras of literature that simply negate the idea that leadership is not restricted to principalship even at the struggling school set up. As the other participant took a comprehensive view of leadership, he opposed the idea of the earlier coordinator. For him:

*Most often, school leader is considered to be the principal – a person in a position of formal authority. However, for me every one of us is a leader. A class teacher is a leader in his class, among his friends, and of course he or she is a part of the school leadership team. (Coordinator A)*

The coordinator makes it clear that leadership is not limited to a few people in formal authority, rather it is everyone’s business. Harris and Lambert’s (2003) idea of school leadership is also in line with how this coordinator felt about the notion of school leadership. Harris and Lambert said that “School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role and a discrete set of individual behaviours. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole” (Harris & Lambert, 2003, p. 16). Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility in leadership.

Another participant also focused on team leadership, though they have a hierarchical structure of administration. He said:

*I've been able to get people to work with me, regardless of their reporting line. Everything runs more smoothly because we are now a team. (Vice Principal)*

Truly effective school leadership should not be the responsibility of one individual, however; it should be a cooperative effort involving a number of individuals-from the state level to the district level to the classroom. The Wallace Foundation (2008) further states that “Leadership is not about one person, it’s about building a shared commitment and building a leadership team” (p. 2). Coordinator A further elaborated that:

*Everybody is a leader of something. If you give people the ownership then they will do a good job. We try to give people shared responsibilities and accountabilities. (Coordinator A)*

This leader shared that they have a leadership team and all the members in the school are leader of their tasks. He also commented on his school head as saying:

*The principal is an experienced person. He is also a dynamic leader, he knows how to influence people, how to negotiate and get things done. He is clear in his vision. He is also very friendly with everyone. He often asks for our opinion on anything before implementing. (Coordinator A)*

While the coordinator spoke of the role of his principal, I thought it more relevant to inquire the principal himself about his leadership. When asked about his leadership role, the principal said:

*It's a shared vision. We in the management team know where we're going and we put a lot of effort into continuing professional development, looking at the*

*training needs of staff. All HoDs monitor their subject areas. We reflect on what we're doing, involving staff in evaluations.* (Principal A)

Another school leader perceived leadership as influence rather than position.

He shared his leadership passage as saying:

*I came to from the post of a teacher, through vice principal and now principal. But I still feel like I am no more than a teacher. I began my first principalship with only three years of leadership experience as a vice principal and without any formal training of leadership. And my only goal was and is to provide students with best practices in teaching and learning. I brought with me a great deal of successful school experience from my role as a teacher.*

(Principal A, Protocol # 01)

While many people expect leaders to be in the driver's seat – intelligent, confident, competent, and in control – in fact many school leaders have no training in leadership, let alone educational qualification. So was the case with the above principal. However, he was self trained over time because of his long professional experience in teaching. He further added:

*There is a little difference in being and not being in a formal leadership position, but in terms of influence, I had a good influence in management even when I was only a teacher. So, it is about exercising your influence on the overall functioning of the school system that characterizes your leadership.*

(Principal A, Protocol # 01)

One of my research participants defined school leadership as fundamentally based on people and relationship. He focused on the relationship and interaction while conceptualizing leadership. For him:

*It is about people, all on the same page of providing education to children. It is about the daily interactions we have with the staff, students, parents and community. We have to decide what kind of atmosphere we want in the building because that atmosphere reflects our attitude and beliefs. (Principal B)*

Duignan (2003) also said that “the perception of ‘excessive managerialism’ has led to a call for the transformation of managers and administrators into leaders who focus more on people-related issues in their organizations” (p. 1). Yet another school leader emphasized capability and influence while defining leadership.

*Leadership is the capability to direct a mass, and getting things done with influence. It is also the ability to handle the contexts besides providing curricular instructions and motivating staff for a common goal. (Vice Principal)*

Bennis and Nanus (2003, p. 19) expressed that leadership is “what gives an organization its vision and its ability to translate that vision into reality” (as cited in Tareilo, 2010, p. 4). Tareilo (2010) also suggested that “One of the first concepts you must accept about school leadership is the fact that it takes a combination of abilities to lead and manage” (p. 5). This concept has been brought forward by almost all of my participants. Moreover, one school leader attached particular importance to the job task of the principalship and said that:

*Although it is one of the most demanding positions in school education, the principalship is the necessary leadership driving force behind school improvement. (Principal B)*

In my query on how it felt like being at the helms of leadership in school at uncertain times, he said:



*At times, I feel like quitting the job and going abroad or catching some other jobs. But I am determined to lead among the dynamic tensions. I feel that anyone can handle a school at smooth time and it's during adversity a genuine leader shows his capabilities. This feeling pushes me through. (Principal B)*

The present context is really very challenging. It has created additional challenges that manifest in diverse ways. And these challenges have exerted significant influence on the lived experiences of the school leaders especially when they are expected to do more with less.

### **Characterizing Leadership**

The school leaders were asked to characterize the leadership practices within their schools. Participants were asked to frame responses around specific initiatives they facilitated and/or developed to help their schools be successful in order to keep the interviews focused on actual practices rather than theories of action.

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As well as being pedagogical leaders, principals are responsible for the day-to-day management of a broad range of policy and operational matters, including personnel, finance, property, health and safety, and the interpretation and delivery of the national curriculum. Principals are accountable to their boards of trustees for the effective conduct of these responsibilities. They are accountable, with the board, to their school community and local people. They also link with government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office who share responsibility for an effective school system. In short, principals are ultimately responsible for the day-to-day management of everything that happens in their schools. (Kiwi Leadership for Principals, 2008, p. 7)

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School leaders fulfill a variety of leadership roles and responsibilities, exercise a variety of leadership practices and, of course, they play an important role in “promoting and sustaining change in schools. Without their efforts, schools cannot change or improve to become places where all students are welcome, and where all students learn essential academic and non-academic lessons in preparation for life in the community” (Salisbury & McGregor, 2005, p. 2). Moreover, their role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 5).

Regarding their perceived leadership quality, they characterized their leadership in different ways. One school leader expressed:

*I don't know for sure whether I am a good leader or a bad one. But I have found my colleagues and community members calling me a good principal. Once I was about to hand over my responsibility to the vice principal (I wanted to study MSc for 2 years), then strong force from parents and colleagues compelled me to hold the job, and I even could not go for study. Nevertheless, I managed to earn a degree in sociology. My teachers, students and staff are happy with my leadership. (Principal B)*

He further added that:

*Despite the fact that I do not hold any formal training or qualification in education, So far, my leadership seems good because all the subordinates and even students and parents regard me as a good principal. Therefore, I am convinced that I am a good leader. But I have the feeling that I need to get a degree in leadership or management. This is what my role here demands. I have heard from my friend that [...] university has a program on [School Leadership]; I am desperate about joining that program. (Principal B)*

This leader's intention to join some leadership or management program seems positive in making himself a better school leader developing his understanding of the recent theories and practices of teaching learning and educational management. In this line, Valentine and Prater (2011) noted that "Effective principals know about and understand teaching and learning theory, are knowledgeable about the latest educational trends. They are available to teachers to help critique these new trends and teaching practices and to determine their applicability to the classroom" (p. 22). For Fullan (2002), leaders in effective organizations have a constellation of characteristics that he identified as hope (unwarranted optimism), enthusiasm, and energy. He stated:

It is not necessary to be born with these qualities; a leader's vitality can be sapped or enhanced by the conditions under which he or she works or lives. Successful leaders tend to engage others with their energy and are, in turn, energized by the activities and accomplishments of the group. (Fullan, 2002, p. 2)

Another participant had a different say. He was reluctant to characterize his leadership himself. He wanted to show by action whether he could prove to be a successful leader. He said:

*The time will tell. My fellow staff will reflect. It will be demonstrated in the academic success and overall school performance in the district and the nation.* (Principal A)

It is true that regardless of location, size or socioeconomic demographics, communities demand that schools lead the instructional and academic performance. School leaders are judged on the basis of what performance the school as a whole

brings about. Characterizing the leadership practices in his school in general and his leadership style in particular, a participant puts his experience in his way:

*Ours is a normally growing academic institution. We have succeeded to achieve both qualitative and quantitative growth of the school during the recent decade. In this regard, I desire to claim the application of transformational leadership in our school but the changes are not rapid as the transformational leadership theoretically demands. In addition to this, I prefer to say ethical leadership as well. (HoD)*

Regarding the responsibilities of school leaders, a participant expressed that their roles should focus on the teachers' and students' learning. He said:

*Principals (school leaders) should be able to perform the daily operations of the school and lead schools in a way that student learning and teachers' development are the focus of interest. (Senior teacher)*

When asked whether they have done so in their school, the school leader pointed to the fact school leaders are conscious of the right of the students to get education in a smooth way. He shared:

*I must say we have been much concentrated on smooth operation of the school on a daily basis and to ensure that students learning remains unaffected, however, we do not have a regular focus on teacher development. At the same time, our primary job of operating the schools on a regular basis ensuring students' learning is also affected not because we are not sincere for their learning, but because there are circumstances, you know, that have become regular uncertainties. (Senior teacher)*

Another participant focused on setting expectations, giving direction and mobilizing resources as the prime responsibility of the school leaders. He said:

*We should set high expectations for academic development of all students, set direction for overall growth of the organization, including teachers and staff development. And more importantly, we have to assure the resources to meet high standards.* (Coordinator A)

These roles are also reinforced by Leithwood et al. (2004) who have identified three major aspects of successful leadership while improving school (as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2008, p. 1). First is *setting directions*. A successful leader aims at developing shared visions and goals about the school that undergird a sense of purpose – an aspect of culture. Second is *developing people*. A successful leader provides both informal and formal opportunities for staff to advance themselves for the purpose of quality teaching and learning as well as relationships and trust. His third aspect is *redesigning the organization*. A successful leader knows when and how to modify organizational structure; reinforce collaboration; and develop organizational routines so as to strengthen the school culture.

It seemed to me as if the participant was theorizing the leadership responsibility. So, I asked him about the practice in his school. He replied:

*Our purpose is to produce the very best learning outcomes for every student, aiming for them to reach their potential in all subjects. Our teachers genuinely care for the safety and wellbeing of every student in their classes. Our quality teachers continue to develop professionally to further support student learning.* (Coordinator A)

He also added:

*Parents and guardians are also invited to attend our PTA meetings to partake in the ongoing discussions around these current topics. We also take their suggestions.* (Coordinator A)

When I asked about the scenario of parental involvement in school activities, the principal of the school, he said:

*Though we have been doing an excellent job in terms of teacher and students performance, we have not been able to involve the parents formally in our decision making process. Though we have a PTA meeting every month (with the parents of the students belonging to a class each month), there is quite low participation of parents. It might be because they think that they have no suggestions since we are doing an excellent job (laughs...)! On the other hand, we have been able to hire and retain high-quality teachers and hold them responsible for student learning, we are not yet able to provide up-to-date technology and instructional materials. You know, some teachers [like English and Social Studies], they called me old-fashioned. It was all because of the resources. We have a little resource to do more. That's a paradox. But now, we are slowly transforming our school system with ICTs – both in administration and instruction. (Principal A)*

This long elaboration of the principal on the parental involvement in school activities showed that they have been serious about parental participation in the schooling of their children. He also talked of their efforts in updating and upgrading the school system with ICT so as to transform the way we have been educating our children.

### **Leadership in Practice**

What makes a good leader? Armstrong (2008, p. 25) said there is no universal answer to this question and cited Loo-Tzu (6th century BC) who had a pretty good stab at it:

A leader is best

When people barely know that he exists.

Not so good when people obey and acclaim him.

Worst when they despise him.

Fail to honour people, they fail to honour you.

But a good leader who talks little,

When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,

They will all say, 'We did this ourselves'.

Leadership has long been perceived to be important to the effective functioning of organizations in general and, more recently, of schools in particular. When we consider school leadership we are actually concerned with leadership practice – with how it is exercised and transacted (Southworth, 2008, p. iii). Thus, leadership is about behavior, action and practice.

In the current landscape of challenges facing school leadership, smooth functioning of the school and improving teaching and learning emerge as the prime responsibility. The principal's role in fulfilling this responsibility remains crucial. Yet consistent with current notions of leadership distribution, principals cannot accomplish all that is expected without the careful and thoughtful leadership of teachers and others in the school. The building of such partnerships requires principals to focus clearly and consistently on a vision for learning, and to promote inquiry into practice through the creation of structures that support collaborative work focused on improving teaching and learning. By distributing leadership for instructional improvement and taking seriously their own ongoing, professional learning, principals can work in concert with others to accomplish great results for students.

There is no question that being the principal of a school requires a person to be not only knowledgeable but prepared and ready to accept the ever-changing responsibilities facing the principalship. Whether one assumes the position on an elementary or secondary campus, the deciding factor regarding the success of the school and its students is most assuredly the leadership ability the principal possesses. (Tareilo, 2010, preface, p. ix)

When interviewed, school leaders described their perception and beliefs about leadership in chaotic situations. They also reflected that there are still many gaps in our knowledge about effective educational leadership and other managerial responsibilities in ways that move our school forward.

Forrester (n.d.) stated that at the heart of every successful organization is the driving force of effective leadership and comments that weak leadership can wreck the soundest strategy and even an organization itself (para. 1). Therefore, strong leadership in education has to be dynamic and bold to accommodate the changing trends. Since the youth today is more knowledgeable and informed than us when we were students, leadership in this case cannot be traditional; it has to be evolving as per the demands and needs of the stakeholders. As one participant put it:

*I have been a teacher in various schools for the last 12 years and now I have been a vice principal for 3 years. I have realized that there is no best leadership style in a school setup as one has to mix all the styles for the leadership role to be effective. We need to be flexible in selecting the leadership style to suit the situation. (Vice Principal)*

Another school leader put his ideas in this way:

*The main roles of school leaders are to build an effective leadership team, to develop school values, and a shared vision, to maintain discipline in the*



*school, to ensure effective teaching and learning, to encourage participatory decision making. And to carry out these roles, the principals need to have interpersonal skills and to exercise collegiality. (Coordinator B)*

In my query to how the school leaders design their school system to support and sustain the overall performance of the school, one participant's remark was noteworthy. He said:

*Keeping the possibility of external pressure and disturbance in mind, I schedule the short term and long term strategic plan in advance. I inspire and motivate the fellow staff to accomplish the works with due alert of any kind of uncontrollable adverse situation. Such kinds of pre-caution and consciousness ease me to sustain the overall school performance. (HoD)*

Another school leader also put his ideas of practice in designing the school culture to support school performance. He said:

*Developing an enabling culture in the school is what I believe the first requirement in supporting school performance. As school is an academic institution, the sole success of it rests on the shoulders of the teachers. The selection and recruitment of good teachers, retaining them with satisfactory benefits and creating a learning environment, professional development is another step. Similarly, regular meeting and discussions with students, parents, and teachers is another cornerstone for better school performance. And finally, developing the school's overall physical and human resources in comparison with other schools in the vicinity, incorporating technologies, and introducing new subjects to address today's demands can lead to gain a competitive edge. (Vice Principal)*

When I expressed my doubt over whether he was implementing all those, he expressed:

*Though we are very clear about how we can go ahead, we are hampered by the financial crisis. (Vice Principal)*

Since school deals with people, it is imperative that the school leadership has to manage people. Armstrong (2008) said that “If you manage people you have to manage people problems. They are bound to happen and you are the person on the spot who has to handle them” (p. 136). Regarding the practice of responding to behavior problems and maintain discipline in the school, a principal shared:

*We have a discipline committee that looks into the cases of misconduct and .... of students. We follow the suggestions of the committee in taking actions against the students. Depending upon the nature and severity of the cases, the committee suggests us whether to send the student(s) for counseling or to suspend them from class or hostel for some days, or to rusticate them. It is very much systematic. (Principal A)*

Other school leaders also reported to have such discipline committees in their schools. However, they said that the committee is almost inactive. Yet, one school had the provision of a discipline in-charge aka DI. Another participant’s voice represents almost the overall scenario of the disciplinary practices in Nepalese schools when he said:

*Though we have a discipline committee, it’s very common even elsewhere that it’s the teacher noticing any breach of code of conduct on the part of the students who takes action. If the cases are a bit serious, they inform the coordinators or even principals and they collectively handle the case. There is*

*almost no chance that the issues are directed to the discipline committee.*

*Nevertheless, I believe that that would be a better practice.* (Coordinator A)

They consider such problems as a way of life, which do not need to be discussed with special focus. So it is much structured in case of student discipline problems. However, regarding teacher discipline, in my observation, there was no such provision as discipline committee or teachers' code of conduct except in one school among my samples. The schools which did not have such committee or rule book, they were found to make emergent decision calling a meeting of the concerned stakeholders. Armstrong (2008, p. 136) suggested an approach to managing people problems in an organization. According to him, the basic approach we should use in tackling people problems is to:

1. Get the facts. Make sure that you have all the information or evidence you need to understand exactly what the problem is.

2. Weigh and decide. Analyse the facts to identify the causes of the problem.

Consider any alternative solutions to the problem and decide which is likely to be the most successful.

3. Take action. Following the decision, plan what you are going to do, establish goals and success criteria and put the plan into effect.

4. Check results. Monitor the implementation of the plan and check.

In times of uncertainty, deterioration in academic performance and lower participation of the stakeholders can kick-start a vicious cycle in which self-confidence and belief of the leader also starts to fall. Tetenbaum and Laurence (2011) asserted that "To continually push back on the followers to do the work and take responsibility for the organization's problems and to hold steady in the face of resistance is not something everyone who purports to be a leader can sustain" (p. 49).

During uncertain times, therefore, there's more pressure than ever on leadership and management teams to hold the workforce together and perform its responsibility.

Dotlich et al. (2009) problematized chaos when they said:

We routinely hear that the intersection of technology, media, regulatory bodies, shareholder activism, politics, people, and competition has created a dynamic playing field with almost unfathomable risk and uncertain opportunity. Everywhere leaders are saying the same thing: The complexity, diversity, and uncertainty of their world have increased, and their leadership ability is not keeping pace. (p. 9)

A school leader, with much sigh, getting tired of the impeding chaos, also shared:

*I'm troubled by the many challenges we face today. We face the problems arising inside the school and also the problems occurring from outside. Most of the times, we face the problems (biggest) imminent from outside, to which we have no solution. And when everything seems just fine, we have internal problems. (Vice Principal)*

Another participant said that he has been overwhelmed by the disorder in the organizational life and that his performance has been affected. He said:

*Coming back to our question, the answer is definitely chaos affects the leadership performance. We decide something today, but while it is being implemented we can't take that up and further. We appear foolish. But anyway, we have to go along and take a newer step. We should know at changing times, all our plans are not going to work well. So we have to think the other way also before we put the plans into action. (Coordinator A)*

Another school leader specifically talks about the school competitiveness and organizational branding. He said:

*Our aim is on all round development of our students. We produce bona fide citizens. Rather than focusing solely on academics, we equally focus on extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. We are promoting sportspersonship in our girls [...boys are already better]. Rather say, we don't have to compete the way other schools are competing. We are a separate brand. We are [CHAMPIONS]. We don't run after what others are doing. We do what we value. And we value what the world values. We have no craving for momentous limelight. We are steadily keeping our name and gaining more trust of our guardians. Right now, we are working hard to making our students, especially grade X, number one. I hope with the cooperation of our teacher friends, all of our students will come out with distinction in the SLC this year. (Principal A)*

Another school leader perceives that sometimes the advancement becomes a problem especially when one is not in a position to respond to them in a positive way. It's not badly perceived when technology keeps making advancements making our life easier and transforming our lifestyle, however, the problem it has added to the school leaders is the multiplying pressures to incorporate the technological advances into school education. That is more traumatic when struggling schools have to compete with other schools in the community. One leader shared:

*Because the world is changing so rapidly, it's easy for parents and teachers to become confused and baffled. Our students have become technological whizzes. Therefore, as teachers, we're aware of the technological revolution, but most of our students know far more about it than we do. They've grown up*

*with it. And yet we have not been able to offer them the basic technology education, let alone using technology in instruction in all the classes. It is very sad to share that only because we lack resources, the students' number is getting down every year. (Principal B)*

Another school leader perceived this as the overriding of the new generation.

