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# Convergent Roles of the School Principal: Leadership, Managerial, and Curriculum-Instructional

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**Abstract**

Researchers have focused on the principal's role as instructional leader in recent literature. They have examined a host of processes for shaping schools as learning organizations and have hinted at the implications of these initiatives for school improvement. Management is important in addition to instructional leadership. What behaviors or practices should principals pursue to be a general manager or curriculum-instructional leader? Research supports the assumption that effective schools have principals who exhibit strong curriculum-instructional leadership as well as essential management skills.

Although there is agreement in the literature on the need to improve the leadership role of the principal, there is disagreement on what behaviors or practices principals should pursue—and to what extent a principal should be a *general manger* or *curriculum-instructional leader*. Some studies have addressed this dichotomy**.**

Principals in North Carolina ($n$ = 370) categorized their professional colleagues into one of five leadership roles (principal/teacher, scientific manager, instructional leader, curriculum leader, or general manager). Sixty percent of the high school principals chose general manager (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Brubaker & Simon, 1987; Sharp & Walter, 2012). Female principals and principals with more formal education (doctorate degree) prefer the role of curriculum or instructional leader compared with male principals and principals with less formal education (master's degree, sixth-year certificate), who prefer the role of general manager.

In a study of 149 successful elementary school principals in Massachusetts, more than 75 percent described themselves as "instructional leaders." The principals were selected on the basis of being strong leaders and because of their schools' student achievement scores. The successful elementary principals in the aforementioned study and in other instructional leadership sources indicate that they devote most of their own professional development time and resources to curriculum, instruction, and school improvement (Cooper, 1989; Johnson, 2008; Jones, 2012).

Other data suggest that suburban school principals and elementary school principals spend more time on curriculum and instructional matters than do urban and secondary school principals, but still not enough time, given that they must still deal with leaking roofs, shrinking budgets, and personnel squabbles (Ayres, Ricken, & Terc, 2006; Michaux, 2011; Tallerico, 2011). Secondary school principals, especially those in large schools, devote more time to

managerial concerns. The latter group of principals relies on their assistant principals and chairpersons in various subject areas to deal with curriculum and instructional activities (Jones & Egley, 2006; Lunenburg, 2007; Lunenburg & Columba, 1992: Sparks, 2009).

Elementary schools are smaller than high schools and are often cornerstones of homogenous neighborhoods, whereas secondary schools often cut across and include many neighborhoods. Due to neighborhood size and homogeneity, elementary principals must be more sensitive to the needs, views, and priorities of parents and community members, which often center around curriculum and instructional leadership (Ayers et al., 2006; Harris, 2005; Williams & Hayden, 2010). However, a point is reached, when a school is very small (fewer than 100 students) or rural, where the principal is given other duties that take away time from curriculum matters (Feldman, 2003; Hill, 1993; Riggs & Serafin, 1998). These might deal with central office tasks, teaching, or the shared principalship of another site.

## Leadership Role of the Principal

In recent decades, the terms *climate, ethos, and culture* have been used to capture or describe the norms, values, behaviors, and rituals of the school organization, what has been referred to as the personality of the organization. For example, when you tell people where you work, they will ask you: What is it like there? The description you give likely will have a lot to do with the organization's culture. In calculating your response to the question, you will describe the kinds of people who work at your school. Probably you will describe the work atmosphere on a typical day: how teachers interact and dress, what they talk about, what goes on at meetings, how students behave, how parents interact with staff. You will describe the facilities in your workplace and how you feel people are treated. More than likely, you will describe what it is that defines "success" at your school and what type of leadership behavior is exhibited by the principal. These responses give clues that help outsiders understand what your school's culture is really like.

The concept of organizational culture was first noted as early as the Hawthorne studies, which described work group culture (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). It was not until the early 1980s that the topic came into its own. Several books on organizational culture were published, including Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy's (1984) *Corporate Cultures*, William Ouchi's (1981) *Theory Z*, and Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. These books popularized organizational culture, and researchers began in earnest to study the topic.

Organizational theorists indicated these cultures were real. They acknowledged that organizations have personalities just like people. For example, organizations can be flexible or rigid, supportive or unfriendly, innovative or conservative. Organization theorists documented the important role that culture plays in the lives of organization members.

Deal and Peterson (2010a) contend that many schools have *toxic cultures*—that is, over time the staff becomes fragmented and demoralized. The purpose of serving students has been lost; negativism and criticism dominate. A disgruntled staff attacks new ideas, criticizes dedicated teachers, makes fun of colleagues who attend conferences or workshops, and recounts past failures. In contrast, other schools have *positive cultures*, where the staff shares a sense of

purpose, and is dedicated to teaching and school improvement. Student successes are highlighted and collegiality permeates the atmosphere. High morale, caring, and commitment abound.

