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A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay

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Abstract

Leadership styles come in many different forms and are often difficult to separate and identify as they mix and entwine in their functions. In this paper I will discuss the characteristics of seven leadership styles or skills: autocratic, instructional, transactional, transformational, situational, expert thinking, and value-added leadership. For each style I will attempt to identify some administrative tasks that lend themselves to a particular style, or that I have seen approached using a specific style. I will conclude with how I foresee my leadership skills developing and how I plan to continue to improve.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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As I reflect on my preparation as an administrator, my thoughts continually return to leadership styles. As an administrator, I feel I have the ability to apply various forms of leadership. One of my strengths is my ability to evaluate a situation and its participants and make decisions based on this assessment. I am an observer and thinker. Once I have reached an accurate assessment of the situation, I then feel confident in my actions. The quality of my leadership will be influenced by my knowledge of leadership styles and the artful choosing of techniques and strategies from the various styles.

Leadership styles come in many different forms and are often difficult to separate and identify as they mix and entwine in their functions. In this paper I will discuss the characteristics of seven leadership styles or skills: autocratic, instructional, transactional, transformational, situational, expert thinking, and value-added leadership. For each style I will attempt to identify some administrative tasks that lend themselves to a particular style or that I have seen approached using a specific style. I will conclude with how I

foresee my leadership skills developing and how I plan to continue to improve.

Autocratic

One of the original leadership styles that people associate with military leaders and football coaches is autocratic. Autocratic leadership styles have hierarchical structures. The leader has strong legitimate powers and exercises coercive power on his/her followers. The leader, alone, decides what is best for his/her followers and mandates accordingly. The followers are expected to do as they are instructed or they will either forfeit possible rewards or be punished. Leaders of this type in an educational context tend to "own" their school. They demand obedient compliance with their decisions. The followers, or teachers in this case, are motivated by seeking the approval of the leader or by avoiding punishment from the leader. The autocratic leader follows Argyris & Schon's Model I belief system (Argyris & Schon, 1978). They have a high emphasis on discipline, are constantly battling improper student and teacher behavior, and are unable stay ahead of change. Lewis (1993) observes that administrators that are having the most difficulty in

the current context of school change are those at the autocratic end of style inventories.

The autocratic style may come into play when administrators are confronted with termination proceedings or any other releasing of staff. Often in these situations the principal is isolated in his/her data gathering and interactions with the individual in question. Also, often in these cases after exhausting other tactful attempts, it comes down to saying, "You will do it this way because I say so."

Also situations that require interpretations of school law often become autocratic. The administrator ends up saying, "After consulting with the district's attorneys, I have decided ...". For the most part teachers accept that some autocratic decisions need to be made, but administrators need to be selective in this regard.

I have had experiences with one superintendent that fits this style quite often. I have yet to notice his district falling behind in changes, although they also are not a frontrunner. His style is offset by the styles of his principals.

Instructional

The second type of educational leadership style is instructional. Instructional leadership is an idea that has served many schools well throughout the 1980's and early 1990's (Leithwood, 1992). The instructional leader places heavy emphasis on improving both curriculum and teacher effectiveness. The instructional leader emphasizes classroom visits to assess curriculum and teaching quality and supplies heavy input into teaching techniques. At its best, an instructional leader encourages staff to keep current on educational matters, to try new methods that reach students, and to become involved in changing the school (Maggard, 1994).

The instructional leader believes that if the curriculum and instruction is improved, student achievement will increase. This is logically true, but the downfall of instructional leaders often is that their decisions on how to improve instruction are reached without shared decision-making. As a result of a lack of collaboration, teachers often only buy into proposed changes and techniques for a short time or with little genuine motivation. Therefore, the chances for long-term, sustained change are minimal.

Instructional leadership obviously comes into effect when deciding staff development opportunities and individual observations. The instructional leader spends a significant amount of time helping teachers improve in the classroom individually or as a whole staff.

The instructional leader must be able to sell his/her ideas. A strong base in instructional psychology helps in this pursuit. Brain-based research (Begley, 1996) and accommodating multiple intelligences are strong contemporary issues of which many administrators have only a superficial understanding.

The ability to comprehend and apply educational research also contributes to the effectiveness of the instructional leader. The instructional leader needs to be able to draw support from a significant number of studies before making a staff development decision.

Transactional

The third leadership style is transactional. This type of leader believes that what gets rewarded gets done. The transactional leadership style discourages people from being self-motivated. It assumes people are motivated almost exclusively by self-interest. We do

things that provide the greatest gain or the least loss (Sergiovanni, 1992). This "leadership by bartering" (Sergiovanni, 1990) leads by using a system of rewards and punishments to motivate people to perform. It takes direct leadership, close supervision, and control of extrinsic rewards. It does, however, successfully help teachers realize what needs to be done to reach a desired outcome. This leader advocates higher wages, incentive pay, and special privileges to motivate people and increase effort. Silins (1992) summarizes that the transactional leader:

1. recognizes needs and wants and establishes appropriate contingencies for performance,
2. exchanges rewards and promises of reward for followers' efforts, and
3. is responsive to a follower's immediate self-interest if it can be met through getting the work done. (p. 319)

The transactional leader is one who motivates followers to perform at their levels of expectation and to achieve satisfaction of their basic needs. Transactions are at the heart of the interchange between leader and follower (Silins, 1992).

