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The Bridging Leadership in Mauritius

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The Bridging Leadership in Mauritius

V. Sharma

I. Introduction

Bridging Leadership is a leadership style to tackle complex and systematic social inequities. It is an approach that goes beyond the capacity of one sector alone to resolve and needs collaborative action of all sectors such as government, parent teacher association, management, teacher and society. This leadership style uniquely suited to confront the challenges the society is facing such as social injustice, widespread disease like diabetic, poverty and environmental degradation.

Bridging Leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on stimulating and sustaining effective working relationships among stakeholders whose collective input is needed to make progress on a given systemic challenge.

Bridging Leadership offers an alternative paradigm in leadership:

FROM leaders as	TO leaders as
Commander and controller	Facilitator and convener
Sole owner of the problem and solution	Prime mover, but a co-owner of the problem and solution
Having all the answers	Creator of the conditions where answers emerge
A single intelligence	Focuser of collective attention and the distiller of collective intelligence
Head of one organization	Ligament between organizations and institutions across a system
Holder of power	Distributor of power, letting go to enable new things to emerge
Omnipotent and strong	Emotionally vulnerable and open to influence
Expert	Non-expert, mobilizing the expertise of others

By building upon the intellectual foundations of **transformative leadership**, and drawing liberally from the concept of collaboration from the field of organizational development, **Bridging Leadership offers an alternative approach that looks at the role of citizens within a partnership framework**.

The bridging method contains insights into a process that begins with convening and relationship building, through the development of consensus, all the way to action or implementation. It considers the needs and potential impacts of leadership at the level of the individual, the organization and society.

Several societal divides separate people from each other, among them poverty, illiteracy, disease, and conflicts of various natures which continue to plague society, and therefore threaten peace and human development. Such problems are so complex that no one person, agency or sector in society can resolve them. Therefore, the collaborative action of government, society, and the private sector in a shared governance era appears essential.

II. Elements of Bridging Leadership

Bridging Leadership is an influence **relationship** among **people** within and across groups, organizations and communities who agree to work together and **intend real changes** that reflect their **mutual purposes.**

The essential elements of Bridging Leadership are:

- Leadership is a **relationship** based on influence that is multi-directional and non-coercive.
- **People** in the relationship are leaders and followers; most likely multiples of both and in which the followers are active and influence leaders.
- The notion of **real intended change** is central. There is a prioritized, purposeful and specific change desired by all parties.
- Over the course of the bridging activities, **mutual purposes** are developed, which may lead to a common cause or vision.

Defined as "*an influence relationship among people within and across groups, organizations and communities who agree to work together and intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes*". Bridging Leadership maximizes every stakeholder's comparative advantage and makes sustainable social change possible. Founded on shared **values**, common understanding, and mutual purposes, bridging leadership is particularly helpful in fostering inter-sectoral collaboration between business, society, and government.

In "**Leaders without Borders**", Mark Gerzon states, "Leadership is not only about what we do; it is about who we are. It is a metaphor for how we are trying to change ourselves as well as change the world around us." So leadership is more than a mere process, it is a relationship that speaks to our very core and reflects our

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essence. All leadership approaches are grounded in a set of principles or values.

These trends and **values** are:

- From image to authenticity - value of integrity
- From tradition to change - value of learning
- From nationstate to global economy - value of inclusion
- From homogeneity to diversity- value of respect
- From solo to team - value of collaboration

Gerzon further contrasts these emerging values with the values upon which command and control type of leadership styles are based, specifically: knowing, exclusion, fear, control and image.

In contrast, each one of the emerging values is key to the bridging process precisely because it promotes openness and acceptance and lays the groundwork for a relationship based on real understanding and trust. These relationships based on trust and the core values, then, become the building blocks for **collaboration**. Thus the bridging leadershipscontributes to leadership studies by introducing the concept of the group dynamic and collective action. It has contributed to the study of collaboration and partnership for development and social change as within the collaborative framework.