He expressed that:

*These days students are very smart in terms of the use of technology. They have the world in their pocket. Grade 4 students are very good at laptop use, which I myself am not. They know net surfing. So in this context, if we cannot amend the teaching style that will be of no use for our students. They will no longer have the patience to stay in the classroom. We need to be project-based, laboratory-based, field-work oriented and maximum use of computer and information technology like internet. So we have got different labs (science, math, English, computer with internet), we have libraries in all the three section junior, middle and senior. We are also preparing our teachers for e-based teaching/learning in the IT Department. We are thinking of building a multimedia hall with seminar setting. (Principal A)*

Whereas another school leader depicts a contrary picture, yet he is also optimistic that they can bring forth an outshining future. He expressed:

*Right now we're in a struggling phase, and we can't think of outshining within a year or two. But we definitely have some plans for gearing up our reputation in our area. We are holding a meeting of the local stakeholders to discuss what new programs and facilities are to be introduced. Similarly, we have collected fund from the shareholders to invest more on student and staff facilities, to introduce ICT in instruction, to hire Montessori trained teachers*

*to run pre-school. These are the demands here. Hope within 2-3 years, we will have a good name in the education field. (Coordinator A)*

It seems that the struggling schools seem to be lagging behind in competition, but that has worse impact on the students. Many students find themselves getting further and further behind with no access to technology in schools. It is everyone's worry that we are introducing our children to a big and complex world. To confront this battle, all of the school leaders were found to be trying their best to incorporate ICTs in schools. The resourceful schools like that of the Principal A have little problem with it, especially in terms of investing in ICTs, yet they did not seem to be ahead in this endeavor. While for the poorly resourced and struggling schools, it's a severe headache to collect fund and invest in technology with no apparent hope of gaining quick returns. Here arises a question: How do our leaders cope under these high-pressure circumstances? The answer to this question is as bleak as the leaders themselves have felt about their incapability to address the issue of integrating technology and providing the 21st century education and skills to the children (which they are entitled to get) despite realizing their importance.

Roden (2008) said that "Building, developing and maintaining this superior quality of leadership, especially in uncertain times, requires commitment and an absolute focus on a clear strategy" (p. 6). So, what strategies do our school leaders have? One participant shared:

*Now we are collaborating with [the other] school nearby in terms of technical expertise, and similarly, one INGO is supporting us with computers and multimedia. We hope we can do a bit by next session. (Coordinator B)*

The idea of collaborative working is considered very fruitful in today's complex world, but it is difficult to get right. The very idea of having access to

resources or being resourceful has a tremendous benefit in gaining a fair competitive edge.

### **Leaders as Climate Shapers**

Culture simply means the way we do things. School culture is a set of underlying beliefs, norms and values held by members of the school. Schools develop their culture over time as people work together to solve common problems. The notion of school culture is far from new. In 1932 educational sociologist Williard Waller (1932) argued that every school has a culture of its own, with a set of rituals and folkways and a moral code that shapes behavior and relationships (as cited in Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 8). Along similar lines, Peterson (2005) described school culture in this way:

Schools, as with any organizations, have a deep set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals, traditions, and ceremonies that have built up as staff work together. ... These unstated norms and expectations become embedded in the culture of the school. All one has to do is walk through teachers' lounge, sit in faculty meetings, or participate in committee or team meetings to see the culture at work. (p. 9)

A school leader talked about what kind of school culture they have developed in their school. He said:

*It's a culture whereby people are free to make suggestions and to think of ways to take the school forward. I can't think of instances where staff are turned down. So, in terms of boosting staff confidence, it's an open culture.*

(Vice Principal)

School culture plays a significant role in school reform and improvement, teacher learning, and student achievement. For Rowe (2008), "...culture cannot be



extracted as a variable. The culture of an organization cannot be separated from it - it is inextricably bound up with the organization” (Rowe, 2008, p. 123). A successful principal has to be able to “nudge the process along through their conversations, decisions, public pronouncements, and actions” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 196). While shaping school culture is a central goal of improving schools, it is likely that many existing school cultures are to be deconstructed and in need of reconstruction. As research on the leadership has noted, the daily work of school leaders is characterized by many brief tasks, an enormous variety of activities, constant interruption and fragmentation of actions, considerable ambiguity, and a high degree of cognitive complexity. It is true that the principal faces numerous routine and irregular tasks. These features of the daily tasks of principals make shaping the school culture demanding and complex. Peterson and Deal (2009) further claimed that “Strong, positive school cultures do not just happen. They are built over time.... Schools with unfocused cultures are barely surviving, whereas schools with strong, positive cultures are rich in purpose and abundant in tradition and meaning” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 8).

Referring to his responsibilities in building an enabling environment in the school, a participant said:

*As the team leader, I take the supreme responsibility of planning as well as implementation of the entire programs. But both of these vital tasks are shared by my assistants in all the levels. Monitoring and feedback are the other vital parts of my responsibility. (HoD)*

School leaders struggle with the challenge of how to build school climates that improve practice in an era of heightened uncertainty and increasingly complex adaptive challenges. Leading at the changing scenario begins with being able to

identify a school's current reality, the ability to articulate the changes being considered, and a firm understanding of where the school is headed. Four themes emerged from the respondent interviews as to the role of school leaders as shapers of climate: values and beliefs of the school leaders, leadership styles, fostering learning organization and fine tuning the environment.

The systematic study of school climate has its roots in organisational psychology and research on school effectiveness. Researchers agree that school climate essentially reflects a subjective view of the learning environment at the school level. Relevant aspects of the school environment are the physical environment, the social system, relationships between principals, teachers and students, a sense of community, teacher and student morale, norms among peers, and safety (OECD, 2009, p. 108). In this sense, school climate is fundamental for the quality of schooling and instruction. Regarding the practice of developing a sound school climate, a participant said:

*We have a clear set of guidelines for every member. There are codes of conduct for both students and teachers; we have a school statute where everything is clearly defined. We encourage new ideas and innovation on the part of the staff and students. We welcome their constructive suggestions.*

(Principal A)

Brewer (1993, p. 281) also held the belief that "Clear and consistent school rules and policies tend to improve the general disciplinary climate of the school, and contribute to improved staff and student morale" (as cited in Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 6). Similarly, Lazear (2000) said that "A positive school climate can also have a positive impact on teachers and their working lives just as a positive

organizational climate can benefit employees, increase their job satisfaction and affect their productivity” (as cited in OECD, 2009, p. 40).

### **Values and Beliefs of the School Leaders**

William Shakespeare said it best when he wrote, “To thine own self be true.” How appropriate are his words for school leaders. Tareilo (2010) said that “Before a principal can begin to lead a staff toward sustained school achievement or can even expect to gain the trust and respect of a staff, the principal must know what personal beliefs he or she holds dear” (p. 1). Regarding the values a school leader has to attaining the school goal, a principal shared:

*That is an interesting question. A person with his 30 years of dedicated service in the same institution has been given the responsibility of a principal. In doing so, the institution should have seen some core values in me. It means the institution has a greater hope from me. The same question always comes to my mind: what can I do to show the institution?*

*I was a simple teacher, and then vice principal and now a principal. It means I have collected the values of all of them. So it is easier for me to lead. What is easier here is we have different departments who are self motivated and guide their faculty teachers. We have HoDS, and Coordinators who manage the academics very well. In this way, we have a power delegation to our HoDs and Coordinators. And I have instructed the appointment holders that what they do and speak will reflect my instruction. So, I take responsibility for the duties done by subordinate leaders. Our focus is on increasing interaction among the teachers and staff so that the problems get minimized at the grass root level. I value shared decision making and team work. (Principal A)*

He further made it clear that currently he feels rewarded every day when he makes connections with teachers, students and parents. He said: “It’s truly the best part of this job. I know we are doing great things here.” This affective quality was also reflected in what motivated him.

*I really love coming to school each single day; I’ve seen this building change from a school that only had maybe 150 students back when I was a teacher; we’re now at 2800. . . . I am proud that now many of the teachers here were my students once. It makes me feel wow, this is my school and these are all my students. (Principal A)*

Valentine and Prater (2011) said that “An individual’s personal values, beliefs, and that to which they are committed can evolve constructively through an expansion of one’s knowledge base” (p. 24). This was reflected in the above participant.

Similarly, another participant said that:

*My goals as a new vice principal called for leadership strategies in transformation, collaboration, and collective decision making. One of my primary beliefs is that a safe and caring environment is essential for students and teachers to be successful. (Vice Principal)*

Yet another leader focused on dedication and ethical aspects while defining his values and beliefs towards leadership. For him:

*Success depends on the dedication of the leader. As the most responsible member of an academic institution, I must always be guided by the ethical values and the norm of humanism. I always implement quality principle and care principal along with adequate emphasis to attractive face value. (HoD)*

Peterson and Deal (2009) went on to explain that culture is a powerful web of rituals and traditions, norms and values that affects every corner of school life.

“School culture influences what people pay attention to (focus), how they identify with the school (commitment), how hard they work (motivation), and the degree to which they achieve their goals (productivity)” (pp. 10-11). Thus, different school cultures warrant different leadership strategies.

The findings demonstrated that successful leadership in challenging times is underpinned by the core values and beliefs of the principal. As one principal put it:

*The core beliefs and values of the principal, above all else, determine the kind of school culture that is to be promoted – may it be internal school culture or interaction with the outer environment. Principal’s belief about the professional development of teachers, collaboration with other schools and immediate society, and community commitment for children’s right to education play vital roles in shaping the school climate. (Principal B)*

Another participant held the belief that successful school leadership at present needs clear vision and should focus on causing change. For him:

*A teacher leader should have a clear vision of where he wants to take the school in five or ten years. And share that vision with his followers. Similarly, he should be a strong decision-maker who can influence others with his ideas. At present, one cannot assume a single person be a know-everything-guy, so leadership can be shared. Authority needs to be delegated. He should empower the subordinates. He should also develop a strong bond with his teachers and network with other schools so that they can collaboratively support each other in combating the common school problems. If they think I’ll do myself and I do the best, everyone will meet their end very soon. We need to challenge the status quo. We need to be change agents. (Senior Teacher)*

Salisbury and McGregor (2005) also believed that “Effective principals establish collaborative teams, bringing together key stakeholders who represent different perspectives and roles in the school community” (Salisbury & McGregor, 2005, p. 3). These values and beliefs inform the school leaders’ decisions and actions regarding the provision of individual support and capacity building.

### **Leadership Styles**

Leadership matters. Leadership doesn’t just count – it counts the most. It is through effective leadership that complexities in an organization are minimized. Leadership involves numerous variables – the organization’s purpose, the leader’s and subordinates’ goals, personality, leadership approach, school settings, and human relations. Leithwood et al. (2004) made the point that “...there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2008, p. 1).

It is clear that leadership has to steer the course of action whether in good times or in bad times. Maxwell’s adage “Everything rises and falls on leadership” (Maxwell, 2012, p. ix) stands truer when it is to lead in volatile environments. School leaders cannot expect to be the expert in all areas for which they have ultimate responsibility. Therefore, no single model of leadership could fit all schools. They vary too much in terms of size, location, vision, culture, intellectual capacity and professional maturity of staff. Depending on the environment and contexts, school leaders are found to take one or the other approach and style of leadership, not necessarily sticking to a particular style, of course. Yet, there is always one or the other predominant style that characterizes each leader’s style. A participant seemed to have adopted situational leadership when he said:

*The appropriate style of leadership is dependable on the requirements of the particular situation and the situational variables mediating the interaction between leadership behavior and situations. (Coordinator B)*

Situational leadership fits to a larger extent in chaotic situations. A fixed, one-fit-for-all situations kind of leadership is outdated in the chaotic times. Only the leader possessing particular qualities will arise due to the specific situational circumstances requiring specific leadership abilities. We need to select the leadership style that is appropriate to maximize performance. As one principal shared:

*We regularly review our leadership and management roles, structures, principles, practices and styles so that we can adapt to changes in particular circumstances. (Principal A)*

What the principal shared is also the ethos of the situational leadership. Thus school leaders who have contextual competence to act with contingency according to the situation are always at the frontline of success at the edge of chaos. Since total control of events is not possible, school leaders need to understand that order is created by “human interaction and the feedback processes within the organization” (Haynes, 2003, p. 40). Therefore, learning through interaction has a major role to play in enabling a social system to exist successfully. McMillan (2004) stressed on the importance of learning, exploring and adapting to changes in their circumstances for complex adapting systems:

... if an organization wants to exist at the edge of chaos and enjoy the rewards that this may bring it needs to be a stimulating, challenging and constantly changing environment. It needs to be a dynamic environment where learning is encouraged, but where there are strong frameworks to ensure that there is not too much novelty and surprise. (McMillan, 2004, p. 95)

## Participatory Leadership

A school leader, a strong believer of participatory practices, shared that he goes for democratic process, involving people and listening to their opinions. He said:

*I focus on being participatory; I involve people from the grassroots level in discussion for decision-making. We have also delegated some authority to vice principal, coordinator and even class teachers. Even if there occurs any problem with their work habit, I take the moral responsibility for that. And I provide regular instructions to my portfolio-holder teachers and administrative staff. (Coordinator A)*

Shelton (2011) also highlighted that “Effective principals create vision and set high expectations, develop and support teachers ..., and strengthen school culture. They also build leadership teams to share or distribute leadership roles among teachers and other school staff to bolster student academic achievement” (Shelton, 2011, p. 4).

The concept of school leadership also raises questions about context, levels of creativity, the nature of risk taking, and measuring impact, among others. School leaders operate within school and community contexts that place constraints on leadership behavior and affect student achievement. Therefore, they need to be transformational. A school leader pointed to the leadership of the school head and said that:

*The principal should be a driving force for improved opportunities for their pupils and staff; and they should think and work strategically within and beyond the school community. I am happy that our principal is nurturing a shared vision through motivating, inspiring, influencing, and supporting all members of the school. (Senior teacher)*



This discussion leads me to make sense that participatory approaches to school leadership are especially appropriate to the challenges facing schools at the turn of the century. Moreover, such leadership primarily manifests itself during times of change.

### **Change Leadership**

The nature of school education is rapidly changing across the world. Thomson (2007) related to the changing context of the school and education in the recent decade. New curricula and new approaches to teaching and learning; the changing social conditions which children and young people are growing up within; the technical and environmental challenges we all face: all these produce extraordinary pressures on the values, purposes and role of school education. This is as true for school leaders as it is for educational policy makers.

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Change, after all, is taking place all around us, all of the time. We live in a Heraclitean world. “You can’t step in the same river twice.” A flower blooms, and then it fades. A person grows old, and then dies. An alarm starts ringing, and then it stops. A car in the street changes lanes. Intentional change, moreover, is as ubiquitous as change in the course of natural events. I turn off the alarm clock. You empty the mailbox. She changes lanes. And this is as much so in educational as any other settings. The classroom period begins, and then it ends. The geography lesson is followed by algebra. A student cannot spell “Mississippi,” but after a practice session, he can. The textbook committee changes the literature textbook. The teacher introduces a new unit on the environment. The principal rearranges the schedule of staff meetings.

Are such changes all really “so difficult”? Is getting them to take place “so hard”?

(Waks, 2007, p. 280)

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Thomson (2007) pointed to the inevitability of the change our school systems need stating that “Schools are a 19th century invention and the modifications made to its basic form are still inadequate to prepare children and young people for citizenship, family life and work in the 21st century” (p. 9). A school leader put his idea of change leadership as:

*We are following the unprecedented change in both school and society. Our education system needs a complete transformation since ICTs have emerged so pervasively that if we cannot adapt to them, we are sure to be swept away in the storm of technological complexities. (Coordinator B)*

The participant shows how urgent it is for us to take a serious step towards change, especially in terms of technology adaptation in school education. Thomson (2007) brought forth discussion about adapting the technological change sequel in schools.

Some argue that in order for schools to meet the needs of all children, they need to be radically overhauled because it is the system of schooling which is at fault. In contrast, some suggest that meeting the needs of the information age requires no more than the intelligent use of ICT in schools to enhance the current curriculum and pedagogy. Whether change is seen as improvement or as transformative depends very much on how the need for change is seen.

(Thomson, 2007, p. 11)

Change leadership has its bases on reflective and collaborative leadership.

Another school leader states that:

*Learning from our past experiences and collaborating with neighboring schools are the keystones for improving school effectiveness at challenging times. (Vice Principal)*

Reflecting upon the daily practices of handling disorders help school leaders to be resilient to lead at the edge of chaos. As a participant put it this way:

*We use analysis of best practices in education in order to be responsive and proactive in changing school environment to prepare children for the future. We focus on student achievement and measure success in terms of positive student outcomes. We also collaborate and build mutually beneficial relationships with other schools and social organizations who share their vision of success. We engage in long term planning and move beyond the immediacy of today into the possibilities of tomorrow. (HoD)*

However, the other participant expressed doubt on materializing the vision of success for tomorrow since it is through present time they need to survive. He stated:

*These days, I rarely think for long term plans, though I make them, because it is now we need to survive first and to indulge in cut throat competition among the schools in the vicinity, then only we can go beyond. In these chaotic circumstances, we need to have immediate plan – action – reflection cycle going on. (Principal B)*

Based on the discussion with the participant, I reflected that leadership is rarely effective if it is simply reactionary. In the context of leading in difficult times it is essential to take the time to observe the situation and then act. This principal thought that implementing short term plans, and reflecting on their effectiveness is the way of doing things in the ever changing world. Warrilow (2010) also supported this view and supplemented his idea of change process:

Leaders need to pay more attention to the early stages of the change process, that is: creating a feeling of urgency, clarifying the vision, good communication and empowering people to take action. And the one key place

to focus is on creating and sustaining the sense of urgency about the need for change, and that starts at the top. (para. 4)

McMillan (2004) suggested that living at the edge of chaos has many advantages for an organization because:

It can always experiment with different ways of doing things and try them out, and so avoid becoming stuck in one particular way of being. Organizations that become too formalized and too rigid struggle to survive in a changing world, as did, for example, the large bureaucracies at the end of the twentieth century. Similarly those organizations that were too disordered and had too little structure or underpinning processes, like many of the dot com companies, also failed to survive. (p. 97)

The school leaders believed that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationship. “One person can make a difference. People working cooperatively make an even greater difference” (S. R. Lamichhane, personal communication, March 14, 2011). As one leader said:

*We need to rely on the strengths of relationship. Strong leadership results from the participation of many people. I believe in people’s ingenuity that everyone is capable, everyone can lead. Almost all staff members contribute to the effective school leadership. They hold the power to improve school environment in the hands they extend to one another. (Coordinator B)*

Donaldson (2007) supported this idea along these lines: “Whether we call it distributed leadership, collaborative leadership, or shared leadership, the ideal arrangement encourages every adult in the school to be a leader. Administrators, formal teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders all contribute to the leadership mix” (p. 29). Truly effective school leadership should not be the responsibility of one

individual, however; it should be a cooperative effort involving a number of individuals-from the national level to the district level to the classroom.

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We cannot avoid change, indeed we may wish to seek, embrace and even thrive on it. Education is an integral part of our society and we must anticipate change as being one of the constants it will face. Whether these changes result in Frankensteins, or gentle, functional, collaborative and sustainable butterflies, depends largely on the response of those in schools.

School leaders can continue to be on the receiving end, to be dependent, or they can choose to make a stand together, to be empowered, to be professional, and to be leaders of democratic institutions proud to be serving their agreed purposes. (Mulford, 2008, p. 14)

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Almost all school leaders agreed on networking and collaboration to be the hallmarks of leadership in today's world surrounded by multiplicity of uncertainties and challenges. Based on the conversation with the participants, I reflected that by putting team first, communicating effectively, capitalizing on synergy, fostering positive attitudes, and striving for perfection, school leaders can raise the bar for their team and prepare to win. When they build trust and shared values, peak performance is possible. They need to value team skills like communication, trust building, and shared decision making.

### **Instructional Leadership**

The role of the school leader has changed from building manager to instructional leader. Today's school leaders are facing new and greater challenges, including increased accountability for student academic achievement; complex social environments that reflect the nation's ever-changing economic, political diversity; and

a constantly changing educational landscape with new technology and limited resources. In this context, school leaders are focused on being instructional leaders to bring about notable academic performance. As one principal noted:

*Since schools are for teaching and learning, schools leaders should have the same focus in their nerves. If the instructional (pedagogical) part is missing from the school (leadership), what are they for?* (Principal B)

The Wallace Foundation (2012) also brought this aspect in light when it states that “The simple fact is that without effective leaders most of the goals of educational improvement will be very difficult to achieve. Effective principals work relentlessly to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction” (p. 10).

