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Updating Skills for Effective Leadership

Abstract

This article first provides a definition of instructional leadership which is based on an analysis of effective school studies. That analysis is reported in the basic categories of school improvement planning, staff development, program development, and school assessment. Next, the authors discuss the development of a needs instrument which was designed for school districts to assess their instructional leadership needs. Finally, an assessment of administrators' perceived training needs in three school districts in the Midwestern United States is discussed. The findings are then related to the changing role requirements and training needs of school administrators.

In the past few years, instructional leadership has emerged as a central job thrust for principals. Edmonds (1979) and Austin (1979), for example, conclude from their studies that instructional leadership is a key to an effective school. Moreover, a Rand study (Rand Corp., 1979) reported that principals are powerful enough to prevent or foster any kind of change within their schools, dubbing the principal as the "gate-keeper" of change. There has been a proliferation of studies in recent years confirming that strong instructional leaders are a primary factor in effective schools.

From the growing body of research literature on effective schools, we know that the principals of such schools tend to be strong programmatic leaders. They establish high standards, frequently observe classrooms, and foster a learning environment (Edmonds, 1982).

Even though the research literature corresponds with our intuitions about good schools and effective leadership (Purkey & Smith, 1985), the

potential for error exists. This potential resides in simplistic interpretations concerning the characteristics of instructional leadership. Acquiring or developing instructional leadership within a school requires more than simply exhorting principals to be strong leaders and go forth and lead. In fact, most principals today are simply not prepared to meet the school's needs for instructional leadership (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986).

Considering the difficulty in making sense out of the many studies on instructional leadership, it will be shown that the studies can be grouped and understood more fully in terms of work and management patterns. This article synthesizes the important elements of productive schools in terms of four basic categories: school improvement planning, staff development, program development, and school assessment. Over fifty school studies were analyzed to determine work and management patterns. First, these findings will be reviewed. Second, the details of this research on the training interests of educational leaders in three school districts in the Midwestern United States will be reported.

Research on Instructional Leadership

School improvement planning

An analysis of various research reports verifies that goal oriented school planning exists in successful schools and is collaborative in nature. Planning tasks include setting school improvement goals which relate to instruction, assigning goal-tasks to teams who plan and carry out their plans collectively, and holding individual teachers accountable for their role in the school's success (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Glenn, 1981; Lieberman & Miller, 1978).

Staff development

Staff development programs, which are school-based and linked to improvement goals, are the most effective programs. In successful schools, staff development is viewed as an essential variable to improvement efforts and is planned by teachers and administrators together to address skills that are transferable to the classroom (Glenn, 1981; Lieberman & Miller, 1978; Miller & Wolf, 1978). Clinical supervision, in-service training and performance planning, and evaluation of staff are examples of staff development programs.

Program development

In effective schools, administrators communicate instructional standards to teachers, and coordinatie schoolwide curriculum, instruction,

and testing. Teachers plan and carry out programs together, providing a climate of high achievement expectations for all students. The instructional program is characterized by adaptability and consistency in general and by clear and timely instructional cues, reinforcement, correctives, and feedback by active student participation (Coulson, 1977; Klausmeier, 1982; Marcus *et al.*, 1976).

School assessment

Furthermore, administrators in successful schools develop a school wide accountability model. Measures of schoolwide productivity are evidenced in student achievement gains, work group productivity, and staff behaviour and performance. Students in effective schools are recognized for their accomplishments (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). Interestingly, researchers have reported virtually nothing about teacher evaluation systems which correlate to any extent with achievement gains.

It is not surprising that, in many studies conducted over the past several decades, educational leaders continually reported their initial administrative training programs limited both in content and methodology, and that such programs addressed school maintenance functions. Further, on-the-job learning appears to be a major source of influence on task performance. Knowledge and skills for effective leadership are either fragmented and piecemeal or are lacking altogether in in-service training programs (Pitner, 1982). Staff development programs for the administrative team tend to respond only briefly to current topics, ignoring emerging basic skills and knowledge. What is needed is a combination of certification and in-service programs for school leaders which provide topic overviews and, more importantly, the basic skills for effective school leadership.

Methodology

In an effort to determine particular skill needs of principals in school districts, a needs assessment questionnaire was developed. Administrative training desires were assessed in seven areas: 1) planning for school growth; 2) the principalship; 3) personal awareness; 4) creative problem solving; 5) staff development; 6) the school as a system; and 7) collaborative long range planning. These subscales and a brief content description of each follows.