III. Characteristics of Bridging Leadership

The bridging leadership needs to have the following characteristics:

1. *Participatory Consciousness*– Belief that complex social issues cannot be addressed by one best solution but by collaboration, participation and ownership of community & other stakeholders.
2. *Passion & Influence* – Can sustain efforts and inspire others through personal energy and can influence the system and implement the desired interventions with or without formal authority.
3. *Emotional Intelligence* –
   - Deal with "stuff" below the surface and "what's in the room"
   - Build relationships of trust
   - Manage conflict
   - Live through ambiguity and confusion
   - Create safe "containers" where everyone is valued and heard
   - Listen to others from the others' highest future potential
   - Can co-own with others, knowing when to step in front and when to step down.
4. *Networked* – Able to call on a wide range of trusting relationships across different places in society and able to embrace diversity and difference to achieve high social return on relationship capital.
5. *Experimentation & Action Oriented* - able to help others suspend the voice of judgment, voice of cynicism and voice of fear so as to create cultures of experimentation and able to move beyond talk to try new things, to tolerate and learn from failure, to take action even if the first steps are small.

IV. Bridging Leadership Framework

Bridging Leadership is the type of leadership that is appropriate in promoting multi-stakeholder processes to address societal inequities. The **Key to the leadership concept** is the capacity of the **individual to move from a personal understanding and ownership of a social issue to a collective action to resolve the issue**. It is about leading collaborative action to bring about social change.

The leadership acts involve three main segments, Building Ownership of the response, Developing Co-Ownership with other stakeholders and together engaging in the Co-Creation of a new reality.

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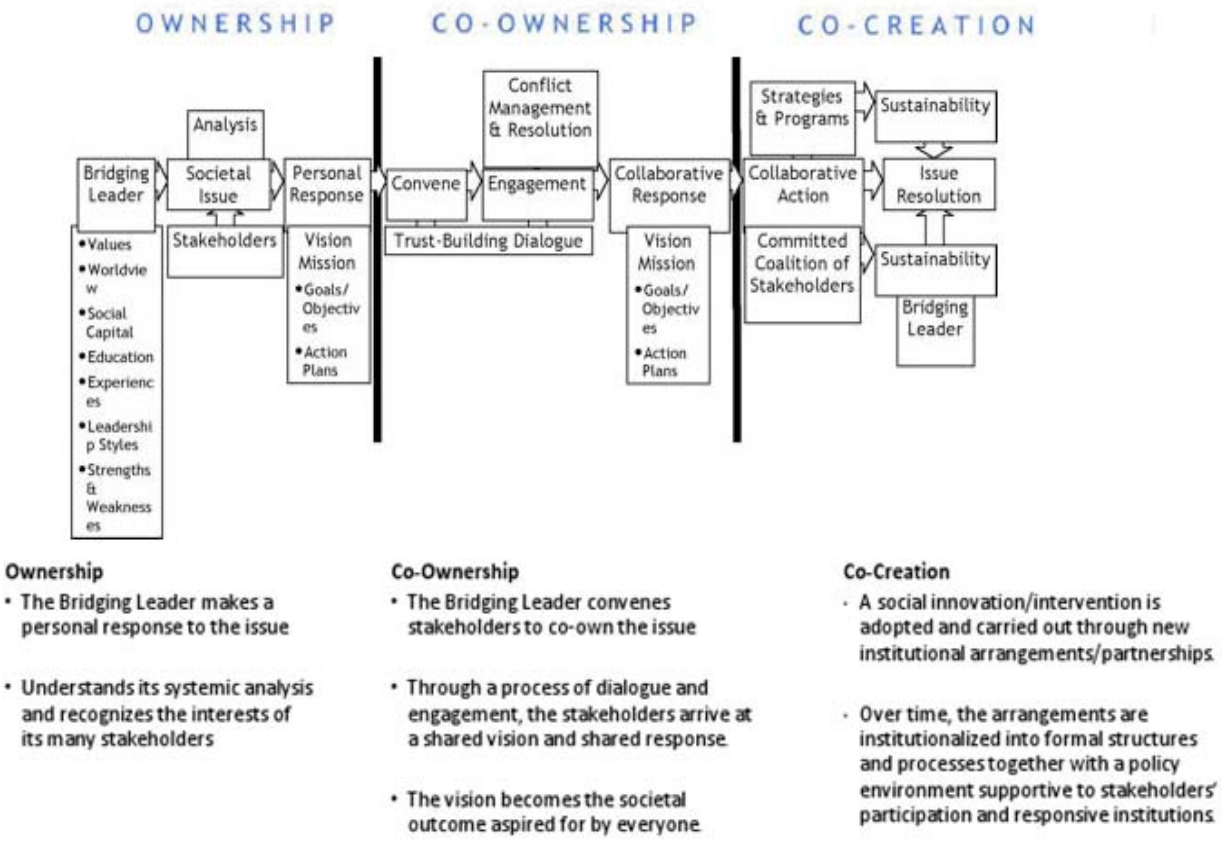