Hoy and Hoy (2003) cited at least six ways that principals influence instruction. These include encouraging academic excellence, supporting faculty improvement, including teachers in instructional improvement, providing resources and materials, sharing best practices with faculty, and recognizing and celebrating academic excellence (as cited in Harris, 2006, p.33). In this connection, another school leader opined that:

*School leadership should involve teachers and seek to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, pedagogical leadership is central to school leadership.*  
(Senior teacher)

Some principals have adopted the “instructional leadership” styles which are central to today’s paradigm of effective school leadership. Schools with more pronounced instructional leadership tend to link teacher appraisals with teachers’ participation in professional development. Schools whose principals are instructional leaders are more likely to take account of innovative teaching practices in the appraisal of teachers. Teachers whose school principal adopts a more pronounced

instructional leadership style are more likely to engage in collaborative activities with their colleagues. Principals who adopt an instructional leadership style tend to develop professional development programmes for instructionally weak teachers.

The use of instructional leadership by school leaders is associated a sound academic practice “to focus teachers’ efforts on what really counts in the educational process” (OECD, 2009, p. 204). This will require principals to not only implement structures and processes to support teacher learning within schools, but it will also necessitate that principals shape school cultures that support and encourage teacher learning. On the whole, instructional leadership is a thoughtful journey that builds and sustains learning cultures.

### **Complexity Leadership**

Complexity leadership can be used as a model for leading at the edge of chaos. It can be used not only for explaining the complexities, and connectivities of a chaotic environment, but also for gaining insights on how to deal with it successfully.

Stevenson (2006) suggests that “Principals have to navigate this uncertainty, working within their national policy context, whilst simultaneously trying to make sense of an environment in which less and less can be taken for granted” (p. 413). On a theoretical basis, chaos and complexity suggest that the future is largely unknowable and subject to periods of rather unpredictable change. This suggests that “detailed planning should be short term and subject to regular review” (Haynes, 2003, p. 115).

A school leader illustrated this with his practice:

*We develop a vision for the foreseeable future, and implement actions to translate the vision into reality. When the things are out of control, as they sometimes are, we become strategic and try to meet the short term objectives, yet in line with the long term vision. (Vice Principal)*

This proposition has led towards complexity driven strategic planning. Haynes (2003) said that “Longer-term planning cannot really be planning in the traditional sense, but a more open and creative forecasting is needed where there is an imagination of possible futures and a consideration of their consequences” (p. 115). This has led to the idea of scenario-building and the idea of visioning broad principles about what kind of future organizations see as desirable. More detailed operational planning is subject to short-term timescales and to regular reviews and changes. Therefore, complexity implies that a new mindset is needed for the management of social organizations, including schools. As a participant put it:

*At a broader level, strategic planning is needed since linear ways of thinking would just meet incongruence between what we do and what should be done. As diamond cuts diamond, only complexity thinking can address chaos and complexities. Change agents are needed to facilitate improvement of school environment in a manner that engages all change participants. (Principal A)*

Similarly, another participant accepted that there is complexity, and advocates that resilient collaboration can be the best formula for survival and growth. He noted:

*It is not the only case that our future is unpredictable, we are already in an instable present which is itself complex and therefore to deal with the discrepancies of today's schools, we need to understand that complexity is obvious and need to deal with it accordingly. May it be through collaboration with the community, political alliances, or partner schools. (HoD)*

Mason (2007, p. 14) advocated that management in a complex and turbulent environment should be organic, with the manager concentrating on creating an internal environment conducive to co-evolution. He further states that “There is agreement amongst chaos and complexity authors that traditional strategy making is



ineffective in turbulent environments” (p. 14). Traditionally, “the future was thought of as an extension of the past, and that the future path of an event could be predicted linearly” (Smith & Rupp, 2003, p. 164). However, since the present itself, let alone future, is inherently unpredictable, school leaders and administrators need to view their schools as complex, nonlinear systems in order to be flexible enough to deal with the uncertainty of the school environment.

### **Strategic Visionary Leadership**

Strategic visionary leadership is the call of the day. For a strategic visionary leader, both vision and action are important. One thing that can be drawn from complexity leadership is the focus on strategic visionary leadership, leadership which defines the vision of the school and translates the vision into action. A strategically focused school is one that is “educationally effective in the short term but has a clear framework and a process to translate core moral purpose and vision into excellent educational provision which is challenging and sustainable in the medium to long term” (Davies & Davies, 2005, p. 244). One of the participants said that:

*Our leadership enables short-term strategic objectives to be met while concurrently developing capacity for the long term vision. Strategies in turbulent environment must be flexible, which require a set of strategic rules and help administrators to cope with opportunities and threats coming rapidly at them without having to do any planning exercises. (Principal B)*

In connection with the strategic plan, Mason (2007) mentioned that “Strategy has become a trial-and-error process, evolving through the discovery of what works. As a result, planning cycles are shorter, and because quick responses are required, tactics often dictate strategy” (p. 15). Referring to the importance of the leadership in taking strategic roles, another leader pointed out that:

*Without a doubt, the principal has the strategic leadership responsibilities. ...*

*But increasingly, people at multiple levels have a major role to play when it comes to sustaining a school's long term competitive advantage. (In-charge)*

When asked what strategies they were taking to build school climate that fosters competitive edge, a participant expressed:

*The guiding principle of my institution is academic excellence through ideal team work. I bear the responsibility of handling the team work. Therefore I involve all the stakeholders in the preparation of strategic plan so that they follow the plan without any question. (HoD)*

Hargrove and Prasad (2010) claimed that “Strategic leadership can bring a new perspective to the challenges faced by today’s schools” (p. 70) but the problem is where does a school leader begin in his/her journey to becoming a strategic visionary leader – someone who has the ability to guide, direct, and develop the knowledge and skills of other individuals in a professional learning community in order to effectively lead the schools at the edge of chaos? It is necessary to be flexible in leadership styles in order to meet the varying needs and demands of school circumstances. Flexibility and variations in styles are necessary to lead schools in our times.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that strategy making in a complex, turbulent environment is different when approached from a complexity and chaos viewpoint. A school’s strategy should involve a vision or identity, bottom-up emergence of the strategy involving all the staff, balancing between structure and rapid change through flexibility and rapid adaptability, and initiating change rather than reacting to environmental change. This is what Mason (2007) called “emergent strategy making” (p. 16). In addition, strategic leadership is not just for individuals: it is inherently a collaborative, team activity where people work together to make

meaning out of complex information, act with strategic purpose, and champion strategic change. No one person has enough information or a broad enough perspective to shoulder the full responsibility for strategic leadership in an organization. Therefore, strategic visionary leadership is a broad term that necessarily encompasses reflective, collaborative, situational, and complexity leadership.

### **System Leadership**

System leaders are those headteachers who are willing to shoulder system leadership roles: who care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own (Hopkins, 2008, p. 50). In my research context, there was a school with its six sister schools outside the valley which were largely directed by the central school at the system level. Therefore, the discussion of system leadership emerged while interviewing the principal of this particular school. The principal by his own efforts and commitment is beginning to transform the nature of educational improvement in his sister schools. He shared:

*When the coordinating body of our schools declared our school as ‘center of excellence’, I felt the need to focus on system improvement. Now, we cannot only limit our achievement to our school, we should support our sister schools to rise. Sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward. (Principal A)*

I got more curious and interested about his idea of system leadership for school improvement and asked what they have been doing to improve the school system. He answered proudly:

*Recently, we have established a ‘Research and Development Division’ in our school which will be led by our expert teacher researchers. The division will carry out the research and make policy recommendations for system*

*improvement for all our schools. And based on the recommendation of the research team we, in collaboration with our coordinating body, will bring about the desired improvement in the school system. (Principal A)*

It revealed that to be a system leader, a school head has to be almost as concerned about the success of other schools about his or her own school. Hopkins (2008) has developed a model to illustrate system leadership.

The model exhibits a logic that flows from the inside out: leaders, driven by a moral purpose related to the enhancement of student learning, seek to empower teachers and others to make schools a critical force for improving communities. Sustainable educational development requires educational leaders who are willing to shoulder broader leadership roles; who care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own.



*Figure 5. An emerging model of system leadership (Hopkins, 2008, p. 59)*

Hopkins (2008) illustrated that the model begins in the centre with the acknowledgement that such forms of leadership are imbued with moral purpose. As illustrated in the next ring of the diagram these are of two types: they engage in personal development, and they have a strategic capability. As denoted in the third ring of the model, the moral purpose, personal qualities and strategic capacity of the system leader find focus on three domains of the school – managing the teaching and learning process, developing people and developing the organisation. These three aspects of system leadership have as we have seen a strong empirical base: system leaders engage deeply with the organisation of teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment in order to personalise learning for all their students, reduce within school variation and support curriculum choice. In order to do this they develop their schools as personal and professional learning communities, with relationships built across and beyond each school to provide a range of learning experiences and professional development opportunities. They also realise that all this requires a robust and reliable school organisation, and they work towards achieving this.

Based on the perceived styles as depicted by the participants, Nepalese schools leaders would be better off adopting these specific styles at the edge of chaos.

### **Leading Through Uncertainty**

To understand the leadership challenge of our volatile age more clearly, I conducted a series of open interview with the participants. However, I felt that I needed to reflect again and again to understand how the leaders are leading through uncertainty. Therefore, “what it means to lead in an age of upheaval, to master personal challenges, to be in the limelight continually, to make decisions under extreme uncertainty— offer a useful starting point for understanding today’s leadership landscape” (Barton, Grant, & Horn, 2012, p. 1). Most of the school leaders

are grappling with today's environment in different ways. And it is very likely that the problems and issues they are wrestling with do not have any clear roots. Sharp (2012) confirms this statistically that "Almost 90 per cent of issues that leaders deal with today are ambiguous, the problem unclear and the solution vague" (p. 53). Therefore, the foremost responsibility of the leaders is to "bring clarity into the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty" (Sharp, 2012, p. 54).

Regarding what strength the school leaders have to lead through chaotic times, a principal shared:

*If I have any strength at all, I would say it is in choosing the right people for the right places and positions. Besides, I walk round the school all the time. I'll go into lessons, I'll cover, I lead assembly, and I visit all the staff rooms and know the children and their parents. I've got an open-door policy, everyone is welcome. We have strong links with key stakeholders in the local community. We have a particularly good relationship with two geographically close schools, and I think our relationship with those schools is good, and competitive. (Principal A)*

This principal seemed to be very clear about where he was going. He was also not much worried about the ongoing uncertainty that shows he or his school had the necessary resilience to endure the likely turmoil may it spring from socio-political reasons, or economic reasons or some behavioral fallacies inside the school. Much alike, Bryan and Farrell (2008) claimed that "The future will belong to companies whose senior executives remain calm, carefully assess their options, and nurture the flexibility, awareness, and resiliency needed to deal with whatever the world throws at them" (p. 12).

However, other school leaders seemed to be overwhelmed by the chaotic situations which have frequently affected the school functioning. They were facing challenges in building their own, and their organizations' ability to navigate successfully through a fast and ever changing landscape – one that continues to remain highly challenging, often confrontational and undoubtedly ambiguous (Sharp, 2012, p. 50). A school leader spoke his mind:

*Disruptive environment has affected us badly. We have not been able to run the schools as per the minimum number of days a year as provisioned in the government laws. It has left us with heightened stress, fear of losing the number of students, difficulties in retaining key staff, loss of confidence and lowering morale. (Principal B)*

School leaders often said that they were operating in a bewildering environment in which little was certain, and the socio-political dynamics were more complex. In this regard, Bryan and Farrell (2008) again claimed that “uncertainty of this magnitude will leave some leaders lost in the fog” (p. 1). This seems to have happened to this particular school leader in my study. Moreover, that holds true for many school leaders across the country, especially those who are less resourceful like this leader. Another school leader shared his ideas of tackling with the chaotic circumstances as:

*We have been facing the chaos following the directives and guidelines of the education acts and regulation and instructions from the DEO, PABSON, or HSEB! We sometimes (but rarely) network with neighboring schools! And to handle the internal chaos, I use my and my support staff's ideas, general meetings, PTA discussions, and above all, my conscience and common sense. (Coordinator A)*

Bryan and Farrell (2008) also suggested some ways out that to avoid impulsive, uncoordinated, and ultimately ineffective responses; companies must evaluate an unusually broad set of macroeconomic outcomes and strategic responses and then act to make themselves more flexible, aware, and resilient. They further suggest that strengthening these organizational muscles will allow companies not only to survive but also to seize the extraordinary opportunities that arise during periods of vast uncertainty (Bryan & Farrell, 2008, p. 1).

Another school leader when asked about his leadership in complex times remained quiet for some time and said:

*Good question, indeed. We are a central school and we have sister schools nationwide. We run our institution being guided by government policies and the vision of [...our coordinating body]. We are planning to decentralize the programs in our sister schools. We have six sister schools outside the valley. We are making this institution complete residential so that we won't need to face any obstacles during bandhs, and strikes which are as I feel the strongest and most formidable of all challenges in running schools in Nepal.*

(Coordinator A)

It is often said that we need such a principal who is a good strategic planner, visionary leader and creative thinker. But things do not always go the way we think in a chaotic situation. Commenting on why plans are not effective in turmoil, a school leader commented:

Planning has little value or is inadequate in the disorderly contexts. If we have to combat the complexities and uncertainty of the chaotic times, we need to be flexible and adaptable with changes. Sometimes, we need to create change,



while in other times; we need to adopt and/or adapt to the change. (Vice Principal)

Regardless of school context, each of the school leaders clearly articulated a framework of core personal values that was at the heart of their leadership practice. This framework comprised two core values: the need to ensure adaptability, and collaboration. As the Vice Principal further noted:

*School leaders should be well versed in different styles and strategies of leadership; they need to be flexible, and tactful to address the emergent challenges. They need to act collectively. Collaboration among the staff members and across professional institutions can ensure better results in chaos.* (Vice Principal)

Tied closely to the need to develop positive relationships in the schools is the need to foster collaboration among the staff. Another leader spoke about how keen he was in fostering collaboration:

*I am a huge believer in collaboration and so one of the very first things I do is to inspire my team for common planning, invite people's ideas, respect their presence and empower them to perform the task with their ingenuity. The most important of all is to include them in decision making.* (Coordinator B)

From the experiences of the participants, it was clear that they are slowly transforming themselves from the classical managerial leadership to collaborative leadership. Dotlich et al. (2009) stated that:

Making decisions when uncertainty prevails requires guts. If you have a vision for your organization, knowing what you stand for and what you are trying to achieve, this perspective can guide your actions even when question marks abound. Clarity of vision makes it easier to navigate unclear waters. (p. 25)

Regarding the decision making practice in his school, a participant talked about shared decision making. He said:

*We don't make decision in haste because we need to think many times about something before deciding in such uncertain times. We call for collective ideas while decision making. We involve concerned people (including students) to make pertinent decisions. (Vice Principal)*

School leaders also spoke about how major decisions were never made without input from the school stakeholders. As one principal explained:

*What happens here is we follow the idea generation process. We make sure everyone is part of the decision-making process and the school as a whole writes the mission and vision itself. Once we do that, they take a sense of ownership and it becomes theirs and they take it and run it. (Coordinator B)*

Another principal spoke about staff input on decisions and the importance of developing a collaborative environment in another way. He also showed the urgency of some decisions where he could not involve people. He said:

*I try to get as much input as possible before making a final decision on something. However, that may not simply be possible in some cases when the decisions are promptly called for. In such situations, I have to use my logic and wisdom. (Principal B)*

The other school leader focuses on participatory leadership which in essence is quite similar to the collegial model. He focused that the way forward was to put more emphasis on participatory leadership. He said:

*We encourage distributed and participatory leadership by supporting the use by teachers of their expertise in all areas of their professional activity; and*

*involving staff in decision-making. However, the principal remains the central source of leadership influence. (Coordinator A)*

Effective principals establish collaborative teams, bringing together key stakeholders who represent different perspectives and roles in the school community and make school based decision. Salisbury and McGregor (2005) highlighted that effective principals share leadership with staff at all levels of the organization. “They know that teams of people who share the same goals will be more effective than one administrator working alone. These principals create time for teams to meet, plan, and teach together” (p. 5).

Now, the practice of leadership has to do much at uncertain times. It is almost impossible to stick to one leadership style in volatile environment. It is often the case that they need to switch their leadership style to match with the situations. Yet, there is always one or the other predominant style that overrides the other. A school leader puts his idea of participatory style when talking about the leadership model in his style. However, he indicated that school leadership could be viewed as a collegial model. He said:

*We have a collegial modality in practice. We are a similar education qualification, and same age group family. We have a kind of horizontal organization in practice though we have a formal vertical role relationship like principal, coordinator, academic director. They enjoy similar status. There is open communication and there is a collegial environment. Authority is further delegated to other teacher leaders like coordinator, and program in-charges who supervise and monitor the classes, set the routine and can manage the classes, sanction leave to the teachers. Frankly speaking, there is*

*power delegation for academic policy, but not for financial policy.*

(Coordinator B)

Greninger and Chambers (2011) said that collegiality is an important feature of a healthy school and one that signifies that positive micropolitics are likely occurring in that school (p. 22). They further added that as a component of school micropolitics, collegiality is a critical element of a high-functioning school environment, and indicative of shared leadership within the school (p. 22). Some leaders also realized that school development is a team effort. As one leader put this way:

*Education is a partnership between school, and the community. Sound decision making relies on motivation and commitment of every staff and collaboration of the school community. (Vice Principal)*

The significance of building a good community relationship was also highlighted by a report Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008).

Principals know how important building and sustaining good community relationships is to the well-being and culture of their schools. Relationship building prepares the ground for creating partnerships between the school and its community. When the community engages with the work of the school, the positive spin-offs invariably benefit both teaching and learning. (p. 14)

In a different context, on my question “How do you normally deal with criticism?” a principal put his idea in this way:

*I value constructive criticism because it helps me do a better job. I’m a good listener who takes criticism seriously. If it’s justified, I try to make the necessary changes. When it’s unjustified, I probe the nature of the problem with questions. I’ve never really had a problem with criticism since I try to*

*maintain open communication on the job. This enables me to deal with many problems before they become subjects for criticism. (Principal A)*

I inquired a senior school teacher about how he felt about working with his juniors (including his students) become seniors (coordinator), he said:

*I normally get along well with everyone in the school regardless of their age, education, or experience. But quite frankly, I do have difficulty accepting poor performance, especially when it affects my work. If this is a problem here, I assume it is a management problem which will be dealt with by management. I expect to be evaluated according to my performance and that my performance would not be judged on the inabilities of others. (Senior teacher)*

Yet in another instance, I inquired a school leader what he was doing to create and sustain a competitive edge for his school. He said:

*In our context, being competitive is to do more than what other school is doing or doing something different from others. Since our school is struggling for survival, it implies more to us. Nevertheless, we have not thought on it very seriously. Right now, we are only thinking for its existence, let alone competing with others and winning. And indeed we don't have that much to compete with other private schools in our locality as they are also facing the same problems. However, we are better at training, developing, and retaining good teachers. We are thinking on increasing the teachers' pay so as to ensure their longer stay. Similarly, we are introducing some hi-fi techs like CCTV and projectors. We also expose our students to public affairs and involve them in some social works. We have also shown our corporate social responsibility by maintain the sanitation of the temple and tap, and have also opened the school library for public on Saturdays. (Principal B)*

Another school leader perceived the competitive environment of the schools and talked about his practice:

*Practically speaking my leadership has been sustaining in the spirit of team work effectiveness. Mutual trust and transparent accountability are regarded as the vital aspects behind the success of our institution. I believe that we have succeeded to make voluntary involvement of the dedicated staff in creating and sustaining our school at the most competitive age. (HoD)*

I inquired of the challenge of the 21st century in education in our schools, a school leader put his ideas as:

*The 21st century has come with a bigger challenge than what it really is. The pressing demands of ICT, critical and creative thinking skills, digital literacy, etc. are the buzzword today. We are introducing IP-board, projector-based teaching, presentation and project work methods, and our English teacher is also speaking of portfolio approach. We need to see what new innovations come forth, and we will go on adapting them in education. (Coordinator A)*

The above discussion showed that every school leader is coping with the situation in one way or the other. Some have taken the same thing as a problem whereas others have seen some opportunity inherent in those problems. Moreover, all of the school leaders showed the ability to promote and establish collaboration and partnerships with not only the members within the school, but also with broader community. They also held the belief that the knowledge required to lead schools is dispersed and that everyone within the school community has both a right and a responsibility to participate in decision making and leadership of their school. Shelton (2011) put it more succinctly stating that “Good leadership is about cultivating a shared vision and building a strong leadership team. Effective principals are

dedicated, well-prepared individuals who know how to create vision, share authority and are ultimately held accountable for their school's success" (p. 1). Donaldson (2007) also highlighted that:

Great schools grow when educators understand that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships. Strong leadership in schools results from the participation of many people, each leading in his or her own way. Whether we call it distributed leadership, collaborative leadership, or shared leadership, the ideal arrangement encourages every adult in the school to be a leader. Administrators, formal teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders all contribute to the leadership mix. (Donaldson, 2007, p. 29)

This reflects the distributed or shared leadership in educational institutions. A key characteristic among those leaders was that, regardless of styles and strategies, all revealed a passion for effective school leadership. The research revealed that the leaders tried to ensure the effectiveness of their leadership by the application of a combination of essential leadership values, qualities and skills and that these enabled them to manage a number of tensions and dilemmas associated with the management of change. This confirmed earlier findings of effective school leaders who had the ability to develop a shared vision, and who promoted participative decision-making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Mulford, 2007).