In their companion book, *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership*, Deal and Peterson (2010b) affirm that the school leader is key in shaping school culture. Principals communicate core values, behaviors, and expectations in their everyday work and interactions with staff. Their actions, words, memos, and even nonverbal behavior send messages and over time shape culture. Either they encourage and reward effective teachers and accomplished students, or they ignore them and bury themselves in micromanagement or politics. In their book *Creating a Culture for High-Performing Schools*, Bulach and Lunenburg (2011) contend that creating a positive school culture is the starting point for developing a high-performing school.

## Managerial Role of the Principal

A sizable body of literature has dealt with school leadership but very little has been written about the management of schools. The literature, some of it empirical, has concentrated on the school principal's role as instructional leader (Jones, 2012; Krajewski, 2012; Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 2005; Zepeda, 2012). This literature has examined a host of processes for shaping schools as learning organizations and has hinted at the implications of these initiatives for school improvement. Management is important in addition to instructional leadership (Lunenburg, 2007; Sharp & Walter, 2012). When school improvements occur, school administrators play a central role in (a) ensuring that resources - money, time, and professional development - align with instructional goals, (b) supporting the professional growth of teachers in a variety of interconnected ways, (c) including teachers in the information loop, (d) cultivating the relationship between the school and community, and (e) managing the day-to-day tasks of running a school. Each of these is viewed as a management task in the sense that it involves daily or weekly attention to problem solving within the school/school district and between the school/school district and its immediate environment.

Management is a prerequisite to leadership. You cannot change something unless it is a viable system in the first place. It has to continue to survive while you take it to the next level. Management of the day-to-day operation of a school is essential. Otherwise, the organization falls apart from the bottom up. Very quickly, poor management catches up with the organization. The person at the top needs not always be a leader in the sense that he/she has a vision or direction or can cope with the future. Very often good leaders do not take the time personally to practice management skills even though they have knowledge of management skills. Part of leadership is knowing what you do best and using all of the available resources at your disposal. Thus, school principals work with students, teachers, parents, and others to set up organizational structures and help to develop the other people in the organization by delegating and very carefully monitoring the management functions in the school or school district.

Think of all the activities employees perform in a school. They schedule classes, order supplies, maintain student records, teach classes, clean classrooms, prepare food, drive buses, type letters, photocopy, and the like. If one was to make a list, one would probably identify several hundred different tasks. Without structures, policies, and processes, would all the required tasks be performed efficiently and effectively? Who would teach the classes, clean the classrooms, wash the chalkboards, serve lunch in the cafeteria, drive the buses, or mail student

report cards? The management function of *organizational structure* is the process of deploying human and physical resources to carry out tasks and achieve school/school district goals. How do school principals manage the day-to-day activities of the school/school district and, at the same time, work toward the school's/school district's improvement? They do not do it alone.

The role of manager is essential for the principal and is probably the most important aspect of school leadership. In their classic text on organizational behavior, Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn (1978) divide management skills into three major areas: *technical*, involving good planning, organizing, coordinating, supervising, and controlling techniques; *human*, dealing with human relations and people skills, good motivating and moral-building skills; and *conceptual*, emphasizing knowledge and technical skills related to the service (or product) of the organization. (For principals, conceptual leadership connotes knowledge of curriculum, instruction, teaching, and learning.) Thomas Sergiovanni has added three other areas of management for school administrators, including *symbolic leadership*, those actions the principal emphasizes and wishes to model to the staff (Sergiovanni, 2006, 2008); *cultural leadership*, those values and beliefs the principal believes are important (Sergiovanni, 2000, 2009); and *moral leadership*, behavior built around purpose, ethics, and beliefs which can help transform a school from a formal organization to a "community" and inspire commitment, loyalty, and service (Sergiovanni, 1996, 1999, 2012). Michael Fullan (2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013) and Seymour Sarason (2002) add a seventh dimension of school management - the principal as a *change agent* and facilitator. Finally, Deal and Peterson (2000, 2010b) refer to an eighth characteristic, based on *cooperative leadership*, that encompasses building collegiality, a sense of school identity, and a democratic and inspiring school culture.

In general, there seems to be agreement that principals must "lead from the center." They create an environment where teachers can continually learn and grow. Leadership activities are dispersed according to competence for required tasks rather than authority; that is, leadership and management are based on ability rather than role. Central to this view of the principalship is a movement from a "power over" approach to a "power to" approach (Bulach & Lunenburg, 2011).

Diane Tracy (1990, 2001), a New York management consultant, suggests a new concept of power. The concept has been referred to in the educational literature recently as "empowerment." The new advice is that you can achieve ultimate power by giving it to the people who work for you. Tracy says, that power "operates under the same principle as love: The more you give others, the more you receive in return" (p. 196). Also, she suggests that leaders can maximize their own power and their opportunities for success by enabling the employees they supervise to achieve their own sense of power and success.