Figure 1: Bridging leadership framework

The bridging leader whose values and principles compel him to make a personal response to address inequities and societal divides recognizes that the complexity of the problem can only be solved by convening the stakeholders to the divide. (Ownership)

Through a process of dialogue and engagement, the stakeholders arrive at a common vision and collective response to the situation. (Co-ownership)

The stakeholders then adopt a social innovation that leads to the societal outcome, and carries it out through new institutional arrangements. The bridging leader and the coalition of stakeholders ensure that these institutional arrangements have clear and measurable goals with the required capability and resources to demonstrate results. They regularly review their progress vis-à-vis the desired societal outcome and assess the individual and collective roles and accountabilities in the process. (Co-creation)

Over time, these arrangements become formal processes that lead to a reform-conducive policy environment and responsive programs and services. Other stakeholders are invited to the coalition regularly, and new bridging leaders are developed to sustain the transformation process towards societal equity.

Each part described can be a starting point for action. The process is non-linear and iterative, requiring the leader to constantly review each segment to ensure sustainability of the process.

V. Process of Social Change

People work in organizations and organizations operate within the broader context that is society. Thus, bridging is not just a horizontal exercise; it is a process that begins with the individual leaders, working through groups or organizations, which, in turn, comprise the fabric of society. Figure 2 is a graphic representation illustrating how bridging can spark and carry forward a process of social transformation.

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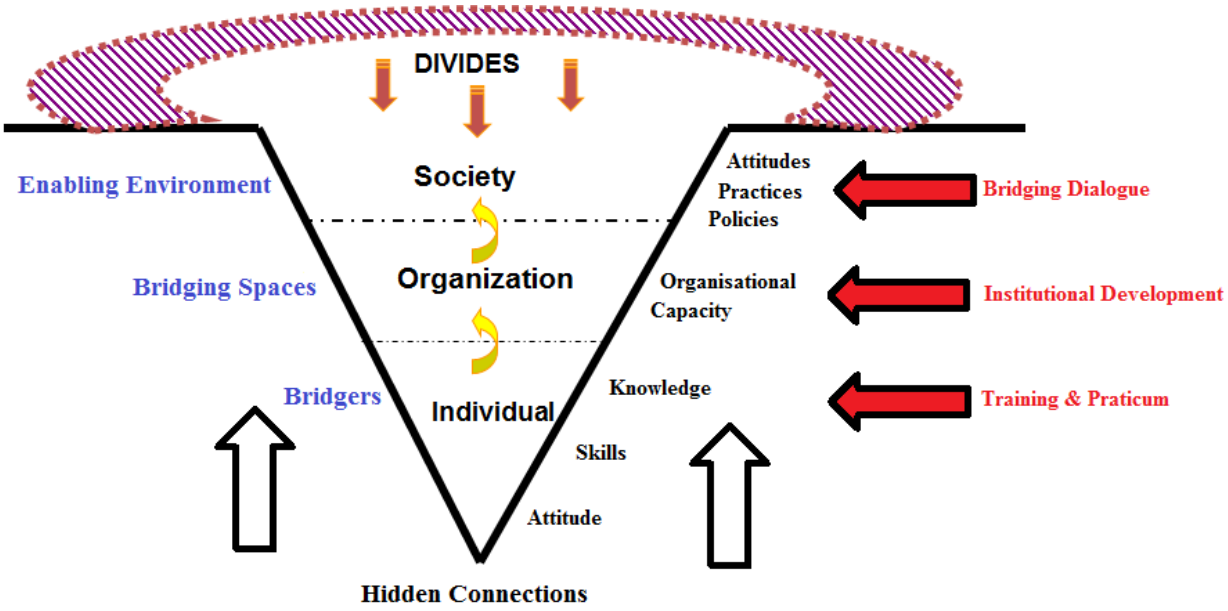