### **Professional Affairs**

Barber and Mourshed (2007, p. 40) say 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (as cited in Mpokosa & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 11) and principals play a major role in developing a "professional community" of teachers who guide one another in improving instruction (The Wallace Foundation,

2012, p. 7). These literatures suffice to say that teachers including school leaders need to develop themselves personally and professionally.

In Nepal, the headteacher is seen as playing a crucial role in teacher support. Regular staff meetings and delegation of roles and responsibilities boost teacher morale and create a mutually accountable and collaborative team. However teachers recognized that in order to do this headteachers should be given the authority to reward and discipline teachers on the basis of their performance. (VSO Nepal, 2005, as cited in Mpokosa & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 42)

Therefore, the role of school leadership, especially, the headteachers is crucial for improving teacher management and teacher motivation and ultimately for improving learning outcomes for students. A report of Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development also suggested that we need to respect teachers' professionalism and should provide them with enough room for learning. It stated:

More teachers will strive for excellence when there's more reason for them to do so. If we truly honor our teachers, we won't continue paying them poorly, disrespecting their professional opinions, and subjecting them (and our children) to unsafe or shameful working conditions in our schools. If we value our children, we will honor their teachers; we will give them room to excel. (ASCD, 2009, para. 2)

Regarding the practice of professional development, a school leader shared what system they have in their school:

*We did not have any distinct professional development team or anything related to this, if the principal was pressurized much by the teachers, especially through the concerned Heads of the departments, they would get*



*some trainings. But that scenario has changed recently; the school has allocated two lakhs rupees per annum to be spent for teachers' training and professional growth. Besides, the 'Research and Development Division' also conducts in-school trainings hiring experts and sometimes with the expert teachers we have. We also invite teacher participants from other sister schools. (Coordinator A)*

The principal of the school also indicated to other aspects of teacher's professional growth. He said:

*Now, we have a clear ladder system for the promotion of the teachers and non-teaching members. With a certain level of qualification and desired performance, the staff are promoted to the higher levels. Similarly, we have managed the grade systems, and regular promotion on the basis of the year of service. For example, once a new graduate teacher (GT) is appointed, he or she shall be permanent by the following year with satisfactory performance. After 5 years of their service, they will automatically be promoted to GT 'A'. On completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> year, they will be promoted to TGT (Trained Graduate Teacher). (Principal A)*

Other school leaders also talked about the need and practice of professional development of the teachers and other staff at their schools. Most of them said that they sometimes conduct training and orientation sessions to upgrade their existing knowledge and practice. In this connection, another school principal said:

*Though we don't have any fixed policy to providing training to the teachers, we do send them for training or conduct trainings for them as per the need. To tell you the truth, we do this because everyone is talking about professional*

*development of teachers and so on. However, the problem with us is once the teachers are well trained and experienced in their job, they may leave the school and go to other schools which may pay them higher. We have many instances of such cases. If only they told us the clear reasons, mostly the salary matters, we might talk and revise the scale. But they do not give us that chance.* (Principal B)

If they fear that teachers would quit and their investment in developing teachers would be wasted, so what are they doing to retain the teachers? He said:

*Now it is not a good thing but we are compelled to do. Before sending the teachers for trainings, we have to do a bond with them about how many years they would not leave the school if they were provided with the training.*

(Principal B)

Another participant also shared similar experiences:

*There is a constant fear that spending on teachers could be a total waste in case the teachers quit.* (Vice Principal)

While teachers and the schools benefit from different forms of ongoing practices of training and development, many activities of that nature were not built into the professional development structure at the school. In fact, there did not seem to be a distinct professional development strategy or plan except in School A. In seeking to meet teachers' professional development requirements, school leaders need to consider both how to support and encourage participation and how to ensure that opportunities match teachers' perceived needs. Teachers' perceived needs should also match the wider goals of school development and how well teachers' professional development is coordinated with appraisal and feedback practices in schools and school evaluations more generally.

Moreover, the teachers should also contribute to the schools at least by committing to their service for a specific number of years, though it is not a legal provision. This is because as an individual, teachers need to grow, and the school needs to get maximum performance of the teachers. This is possible only through professional development activities. That reality underscores the importance of admitting teachers in professional development programs who have the intention and the ability to use that training to the school.

Quite important, school leaders, especially principals also need to grow. They also need to learn. They have limited expertise. “Like all educators, most principals have their own areas of instructional expertise. ... The school administrator cannot be an expert in everything” (Danielson, 2007, p. 15). Therefore, they should also keep learning. Rather than generate propositions ahead of time, I used inductive reasoning in my inquiry. I sought to examine the professional development shaping these educational leaders as they learned their roles and responsibilities in the school. A principal said:

*Though I have not received any formal training on school leadership, nor do I have any academic or professional degree on education and leadership. I have become a school leader through practice. However, I had felt long before that I needed to earn a degree in school leadership. Now, it is almost the time of my retiring, I have encouraged the vice principal to join some program in educational management. So that by the time, he takes over the principalship, he would be sound enough both theoretically and in experience. (Principal A)*

All of the school leaders acknowledge the changing roles of school leaders, and call for appropriate capacity building programmes designed to help school leaders cope with their new roles. Therefore, school leaders need appropriate training and continuous

professional development and support in order to cope with their ever changing roles (OECD, 2009, Policy section, para. 1). It's an old observation, but it's worth repeating as a school leader prepares himself/herself for a changing world: one cannot lead unless the team is ready.

Now, more than ever, there is a critical need to grow and develop leadership skills. Unless our schools are rigorously developing their leaders, they will be forced to recruit the next generation of leaders from outside. A more reliable solution is to develop the leadership ability of the existing leaders from within.

### **Fostering Learning Organization**

Leaders of twenty-first century organizations are searching for ways to improve the ability of their organizations to respond more rapidly to their challenges. Amid sometimes unpredictable, always uncertain, and highly turbulent external and/or internal conditions, an organization's capacity to learn may be the only true source of competitive advantage. To develop the capacity to learn, organizations develop into what Senge (1990) called "learning organizations". He defined learning organizations as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Similarly, HM Inspectorate of Education (2007) noted:

A learning organization creates the conditions where staff have confidence in exercising their initiative and in grasping opportunities to share knowledge and assume responsibility. Such conditions serve to develop the capacity of people and teams to achieve a positive impact on the life of the establishment.

Current and future leaders learn with and from others, formally and informally, prompting reflection and change. (p. 66)

Over the past few years educational publications have identified the primary role of the leader, particularly of the principal, as a strong instructional leader who has the knowledge, skills, and ability to create and sustain a supportive, professional learning organization. As Checkley and Checkley (2000) indicated “The key role of the contemporary principal is to serve as an instructional leader who, in turn, promotes teacher growth” (Changing Schools section, para. 2), the role of school leaders is to create the school a learning organization. Schools are by their own nature organizations of learning, where knowledge generation and knowledge transfer constitutes the production process. However they are not necessarily learning organizations and this is an intriguing paradox. Just because school is a place for teaching and learning does not guarantee that it is a learning organization. It is true that the primary business of a school is to impart learning, yet the question of learnability of the school is often raised.

Fortifying the school against the odds in the era of constant change and political upheavals, of late, schools have equally paid their attention to organizational learning, more particularly, teachers’ professional growth, and above all, sharpening the axe of leadership every moment. As one participant pointed out:

*Knowledge, intelligence and cultural values coming from all individuals who are part of the academic community are aggregated at the organizational level. This aggregation generates important synergies for the school and therefore learning becomes an encompassing process in teaching, managing, and leading. (Coordinator B)*

Similarly, another participant considered herself a lifelong learner and shared her experience in regard to developing a learning organization culture:

*A school leader is a learner so much as a teacher is a learner. I myself call me a learner. If a teacher ceases to learn, he is no more a teacher. Everyone is a learner. I focus on the learning of every individual in the school. I encourage discussion among the students. When they come with different discussion and conclusions that will help them become independent learners. But the teachers as facilitator should always be prepared to help them in any point in case. (Principal Aa)*

She further added that:

*We value continuous improvement and learning. We encourage our teachers to advance their studies and personal growth. We celebrate their success: we announce that our this teacher has completed his/her one-year BEd or MPhil; another teacher has got a government appointment, one more teacher is going to America for further study and so on. I take pride in upholding our tradition of celebrating success of our staff. I strongly believe that this will give our students a message that better studies open better avenues for success.*

(Principal Aa)

The essence of this proposition is the harnessing of shared vision among organizational members in order to encourage collective learning. This will allow organizational members to draw on their energy and creativity to fulfill a higher learning order. Focusing on the leaders' role for teacher development, another participant said:

*School leaders need to channel their worldviews into useful learning opportunities to equip their members with competitive knowledge and skills.*

*Learning and open communication must be closely linked to the organization's competitive direction. (HoD)*

The school leaders seemed to be guided by the concept of learning organization as they did not hesitate to say that they need to learn from the teachers and other subordinates in the school. Focusing on reflective practices, and learning from failure, another leader succinctly put it his ideas this way:

*... we promote an environment that supports continuous learning and sharing of knowledge...reflecting on the past experiences, learning from mistakes, and striving for the best. (Principal B)*

In fact, reflection is the other important characteristic of organizational learning. Yeo (2010) also affirmed that “Reflection allows organizational members to learn as they perform” (p. 41). Another participant put it this way:

*Leaders are introspective and reflective. We ask questions and seek answers. We need to be familiar with current researches and best practices, not only in education, but also in other related fields. ... I maintain a personal plan for self-improvement and continuous learning, and balance my professional and personal life. (HoD)*

Learning is always the primary function of schools, the key for all the stakeholders. This emphasis on learning is significant. Students come to school to learn, and “teachers who are not learning while teaching are not really teaching” (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 3). A good teacher is one who learns while he or she teaches. Similarly, a learning principal's leadership creates the atmosphere of professional growth. Hargrove and Prasad (2010, p. 3) underscored the role of learning principal stating that “A learning principal makes a learning school”. A

school with a good learning environment for all members has the highest potential to lead against the odds. Another school leader pointed out:

*Handling the complexities and uncertainties of the today's society in general and school environment in particular, often seem insurmountable to principals and the teachers alike. Nevertheless, we need to learn from our past success cases of overcoming contextual barriers. What we need to have in challenging contexts is the fundamental belief in the centrality of learning. (Coordinator B)*

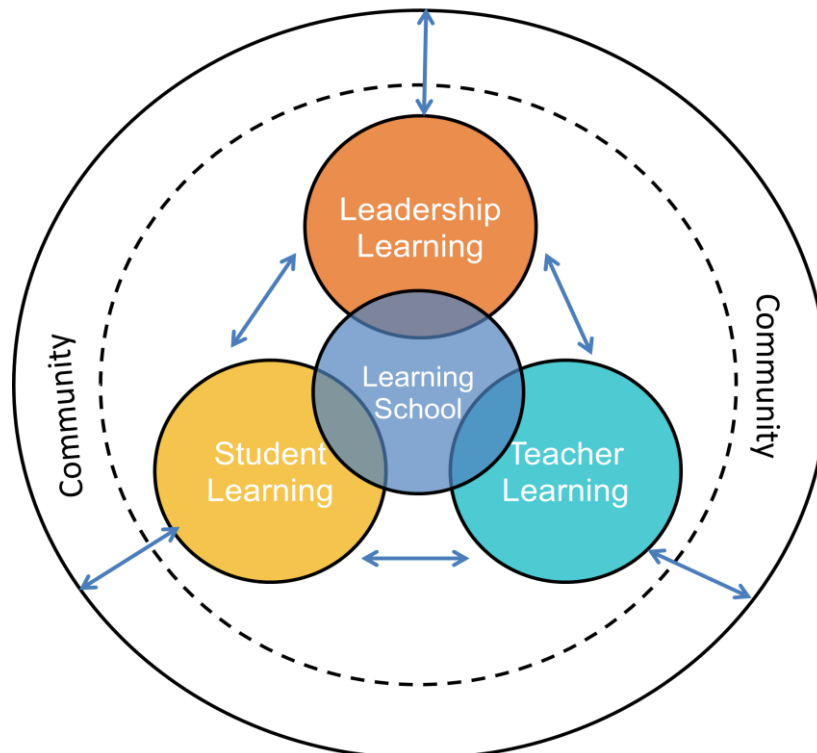
Owing to the challenges of increasing competition among the schools and the demand of the society to incorporate technology in the classroom, the significance of investing in learning has escalated. According to Earley and Weindling (2004), "... staff development has to be school-wide, rather than specific to individual teachers' needs, and closely related to the curriculum" (p. 158). As schools compete in a global marketplace, there is increased pressure on human resource development to equip them with the new and improved job skills. As a participant put:

*We cannot be satisfied that we have been able to survive, we have about 500 or 800 students, rather we have to prove that we are the number one or two. We need to compete with the schools in the vicinity in the first place, and to attract the students with world class education, we need to prepare our teachers first. Incorporating the technology in education, providing the 21st century life skills are the rising demands of the society. And if we cannot have efficient workforce, or prepare our teachers, we cannot survive after three years. (Vice Principal)*

In fact, the most notable trait of great leaders, certainly of great change leaders, is their quest for learning. Even though they have achieved a great deal, today's school leaders show an exceptional willingness to push themselves out of



their own comfort zones because they just don't have to survive, but to compete. They continue to take risks, not in spite of but because of, competition for excellence. In addition, an organization that focuses on learning increases its intangible assets, which may be the only way it can remain competitive. With these responsibilities in the forefront, school leaders must motivate and inspire those who will strive for continuous school improvement, and never be satisfied that the job is done. Based on the discussion above, the following model of learning school (school as a learning organization) has been developed.



*Figure 6.* School as a learning organization model

In a changing world, Mulford (2003) reminds us of Noah's principal: one survives not by predicting rain (or change) but by building arks. Amid uncertain, continually changing conditions, many schools are constructing arks comprising of their collective capacity to learn. They are striving to become intelligent, or learning, organisations (as cited in Mulford, 2008, p. 14).

### **Fine Tuning the Environment**

First and foremost, we need to understand the contextual elements, causes of the chaos, their impact on our daily practices of school leadership and the future directions set by the changing environment. Then only we will be in a position to deal with complexity. But the demands of managing the environment mean that principals need to be strong external leaders as well. As one participant noted:

*... I not only coordinate the school activities, manage the teaching and non-teaching staff, promote student learning; but also serve as the liaison to those outside the school and act as spokesperson of the school. (Vice Principal)*

Hatch (2010) also supported this view, “Over time, regular contacts between insiders and outsiders can grow into long-term relationships with allies who understand the school, provide access to resources, and act as advocates in times of crisis” (Build Networks section, para. 1). Another participant highlighted the importance of alliance with the community. He said:

*Parents who value education in our school are an integral part of the school. It is also necessary for the principal to involve broader community, serving it and being served by its resources. Schools are strengthened when they occupy a place in a community that values education. (Senior teacher)*

It is obvious that there is a clear link between school and its outer environment. School and community relationship necessarily brings into focus the importance of school as an open system. This system calls for “developing a broader perspective on several connectivities between school and the outer environment” (S. R. Lamichhane, personal communication, March 15, 2011). Mason (2007) indicated that “...complex and turbulent environments can be desirable, but since many

organizations are uncertain about how to cope with such situations, it makes sense to identify ways to handle such situations” (p. 11). One of my participants believed that:

*There is inter-relationship between an organization and its environment. But identifying a causative link between environmental variables and leadership action is hardly possible because of the complexity of variables and the chaotic nature of environment. (In-charge)*

One of the participants believed that there needs to be a paradigm shift in organizational design which includes a leadership team, rather than a single school principal as leader. He stated:

*We must rethink current roles and responsibilities in school and design a system that will work in this highly challenging environment where we can set high standards for all students. The roles would be built around the core functions of the school (which have) moved beyond the confines of the principal's office and typically includes a leadership team made up of teachers and community members as well as the principal. (Vice Principal)*

Another aspect of fine tuning the environment necessarily demands adoption of technological advances made every moment since market forces are competitive, technological advances are accelerating, and societal changes are occurring rapidly. A participant said:

*Schools have to keep up with the technological advances that are being made nearly daily. Programs, equipment and attitudes are shifting to reflect the changes of a constantly evolving society that demands technologically savvy people. ... take pains in building a school compliant with the technological advances. (HoD)*

In a fluid, dynamic environment where innovation rules, the participant themselves have strongly felt that the leadership should contribute to “energizing schools to catch up with the fast velocity of change” (S. R. Lamichhane, personal communication, March 14, 2011), ensuring agility or nimbleness by implementing changes more efficiently and effectively to succeed in unpredictable, contested environments. They should focus on increasing capacity of people and the organization to change constantly and increasing resilience.

### **Conclusion**

In the recent decade, the role and functioning of schools are changing and so is what is expected of school leaders. They work in complex contexts, with complex streams of action, and face a range of problems from simple to highly unusual. It means challenges to school leadership prevail given the dynamic tensions that spring up from the restless socio-political environment and the rapid growth of information technology. Problems are faced in the schools also because they emerge in the workplace itself. As a result of some seemingly insurmountable challenges, school leaders are in a state of confusion in taking up the appropriate leadership behavior since no single style of leadership can be the solution to such circumstances.

On the other hand, the accelerating change and complexity has brought a realization in the leadership to “engage the thinking of complexity and in some cases chaos not as a special case but the reality of the world in which we develop our strategies” (Rowe, 2008, p. 118). This implies that school leaders are to move beyond traditional pathways to deliver educational benefits for their students. These include community involvement, cross-school activities, and extensive use of information and communication technologies. It is evident that the job of school leaders is getting bigger and more challenging and they cannot do individually. Unilateral decisions are

largely unworkable. Therefore, the schools were found to be inclined to make it a point to go for collective decision making. Therefore, it is call of the day that they should be pragmatic and do what needs to be done and take on any help from others. This shows that today's school leaders are working together within and across schools.

Moreover, there is a growing interest in developing schools as learning organizations and in ways for teachers and leaders to share their expertise and experience more systematically. Therefore, they are currently focusing on professional growth of their teachers and of themselves. In addition, school leaders are also grappling with the lack of resources to do more in educating children with modern technology. Therefore, what the leaders should do is focus on doing what is urgent and important to bring about better learning environment in the school since they also view their role as the shapers of climate that fosters the learning of all members of the school community.

Finally, given the differing contexts of the schools, school leaders and their practices in different schools are characterized by a Gaelic proverb that reads – Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, while others wonder what has happened.

This chapter suggests that “when we consider leadership, we need to consider its tentacles reaching out to a different set of relationships of process, emotionality, instability, change, time and culture” (Rowe, 2008, p. 118). The ways that school principals address these chaotic challenges are through learning from the past experience and instant insights they get out of situations. It is true that principals have central roles in leading schools towards effectiveness and thus their leadership has remained critical to success through reform initiatives. Effective educational

leadership builds the pedagogical, administrative and cultural conditions necessary for successful learning and teaching. Principals do not do this alone. They use their leadership and management skills in ways that motivate and develop the capabilities of others so that responsibility for strengthening and sustaining the work and direction of the school is shared.

## CHAPTER VI

## AGAINST THE ODDS: MOVING FORWARD

This chapter explores the ideas behind and methods of dealing with prevalent chaos in the Nepalese academia. This has brought about the discussion of what strategic moves can be the safer ways out from the chaotic disturbances, and of course, also the chaotic edge with potential leverage that allows some room to excel. Therefore, this chapter attempts to scrutinize and reflect on the roles of school leaders in relation to strategic (visionary) leadership. The concern here is thus how the school leaders consciously develop and deliver strategies that are realized in action unlike the government initiative like SZOP that lacks any concrete steps and that “sans any real trust” (Editorial, 2012, p. 8).

Given the complex, uncertain, and turbulent world of constant change in contemporary organizations, Handy (1994) said that such tensions are “endemic” and argues that leaders are faced with tensions dilemmas and paradoxes that are “inevitable, endemic and perpetual” (as cited in Duignan, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, it is hardly surprising to find that teachers often say ‘no’, ‘no’ to get into the leadership positions. However, Osborne (2008) suggested that “Organizations must constantly adapt to new realities and create opportunities for growth. It is your role ... to steer these changes, encourage others to take on new challenges, and project credibility and integrity even in times of uncertainty” (Osborne, 2008, p. 42). Therefore, the role of the leaders is highly demanding and painstaking in leading at chaotic times.