The category **planning for school growth** focused on the principal's personal school planning tasks and included organizational analysis and action planning dimensions. The next category, **principalship,** consisted of questions expressing concerns for school leadership, planning, organizing, motivating staff, and controlling school activities. The **personal awareness**

category addressed personal interests about personality characteristics, self-concept, and administrative style effectiveness and their effect upon job performance. The fourth category, **creative problem solving**, addressed techniques and processes which can be used in solving real school problems in a collaborative mode. Fifth, **staff development** questioned needs relating to in-service training, clinical supervision, performance planning, and evaluation for staff members. Sixth, **the school as a system**, addressed questions about environmental factors, such as federal, state, community, parental, and district pressures, and factors which are internal to the school such as students, programs, achievement levels, and staff competency. Finally, **a collaborative long range planning** category included questions about procedures for schoolwide goal setting, team level action planning, monitoring, and evaluation of school goal success. The questions from all seven categories were then randomly assigned to the survey instrument.

Sampling procedures

The number of cases used in the instrument validation was 442. This number was arrived at by having at least five times as many subjects as try-out items (Lemke & Wiersma, 1976; Nunnally, 1970). The respondents were elementary, middle, junior high, and secondary principals and assistant principals, superintendents and assistant superintendents, supervisors and curriculum directors from school districts in Arizona, Kansas, Missouri, North Carolina, and Texas.

Instrument analysis

The collected pool of data was submitted to factor and subscale analysis (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). Instrument validity was established by two methods. First, content validity, which involves essentially the systematic examination of scale content to determine whether it covers a representative sample of the domain to be measured, was established. This was accomplished in the following manner: each subscale area was reviewed and questions were written which were believed to be representative of the behaviours, attitudes, or characteristics to be measured. Seventy-six questions comprising seven subscales were written. (Representative selection of items and sensible test construction are cited by Nunnally [1967] as the standard means of ensuring content validity [Anastasia, 1976; Ebel, 1956; Huddleston, 1956; Lennon, 1956].)

Next, construct validity, which is the extent to which the test may be said to measure a theoretical construct or trait was established (Anastasi, 1976). Internal consistency of the items (Nunnally, 1967), was arrived at by factor analysis. The factor analysis method employed was principal components. This method was selected as the most appropriate factor

analytic methodology since the study was to investigate the total variation of the scale items without regard to whether the variance was common or unique. Scale items were retained in the instrument only if they had a factor loading greater than or equal to .30. The rule often used in this context is to consider factor loading less than .30 as not substantial (Kim & Mueller, 1978).

In the initial principal components analysis, thirteen factors were extracted using as the criterion eigenvalues greater than 1.0 as the cutoff for extraction of factors. The 76 x 13 factor matrix was next rotated in an attempt to reduce the number of factors. Both oblique and varimax rotations were performed. The factor structures were then reviewed. It was concluded that, as the number of factors to be rotated was reduced from thirteen to seven, the 51 x 7 varimax rotated factor matrix was the more logical. The original 76 questions were hypothesized to be contained in seven subscales. Seven subscales were confirmed in the varimax rotated factor matrix.

Table 1 indicates that 51 items remained in the instrument following the elimination of 25 items suggested as inappropriate by the factor analysis. These 51 items were grouped into seven meaningful components: planning (nineteen questions); the principalship (five questions); personal awareness (six questions); creative problem solving (five questions); staff development (five questions); the school as a system (five questions); and goal setting (six questions).

TABLE 1

Item Numbers, Specific Subscales, and Factor Loadings for the Instrument

Item Number on Instrument	Specific Subscale	Factor Loading
51	Planning	0.53643
19	Planning	0.44132
20	Planning	0.42469
23	Planning	0.56416
28	Planning	0.48922
29	Planning	0.54881
30	Planning	0.40853
31	Planning	0.53440
33	Planning	0.47156
34	Planning	0.43055
35	Planning	0.45006
37	Planning	0.50075

Item Number on Instrument	Specific Subscale	Factor Loading
38	Planning	0.52190
39	Planning	0.65509
40	Planning	0.54036
44	Planning	0.40738
46	Planning	0.53442
48	Planning	0.55914
49	Planning	0.57047
14	Principalship	0.41312
17	Principalship	0.44634
18	Principalship	0.40187
22	Principalship	0.56485
24	Principalship	0.52183
26	Personal Awareness	0.73853
27	Personal Awareness	0.73157
32	Personal Awareness	0.40379
36	Personal Awareness	0.64508
45	Personal Awareness	0.69274
47	Personal Awareness	0.52278
10	Creative Problem Solving	0.64388
11	Creative Problem Solving	0.67645
12	Creative Problem Solving	0.46134
13	Creative Problem Solving	0.45535
15	Creative Problem Solving	0.40104
21	Staff Development	0.41496
41	Staff Development	0.71802
42	Staff Development	0.46332
43	Staff Development	0.71799
50	Staff Development	0.46679
7	School As A System	0.40592
8	School As A System	0.71327
9	School As A System	0.71176
16	School As A System	0.36231
25	School As A System	0.30542
1	Goal Setting	0.53643
2	Goal Setting	0.42218
3	Goal Setting	0.53402
4	Goal Setting	0.46474
5	Goal Setting	0.48904
6	Goal Setting	0.46491

Evaluation of the reliability of the instrument was accomplished through use of the Kuder-Richardson generalized reliability formula, coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951; Ebel, 1965; Novick & Lewis, 1967). This formula was appropriate since a Likert scaling format was employed in the instrument form.