Figure 2: Bridging forward a process of social transformation

At each level a different set of elements are needed to advance the process to the next level and beyond. For example, bridging leaders require specific knowledge, skills and attitudes to become effective bridgers. Training and real time practice are the means of acquisition. Organizations, in order to be viewed as bridging spaces, must demonstrate certain core competencies such as systems of accountability, capacity to execute mission related activities, adequate revenue generation, and effective management of human resources, constituency responsiveness, and ability to mobilize and utilize information. Institutional strengthening programs can help organizations position themselves as strategic bridging spaces.

Finally, basic conditions must be met within the enabling environment to give bridging a chance to take hold. The seed of collaboration requires fertile ground for it to grow. It is impossible to sustain healthy organizations in a sick environment. A society populated with bridging organizations is necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving sustainable social transformation. Society must offer basic policies, practices and attitudes that encourage collaboration and the accumulation of social capital.

Bridging Leadership attempts to increase society's deposit of social capital by increasing levels of trust in the public space. The principal mechanism for accomplishing this is the **bridging dialogue**. It is a process of collective thinking and communication in which mutual understanding and trust are developed, new relationships formed, and barriers and obstacles removed.

Once a minimal level of trust exists and the chains of trust are extended across the public spaces, collaboration can begin and real progress made on solving complex problems. Over time, collaboration can evolve into what Waddell terms societal learning or "a process of changing patterns of interactions within and between diverse organizations and social units to enhance society's capacity to innovate." This capacity to innovate is essential to coming up with sustainable solutions to our most critical problems.

So bridging leadership is the removal of barriers that prevent groups from finding common ground and working together towards sustainable solutions. It attempts to initiate dialogue involving all the critical stakeholders. Initial activities are designed to develop trust and relationships, building from a foundation of "early, small successes".

Figure 3 indicates, dialogue should involve a wide range of actors at the initial stages. As specific activities begin to take place and progress towards concrete goals is made, the process may become more focused.

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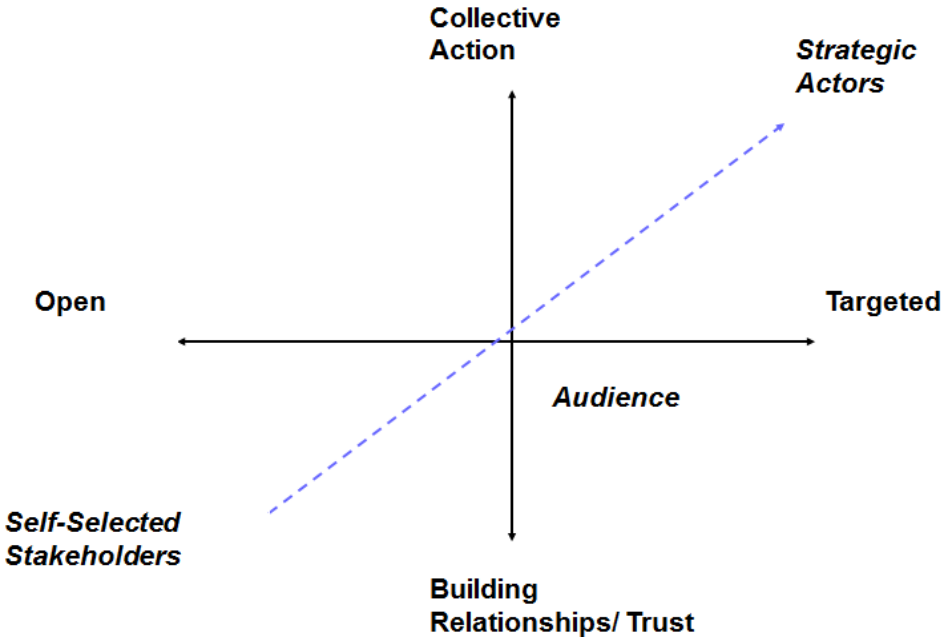