The chapter has attempted to generate answer to my fourth research question. While discussing and interpreting the field data, the following four themes emerged:

1. Dispelling the Myths
2. Beating the Unbeatable Odds
3. Strategic Moves Ahead
4. A Look Ahead: Actualizing National Imagination

### **Dispelling the Myths**

Before anything else, be clear on where you stand today, suggested Page (2008, p. 10). Page (2008) further advised that “All too often feel the heat of the fire upon us too quickly and we rush to a solution planning and understanding of our current school system is key, at an individual, local and national scale” (p. 10). Should we not be clear on where we are standing today? Therefore, understanding chaos is of paramount importance for us before we take up steps to fight it.

We live in uncertain times. We always do. Former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was spot on half a century ago when he famously remarked, in answer to a question, that what made life most difficult for him was ‘events, dear boy, events!’ This is true for leaders of any organization regardless of whether events take the form of a general downturn in economic fortunes or instead stem from deeper seated seismic shifts in specific market conditions or developments in trade, technology, demography, climate and regulation. The secret of success thus lies not in futile attempts to avoid uncertainty but rather in the ability to cope with the challenges life inevitably throws up.

... Part of that ability is perspective (or ‘keeping your head while others panic’) which, believe it or not, economists are sometimes able to provide. Even what in hindsight look like periods of relative calm for the economy often don’t feel so when you are living through them, so it’s important not to act too soon and make the wrong moves.

(Philpott, 2008, p. 18)



Very often the term ‘chaos’ has the negative connotations like turmoil, turbulence, complexity, and disorder. It is used to mean an array of all those complexities and uncertainties ruling the world today. It is true. Literally it means a state of total confusion and disorder. And that is why, most of the school leaders, let alone any laymen, shrug their shoulder and get the goose bumps when they hear it. It is easy, therefore, to become disoriented, confused and frustrated in such challenging conditions. Yet, there are some people who strongly believe that with disorder follows order. A school leader put it:

*I feel chaos as a threat as well as an opportunity because it hinders timely accomplishment of scheduled tasks and enables us with extra consciousness respectively. ... When we are conscious that our situation is difficult, we take extra caution to make things happen. (HoD)*

Similarly, another school leader perceived chaos as formidable in the beginning but slowly when he started taking up the job more seriously, he felt that it is a way of life in a globalized world. He said:

*You know I was very much afraid of the terms like chaos, uncertainty, disorder, conflicts, etc. now I realize that they are a part of our daily life. People say in the changing world, nothing is constant, nothing is predictable. But humorously, I have found them to be the only thing to be constant. They occur every minute, everywhere. We cannot simply escape them. So they are now an integral part of our social life. (Coordinator B)*

This is so true when Duignan (2003) also revealed the same concept stating that “Perhaps there is nothing unique about this situation, because paradoxes and tensions are, in fact, a part of the fabric of life in organizations” (p. 2). Leading in

such a climate is perhaps less a job and rather a way of life. The coordinator further added:

*When we have realized that chaos is difficult to deal with, it is our job to simplify the chaotic circumstances step by step and deal with them. Once we have found the problems or a list of possible problems and challenges, our next step is to strategize the actions to take. (Coordinator B)*

Moreover, the discussion in this research is of the “edge of chaos” rather than simply “chaos”. At the Edge of Chaos the context is not so dynamic, non-linear and unpredictable that the organization cannot survive; instead patterns of short-term predictability are present alongside unpredictable movement in the pursuit of fitness (McCarthy, 2011, p. 35). In such situations, Anderson (1999) maintained that leaders need to be versatile to the demands of their role, by being sensitive to changes in their environment (as cited in McCarthy, 2011, p. 35). “The future is inherently unpredictable” said Wah (1998, p. 24, as cited in Smith & Rupp, 2003, p. 163), so he advocated that organizations should “reside at “the edge of chaos” where it will have enough structure to hold people and processes together, yet enough flexibility to allow innovation and adaptation” (p. 25, as cited in Smith & Rupp, 2003, p. 163). It seems Wah’s (1998) future has come today since complexity, and unpredictability overwhelms us. In this regard, all of my participants strongly felt that this is not the time to resort to wishful thinking, but rather to push up the sleeves and fight off the unfightable.

### **Understanding the Context**

Context matters. The first thing a school leader needs to know is its context – the local setting, environmental setting, internal and external forces and impact of socio-politico activities. Therefore, Mulford (2010) said that “School leaders need to

be contextually literate” (p. 188) since a number of powerful contextual forces are challenging the very nature of schooling. The challenging forces include rapid advances in science and technology, increased globalization, changes in demography including in the nature of work, and pressures on the environment. Mulford further stated:

Taken together, these contextual forces imply that schools and their leaders need to broaden ‘what counts’ to include the non-cognitive outcomes of schooling. They need to achieve a better balance, or make a choice between competing forces (favouring stability on which to build change, independence rather than dependence, community rather than individualism, and heterogeneity rather than homogeneity). (Mulford, 2008, p. 19)

Mulford (2007) identified successful leadership as “an interactive, reciprocal and evolving process involving many players, which was influenced by and, in turn, influenced, the context in which it occurred” (p. 19). In fact, all of the sections that follow are set within the context of understandings and requirements of and support from the environment – that is, within and outside the school boundary.

Macdonald and Hursh (2006) focused on the changing state of knowledge, its access, source, obsolescence, and the permanence.

We have argued that schools need to be transformed, particularly within the changing global economy. ....Furthermore, the nature of knowledge and how we access knowledge has changed. The classical subject areas of English, science, math, history, civics/social studies, and the arts no longer make sense. ... Textbooks are inadequate as a knowledge resource. What is known is quickly changing and other resources – particularly via the internet – are more current and relevant. (Macdonald & Hursh, 2006, p. 121)

A school leader has expressed much like what Macdonald and Hursh (2006) have stated. For him:

*So much as the knowledge you gained yesterday becomes stale by tomorrow, the leadership practice that you did yesterday are no longer valid today. Every single instance of a situation needs a different way of tackling. (HoD)*

This position has created a working context for school leaders which is very different from the context in which many of them 'grew up' professionally (Mulford, 2008, p. 2). So, given all the above, efforts to better understand the consequences of the working context of schools are essential for school leaders. Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008, p. 8) has highlighted the distinct contexts of each school:

The distinct context of each school means principals need to have the kinds of leadership skills and understandings that will help them to maintain the best possible conditions for teaching, learning and building community confidence in the school. Building strong learning communities where there is shared commitment to investigating, exploring and evaluating practice is a critical leadership responsibility.

Given the distinct context of each school, school leaders should adopt the distinct leadership qualities that fit their context, yet they may also hold those that are common to other school contexts.

### **Beating the Unbeatable Odds**

There is no formula to prepare school leaders to succeed in the complex and uncertain world we all face. Moreover, the challenges that leaders face today have no easy answers, and what works for one leader may not directly apply to another. But we can still find some ideas, and insights that will help all survive and thrive in uniquely challenging times.

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### Leadership Beyond School Walls

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The OECD's comparative review of school leadership suggests that an important role for school leaders is that of collaborating with other schools or communities around them. Schools and their leaders strengthen collaboration, form networks, share resources, and/or work together. These engagements enlarge the scope of leadership beyond the school to the welfare of young people in the city, town or region. They can also nurture a culture where improving school leadership is accomplished across communities, to the benefit of all concerned.

At the same time, experience in these municipalities also shows that for school leaders to be able to take on this larger system-level role, leadership at the school level must be better distributed, so that deputy heads and leadership teams can assume some of the school leaders' tasks when he or she is taking on larger roles. Overall, the study suggests that leaders' collaboration with other schools and with the local community can help to improve problem-solving through intensified processes of interaction, communication and collective learning. It can also help to develop leadership capacity and address succession and stability issues by increasing the density of and opportunities for local leadership in the school and at the local level. (Schleicher, 2012, p. 20)

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“It is no secret that we are at the forefront of one of the most exciting and promising of all ages in human history” said Covey (2008, p. 6). He further elaborated:

The exploding advances in technology and the globalization of markets have created unprecedented opportunities for growth and prosperity for individuals, families, organizations, and society as a whole. Of course, there are also many problems and challenges – there always have been and always will be – but

gaze in any direction and opportunities to progress and make a difference are everywhere. (Covey, 2008, pp.6-7)

Similarly, Handy suggests that we cannot afford such confusion and we must learn to ‘find pathways through’ or manage paradoxes because they are part and parcel of the fabric of life (Duignan, 2003, p. 2). In this connection, it is better to look into the leadership scenario in our schools to explore how the schools leaders have been beating the odds. A school leader said:

*We have to figure out the stars among the staff who can take the helms of different situations. Because no one is perfect at everything, and everyone is good at one thing or other, we have to identify the strengths of the staff and mobilize them in the concerned area in the needed times. (HoD)*

Buckingham (2005) has theorized the similar concept and stated to “capitalize on employees’ strengths” (p. 3) to beat the difficult events and circumstances. He further gave the procedural guidelines in capitalizing the employee’s strengths in the following way:

First identify each employee’s unique strengths: Walk around, observing people’s reactions to events. Note activities each employee is drawn to. Ask “What was the best day at work you’ve had in the past three months?” Listen for activities people find intrinsically satisfying. Watch for weaknesses, too, but downplay them in your communications with employees. Offer training to help employees overcome shortcomings stemming from lack of skills or knowledge. (Buckingham, 2005, p. 3)

Relating to the leadership responsibilities in building an enabling school environment to beat the challenges of chaos and uncertainty, a school leader put his ideas in this way:

*Invite ideas, respect diversity, involve people in decision-making, empowering the staff with authority delegation, listening to them with empathy, provide instructions, establish a system for promotion and professional growth, make them feel secured in this job by taking moral responsibilities for their mistakes (if any) (that is because of my lack of instruction to them), organizing student-teacher, and parent-teacher interaction sessions, and so on and so forth. A principal can do a lot, and the other leaders can suggest principals do many things. They can provide the Heads with constructive ideas. (Coordinator A)*

Another participant highlighted that sometimes changing the leadership may work. He said:

*When the disorder persists and the leaders cannot address them. It is very likely that we have to test a new principal. The existing may not be fit to tackle the problems because he/she may lack necessary competences required of the changing world. (Coordinator B)*

Christopher Cerf, New York City's Deputy Schools Chancellor, supports the fact that picking up a right school leader is imperative for school success. He typically related his argument in relation to teacher turnover and put his ideas this way:

Pick the right school leader and great teachers will come and stay. Pick the wrong one and, over time, good teachers leave, mediocre ones stay, and the school gradually (or not so gradually) declines. Reversing the impact of a poor principal can take years..." (as cited in The Wallace Foundation, 2008, p. 3)

Hatch (2010) suggested that "Schools that distribute the work, scan and seed the environment, cultivate networks of allies, and thoughtfully work to reshape demands put themselves in a strong position to deal with changing conditions in the external environment" (How to Manage section, para. 1). The other school leaders

had some typical ways out to survive in chaotic times that had compelled them to foster competitive edge for their schools. In this regard, one participant said:

*We can't go to the outer field folding up our sleeves to compete; we must first bolster ourselves internally. So I think there are two ways to think over this issue. One is to be competitive within and the other is competing with the rest of the world. When we are competitive within, we can have better competitive edge with out. The first thing we need to do for internal competitiveness is to attract better professionals and retain them, train and develop them, encourage innovation, incorporate new methods of teaching, and create an enabling environment. And to present ourselves competitively in the outer world, we must equip ourselves with what others lack. (Principal A)*

Regarding attracting and retaining good teachers, Schleicher's (2012) claim is worthwhile to note. He said "Competitive compensation and other incentives, career prospects and diversity, and giving teachers responsibility as professionals are important parts of strategies to attract the most talented teaches to the most challenging classrooms" (p. 77). The principal further added:

*Similarly, we need to adopt the changes taking place in the socio-economic and academic scenario worldwide. We should take into account the pressing demands of the parents, and proactively prepare students for a changing world since our students will have to live in the world which we have not lived. (Principal A)*

Another leader put his idea of community engagement in school business. He put his ideas along the following lines:

*Schools should play a vital role in strengthening linkages within their communities by providing opportunities for interaction and networking,*



*which, in turn, contribute to their well-being and builds a strong cohesion between them. We can encourage parental and community involvement in school functions so that they also feel that schools are to be protected for the future of their own children. (Senior teacher)*

The importance of linking social capital from the school with its community is high, especially where it results in an enhancement of that community's capacity to influence its own future. Essentially, schools work in public relationships to serve a community, and are primarily accountable to the community. While all schools can do much for themselves, support from outside is also needed. Therefore, schools are in a need to work in strong partnership with other institutions. Above all, school leaders should have strong commitment to face unprecedented challenges. Another school leader succinctly puts his idea of what they should concentrate more in today's rapidly changing world (in terms of technological advances, increasing globalization, and ever rising uncertainty of the socio-political environment). He said:

*Specifically, quality in instructional methodology (with ICT), teacher training and development, student services with health and safety, following the recent trends in education, collaboration and networking with other schools, are just a few things we need to focus upon. (Coordinator A)*

Another leader suggested different activities that could promote collegiality at the school level. He said:

*It is important to maintain collegial relationship among the staff members in the school first. To do so, we can take the ideas like formation of interdisciplinary teaching teams, involving staff in school-wide problem solving, and fostering action-based or cooperative learning. (Senior teacher)*

Another leader focused on networking and working in allies to tackle the impact of chaos in academia. He said:

*Since we cannot face the changes effectively if we go for individual efforts, it's high time we had developed allies so that we could handle the disruptive environment collectively. Rather than facing competition and opposition, there should be a genuine feeling of togetherness in the effort to minimizing the impact of external chaos. (Principal B)*

Although the school leaders are working often in different contexts and with differing challenges at varying times in their leadership, they cannot underestimate the opportunity that networking and working in allies may provide them to support in difficult times. This is in fact a very effective way to collectively handling the environment. Hatch (2010) also confirmed “Over time, regular contacts between insiders and outsiders can grow into long-term relationships with allies who understand the school, provide access to resources, and act as advocates in times of crisis” (Build Networks section, para. 1). Another school leader also talked about the mutual benefit of making links with the other partners for a common cause.

*There exists tremendous potential between our schools or in the relation between schools and community to further expand and deepen the areas of mutually beneficial cooperation. It is an anchor that keeps us steady in times of turbulence. In this age of interdependence, we can equally benefit from the neighboring (more) successful schools. (Coordinator B)*

He further said:

*The relations between schools need no introduction; what it needs is a strengthening in the aspects of teacher development and infrastructure sharing. (Coordinator B)*

Another school leader listed down some of the ways as possible radical solutions to address the challenges of schools on the edge:

*Schools should network and collaborate. Struggling schools can merge. New trends/methods in education, curriculum and instruction should be adopted. Enhancing digital literacy (even of teachers) should be the focus. Enabling learning culture needs to be fostered in schools. Competencies of teachers and principals need to be evaluated often by an external (government) body periodically so as to test their professional maturity and whether they are updating themselves. We need to learn from highly successful schools both from the local and international contexts. (In-charge, Protocol # 02)*

To carry out the above roles, the school leaders need to have interpersonal skills and they have to exercise collegiality. Moreover, stimulation of ideas through discourse among organizational members essentially begets new ideas that can raise the level of organizational effectiveness. Based on the discussion with the In-charge, I also reflected on my understanding in my analytical memo:

*Providing space for everyone to express their ideas within school is a healthy move to generate a wealth of ideas. Similarly, encouraging the involvement of local community in school affair is a way forward in facing the chaos. Leaders must not have 'a toad in a well' attitude; they need exposure to different school environments towards leadership development. Thus, school improvement is a collaborative effort. (Memo # 04)*

### **Rising to the Challenges**

It might be useful to consider some of the background of leadership development, which may have contributed in some part to the way that schools rise to the challenges. A participant put his ideas this way:

*To ensure best school leadership, we need to provide the existing leaders with capacity development trainings. Moreover, young teachers are to be continuously assessed for their leadership potential and are to be given the opportunity to develop their leadership capacity. (Principal A)*

Another participant also had a similar say:

*There should be a clear structure to choose future leaders from successful teachers already in the school. Potential school leaders can serve on the committees, be promoted to middle level leadership positions (e.g. block in-charge, subject in-charge, coordinator, head of department), and be transferred to the higher level positions when they are ready and when the time demands. (Senior teacher)*

These above participants focused on capacity development of the existing and potential school leaders to prepare them to take up the job with efficiency. However, another school leader focused on what we should do and what kind of leadership roles are to be performed to tackle the chaos at present. He expressed:

*Besides the traditional administrative or managing roles, the present day school leaders should play the pedagogical or instructional roles, team building and public relation roles. Because instructional role binds the leader with the need to focus on staff development, supervision, setting direction, creating conducive climate for effective teaching and learning. Similarly, public relations role binds the leaders with maintaining good relationship with the parents, community stakeholders, educational authorities, etc. (Vice Principal)*

Another participant pointed out three critical roles of a school leader. For him, these roles include “ensuring effective teaching and learning, strategic vision and

leadership, and professional development of the staff” (HoD). Similarly, another leader expressed his idea on the leadership role to deal with the growing complexity, uncertainty and challenges of the turn of the century. He expressed:

*I don't know exactly what term is used to refer to the kind of leader I think will be required to deal with all these, but I think a leader who is able to analyze the situation and act promptly is the need of the day. May I call this leader as situation-oriented? It is necessary to be flexible in leadership styles in order to meet the varying needs and demands of schools. Such leader should also be strategic in that they should use different tactics to deal with immediate and unexpected situations. For example, if we know that there was strike called by teachers, we should at the moment manage the classes. If it was pre-declared, we won't have that much problem – we can simply declare the day off. But if it is unknown till the school time begins, we need to mobilize the student leaders and may give the day off after the break. (Coordinator A)*

Another participant put his idea on transformational leadership which he thinks can to the best extent face the challenges and move forward in chaotic times. He said:

*Most probably transformational leadership can cope with all these vicissitudes of academic sector but it can't be so easily applied by all the leaders in all the situations. (HoD)*

However, the stark truth is that transformation does not exist as any distinct point in time. Simply put, we won't know when we get there. Page (2008) stated “Transforming education is a process of continual evolution contained in a complex system of flows and interactions where balance, agility, adaptability, skill, hope, values and resilient energy drive the flows and interactions” (p. 11). Given the

perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school and the participants also focused on the role of the school leaders in rising to the challenges of the growing complexities. Harris (2002) also viewed:

Effective leadership is at the core of every successful organization. The contribution of leadership to school improvement is widely acknowledged and supported in the research literature. Findings from diverse countries draw similar conclusions about the “centrality of leadership to school improvement. (Harris, 2002, p. 66)

A school leader also talked about leadership qualification for school leaders.

He said:

*It would be better if the school leaders, especially the principals, are required to have some teaching experience, successful completion of some principal preparation program and/or a master’s degree in leadership. I have realized that I need to have some training and also a degree in leadership. I am planning to go for the latter. (Principal B)*

When I talked with many school leaders, I found that school leaders in the complex and uncertain socio-political context are expected to be everything. Their role has “swelled to include a staggering array of professional tasks and competencies” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 4). In these chaotic times, the school leaders are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations and communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, as well as guardians of various legal, and policy mandates and initiatives. In addition, they are expected to serve the often conflicting needs and interests of

many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, unions, and district office officials. Fullan (2007) said:

It should be clear, then, that school improvement is an organizational phenomenon, and therefore the principal, as leader, is the key. With all this confirmation from the research literature and with many current attempts to situate the principal as change leader, one would think that it would be a slam dunk to make progress. Well it is not, and here is where progress means digging deeper into the problem and its solution. (p. 167)

Today, in countries throughout the world, it is widely recognized that successful school improvement hinges on many factors, but the most important of all is the leadership capacity since school improvement requires the commitment of a team of outstanding school leaders and teachers. Similarly, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2008) supported this claim by stating that “no school improvement effort is likely to be sustained without the involvement of teams of strong leaders” (p. 1).