The Cronbach alphas for these subscales follow: planning (.94); personal awareness (.86); staff development (.82); the principalship (.82); creative problem solving (.82); goal setting (.82); and the school as a system (.76).

Application of Cronbach's alpha to the 51 questions on the final instrument version yielded a reliability coefficient of .96, which is considerably higher than the minimum value of .50 often cited as necessary for the evaluation of group achievement and slightly larger than the value of .90 cited as necessary for the assessment of individual achievement (Cronbach, 1970). Anastasi (1976) has posited that it is desirable for reliability coefficients to fall in the range of .80s or .90s.

Findings and Discussion

One hundred thirty-eight elementary, middle, and high school principals and assistant principals, as well as some central office supervisors, from three Midwestern American school districts were surveyed. The respondents reported a concern for training in all the areas surveyed. Participants were expected to select a range of six levels of need: "One" indicated no desire for training; "Six" indicated a desire for assistance with school implementation. The following definitions were used to guide the participants' responses:

1. **no training:** skill unrelated, therefore no need exists for training
2. **no training:** competency high, therefore no need exists for training
3. **training – awareness level:** training desired at a beginning level
4. **training – initial practise:** have some skill/knowledge; desire guided practise)
5. **training – skill refinement::** have skill and knowledge; desire guided skill refinement
6. **assistance with school implementation:** have skill and knowledge; desire help with implementation

The six points on the instrument reflected a skill/training range.

Of the seven categories surveyed, respondents reported that they desired training in all categories, with the desires ranging between "awareness" (category 3) and "initial practice" (category 4). Table 2 outlines the specific preferences for training of all the administrators surveyed. New knowledge and skill in all categories are perceived as important to their role success.

TABLE 2

Ranking (High-to-Low) of the Need Indices
for the Instructional Leadership Surveys
(All Educational Leaders n=138)

RANK	AREA	NEED INDEX
#1	PLANNING FOR SCHOOL GROWTH (questions relating to organizational analysis and school leadership planning)	4.268
#2	CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING (questions relating to cooperative decision-making)	4.257
#3	THE PRINCIPALSHIP (questions relating to instructional leadership expectations)	4.255
#4	STAFF DEVELOPMENT (questions relating to clinical supervision, training, and teacher evaluation)	4.253
#5	COLLABORATIVE LONG RANGE PLANNING (questions relating to cooperative goal setting and action planning, monitoring and evaluation)	4.216
#6	PERSONAL AWARENESS (questions relating to the leader's self-concept, personality, and leadership style, and their influence on instructional leadership behaviours)	4.052
#7	THE SCHOOL AS A SYSTEM (questions relating to school goals, organization, performance, program, technology, and management, and how together these guide the school improvement process)	3.878

Planning for school growth, which focused on organizational analysis and school leadership planning, emerged as the area of greatest interest and concern. Last in rank was **the school as a system** which was the category describing the school's ecology and the many organizational factors which work interdependently to influence achievement results. While all seven categories were distinct from each other, each seemed to represent an area of concern for principals in providing effective instructional leadership.

It appears that those studied perceive the task dimensions surveyed as a desirable focus for their own professional development. Further, the skills necessary for successful collaboration, organizational assessment and analysis, and a knowledge of how personal characteristics influence leadership, all appear to be important to the administrators for the successful implementation of instructional leadership tasks.

Each school district and professional organization needs to devote priority attention to these skill needs in particular, augmenting workshops on what teachers can do. Furthermore, principals can benefit from continuous coaching by peers and from their efforts to develop and implement new skills. A feedback mechanism of some sort is essential to the eventual successful development of expertise in instructional leadership.

Summary

The principalship has shifted from an emphasis on just administering policy to a focus on leading instructional improvement efforts. Principals want the skills necessary to become successful instructional leaders.

This study of principals reinforces these observations. Because of a major redefinition of the principalship, principals themselves are faced with a need for new job knowledge and skills. Further, principals want training in the elements of annual schoolwide, team-level and individual teacher planning, coaching, and evaluation. In addition, they want skills for designing successful staff development programs, providing on-the-job teacher coaching, monitoring performance and program development, implementation, and evaluation. Moreover, in addition to the tasks of instructional leadership, principals also want to know how to involve others in cooperative planning and action successfully.

The message for role development is clear: if principals are expected to perform new tasks and accomplish different kinds of performance results from that for which they are trained, their development in a new set of knowledge and skills must become a distinct priority. Moreover, experiences during this research necessitate not only a report of those

findings of what principals say they want, but also to challenge the supervisors of principals to foster skill development by combining initial training in instructional leadership tasks with continuous on-the-job peer and supervisory coaching. Principals may be expected to help transform schools in newly defined parameters; they must be provided with necessary skill development activities for their success.

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