Figure 3: Bridging Dialogue

Thus, from a bridging perspective, the initial stage of dialogue involves casting a wide net for potential stakeholders. The essential early objectives involve building relationships and trust. Ideally, this stage would be centered upon small, low-risk activities that allow for immediate successes and for trust to take hold and grow. Over time, the objectives would tend towards more sophisticated types of collective action. As activities intensify and require increasing levels of commitment and investment, the participants would be targeted, in part, based upon potential contributions to the collaboration, in addition to specific interests.

VI. Example: Bringing Leadership in ZEP School

A good example of the Bridging leadership approach is about the 'Zones d'EducationPrioritaires' (Z.E.P.) school in Mauritius. The Mauritian government made an attempt to upgrade the performance level of low achieving schools. Emphasis was placed upon improving the overall school infrastructure and to a limited extent on pedagogical innovations with a view to raise the level of achievements. This sectoral approach, although it had some strength, has, however proved to be insufficient and limited in scope. Based on the past local experiences and considering the various experiences being carried out in other countries, the concept of the 'Zones d' EducationPrioritaires' is found to be the most suitable in the Mauritian context.

The' ZEP' defines the school within its environment and aims at mobilising all the resources within the Zone to contribute in raising the standard of achievement of the school. This will mean empowering Head Teachers and his/her team, crafting a shared vision and mission and implementing a school development plan with all the other key players in education, that is, the parents, the community-based associations, NGOs, and business organisations.

The philosophy of the 'Zones d'EducationPrioritaires' (Z.E.P.) is based on the premise that positive reinforcement is required to create favourable learning conditions for children living mostly in the less developed regions. This approach aims to reduce school inequalities and in a broader perspective, to combat social inequalities by providing equal opportunities to all primary school children of the Republic of Mauritius.

As an inclusive strategy, the 'Z.E.P.' concept aims at improving the school standards within a medium term period in order to obtain tangible results. Although there is close monitoring of the project, an evaluation will be carried out every three years. Partnership of schools, the business sector, local communities, NGOs and parents are the main means of delivering these much-needed improvements.

The 'Z.E.P 'innovative strategy lies at the heart of the government's education programme in favour of disadvantaged children. This strategy is being established to improve performance in schools in challenging circumstances and forms an integral part of the overall educational reform plan. Deep-seated problems in education will require a fresh approach if they are to be tackled successfully.

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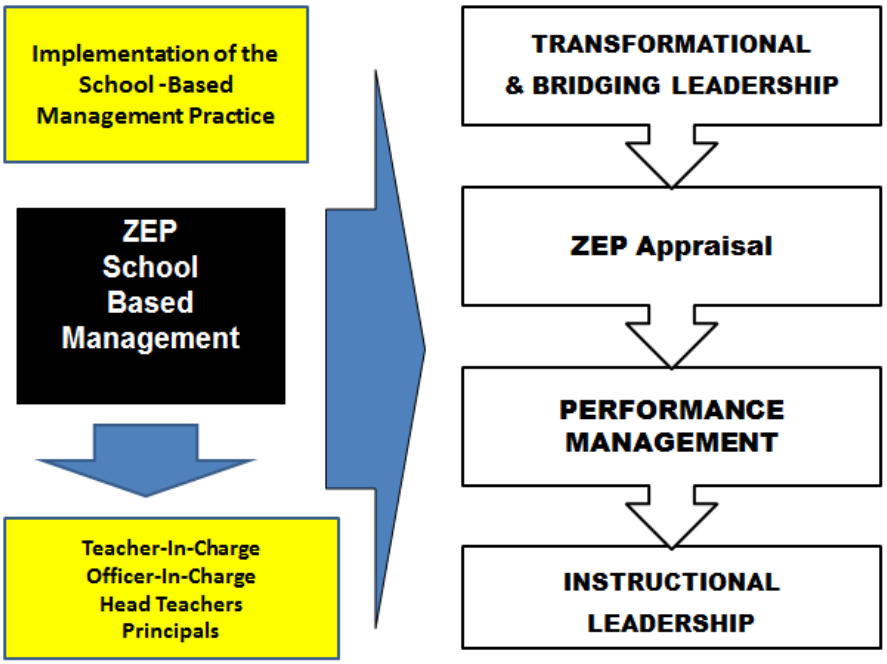