### **Strategic Moves Ahead**

When one recognizes that chaos exists and we are at the edge of chaos, it is imperative to think ‘how to behave towards it’. Everyone has realized by this time that no solution pops up waiting wonders to happen for them. It is the leader’s job to create that wonder to happen. Therefore, leaders need to continuously discuss issues openly with teachers and other leaders generating more and more ideas and deciding upon the best suit. The Fiji Times Online (2007) made it a point that:

A leader must see problems as friends and takes criticism with appreciation and highest degree of patience. In a dynamically complex school environment, a facilitative approach, collegial governance and multi-level planning is vital

instead of the directive approach which is very bureaucratic. (The Fiji Times Online, June 4, 2007)

The school leaders envisioned that they needed to successfully analyze the contexts, and plan and act accordingly. For example, one Principal understood that the school was not in accord with the high community expectations. When he began at the school, he noted:

*... it was not in line with the community expectation, nor was it in a position to compete with the other schools in the area. The curricula and teaching learning styles were too traditional, I mean, not in compatible with the competitive market, you know, they had been teaching Sanskrit. I sought to change the culture by setting high expectations and encouraging academic rigor. (Principal B)*

Another principal found that the community was indifferent towards school activities. So, he quickly acted to increase parents' participation in school activities and encourage adoption of new school rules:

*I was more than surprised to know that parents just pay the fees and send their children to school but rarely come to discuss on their children's achievement. There was poor attendance of the parents even on parents-teachers meetings. I had to adopt strict rules, for example, if a student fails twice, he will be expelled from school, so that the parents would be more attentive to learning students' progress. (Principal A)*

Understanding the total school environment helps school leaders build their system resilient. As an effective school leader, a leader should manage both the inner and outer environment. In this consideration, one leader's comment was typical:



We need to reflect on our own behavior within the organization, see what is obstructing our daily schedules, and also pay attention to the outer factors that impinge on school functioning. We need to first micromanage the inner environment and then we can go for broader outlook. (Vice Principal)

His comment can be linked to the critical humanist perspective of leadership.

The leader should be sensitive towards both inner and outer criticality, i.e., the leader should critically reflect into his or her own behavior within the organizational context, and also needs to critically assess, scan, and analyze the external environment which reveal to the leader what is needed to be delivered as against what is being delivered.

According to Duignan (2007), “In today’s often ambiguous and uncertain contexts, authentic educational leaders need to be capable of good judgement and possess a wisdom derived from deep critical reflection on life and work experiences” (para. 2).

Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008) also stated “Principals can benefit from personal reflection, sharing ideas and initiatives with their peers, and working with others to clarify situations and solve problems” (p.13).

The other aspect of environment scanning is accommodating political reality.

The challenge for leaders is to develop open-eyed awareness of political realities without becoming overwhelmed by frustration and anger. As one leader put it this way:

*...handling outer context necessarily involves understanding the political reality. Though most of the turbulence has been a cause of defective political reality, we cannot just be frustrated and sit idle. School leaders, more particularly principal, can ...by frequent professional gatherings, accessing educational media, and networking with other school leaders. (In-charge)*

Another school leader focused on communication in maintaining good school climate. He said:

*Communication is very critical for a leader, and transparency in communication should be standard practice in organization. (Coordinator A)*

*A principal commented on the role of the teachers unions:*

*Very often teacher unions are speaking for the facilities for the teachers, they rarely talk about the professional development of teachers. I have never heard them invite teachers for training. I think they should be more engaged in encouraging teachers to take the lead in their own learning. (Principal B)*

Thus, school leaders can develop good relational alliances with the school members, community stakeholders, including politicians and the influential. They need to keep themselves abreast of the educational updates, demands of the century, and socio-political landscapes.

### **Leading with Vision: From Current Reality to New Vision**

The key elements of leadership are the ability to create a vision, then to lead people towards its fulfillment. The school leaders pointed to the urgent call for creating a shared vision for success. They felt the need to make a shared vision for their schools. Though every school had in their school book the vision and mission of their schools, the leaders felt that it is high time they revised the vision to meet the demands of the changing educational landscape. Davis et al. (2005) said:

*Principals play a vital and multifaceted role in setting the direction for schools that are positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children, but existing knowledge on the best ways to develop these effective leaders is insufficient. (p. 1)*

Recognizing that the school vision needs to be revised and should reflect the shared responsibility of all, a participant expressed:

*The vision of our school has become outdated. Moreover, it was copied from some other schools (laughs...!). That is going to help us. What I feel is we need to create a shared vision for success in our unique context, unlike the one we have right now. Since no two or more schools are run with exactly the same context. We differ significantly in location, size, target community, resources, investment, and commitment and the way we perceive what it means to educate children as a whole. (HoD)*

An additional factor prominent in the personal ethos of some of the interviewees is professional experience. This factor includes all past professional experiences affecting the current organizational vision promoted by the leader. The factor was clearly reflected in the comments of a school principal who stressed that:

*I have seen the vision of the school changing now. I think we are very soon deciding on a new school vision. You know, I have a new vision for our school. My vision is built from thirty years of educational activity. I know where we are heading. Yet, I give importance to shared vision and setting direction for success. (Principal A)*

Experiences of these school leaders indicate that school success is derived from the development of a shared or collective vision for the school. All of the participants strongly believed in creating a shared vision and making it a force that streamlines all towards realizing the vision. As one participant put it:

*In a highly fragile environment, a leader laden vision may not work out well, so we need to involve the stakeholders in creating a shared vision and we can direct the organizational members towards higher objectives. When the vision*

*is shared, they feel ownership of it, and feel the urge to work towards achieving it. So is the case with setting long term goals, which may not be feasible in setting immediate goals in emergent situation. (Coordinator A)*

Effective leaders recognize their own strengths and attract competent people to enhance the organization's capabilities. They cultivate and focus the strengths of colleagues to achieve the shared vision. Another principal defined her realistic vision for school success in the dawning 21st century. She explained that:

*The shared vision we developed for school success is strongly based on our enduring beliefs and values, understanding of the context, and underlying philosophies of education. We value diversity, believe "each child matters," provide effective instructional leadership for high student achievement and we are committed to provide the 21st century life skills to our students incorporating, at the best possible, the latest development in information and technology. We always want to be number one. We have a deep interest in providing every child an excellent education. But as our past performance suggests, getting there is not easy. (Principal Aa)*

School leaders who create a vision for success for all students and provide effective instructional leadership for high student achievement are the key to academic success. Bringing this vision to fruition will essentially demand a concerted effort by all the stakeholders. It is the responsibility of the leadership to set the right direction, empowering the staff, and escalating the organizational growth. School leaders' abilities and authority in decision-making and problem-solving are be important. Can they quickly deal with a situation by analyzing the nature of the issue and taking appropriate action that incorporates alternative course of action? As one participant put it:

*We engage in shared decision making with the school community, including staff, students, and parents. We think we are both the guardian and reformer of the educational system. ... we ensure that all are engaged in a common goal and moving in the same direction.* (Vice Principal)

Effective leaders collaboratively create a vision and establish a climate for people to reach their highest level of achievement. They communicate the vision and direct all actions toward achieving the vision. Through this collaboration, the leaders define the path for educational and personal success for all students. Although they say it in different ways, all of them agreed that effective school leaders are responsible for “establishing a schoolwide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 5).

### **Setting Out in New Directions**

At the heart of all great organizations are the people who drive the organization's purpose and its success—the people who need to lead themselves and others. Setting out in a new direction requires leaders who can not only lead the way, but who can help others to follow. Leaders who prepare the way should ensure that others can follow. They make links between where people are, and where he or she is taking them. Not surprisingly though, encouraging people to move from current reality to new ground can cause tension. A school leader expressed that:

*In order to provide powerful educational experiences and achieve dramatic results for our students, we acknowledge that we must do away with traditional approaches and long-held arrangements that have hardened into place over decades. We also need to move from talk of reform to substantive action.* (Principal A)

Another school leader expressed:

*We know that there are a lot of challenges. But these challenges cannot be used as excuses; excuses do not change outcomes. We realize that we must honestly confront the challenges collaboratively. Rather, it is because every school faces these challenges, we must create a transformed system that will look and feel very different from what we have today. (Coordinator B)*

Combined with comprehensive pressures and the constant need to adapt and change, the demands of strong leadership at every level of an organization are essential to its strategic alignment, effectiveness and success.

### **Turning ‘Negatives’ into ‘Positives’**

People act the way they find the environment. If this is true, school leaders should not fret about student and teacher behaviors any more. They can simply create an enabling school environment, that’s all. But it is not as simple as said. What suits me fine may seem to be a lousy stuff for another. Individual differences matter. Peterson and Deal (2009) claimed “Although school culture is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of staff, students, and parents, it can be shaped by the work of leaders” (p. 12). They further said “Staff and administrative leaders must work together to transform negative cultures into positive learning communities. Without this, a school will never achieve its hopes and dreams” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 206). Therefore, the daunting task for school leaders is to enhance a favorable school climate for the good of majority. A school leader put his ideas this way:

*In times of constant change, school leaders need to be flexible, adaptable and creative. As important as it is to address the longstanding weakness of the staff development, the fact is even well-prepared teachers are unlikely to work to the fullest for long in a system that undermines them. Therefore, the school leaders should focus on creating stimulating opportunities for effective people*

*development, they need to have the knowledge of creative handling of the disruptive teacher and student behaviors. Above all, they should be equipped to turn the negatives into positives. (Senior teacher)*

Peterson and Deal (2009) also shared:

Working with both the positive and the noxious members of your school's informal network is extremely important. These informal players in the culture drama can often make or break a culture, sustain it or send it into a death trajectory. Becoming an effective leader requires working effectively with both positive and negative types of informal networks. (p. 148)

A school leader focused on developing a collaborative work culture in talking the difficulties facing the schools today. He said:

*Collaborative work culture and institutional membership concept can support face such challenges to some extent. (HoD)*

Pont et al. (2008) stated that within each individual school, leadership can contribute to improve student learning by shaping the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur. Beyond the school borders, school leaders can connect and adapt schools to changing external environments (p. 16). Another leader focuses on the need to fine tuning the environment for a better school culture. For him:

*The role of school leaders must be redefined in the changing context. Gone are the days when they spent most of their time thinking about student achievement, now they need to focus on an array of forces right from managing the disruptive behavior of the students to the latest technologies and teaching practices. Competing with other schools in terms of students' performance and quality of facilities, school leaders should think anew about how to fine tune the environment that support their goals. (HoD)*

Creating a positive school climate is also necessary to keep the best people in the job and to attract a good many students. Another participant remarked:

*This is a competition. Both the teacher and students can have the choices to stay in my school or go to other school. There is an increasing school choice for them. (Coordinator A)*

Even though not all school choice settings actually put pressure on schools and school leaders to compete, in some environments school leaders are more and more expected to market their schools efficiently, know what competing schools offer, develop niches for their schools and maintain good customer relations with students and parents (Leithwood, 2001). Similarly, Pont et al. (2008) viewed that “In some cases, school choice is deliberately used as a mechanism to enhance competition between autonomous schools. In systems where funding follows the student, parents are treated as clients who choose the school providing the best quality” (p. 24). All these aspects make the leaders take a step towards creating a school climate that retains good people and attracts more students.

### **Navigating the Wave of Uncertainty: Preparing the ‘Best Self’**

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There are no shortages of challenging opportunities. Although in these extraordinary times the challenges seem only to be increasing in number and complexity, all generations confront their own serious threats and receive their own favorable circumstances. The abundance of challenges, however, is not the issue; it’s how you respond to them that matters.

Through your responses you have the potential to either seriously worsen or profoundly improve the world in which you live, study, and work. (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, Introduction section, para. 2)

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Although many school leaders have gained the positions climbing up or jumping up the leadership stairs, a few may initially jump on the bandwagon and move into what they consider to be the progressive leadership. It is widely held that school leadership is crucial to the success of schools. However, many changes have taken place in school leadership over the past few years which have put more pressure on the part of school leaders. To cope with the changes, school leaders need training, development and support as many of them feel isolated and stressed up. For want of formal training in place, almost all principals are learning on the job. According to one principal:

*There was nothing in my education, let alone training, that prepared me for this job. I was a pure science student, but when our friends [shareholder partners] proposed me for principal, I became one. (Principal B)*

He further said:

*Initially, I was not greeted well by my teachers. I did not have a very intimate relationship with teachers because I was teaching in other schools also, and I was only teaching two periods in my school. In the beginning days, teachers quietly quit and landed to other schools. But when I devoted my whole time to my school, slowly the situation came under my control. (Principal B)*

He also warned new school leaders that similar fate may be in store for them. Therefore, he suggested that school leaders are to be emotionally mature enough to engage in mutually rewarding and elevating relationships. They should be capable of elevating the spirits of those around them and contribute to their environment through the quality of their relationships (Duignan, 2007, para. 2). Not always is the connection between the leaders and subordinates as blur as in the above case of the principal. But many subordinates want leaders to demonstrate leadership capabilities.

And most of the time, they don't want to leave the organization; they simply want to leave the leaders. However, the skills involved in responding leadership issues and challenges are not something one can acquire overnight by reading a book on how to lead.

Though most of the skills are already possessed by school leaders, what they need to do is refocus and sharpen those skills in relation to clear understanding of how the leadership process unfolds and what you are expected to do in challenging times. Some believe that there are no training programs for private school heads though the government conducts training for the public school heads. One leader put it this way:

*In my view, the government should provide training to the private school principals as much as they provide to the public school headteachers. If that is not possible, private school organizations should be forced to conduct training for the head teachers. Besides, there should also be strict enforcement of the government policy in regards to the qualification of the school principals. School leadership standards should also be established. The existing principals should be asked to upgrade their qualification or they should be gradually replaced by more qualified and competent teachers. They should not be left uncontrolled in every way. At least private schools should not be free like the grocery shops in that they can have unqualified principals and can raise the fees when they want. (HoD)*

It shows that *better leadership training is essential for school leaders.*

Improving the training of private school principals is not the entire answer to the nation's school leadership challenge. But it is certainly a crucial part of it. The Wallace Foundation (2008) concluded "if there is a national imperative to improve our failing schools, then there is also a national imperative to strengthen the

preparation of school leaders” (p. 11). It is imperative that school leaders participate very often in professional development. As a result, they may find continuing professional education to be meaningful, and this promotes professional development. Duignan (2007) further highlighted that “Leaders ... require more than management knowledge, skills and competencies. They require creative, intuitive frameworks based on an in-depth understanding of human nature and of the values, ethics and moral dimensions inherent in human interaction and choice” (Duignan, 2007, para. 3)

It is obvious that school improvement is an organizational phenomenon, and therefore the principal, as a leader, is the key. With all this confirmation from the research literature and with many current attempts to situate the principal as a key change leader, “one would think that it would be a slam dunk to make progress. Well it is not, and here is where progress means digging deeper into the problem and its solution” (Fullan, 2007, p. 167). In the changing scenario, new landscapes of connections, which cannot be exhibited by cause and effect relations, need to be focused. As the new perspective puts emphasis on the need for understanding the entire dynamics within organizational systems it is crucial to acknowledge new way of understanding fluctuations, disorder, and change. To this end, “understanding of the connectivity between order and chaos is essential” (S. R. Lamichhane, personal communication, 2011, April 11). For change and progress, association between these forces is vital. “To understand the future it is necessary to have some understanding of the past. “Education for All” is today an uncontested value and schooling is widely accepted as the means to that end” (MacBeath et al., 2007, p. 125).

### **Channeling Chaos Through Lateral Thinking**

When the problems surround us, we will have two options: face them boldly or give in. our first and foremost effort will no doubt be on facing the problems. And

as many school leaders put it, they are not going to choose the second option in any case; rather they will stick to the first option but with varying (levels of) strategies and tactics. As one leader put it more succinctly:

*We don't need to fret because of chaos. I think it is an opportunity. If we can handle chaos, a new kind of confidence to tackle the problem will be developed in leaders. We need to see it differently as Shiva Khera has said, "Winners don't do different things, they do things differently." This thinking applies in resolving chaos. We need to have creative and lateral thinking, thinking out of the box. (Coordinator B)*

The coordinator has experienced and felt that the days for linear thinking are gone. He illustrated what later thinking means with an example:

*Suppose you are building a house in 4 Anna land, and in the foundation ground you find a big boulder. You have a headache, you try to dig it up with an excavator, you cannot, you try with explosive to break that into pieces, and neighbor's windowpanes are smashed. You try different things and end up. We need to rise up and think in a different way. Why don't you think that the boulder fits there well? See if it can serve as a wall, it will save your money. If we think this way, everything can be handled well. Handling chaos is the quality of leadership. It develops your resilience. We don't need to be a great thinker to be a good leader. We just need to develop a different common sense. (Coordinator B)*

We see the possibility that school leaders act in a social system and may have shared the leadership challenges, however partially, their situations differ and their behavior and actions are the reflections of the school they are in. Rowe (2008) said:

Leaders are able (or tasked) to create chaos and/or complexity as well as live with it and this is opposed to the notion of management that seeks to control and attenuate chaos and complexity. Leaders operate with emotions rather than resources and step in and out of change and transience. (p. 134)

Since complexity and unpredictability overwhelms us, school leaders need to view their schools as complex, nonlinear systems in order to be flexible enough to deal with the uncertainty of the changing socio-political and educational environment. To achieve this, Wah (1998) argued that organizations must become “complex adaptive systems” (p. 25, as cited in Smith & Rupp, 2003, p. 163).

These complex adaptive systems are composed of autonomous agents whose interactions with each other produce the emergent structures that form the unique properties of the system. In other words, everyone in the organization is an equal piece that just needs to fit together in some emergent way.

Relating to the adaptive model, a participant spoke of how school members come together for a common purpose:

*We need to act more like ant colonies where everyone inherently understands their roles and adapts to them.* (Coordinator B)

In order to build an adaptive system, the entire organization must be involved, not just the leaders, in order for it to survive and to succeed. However, “leaders must create an environment in which other member feel trusted and empowered to make decisions” (Smith & Rupp, 2003, p. 164). In a complex environment, leaders need to believe in people’s power, their ingenuity and rely on them. As another participant put her comment:

*We instill confidence in our teachers particularly to bring their intelligence and capacity to their work and to make decisions keeping in mind the image of*

*the school. We need to rely on the human capital. It is our responsibility to build their confidence through competence. (Vice Principal)*

Similarly, Schleicher (2012, p. 21) viewed that the responsibilities are on the shoulders of the school leaders:

As greater responsibility and accountability is demanded of school leaders, leadership needs to be distributed effectively within and across schools.

School leaders need to develop a network and share their tasks with vice-principals or co-principals, deputy principals, assistant principals, vocational/technical department heads, workshop managers and/or co-coordinators and teachers with special duties.

Schools must adapt in order to compete at the edge of chaos, they need to achieve flexibility allowing for everyone's contribution in difficult times. An important characteristic of an adaptive system is the absence of central control. Instead the system should be composed of autonomous agents whose interaction with each other produces synergy in the organization.

### **Getting Out of the Comfort Zone**

All the school leaders have realized that it's high time they stopped fiddling with their glasses sitting in the rocking chairs, since that does not suit anymore given the complexities and uncertainties of the prevailing socio-political context. Moreover, technological revolution has added much to their stress, not because they are not on the current fad of technological gadgets, but because they are in economic crisis. In such a situation, preparing students for the global marketplace is a far cry. Therefore, school leaders are looking for new opportunities or different ways to foster growth. They are to find the new and look to the future, building on but not resting on current success.

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School principals have a lot on their minds and even more on their plates. Each day is full of situations that demand immediate attention and land mines that can explode without warning. So where does a principal need to focus attention and take action? Many people believe that the technical aspects of the schools – especially instruction – should be at the top of the priority list. This fieldbook offers another avenue. It is the culture of schools that really matters. Culture is where principals need to devote much of their time and attention. Without a well-focused and cohesive set of cultural norms and values, a school is adrift, subject to the turbulent and ever-changing pressures that dictate the next promising direction to take. Without a cultural compass, a school becomes a weather vane, and everyone becomes dizzy and disoriented, not knowing where to head. (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 253)

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Good leaders also look for differences and opportunities, rather than necessarily taking the most obvious or popular route. Burns and Sinfield (2012) note that “if we can force ourselves out of our comfort zones, and consciously decide to take risks, make mistakes and improve, everything else gets better” (p. 4). A principal remarked:

*The context within which school leaders work has been characterized by increasing complexity in one hand, and increasing expectations from parents on the other, and consequently greater demands for accountability. These changes have led to more pressure on school leaders, more particularly on the principals to get results across a variety of situations. To address this, we need to come out of our school compound and make a pressure group to pressurize the government to fulfill its commitments. (Principal A)*

Another leader also highlighted that reflective practice helps leaders take a sustaining path:

*Above all, as an individual, we need to adopt reflective practice in leadership.*

*We should learn from the past, we learn more from the mistakes made in the past. This is a way to sustain our school culture. (Coordinator A)*

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Do you have any idea how many prototype light bulbs Thomas Edison threw away before he finally raised his hand high in the air and gleefully exclaimed, “Eureka, I think I’ve got it”? Nine thousand. Yes, nine thousand (Foo, 2007).