Today, many school districts are recommending a flattening of the pyramid. These administrators are beginning to see the need to involve their faculties in making decisions and solving problems. "Real power," according to Tracy (1990), "flows from the bottom up, rather than from the top down" (p. 197). According to Tracy (1990), "if you are successful in giving your people power, they will surely lift you on their shoulders to heights of power and success you never dreamed possible" (p. 199).

Diane Tracy follows up her view of empowerment with practical suggestions on how to achieve a redistribution of power. She recommends ten principles of empowerment. They are:

1. Tell people what their responsibilities are.
2. Give them authority equal to the responsibilities assigned them.
3. Set standards of excellence.
4. Provide them with the needed training.
5. Give them knowledge and information.
6. Provide them with feedback on their performance.
7. Recognize them for their achievements.
8. Trust them.
9. Give them permission to fail.
10. Treat them with dignity and respect. (1990, p. 201)

In an era of reform and restructuring of schools and with increased legal considerations and government regulations, the principal's duties and tasks have increased to an overload level. Principals are compelled to share responsibilities with and empower others in order to manage schools on a day-to-day basis. If they give away power selectively to individuals and groups, they can retain and enhance their span of control and subsequent influence.

## Curriculum-Instructional Role of the Principal

Although scholars generally agree on the need for the principal to be a leader in the areas of curriculum and instruction, they sometimes disagree on what specific roles and behaviors should be exhibited and how much time should be devoted to these twin areas of leadership. When principals are surveyed, they often report that the curriculum and instruction aspects of the job are top-priority work areas, and that they need to spend more time on the job related to these two technical areas of leadership (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

Given the national and state standards movement and the need to upgrade the curriculum to meet these standards, school principals' attention has increasingly focused on curriculum (Glatthorn, 2000; Sorenson, Goldsmith, Mendez, & Maxwell, 2011). Most national standards have been greeted with approval by business groups but not by all state education agencies or education administers. National standards have been affected by legislation and assessment procedures. They impact school practice, leadership behavior, and teaching practices (Collins, 2011; Hirsch, Lappan, & Reys, 2012; Squires, 2009).

A significant discrepancy exists between statements and actions. Data suggest that teachers do not view curriculum-instructional leadership as a major responsibility of principals, do not see much evidence of such leadership on the part of principals, and are reluctant to accept principals in this leadership capacity (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hess, 2005; Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 2005). Often teachers feel that principals are not capable of providing such leadership. Often, they do not want the principal's assistance in these technical areas that teachers consider to be more appropriate for peer coaching (Foltos, 2013; Kaufman & Grimm, 2013; McDermott, 2011) and collegial staff development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004).

Principals have historically spent little time (15% to 20%) coordinating activities in curriculum and instruction (Dipaola & Hoy, 2012). They spend much less time (3% to 7%) observing teachers in the classroom (Krajewski, 2012; Zepeda, 2012) and complain that

managerial activities take up most of their time. Dealing with the daily operation of the school and attending meetings tend to take up most of their time. Although the major principal associations (NAEP and NASSP) overwhelmingly envision the principal as a curriculum-instructional leader, the realities of the job do not permit emphasis in these twin leadership areas (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

With regard to the principal being a curriculum-instructional leader, Joseph Murphy (1990, 1998) has developed six curriculum and instructional roles for the principal:

1. *Promoting Quality Instruction*. Ensuring consistency and coordination of instructional programs and defining recommended methods of instruction.
2. *Supervising and Evaluating Instruction*. Ensuring that schools goals are translated into practice at the classroom level and monitoring classroom instruction through numerous classroom observations.
3. *Allocating and Protecting Instructional Time*. Providing teachers with uninterrupted blocks of instructional time and ensuring that basic skills and academic subjects are taught.
4. *Coordinating the Curriculum*. Translating curriculum knowledge into meaningful curriculum programs, matching instructional objectives with curriculum materials and standardized tests, and ensuring curriculum continuity vertically and across grade levels.
5. *Promoting Content Coverage*. Ensuring that content of specific courses is covered in class and extended outside of class by developing and enforcing homework policies.
6. *Monitoring Student Progress*. Using both criterion- and standardized-reference tests to diagnose student problems and evaluate their progress, as well as using test results to set or modify school goals.

According to Murphy (1990), the six major dimensions or roles exemplify an effective principal. His research supports the assumption that the distinguishing reason for effective schools is a school principal who exhibits strong curriculum-instructional leadership.

## Conclusion

The professional literature, some of it empirical, has focused on the principal's role as instructional leader. This literature has examined a host of processes for shaping schools as learning organizations and has hinted at the implications of these initiatives for school improvement. However, management is important in addition to instructional leadership. What behaviors or practices should principals pursue—and to what extent should a principal be a general manager or curriculum-instructional leader? Research supports the assumption that effective schools have principals who exhibit strong curriculum-instructional leadership as well as essential management skills.

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