Figure 4: ZEP innovative strategy

The School Project is a management tool used by the Head Teacher and his/her team with the active participation of all the **key players** (PTA, NGO, Community Based Organisations (CBO), Private Sector representatives) to assess the strengths, the weaknesses, and the areas for school improvement. One segment of the process is focused on self-awareness and involves developing a sense of personal **Ownership** of a societal problem and the response to it.

The School Project identifies the key performance indicators, the performance objectives and spells out a detailed action plan within a timeframe. Both the pedagogical dimension and the management dimension are included in the School Project. The management of the 'Z.E.P.' schools strongly encouraged to involve, **leaders of PTAs**, local NGOs and local business partners in the conception and implementation of the School Project. Within the School Project, a special award is given to pupils who have consistently demonstrated good performance and attendance.

The various schools in the group undertook **co-ownership** of collaborative programs and came up with collaborative projects. The members of the coalition are committed to working collectively and individually to help bring the human development index of the schools at par with the rest of Mauritian schools by 2020.The group has since expanded to include teachers who were volunteer.

The bridging leader acknowledges the range of his assets (for example, values, education, experiences, family background, etc.) which when accumulated comprise his leadership capital. Knowing his capital, the leader examines how these assets are put to use to benefit the wider society. This brings the leader to a deeper understanding of the societal problem, its underlying causes and his possible contribution to it. The analysis brings to fore the need to take a personal response, and commit one's resources to the resolution of this issue. Without this personal commitment, collaborative action with other stakeholders will not prosper when confronted with immediate challenges.