Now, we are not talking about some fluke inventor who discovered the pizza-cutting wheel or the remedy for male-pattern baldness. Edison tried nine thousand ideas, concepts, suggestions, and prototypes before reaching success with a light bulb that shone longer and brighter than any of his previous attempts. With his nine thousand attempts under his belt, Edison exclaimed, “I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.” (Tareilo, 2010, p. 73)

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Another school leader put it this way:

*We should not feel swept away by the complexities and disorder in the country. There are still some ways out, we can reach out to the community and involve local politicians (especially because the chaos has been rampant because of the political instability) to commit on children’s right to education and that schools should be protected as the government has declared ‘zone of peace’.* (Coordinator B)

The ideas of the coordinator are in line with Burchell (2008). For Burchell, “Leaders can only respond to such a severe crisis by spending time with people, by not necessarily accepting the first answer they give, and not necessarily sticking to



existing methods” (2008, p. 5). Another participant put similar ideas to that of the earlier participant. He said:

*Though the government and political parties at the central level have committed to the declaration, their local bodies do not seem to be so. Therefore, our role at present is to make them a serious and dedicated commitment to support ‘SZOP’. (HoD)*

In recent years, the context of school leaders’ work has increased in complexity, which has led to changing expectations of what school leaders need to know and be able to do. Therefore, the school leaders as they have thought of should make a strong network of the schools, hold rigorous discussion on abiding by the government directives, and making the government and political parties stick to their commitments. By proactively inviting the community and parents into their schools, school leaders can feel able to gain greater control of their domain and establish relationships with political groups or unions on a more positive footing.

### **The Way Forward: Actualizing National Imagination**

A great variety of scenarios for the future of schooling can be imagined from current societal trends and different leadership contexts. However, zeroing in on our current problems and prospects of school leadership makes us feel the urge to implement some strategic formula for effective school leadership, but nobody knows what that formula is. We have been experimenting one after the other approach to leadership depending on our contexts, yet we have not been able to come to any leadership model that can serve as a panacea. But the situation is not as worse as it is painted since it is at the edge of chaos, that “we bring forth possible new worlds. This is where new life emerges, new learning comes into being” (Fels, n.d., p. 80). We are therefore, in the process of making things go right.

Recently, there is a growing concerns about the government's initiatives to make schools politics free and protect schools against any unlikely circumstances that may occur thereof. Probably relating to this, a participant said:

*Government should have a national image of what our schools should look like and how they should operate. Of course, the government should not shy away from its global commitment "Education for all", and hence should provide private schools with subsidy. (Coordinator A)*

Another school leader also put his idea on the government's effort in managing school sector. He said:

*Though the government has declared schools as 'zone of peace', it lacks commitment from the same for effective implementation. However, we have to take this initiative as a good effort in shaping the nature of school and guaranteeing the rights of children to get education. (Coordinator B)*

Quite similar idea was expressed by another participant. He said:

*The leadership of political parties and their sister organizations should form a concrete agreement to depoliticize school premises and children. (Principal A)*

The declaration of school sector as "Zone of Peace" on 25 May 2011 is a way forward in making national imagination about education. Despite being designated as a "zone of peace", it seems that schools and students are still being used as bargaining chips by the very teachers and students unions. Whether or not the government succumbs to the demands of the unions, the question still remains: Will students continue to be used for political gain in the future? (Hamilton, 2011, p. 3). It bears repeating Wagley's (2011, June 8, p. 8) question "In this chaos, where politics itself is liquefied, who will give priority to the peace zone?"

Regarding the implementation of the zone of peace slogan, Wagley further presented a five step-solution:

First, they should devise such a mechanism that stops political strikes and/or ‘bandhs’ from reaching or affecting the educational institutions. A central level political consensus is required here. Second, the mechanism of punishment for those who defy this rule is needed. ... Third, making the children free from psychological terror and a feeling of safety, while traveling to school and coming back home, is required. ... Fourth, making people, especially the political parties and their sister organizations, convinced that the children are the future of the nation. ... And finally, a strong monitoring mechanism is required to see if the idea is working well in practice. (p. 8).

However, he also warned, “Unless the mechanisms are in-built within the system itself, the dream of ‘Education as zone of peace’ will remain unfulfilled” (p. 8). Therefore, implementing our national imagination, i.e. “School Sector as Zone of Peace” wholeheartedly with the active collaboration with and strong commitment of different stakeholders is the need of our time. Moreover, Hamilton (2011) argued “As the future workforce and leaders of the country, it is imperative that students and their futures are not leveraged, bartered or bargained away” (p. 3). It is therefore crucial that all the people involved in the educational sector strive to keep schools a zone of peace for the sake of the students’ education and future.

All participants were found to take SZOP as a welcoming sign, though its practical implementation has already been proved shaky. A participant remarked:

*The real challenge of the schools as zone of peace strategy is to develop a new educational offer for students that provides the services for meeting children’s basic rights to education. Schools as zone of peace is in itself not the answer,*

*but it is the potential doorway to guarantee every child's right to education.*

(Vice Principal)

If we can consider school sector as “Zone of Peace” as our national imagination, we need to have the same level of seriousness in its effective implementation.

### **Conclusion**

What is success? It is a toy balloon among children armed with pins.

- Gene Fowler, American writer (as cited in Sartor, 2008, p. 253 )

It is widely held that “We need to make schools places of profound learning and continuous fun, where collegueship and caring are continuously celebrated” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 255), however, insecurity and uncertainty as by-products of chaos have increased today more than ever before and they have affected the leadership performance of the school leaders. Despite all the twists and turns, it's the school leaders who should and can take necessary steps towards making things happen.

The ever increasing complexities require leaders to “possess a wide range of navigation tools. You can't lead as you have in the past. You must tap into the capacities of your head, heart, and guts as increasingly volatile and unpredictable situations dictate” (Dotlich et al., 2009, p. 13). In order to lead the schools towards educating children unconditionally in a challenging time requires school leaders to be well equipped, both in terms of physical resources and capability to apply multiple strategies in a changing school dynamics. In many schools, the creation of professional learning communities has been one source of success as leaders attempt to develop structures that support shared leadership. By moving toward their common purpose, teachers and administrators can become involved in shared and continuous

learning experiences that allow for problem-solving and sharing strategies for success. Moreover, leadership preparation and training are central and building networks of schools to stimulate and spread innovation and to develop diverse curricula, extended services and professional support can bring substantial benefits (Schleicher, 2012, p. 29).

School leaders believed that they can make a difference in school and student performance if only the government and political parties translate their words in actions – commitment to school sector as “Zone of Peace”.

In Baishakh every year, over two million children across Nepal begin their first day of school facing the challenge of an uncertain year ahead. Let’s be hopeful that unlike yesteryears, they won’t start the month with school closures and school buses vandalisms.

## CHAPTER VII

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The chapter first begins with the discussion of the findings drawn from the analysis and interpretation of the data in chapters IV through VI. Undertaking this study, I was interested in exploring the existing leadership scenario in the Nepalese schools. Enriched with the theoretical underpinnings of chaos theory, this study explored the practices and perceptions of the Nepalese school leaders about leading at the edge of chaos.

The study was based on open interviews with eight school leaders in four urban schools based in Kathmandu Valley. In the end, the results of these interviews suggest that rather than looking for school leaders with the power and ability to beat the chaos, the wiser answer will be to channel the chaos. The findings of this study are the results of my ability to learn how to negotiate with each participant, as I worked with each of them to understand the meanings behind the experiences they shared with me. Each stage of data generation and analysis involved meaningful input from the school leaders themselves as they helped me to shift my thinking to be closer to their own. Based on the thorough analysis and interpretation of the field data, and after reading and re-reading of the interpretations made in the preceding three chapters, I have drawn the following five major theme based findings after all “qualitative approaches such as IPA do not seek to find one single answer or truth” (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 23):

1. Nepalese school leaders are entangled in chaos.
2. There is a growing complexity in the Nepalese school leadership landscape.

3. There is an urgent call for capability building in leaders.
4. Leading with and through complexity is a collaborative effort.
5. Leadership is the answer.

These findings appear to support several leadership literatures on school leadership in complex and chaotic times. However, this study also brought some new and typical leadership experiences in the context of Nepal. These findings are discussed along the following subsections, albeit with slightly different headings, though they are the same in essence.

### **School Leaders: Entangled in Chaos?**

Nepalese schools are hardest hit in the last decade due to ever increasing socio-political disorder and thus the school leaders are facing the greatest challenges in leading through chaos. The participants felt that chaos is so pervasive that it has affected not only their professional and organizational affairs, but also affected the very personal life. As the vice principal expressed now they accept that chaos is ruling over them and that they cannot escape from the grip of it. Wallace and McMahon (1994) saw turbulence as referring to both internal changes within organisations and external changes in demands from their environments. As they pointed out, schools will have areas of turbulence and stability co-existing at the same time, but the balance may be more towards one than the other at different times.

So much as chaos is embedded in socio-political affairs; it is equally embedded in academia. They have felt that among many challenges to school leadership, socio-political chaos directly attacks on the functioning of a school. It means there are also aspects or kinds of chaos in terms of where they are rooted. There are two kinds. Internal chaos arises because the school has not been managed well. On the other hand, external chaos arises because socio-political or even global

and technological settings have given birth to it and it comes with more tentacles like the strikes and bandhs called by some oriented groups, information overflow, obsolescence of knowledge, technological overhaul and so on. All of these compelled the school leaders much more exposed to unforeseen shifts and negative surprises and they have to make quick decisions and respond to them.

Although they recognized both internal and external chaos, they always talked about the fear of external chaos. They seem to have neglected the internally caused chaos in their schools. This is because they seem to be prepared to deal with internal crises since they have been habitual with them. But the participants strongly felt that they need to be more prepared for external crises, where it's not the strategy of the schools that is in question; it's the ability of leaders to figure out how to *adapt* that strategy (Barton et al., 2012, p. 5). The school leaders reported that since the leaders are always puzzled which action or strategy to take, one decided the problem might have taken a different turn and the strategy fails which makes the leaders failures. Highlighting the gravity of external chaos, Barton et al. (2012) said "We are going to have a lot more of external crises because we are living in such a volatile world—an age where everything is leveraged and technology moves so fast. You can be rocked by something that originated completely outside your area" (p. 5). Given these complexities, leaders now confront huge challenges that must somehow be understood and acted upon. Therefore, it is necessary that school leaders don't just sit around waiting for the solution to come from the government or any external agencies. They are to be looking around, trying to find out who has the best ideas.

Every day, complexity and chaos seem to bring more uncertainty and paradox into our work lives. And therefore, it is very challenging for school leaders in the age of upheaval. No leader can get enough information before making a truly good



decision; in the short time between making a choice and implementing it, new data points are born that may render the choice flawed (Dotlich et al., 2009, p. 22). Similarly, technology innovation renders a huge capital investment which the struggling schools can hardly think of at least at present. What they are rather practicing is resource-based strategy in tackling the challenges, which especially in the poorly resourced schools does not allow them to invest in technology integration.

### **Growing Complexity in Leadership Landscape**

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A convergence of forces is reshaping the global economy; the pace of innovation is increasing exponentially; new technologies have created new industries, disrupted old ones, and spawned communication networks of astonishing speed; and global emergencies seem to erupt at ever-shorter intervals. Any one of these developments would have profound implications for organizations and the people who lead them. Taken together, these forces are creating a new context for leadership. (Barton et al., 2012, p. 4)

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At this time, there are many changes coming into the education system in Nepal. It is a changing educational landscape in curriculum, instruction, structure, staffing, and funding.

The complexity of this challenge calls for a bold and timely response—a global solution that allows poorer countries to leapfrog costly stages in the development and expansion of their education systems, while enabling schools all around the world to incorporate 21st century skills into demanding curricula. (CISCO, 2008, p. iii)

The research participants also identified contextual demands arising from both internal and external chaos.

More than ever, in today's climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. (DeVita, 2005, Foreword)

Despite all those challenge, the school leaders have inadequate time for collaboration, learning, and leading. Given the complex leadership landscape, school leaders need a variety of skills and tactics to accomplish leadership. So it appears that the old 'command and control' model of leadership is increasingly irrelevant in a business context today (Sharp, 2012, p. 54). An interesting substantiation was that the school leaders were also practicing leadership in a variety of ways. Some of the school leaders interviewed acted as instructional leaders; others delegated that function and focused exclusively on external development and strategic leadership. However, they were much concerned about developing some more resilient leadership abilities so as to equip themselves for the changing leadership landscape. Kelly and Hayes (2010, p. 22) illustrated this scenario with example:

Leadership is tough. In a modern organization exercising leadership is a serious, time-consuming, tiring, demanding, exciting and rewarding experience. At the top there are no half measures. You don't climb half a mountain. You don't take in half a view. You don't address half an audience. You can't run any significant organization, part of an organization or a team of people, unless you are prepared to give enormous and whole-hearted commitment. (Kelly & Hayes, 2010, p. 22)

Leadership functions are indeed distributed across many formal and informal roles thus these roles must be coordinated. A significant factor that emerged from three of the interviews was the sense that leadership was about having a vision and also about sharing leadership itself. Interviewees also highlighted that effective school leaders must be ruthlessly consistent; willing to make difficult decisions around personnel and resource allocation; and able to maintain urgency, resolve crises, and hire and manage a new staff. However, they all considered themselves too weak to take up those tasks at a single go. They said that such decisions are made in a leadership team. Sergiovanni (2001) spoke on what makes effective leaders. He said:

It is not by chance that some leaders are more effective than others, even when all are faced with similar demands and constraints. Effective leaders have a better understanding of how the worlds of schooling and of school leadership work. They have figured out alternatives to direct leadership that are able to get people connected to each other, to their work, and to their responsibilities. They are less likely to base their practice on the assumption that predetermined solutions exist for most of the problems they face.

(Sergiovanni, 2001, p. 2)

Cunningham and Cordeiro (2006) argued that leadership literature has evolved from directing, controlling, and maintaining, into empowering, building relationships, and shared decision-making. Most of the school leaders interviewed were well versed in the vocabulary of 'vision' and 'shared decision making'. Whether they were working as a principal or a coordinator, they reported that strategic leadership was an important element of the job. Similarly, leaders in all of the schools said they shared with others some responsibility for action. Nevertheless, they were still anxious about building trust and relationship, and making allies and networks with other schools in

the surrounding. They all also seemed to realize that there was no simple answer to the question, “What does it take to lead a school?” It is precisely when times get tough that leadership is most required, especially leaders who can lead people through uncertainty, keep people engaged and focused on performance (Holbeche, 2008, p. 4). It is proven that in a society characterized by escalating uncertainty, a social organization like school cannot maintain its viability unless its leaders keep current with the latest thinking about how change can be managed.

Recently Nepal government has tried to stabilize the impact of external chaos to some extent by announcing school sector as zone of peace. However, Nepalese educationists and school leaders are skeptical about the government’s commitment, given the past record and present fluid political situation in the country. As lip service about creating zone of peace continues, more complexities are expected to increase with no substantial action to materialize the commitment. It pushes me to borrow Rowe’s (2008) rhetorical question: Will the sun rise tomorrow? The answer seems obvious – yes! The sun rises every morning and has done for millions of years so clearly as long as we don’t allow for tricks like ‘not if it’s cloudy’ then the sun will rise tomorrow (Rowe, 2008, p. 33).

### **Call for Capability Building in Leaders**

Leading a school takes a variety of skills. Thus given the most formidable challenges in school leadership in today’s time, Nepalese school leaders are in urgent need for learning new leadership skills and developing their leadership capacities. It is necessary that with knowledge moving to the fore, leadership is characterized by flat hierarchy structures, using teams, networks, diverse sources of expertise, the use of evidence and continuous professional development (Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p. 65). Lucas (2005) expressed that it is not surprising that learning to learn has been

described as the key skill of the century (as cited in Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p. 65). Similarly, giving importance to learning, Stoll et al. (2003) said “Learning is the core purpose of schools. These days: ‘If you can’t learn, unlearn and relearn, you’re lost because sustainable and continuous learning is a given of the twenty-first century’” (as cited in Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p. 65). Many school leaders expressed that they just bumped into the leadership without any formal training and required educational qualification, and thus they need to upgrade themselves with some leadership education degree or similar kind of formal training. However, Duignan (2007) stated:

The idea that it takes time beyond “basic training” to acquire the knowledge, skills and habits of effective leadership has largely been taken for granted in fields like the military, business, medicine and architecture. Not so in education. Until recently, few new principals could expect much in the way of formal mentoring or coaching support after they were hired. (Duignan, 2007, para. 3)

Most of the school leaders interviewed also expressed that they learned the leadership skills, whatever they know, from the job through experiences, since most of them came to the leadership positions from the teaching field with years of teaching experience before. This study showed that school leaders are invariably drawn from the teaching profession. Given the centrality of leadership for learning, noted earlier, however, it is essential for school principals and other leaders to have substantial professional experience.

Regardless of their training and educational qualification, most school leaders think they learned the skills they need ‘on the job’. ...Given the complicated picture that emerges of what it takes to lead a school, it is no wonder that educational qualification alone falls short. Being a principal is about

instruction, but it's also many other things. Being a principal requires one to act as a leader, but no one can do it alone. (Portin et al., 2003, p. 39)

Bush, Bell, and Middlewood (2010) added that "In practice, of course, the journey from teacher to leader is an incremental process, which generally involves the gradual substitution of leadership and management activities for classroom teaching" (p. 7). In today's often ambiguous and uncertain contexts, authentic educational leaders need to be capable of good judgement and possess a wisdom derived from deep critical reflection on life and work experiences (Duignan, 2007, para.1). They are to be emotionally mature enough to engage in mutually rewarding and elevating relationships. Quite often in the pursuit of better practices, and greater efficiency, organizations fail themselves by not taking the time to properly reflect on their past practices.

It adds much sense that reflection is also a capacitating tool that allows for the possibility of continuous improvement within an organization. Similarly, another competence required of the time is the confidence. Osborne (2008) reported that especially in times of uncertainty, upheaval, or crisis, believing in yourself and making the right decisions will give you credibility and integrity, which in turn will enhance the organization's reputation and build trust in all stakeholders (p. 54). Similarly, Osborne (2008) also talked about other capacity building tools as maintaining networks of contacts:

As a leader, you will need to create, develop, and maintain networks of contacts within and far beyond your own organization. Networks enable you to exchange information with others, share resources, gain referrals, leads or recommendations, test ideas, build long-term relationships, and help others in return. (p. 56)

Osborne (2008) further talked about nurturing the leadership in new potential leaders:

For an organization to expand, it needs to invest in the development of the new leaders that will take it forward. Individuals who display leadership potential should be considered as an important asset that will grow if nurtured, and will be lost if not. (p. 60)

There's no universal recipe for success in leadership, and different circumstances call for different leaders and different leadership styles. The leaders in this study saw their roles as involving resourcefulness and responsiveness in solving problems to address instructional, curricular, and structural challenges in their schools.

### **Leading with and Through Complexity**

Leadership is not a single person's business. School improvement depends on the active involvement of teachers at all levels. Recognizing this fact, Stoll and Temperley (2009) said "Leadership in this scenario is complex, distributed and often collective, local decision making is strong, and there is wide use of networks" (p. 65).

The research participants also focused on developing collaborating efforts in meeting the challenges of the information age society. Reflecting upon their collaborative practices of handling disorders help school leaders to be resilient to lead at the edge of chaos. As one leader shared "*We also collaborate and build mutually beneficial relationships with other schools and social organizations who share their vision of success*" (HoD). Sharp (2012) also talked about valuing diversity in leadership.

To support this, leaders need to value diversity of views as a source of ideas, innovation and engagement. Those who encourage the fertilization of ideas are

critical for future wealth generation, as are those forward-thinking leaders who recognize that the public, private and not for-profit sectors are inextricably linked by a shared accountability to the communities who use and sustain them. (Sharp, 2012, p. 54)

All school leaders agree on networking and collaboration to be the hallmarks of leadership in today's world surrounded by multiplicity of uncertainties and challenges. A principal shared:

By putting team first, communicating effectively, capitalizing on synergy, fostering positive attitudes, and striving for perfection, we (school leaders) can raise the bar for our team and prepare to win. When we build trust and shared values, peak performance is possible. (Principal A)

Holbeche (2008) also shared similar ideas:

Leaders' ability to exercise the kind of leadership which motivates their teams and provides challenging work opportunities is essential to sustaining organizational performance. The leadership paradox is that strong leaders are needed, but they can't command change in employees – unless employees want to follow them. (p. 3)

The school leaders pointed to the urgent call for creating a shared vision for success. Similarly, they also noted that through collaboration, the leaders define the path for educational and personal success for all students, teachers and as a whole the school. By saying this, they focused on organizational learning.

