

Principals Managing and Developing Their Human Capital

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Abstract

Periodically principals need to pause and reflect on the extent to which they are maximizing their human capital and determine how it could further be strengthened. Effectively managing energy is crucial to principals in maximizing their human capital. Expressing appreciation and providing positive feedback to teachers, teams, groups, students, and other stakeholders with whom principals work help to regenerate energy through the positive emotions principals feel resonating from these sources. Application of the outward mindset assists principals in demonstrating their understanding and being sensitive to others. Being optimistic and resilient also help principals to retain energy, utilize their human capital, and increase productivity. Through the effective use of emotional intelligence, principals can maintain motivational perspectives and aid in the effective use of their human capital. Strengths' management makes principals acutely aware of the importance of focusing on their strengths and continuing to develop them while managing their weaknesses, rather than only trying to eliminate such weaknesses.

Keywords: human capital, principals, managing and generating human energy, resiliency, optimism, emotional intelligence, strengths' management, outward mindset

The term human capital, coined in the 1960's, represents the assets principals possess—and can develop—to give added value to their job, school, and student learning. Human capital is not a fixed quantity; it can decrease or increase depending upon the principal's efforts, experiences, developmental activities, and job challenges. Principals periodically need to assess their human capital, reflect on their strengths and how to maximize their use, manage their

weaknesses, and develop additional human capital for enhancing job performance and satisfaction.

Managing Energy

“Most of us respond to rising demands in the workplace by putting in longer hours, which inevitably takes a toll on us physically, mentally, and emotionally” (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2010, p. 61). Principals often try to “outwork” increased job demands, which results in an energy drain. In the long run, putting in more time is not the answer to effectively addressing an increased workload. Principals need to allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use it for maximizing productivity. As Kogon, Merrill, and Rinne (2015) note, “Extraordinary productive people consistently *recharge* [their energy]” (p. 15).

The capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) the body; (2) emotions; (3) mind; and (4) spirit. For each of these factors, energy can be expanded and renewed with “intentional practice” (Goleman, 1995). Principals need to identify situations that place considerable demand on their energy with limited payoff to their overall productivity and, to the extent possible, minimize or eliminate them. This may be difficult because of the nature of principals’ job needing them to be “fluid” (flexible to change) based on the unexpected events in a given day, week, or month. The bottom line, though, is that principals must manage their job as opposed to the job managing them.

A resurgence in energy can be enhanced physically by principals having proper diets, exercise, and sleep. Meditation, which creates relaxation, can also play an important role in regenerating energy. Energy regeneration can be addressed by principals managing their daily schedule to build in periodic breaks throughout the work day, even if only for a few minutes, to rest their minds. Principals must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy (Kogon et al., 2015).

Reducing interruptions by others and the interruptions principals create on their own (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) is crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon et al., 2015). Expressing appreciation to others, and receiving positive feedback from teachers, teams, students, and other stakeholders with whom a principal works, are excellent sources for regenerating energy.

The nature of principals’ jobs is that they are considered as “always-on workers.” This term means that there are often few boundaries between the work life and the personal life of principals. While it is not possible for principals to always separate their work and personal lives, it is important for recharging their energy whenever possible so that work life factors do not interfere with the rewards and relaxation gained from their personal lives (Feintzeig, 2017).

Regenerating Energy Through Those With Whom the Principal Works

As Drucker¹ (2010) noted:

Very few people work by themselves and achieve results by themselves—a few great artists, a few great scientists, a few good athletes. Most people work with others and are effective with other people. This is true whether they are members of an organization or

are independently employed. Managing yourself requires taking responsibility for relationships with others. (p. 26)

The concept of mindset is an excellent source for how a principal can consciously work with others—both individually and through teams (e.g., PLC’s), committees, and other groups—to generate and secure energy. Principals need to furnish those with whom they work positive feedback and praise for effective efforts and results. In return, principals will gain positive emotions and an “upbeat” feeling that regenerates their energy.

The Arbinger Institute (2016) provides an excellent source for the application of mindset by principals through the concepts of inward and outward mindsets. The outward mindset principal perceives the efforts in work completed by teachers, teams, and others as crucially important and meaningful. The principal demonstrating an outward mindset provides positive feedback through praise and recognition and gives the individuals and groups with whom he/she works specific feedback on their performance. The outward mindset, for example, represents the principal coaching teachers in a positive manner to help them improve and effectively meet challenges which may be difficult for them. Application of the outward mindset results in principals being regenerated through the positive feelings they receive from those stakeholders (including students) with whom they interact.