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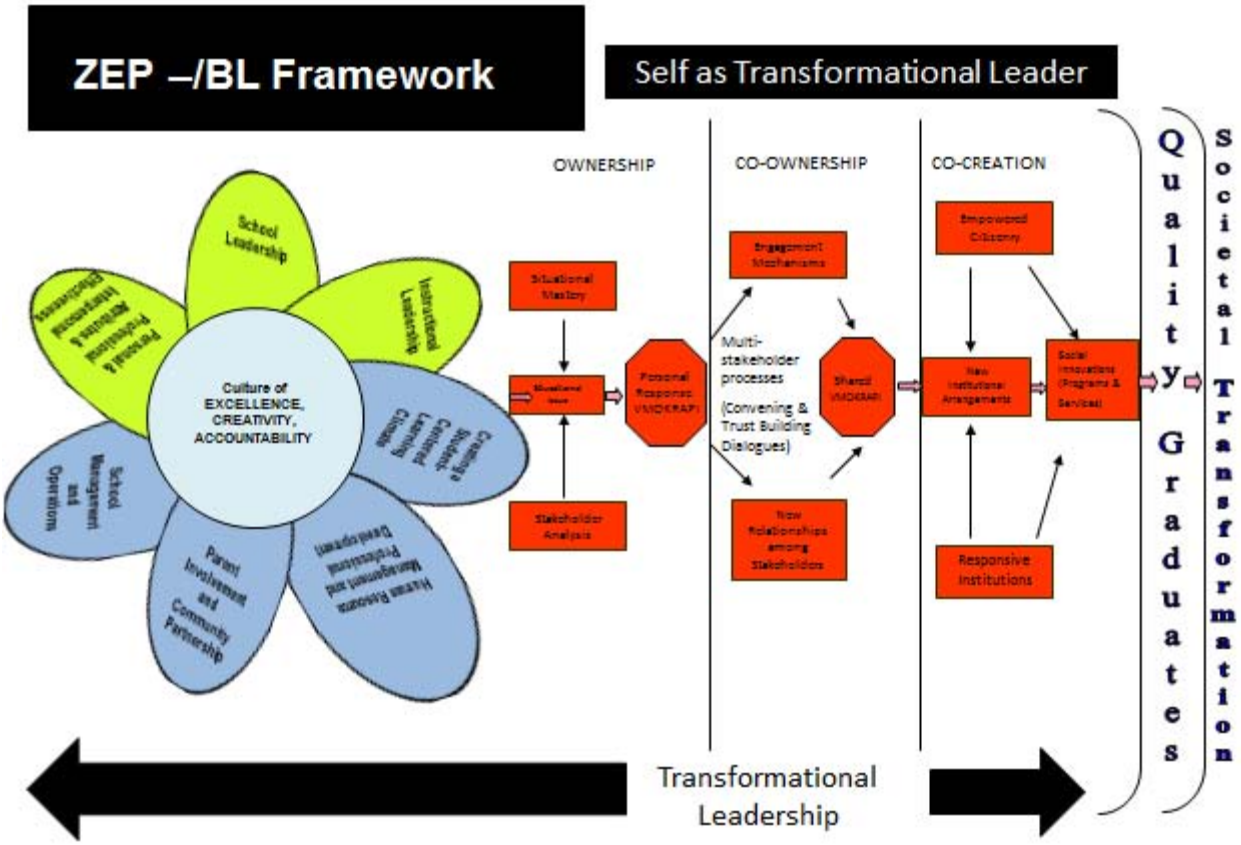

Figure 5: ZEP Bridging Leadership Framework

Called **Co-creators**, they are at the forefront of engagement activities in their respective schools. The different NGO's, Private Sector representative's PTA and government work together to improve the socio-economic, and peace and order conditions in the education sector of Mauritius. Here, the commitment to work collaboratively is translated into clear goals, outputs and targets that will lead to the resolution of the problem. Innovative plans and programs are drawn by the collective, guided by the principles of transparency, accountability, participation and resource-sharing. In pursuing the programs, the group tries to attain their common vision through concrete mechanisms and strategies. Maintaining the commitment of the stakeholders is important as resolving the societal issue may take some time. The sustainability of the initiative also ultimately rests on the capacity of the leader to nourish him and renew his commitment to his personal mission.

The Co-creators are taking on leadership roles in the identified activities, promoting the engagement between society and government units and paving the way for further replication at the community level. Efforts to identify more community leaders, and to develop local institutions that will be able to execute the capacity-building programs, are being made. A sectoral approach is being used to organize structures for providing support to local initiatives.

Program champions have been identified from the Ministry of Education to serve as technical consultants and resource links for the convenors. Local capacity is also being built to ensure that convenors have the tools and frameworks to manage programs that have community participation which is sustainable in the long term.

While the work has been challenging, the results are slowly emerging. The ZEP schools and/or NGO's task forces have been operationalized with the government support and private sector participation. Eventually, the objective is that these task forces have transformed into formal mechanisms for government-NGO interaction. When this is realized, the community is an active partner in governance, and influence local development policy and the allocation of the local government's development funds.

Future work will focus on building the capacity of leaders, and the formation and development of responsive institutions that will create development opportunities needed by the constituencies of Mauritius.

VII. Conclusion

Bridging leadership is about creating or enhancing bridging social capital. Bridging leaders are those who can understand, engage and lead groups of people with diverse interests to effective group action to solve problems or achieve goals under conditions of

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complexity. Bridging leaders fight against social exclusions. To pull the inhabitants of Planet Earth through the difficult 21st century problems of poverty, environmental collapse, ethnic-religious wars and threat of nuclear war, we NEED more bridging leaders.

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