It is equally important for school leaders to collaborate with other schools or communities around them. These school leaders in this study also focused on building bridges not only within the school but with outside agencies. Schools and their leaders



can strengthen collaboration, form networks, share resources, and work together.

These engagements enlarge the scope of leadership beyond the school.

### **Leadership: The Answer**

Every school faces unique challenges, and no single leadership or management approach applies to all of them. It means not every school needs the same kind of leadership. Kelly and Hayes (2010) put this more succinctly:

So what are the world's senior managers to do in the face of such unprecedented and unrelenting change? Confronted with change and its range of incredibly powerful drivers, there is one unifying need: leadership. When the going gets tough, the tough exercises leadership. Equally, tough times call for soft skills. Make no mistake – in turbulent times, leadership is the prerequisite of survival and future success. (Kelly & Hayes, 2010, p. 20)

I believe that leadership is going to be crucial if schools are going to survive the ever increasing chaos and even thrive. However, leading at the edge requires an artful mix of focus, motivation, inspiration and courage to take risks that constantly push the boundaries. The assumption that successful leaders are those who respond most appropriately to the demands of the specific situation is commonplace. Grint (2005) remarked:

When all is calm successful leaders can afford to relax, seek a consensus and make collective decisions at a leisurely pace. But when a crisis occurs the successful leader must become decisive, demonstrate a ruthless ability to focus on the problem and to ignore the siren calls of the sceptics and the cynics. (Grint, 2005, p. 1468)

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### How leaders keep themselves up in bad times

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High-impact experienced leaders are keenly aware that bad times are caused by what leaders do in good times. Good times are a direct result of actions taken during the bad times. These leaders don't get discouraged in bad times; rather, they see bad times as an opportunity to go in and fix, repair, adjust, and do all the things they couldn't get to in the euphoria of successful times. They become more action-oriented.

However, they don't just jump in; they planfully think about what they need to do to get through the challenge of the times and better prepare the organization for the new.

As one experienced leader said in bad times, "It's like a sailboat race. When the wind stops, the winning boat uses this bad time to get ready to be the first to catch the wind." These high-impact leaders send clear messages to everyone, always with the underlying theme--we will get through this and be better in the next round. They develop their own language for this, such as one leader's axiom, "when the tide is out, you can see the rocks." (Harkins, 2008, p. 1)

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The fact of the matter is that when times are good, even idiots can be successful. It is when times are tough that the best get separated from the rest (Pfeffer, 2008, p. 11). He further suggested that instead of bemoaning the economic turbulence and tough times, recognize this period for what it is: an opportunity to gain ground on a bunch of competitors that will probably repeat the mistakes of the past (p. 12).

To sum up, the findings of this study provided an intriguing understanding of the chaotic turbulence experienced by school leaders who participated in this study. Despite all the nuances, the fifth theme strongly holds that the only answer to all the leadership challenges is again nothing else but leadership.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To begin at the end, this chapter presents the conclusions reached from the discussion of the findings of this study and draws some implications for practice and research. Therefore, after the discussion of the research conclusions, I have presented some implications of this research in this chapter.

I have developed the findings for this study as a result of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process, and the findings have reflected the focus of phenomenology, which is the lived experience and meaning of a particular phenomenon – in this case, the phenomenon of school leadership.

The philosophical framework of the study permitted me to move closer to the school leaders' phenomenology of leadership experience at the edge of chaos, and as a result, shifted the understanding and interpretations being developed to be far more reflective of the school leaders' reality.

#### **Conclusions**

One of the most important concerns raised consistently by participants was that the study questions were very relevant to the experiences of school leaders at challenging times. They were also (probably, therefore) found to be too willing to discuss and pour their hearts out about their leadership practices at present. They said that pointing to the relevant issue at turbulent times and documenting their perceptions, understanding and experiences was a pleasure for them. Nevertheless, in an era of chaos, complexity, competition, and confusion, acting to excel was not as easier as said.

The participants revealed that chaos exists in the school system so much as it exists in every sphere of social life. They also affirmed that uncertainty and unpredictability have become the norms of school system these days due to the consistent political meddling, unionism and increasing competition among schools. Moreover, leaders in schools are confronted by external and internal challenges and expectations that make demands on their time, expertise, energies and emotional wellbeing. The changing scenarios of our schools are reflected in the increasingly diverse mix of leadership problems. And therefore, the challenge for leaders is to develop open-eyed awareness of political realities without becoming overwhelmed by frustration.

It is evident that our schools are facing a number of challenges that require committed and responsive leadership at all levels. This means that schools have to respond to different and greater challenges than ever before. The challenges become toughest when we lack the resources to support us. Therefore, channeling the resources should be the utmost priority of the school leaders. It calls for school leaders to have the guts to balance external and internal change efforts, and to believe that the very core of success lies at the edge of chaos.

In the recent decade, the roles and functionings of schools are changing and so are of school leaders. All participants in the study were conscious that socio-political chaos has a central impact on their leadership roles. Yet, most of them have now adopted it as a way of life. Experiences that were belittling their roles included not only inadequate resources in the school, but also unnecessary bandhs, and strikes, unhealthy competition among schools which have left them without viable choices.

The school leaders reported that the chaotic situations they confront are related to the socio-political uncertainty, and economic crisis. They face challenges also due

to rising expectations for schools and schooling in a century characterized by technological innovation, and globalization. It means challenges to school leadership prevail given the dynamic tensions that spring up from the restless socio-political environment and the rapid growth of information technology. More often than not, it is viewed as a challenge which cannot simply be responded with ease. This implies that school leaders are to move beyond traditional pathways to deliver educational benefits for their students. These include community involvement, cross-school activities, and extensive use of information and communication technologies.

It is evident that the job of school leaders is getting bigger and more challenging and they cannot do individually. Unilateral decisions are largely unworkable. Therefore, the schools were found to be inclined to make it a point to go for collective decision making. In addition, school leaders are also grappling with the lack of resources to do more in educating children with modern technology. Therefore, what the leaders should do is focus on doing what is urgent and important to bring about better learning environment in the school since they also view their role as the shapers of climate that fosters the learning of all members of the school community.

The participants believed that they need to make schools places of profound learning, however, insecurity and uncertainty as by-products of chaos have increased today more than ever before which have affected the leadership performance of the school leaders. Despite all the twists and turns, it's the school leaders who should and can take necessary steps towards making things happen. They can do so by frequenting professional gatherings, reading education media avidly, and networking with other school leaders.

The findings of the study provided a very clear picture of the lived experiences of Nepalese private school leaders about leading at the edge of chaos. The impact of chaos on school leaders emerged as being of significant importance to all school leaders.

### **Implications**

The thematic findings outlined in the previous chapter lead to the implications for policymakers and school leaders. These implications arise from the portrait of school leadership the participants portrayed rather than an evaluation of effective practice. More specifically, the analysis of the interviews with eight school leaders points to the challenges and practices of school leadership at the present day context. These discussions of the findings have important implications for both school leaders and policymakers. In the light of this study, several implications can be drawn for the field of educational administration. Along the following subsections, I have described key lessons and action implications that emerged from the research and from the collective experiences of the school leaders in question.

#### **Implications for Policy Makers**

Policy makers need to adapt school leadership policy to new environments by addressing the major challenges which have arisen over the past decades.

There is a growing concern that the role of school principal designed for the industrial age has not changed enough to deal with the complex challenges schools are facing in the 21st century. ... As expectations of what school leaders should achieve have changed, so must the definition and distribution of tasks, as well as the levels of training, support and incentives. (Pont et al., 2008, p. 16)

The above case seems to be true for Nepalese schools too. Considering the changing, challenging and uncertain school leadership landscape, today's school leaders are deeply concerned about their present and future prospects in a time of uncertainty. Policymakers have a make or break opening—and an obligation—to chart a new path for school education that will secure our academic competitiveness. Our school leaders can thrive in this century only with informed leadership and concerted action that prepares schools to compete. Therefore, this research urges policymakers and school leaders to shape school cultures that are attuned to competitive needs.

Universities in general and schools of education and management in particular may include particular programs like educational leadership or principalship, or at least some courses on that with complex tasks like planning, decision making, strategic management, etc.; once they start working, they need on-going professional development that is tailored to their school's unique circumstances. The research also puts strong emphasis on the need for well-crafted internships or leadership training and other opportunities for leadership experience for the new school leaders.

Similarly, it is high time government had set standards and qualifications for school leaders at all levels. Though, there are some guidelines and directives explaining the educational qualifications of the head teachers (Compulsory MEd), no such provisions are found for other school leaders. Moreover, even the existing regulations are not strictly maintained in the schools. Therefore, strict enforcement of the educational laws and directives is a must. Likewise, some rigorous formal training on school leadership may be enforced on the potential leaders. In addition, the training has to focus on the specific areas of the leadership positions, e.g., subject in-charge, school coordinator, head of the department, vice-principal, principal.

Likewise, school alone is not adequate for the larger challenge of facing the external chaos brought about by political turmoil, technological revolution or global economic crisis, therefore, the complex challenge of educational reconstruction merits a national policy that acknowledges the need for subsidizing of school efforts, including those of private schools.

### **Implications for Practice**

To address the growing challenges brought about by chaos in academia, developing resilience on the part of the schools and their leaders through peer coaching and relationship (including with external allies) can be encouraged so that they can combat the leadership challenges as they face. School leaders need the strong support of quality and specific professional learning. This provision needs to be seen as a continuum as well as acknowledging the involvement of school leader professional associations (Mulford, 2008, p. 69). Current and prospective school leaders can utilize the findings from this study to better improve their own leadership practices. This may further encourage them to revisit their current leadership practices and make appropriate steps to develop processes within the schools that have been identified as supporting successful leadership practices.

Recognizing the significance of leadership behavior, by means of this study, would provide additional evidence to school authorities in selecting or training their leaders or potential leaders. In-service training and development programs may be prepared in order to improve the leadership qualities of the administrators. Workshops and seminars about the recent trends in management strategies such as TQM (Total Quality Management) and Strategic Planning can be conducted with the aid of the educational agencies like Department of Education or universities. It is imperative that people who opt for leadership position should have some educational degree and



leadership training. The qualification and training hours may be subject to the leadership positions or levels they are going to take over.

A single school principal cannot do much in the chaotic circumstances, therefore, rather than having a school leader having a school leadership team would help lead the school system effectively. Therefore, leadership roles may be distributed to reduce the workload of the school heads and to involve the staff in the management and administration of the school. School leaders may be given less administrative tasks. Some professionals may be engaged to carry out some of the administrative tasks. Similarly, there is a need for schools and school systems to confer greater professional autonomy to school leaders, working with and through them.

Mentoring potential leader with leadership skills by a senior school leader and providing them an opportunity to practice leadership at the basic level will significantly help both the school and the potential leader. Therefore, provision of early leadership experiences for young teachers and leadership development for middle managers can become part of a whole career framework for leadership development. This will also imply a practice of succession planning in the school. As succession planning needs to be more than just-in-time job replacement, comprehensive succession frameworks for the management of educational leadership (including leader recruitment, development and retention) need to be developed. Success will be achieved when there are enough high-quality applicants who are interested in a job with which they are familiar enough to make an informed career decision (Mulford, 2003, p. 4).

There is also a need for greater community engagement, particularly from parents and community-based organizations, to ensure a continuous demand for and commitment to school improvement. There is a strong felt need for the school and its

serving local community to increasingly become the focus of attention in making strategies for sustained school improvement. Similarly, all the concerned stakeholders can talk about actualizing the national imagination: schools as “Zone of Peace”, so that they can make the local stakeholders including political parties stick to the commitment and respect the children’s right to education by making schools politics free.

There is also a need to build on the preference by school leaders to learn from each other (across schools) by developing and refining quality network learning communities, sharing of resources, and standing for common purposes.

It is imperative that school leaders have formal pedagogical training, training in school leadership and pedagogical experience because they need to be well versed in all those education, pedagogy and leadership related matters to lead in different circumstances effectively. School leaders need to be supported to cope with their changing roles and to deal with such issues as ICTs, globalization, disruptive behavior of the students and teachers, and increasing accountability demands. Teachers and students’ unions may play an active role in promoting professional development of the teachers. Teachers unions may also play a critical role in preparing teachers for school leadership positions and in professionalising school leaders. For example, the unions may organize programs and offer courses for teachers and principals. Similarly, private schools’ organizations like PABSON, NPABSON, and HISTAN may provide training opportunities to their school leaders importantly, especially on meeting the challenging needs of the information age society – integrating ICTs in school education, meeting the global challenges of education for all and improving quality of education, and on facing chaos brought about by socio-political disorder.

Current and prospective school leaders can utilize the findings from this study to better improve their own leadership styles and practices. This may further encourage school leaders to revisit their current administrative practices and make appropriate steps to develop processes within the schools that have been identified as supporting successful leadership practices.

### **Implications for Further Research**

While there is increasing research on how school leaders perceive and characterize their leadership styles and influence, less is known about how to help principals develop the capacities that make a difference in how schools function in chaotic times. Therefore, it would be useful to design a study on this theme. Further research is needed to understand more fully the leadership practices to turn around schools in uncertain times.

Additional investigations can be conducted through purposeful sampling with more number of school leaders from a diverse background which renders a comparison in terms of sample size and diversity of the participants and their contexts. Similarly, further studies can be made with distinct participant selection criteria including educational background of the principals, their teaching experience, and geographical location of the schools since this study did not look into the educational background and leadership training the participants received.

Out of one of the limitations of this research, one research implication can be drawn. Since leaders in middle schools and high schools are somewhat under-represented in this research, I believe the field would benefit from additional research with significant samples of leaders in both elementary and secondary schools. A similar study may be undertaken with other similar sized high schools to further investigate the leadership style and subsequent results of high school principals in

rural settings. Similarly, further exploration may be made with a set of larger or smaller high schools in urban settings, to see if the size of the institution affects perceptions of the school leaders about leading at the edge of chaos.

### **Summary**

This study aimed at understanding how Nepalese school leaders make sense of and attach meaning to their lived experiences of school leadership at the edge of chaos. An explication of the interview transcripts yielded three superordinate themes; and an exploration of these superordinate themes and their constituent sub-themes formed the basis of the three major chapters for data interpretation. These themes and several subthemes captured how the participants perceived and experienced the challenges and opportunities in leading in chaotic times. Each theme was illustrated by concentrated summaries and rich and thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions and understandings.

In order to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon of leadership during complex, changing and challenging times through the eyes of secondary school leaders, an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was adopted. This research method was selected because it lends itself to a more exploratory analysis. Thus, guided by the philosophical assumptions of IPA, this study represented and constructed the experiences of school leadership at the edge of chaos by focusing on the voices of eight secondary school leaders who were leading their schools in the Kathmandu valley. Testimonies were collected through a wide variety of methods that included face-to-face interviews; follow up telephone interviews, observations, reflective memos, emails, and protocol writing.

After presenting the ideas of the participants on leadership practices in chaotic times, I offered a few additional reflections on the topic while interpreting the data.

My interpretations drew in part on the interviews with my research participants, and on my review of extensive academic literature on the subject. All reinforced my belief that today's school leaders face extraordinarily new challenges and therefore they must 'act with tact' towards fulfilling their shared vision and mission of the school.

Findings from the field and existing literature confirmed that today's school leaders face a daunting challenge. On one hand, they face the impact of socio-political turbulence. On the other hand, they have to survive and compete in the 21st century which dictates high investment in incorporating technology in education, preparing teachers for 21st century education, and competing for emerging market opportunities. The outcomes of the research demonstrated that school leaders are committed to their roles and facing the ever rising challenges. Their responses varied regarding perceptions of the internal chaos management since micro politics of their schools differed significantly. However, their tensions were similar in tackling the externally caused chaos. Most of them were overwhelmed by the political disorder which had caused their schools to shut very often. Therefore, school leadership at chaotic times is really challenging, but it is inevitable for school leaders to deal with the growing complexity, uncertainty and challenges of the turn of the century.

A list of strategies drawn from the lived experiences of the participants has been suggested to help leaders manage and develop leadership and organizational learning. However, the conclusions drawn in this study are not absolute, and therefore, our challenge as educational leadership scholars and practitioners is to figure out what our work as leaders should be in new times.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix I: Interview Schedule****1. Placing the chaos in perspective**

- How do you as a school leader perceive chaos in academia?
- What types of chaos have you felt in your school?
- What problems and prospects to school leadership do you perceive at present?
- What factors are creating chaos?
- What internal and external influences impact school (leadership)?
- How does chaos influence/affect the performance of leadership?

**2. Leadership practices**

- How would you characterize the leadership practices within your school?
- How are you coping with the chaotic situation?
- What are your core values and beliefs about successful school leadership?
- What are you doing to create and sustain a competitive school?
- What are your responsibilities in building an enabling environment in the school?

**3. Strategic moves ahead**

- What strategies are to be taken to build school climate that fosters competitive edge?
- What kind of leadership is required to deal with the growing complexity, uncertainty and challenges of the turn of the century?
- What plans do you have to stand out from the crowd? To be number one or two?
- How do you meet the needs of the 21st century education?
- What radical solutions would you propose to address the challenges of schools on the edge?

## Appendix II: Analytical Research Memo

Researcher: *Rebat Kumar Dhakal*

Date: *April 14, 2012*

Re: *Preliminary field findings, School Leadership Study*

File No.: *08*

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### **Background**

I recently held an open interview (face-to-face) with a school leader (Principal A) of a seemingly successful school in Bhaktapur. The interview session lasted for one hour 15 minutes. This memo highlights the key preliminary findings of the research.

### **Field Findings**

The notion that school leadership was challenging in the present context of socio-political turmoil in Nepal seemed proven when the participant very often cited the hindrances and hurdles in operating school even with seemingly normal beginning in the morning. He tended to feel strongly that school leaders are desperate in many situations; they are in a continuous dilemma whether to run the school or shut the school on a particular day. This idea was described in various ways not only by this particular participant but by a great many participants; nevertheless, the theme remained the same.

One challenge highlighted in the interview was that he and many other school leaders were uncertain about what changes would make it so developmentally distinct from the other, about how to develop resilience. Again, the seeming benefits of “chaos” and “uncertainty” was most noticeably captured by this participant and his school which by its nature tended to be more secure than other completely privately

run schools. Besides, it was seen that the revolution brought about by technology in education has also been found to be adapted in his school, which was also an indicator that his school had earned some competitive edge over the other schools in the vicinity.

Today, with the rapidly growing unprecedented globalization, hyper-competition and technology advancement, the primary challenge for school leaders is to keep their teams focused amidst the whirlwind of constant change. Currently, school administrators are very conscious of the pressure of changing social, political and professional expectations for them. The challenge for school leaders is meeting these social and professional demands, without losing sight of the need to meet the needs of children. Moreover, the pace of change and accountability is ever increasing. This presents a dilemma for school administrators. Addressing all of these issues seems to be a very daunting task. In such situations, they have to make difficult decisions for their teams such as swiftly channeling resources away from non-critical areas. And the most important decision is to decide what is most urgent and important.

In fact, we live in a complex world of uncertain socio-political changes, global competition, unprecedented advancement in technological innovations, and blooming new work arrangements in organizations. Surrounded by all these chaotic factors, there are more real-time decisions to make and steps to take in today's school environment than ever before so much as it is with other social organizations.

### **Conclusion**

Nepalese school leaders are falling further and further into the quagmire of chaos. They are struggling with all kinds of things – things that happen to them personally and to the organization, yet their passion for the dynamic role is



indescribable. Therefore, they hope that they will survive this wild, chaotic time unharmed so that they can one day get all the returns again. And it doesn't matter how out of place they might feel right now, it is normal... and this too shall pass. Together with the chaos surrounding them, it is also a very exciting time to surpass.

There are so many grey areas in being a school leader in turbulent times. There are things for which they want answers, but don't get one. The most arduous of challenges is when things go wrong in their intimate zone; they should not allow it to disturb the equilibrium of their position.

### **Appendix III: Research Protocol**

Please, write down your experiential descriptions on the issues/concerns given below.

1. How have you experienced chaos (order and disorder) in your school context?

2. Reflect on your leadership practices and experiences at your school, especially while dealing with chaotic situations.

3. What experiential strategic moves have you felt useful in tackling chaos and gaining competitive edge?