The inward mindset principal is egotistical, self-centered, and has little concern for others in the work environment. The inward mindset principal has very little, or no, consideration of the wants, needs, and psychological support needed of others with whom she/he works. Positive feelings are not received by the principal, and energy is not recognized. Figure 1 represents a comparison between the inward and outward mindsets as applied to principals.

Inward	Outward
1. Strives to control people	1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work
2. Often blames others when things go wrong	2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and staff in the school’s work environment
3. Is narcissistic	3. Displays modesty toward staff and others
4. Consistently defends one’s position	4. Works collaboratively with staff to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for the school’s problems
5. Interactions with staff and others focus on protecting oneself	5. Interactions with staff, students, and other stakeholders with a focus on building positive relationships with and among people
6. Uses behaviors that sometimes try to manipulate staff and others in an attempt to improve one’s own image	6. Strives to facilitate “committed behaviors” collectively with staff and others to improve work produced and achieve the school’s goals

Inward	Outward
7. Shows minimal regard for how to create “collective results” among staff and others	7. Motivated about how to work with staff and others collaboratively and for others to collaborate with each other and oneself
8. Views staff and others in a context as to how they can help oneself achieve goals	8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of staff and others to create a work environment that prompts individual and group cooperation
9. Assumes that to simply change one’s behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of staff and others	9. Understands changing how oneself views staff and others is more beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward staff and others
10. Focuses on how to make oneself “look good” for work produced, even at the expense of staff and others	10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with staff and others that incorporates their needs, wants, and gains them recognition
11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other	11. Focuses on the school’s staff as an entity having a collective belief of working with each other for the common good of student learning
12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself	12. Assists staff and others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of the students
13. Focuses on getting the work “out the door” with little identity for its benefits	13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have for students, staff, and the school
14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased	14. Helps staff and others understand what they need to do; provides developmental training, when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources
15. Creates conflict that keeps staff embattled with each other (divide and conquer for control)	15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among staff and others

Inward	Outward
16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself	16. Focuses on the goals of the school, and objectives and behaviors that take staff and others into consideration
17. Advances one's own agenda even at the expense of what is best for students and others	17. Focuses on working together with staff and others for "collective" results to benefit students
18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself	18. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff's and others' abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work
19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of staff and others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear	19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff's and others' abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work

Figure 1. Comparing inward and outward mindsets for principals toward staff and others.

Optimism and Resilience

Optimism helps principals to utilize their human capital by being motivated to “be their best.” Optimism prompts principals to perform effectively, even when the job challenges are monumental, and helps them to have the resilience needed to work through difficult situations when things go wrong (Seligman, 2002).

Resilience is composed of four characteristics: (1) principals clearly accepting the harsh realities facing them in their jobs, including difficult and discouraging events; (2) finding meaning and learning from situations that are difficult; (3) having the uncanny ability to improvise and make do with whatever resources are at hand, as limited as they may be, to be effective; and (4) unwavering optimism (Coutu, 2010, p. 52).

Facing a harsh reality means a principal is realistic—but not pessimistic—about the difficulties and barriers (e.g., finances and other resources) that sometimes exist to accomplish an important task or goal. Such a principal creates an optimistic and positive attitude that allows for enduring and moving forward when things go wrong and not letting negative events have a lasting effect on motivation. Remember that optimism is motivational and breeds a “can do” attitude, whereas pessimism leads to a lost sense of control and a “cannot do” attitude.

Outward mindset principals do not view themselves as a victim in difficult situations. Rather, they view the situation as a learning experience and are not overwhelmed by it. When things do not go according to plans, it is important for the principal to improvise and have alternative plans of action. Being resourceful during difficult times means the principal is constantly looking for immediate and additional resources by, for example, networking with other staff in the district. Throughout such times, the principal remains unequivocally optimistic.

Emotional Intelligence

“Emotional intelligence is an assortment of mental abilities and skills that can help you to successfully manage both yourself and the demands of others” (Walton, 2012, p. 3). Emotional intelligence stresses: (1) knowing yourself; (2) controlling emotions through self-management; (3) showing consideration, empathy, and feelings for others to build positive relationships; and (4) effectively using social skills to build an awareness that aids positive interactions and relationships with others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 24). Specific explanations for each of these four areas are:

- (1) *Knowing yourself* stresses being cognitively aware of your mood, and thoughts about a given mood at a given time, to help manage behavior. Specifically, when examining a negative mood (e.g., anger), it is usually best to reflect before reacting, unless eminent danger exists. It is important to have positive “self-talk” to get the mind out of a negative mood. Think positive thoughts to prompt a positive mood (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).
- (2) *Controlling emotions through self-management* is dependent upon the principal’s acute awareness of the emotions for the purpose of remaining flexible and striving for positive behaviors. For some situations, the principal’s emotions can prompt an adrenaline rush that instantaneously results in a behavior which may not be appropriate at that time. “Real results come from putting your momentary needs on hold to pursue larger, more important goals” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 33).
- (3) *Showing consideration, empathy, and feelings for others* is building on positive relationships. Relationship management is the principal’s skill to use emotions to interact successfully with others in the work environment, both individually and with teams, committees, and other stakeholders. This stresses building positive relationships that bond the principal with others at work. In order to do so, the principal strives to understand the wants, needs, and emotions of others. Effective listening is a paramount skill to building meaningful relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).
- (4) *The effective use of social skills to build awareness* to accurately read the emotions of other people in the work environment and understand what is actually driving their behaviors. This requires the principal to attempt to “think and feel” as the other person does by putting him/herself in the situation of the other person (role reversal). Being an astute observer and listener is important, as well as reading nonverbal behaviors and observing each person to understand the context for her/his reactions in a given situation. “To be socially aware, you [the principal] have to spot and understand people’s emotions while you’re right in the middle of it—a contributing, yet astutely aware, member of the interaction” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 39).

Principals need to recognize, understand, and acknowledge their negative thoughts and feelings and then develop the “emotional agility” to move past them. The process of emotional agility includes accepting the negative emotions, analyzing what factors prompted them, and being agile enough to switch to positive actions to produce a solution to address the situation. This managing of negative emotions so that the result is a productive solution to a situation is known as “workability” (David & Congeton, 2015, pp. 125-126).

Goleman (1995, p.8) identified that individuals have two minds: (1) the rational mind that is logical and (2) the emotional mind that is impulsive and sometimes illogical. Because of the potential for the emotional mind to be illogical, it is imperative for principals to pause and reflect before letting their emotional mind's thoughts be expressed verbally or nonverbally.

Strengths' Management

“Excellence can be achieved by *focusing* on strengths and *managing* weaknesses, not through the elimination of weaknesses” (Clifton & Nelson, 1992, p. 11). This axiom represents the goal of strengths' management that emphasizes principals utilizing their strengths to achieve excellence. As Rath and Conchie (2008) note, “The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths” (p. 2).

There are times, though, when it is necessary for principals to learn how to work with their weaknesses. For example, organizational skills are important to a principal's job. Hence, while organizational skills may be a weakness of the principal, the principal still needs to be organized. In reality, there are times principals need to learn how to work with their weaknesses and often do so by utilizing individuals in their work environment that have a strength in the area of their weakness (Eureka Books, 2015).

Rath and Conchie (2008) encourage principals to take the most recent edition of the leadership specific version of the Clifton Strengths Finders to better identify and understand their strengths. A principal's strengths usually are represented by those tasks for which great satisfaction is realized. Principals get positive psychological rewards in the form of satisfaction when exhibiting their strengths, and are thus more effective and productive. Principals should continually nurture and develop their strengths, rather than assuming that such strengths will always be strong and need no further attention. Rath (2007, p. 9) notes that principals “can be a lot more of who [they] already are” by focusing on continued strengths' development.

Rath (2007) found that people who have the opportunity to focus on their strengths in their jobs are six times more likely to be meaningfully engaged in work than people that did not have this opportunity. Principals applying the logic of strengths' management to those they supervise via matching staff members' strengths with work assigned (when possible), will increase the productivity of each person as well as the total school.

Summary

Principals occasionally must pause to reflect on what constitutes their human capital and how they can maximize its use. The principalship is a very demanding job—physically and mentally. It is crucial for principals to ascertain how to maintain a high-energy level and be able to regenerate their energy from time-to-time. Utilizing an outward mindset will aid principals in working effectively with others, which will enhance their performance and, in turn, result in positive emotional feedback for the principals to regenerate their energy. Effective principals are resilient and remain optimistic, even in difficult and challenging times. Being optimistic is motivational and helps maximize human capital.

Through the application of emotional intelligence, principals are able to deal with their emotions more objectively and effectively and be more productive. By applying emotional intelligence, principals significantly contribute to others in the work environment being more

productive and enjoying their work. Lastly, it is important for principals to focus on utilizing and continually developing their strengths while managing their weaknesses, rather than focusing solely on eliminating the weaknesses.

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Footnote

¹Peter Drucker died in 2005. He is listed in the reference section as: “Drucker, P. (2010). *Managing oneself: HBR’s 10 must reads* (p. 26). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.” This article was originally published in 1999.