The downfall of this style is that in transactional leadership the leader and the led exchange needs and services in order to accomplish independent objectives. Leaders and followers do not share a common stake in the enterprise (Sergiovanni, 1990). Transactional leadership only works when both the leaders and the followers understand and agree about the important tasks to be performed (Mitchell & Tucker, 1992). The other drawback is that the motivators are all at Herzberg's hygiene level (Herzberg, 1959). Transactional leaders are unable to take their followers beyond the extrinsic rewards that they control. The true intrinsic motivations for teaching, self-esteem and self-actualization, are untapped. These leaders perform adequately at keeping things status quo, but in order to stimulate long-term change and improvement they need to go beyond extrinsic motivation.

I perceive the Iowa Legislature to have this style of leadership. As a result, we have Phase I-III money, some districts utilizing incentive pay, and monetary rewards for charter schools and sharing.

At a local level, schools use money to motivate teachers to do tasks that many high-quality teachers do

any way. For example I know of a school district that encourages the faculty to conduct home visits for each student. An elementary teacher with 22 students in class in the fall is expected to visit each of his/her student's homes, introduce himself/herself, explain his/her expectations, and open the lines of communication before school begins. This is a large step to becoming the "school without walls". Many teachers have been doing visits for five years because it was a good thing to do. Now this summer the district in a transactional move is going to pay a stipend to all teachers that complete their home visits in an attempt to motivate them.

Transformational

The fourth leadership style is the preferred leadership for change. Transformational leadership ought to subsume instructional leadership as the dominant image of school administration at least during the 1990's (Leithwood, 1992). Transformational leaders come into their own in times of growth, crisis, and reform (Silins, 1992). Lewis (1993) also predicts that by the end of this decade, administrators will be in a context that greatly accepts site-based management, emphasizes

and strengthens the current school reform, values collaboration and cooperation and depends on staff development at the school site. Transformational leadership plays a large role in all of these school reforms.

Transformational styles often logically follow transactional styles as the leader moves to strategies that utilize intrinsic motivation for change and improvement. Many leaders perceive transactional strategies as being necessary for the day-to-day managerial tasks, but transformational style is needed for change and the incentive for people to take risks and improve.

Transformational leadership focuses on higher-order, intrinsic, and ultimately moral motives and needs--esteem, autonomy, self-actualization--the moral questions of goodness, righteousness, duty, and obligation (Sergiovanni, 1990). Because of its intrinsic nature transformational leadership allows everyone to become a stakeholder in long-term reform. It is based on the idea that what's rewarding (intrinsically) gets done--what we believe in, think to be good, and feel obligated to do gets done (Sergiovanni, 1992).

The transformational leader is involved with transforming or changing with the intent of constantly improving. The process that the transformational leader uses involves seeking input into decision-making from all publics. The transformational leader believes that the best solutions for problems come from within the school itself. Leithwood (1992) identifies three fundamental goals of transformational leaders:

1. maintain a collaborative structure
2. foster teacher development, and
3. improve group problem-solving (work smarter not harder). (p.10)

Sagor (1992) identifies the three building blocks of transformational leadership:

1. a clear and unified purpose,
2. a common cultural perspective, and
3. a constant push for improvement. (p.13)

The transformational leader is an information supplier and gatherer. He/she facilitates in establishing common goals, visions, and missions with the best consensus possible. Transformational leaders stress developing consensus about group goals and

providing support to groups and individuals in pursuit of those goals (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993).

Transformational leaders truly believe that the group can reach a better decision than they can alone. They also know that when their followers are involved in determining change there is a better chance that long-term change will occur. The transformational leader also encourages risk-taking with the intent to improve.

A transformational leadership style is applicable in many tasks such as determining district vision, mission, and goals. Between the principal and teachers a transformational leadership style is effective in most areas if the faculty is willing and able to assume responsibility, ownership, and some leadership.

School and community relations are effective using a transformational style. It is important to have input from all stakeholders in order to develop ownership and unity of purpose (Crowson, 1992). Facilitating communication between stakeholders is a key to an effective transformational style.

I have seen the transformational style fail in its attempt to unite the Wellsburg-Steamboat Rock District. Perhaps it failed because the transformational style was

tried after a more autocratic style had failed. We had several community meetings to distribute information, solicit solutions, and generate a vision for our district. But it soon became obvious that the sides had been entrenched already and no compromise could be reached. The district was unable come to a unified vision, and the students suffered as a result.

Situational

The fifth leadership style is the application of Hersey's situational leadership (Hersey, 1985). Situational leaders initially assess the maturity of their followers in relation to a particular task. Once they have determined their maturity, then they select either a "people" leadership style or a "task" leadership style that will be most effective with the group or individual. Leaders who are able to attend to both people and task are considered to be the most effective. Situational leaders have to be able to assess the situation and know enough about leadership skills to make a good judgment about what will be best in a given situation (Lewis, 1993).

Situational leaders may start with a low maturity group and apply autocratic leadership behaviors to get

them started. Then as the group gains knowledge and experience, the leaders may become more transactional as they try to "sell" their ideas for improvement. Once the group has passed this stage, then the leaders become more transformative and inclusive in decision-making. Finally, at the end of the spectrum the group becomes almost self-lead and the original leader has only to keep in touch with the progress of the group. These four steps also correlate well with Sergiovanni's (1990) four stages: bartering, building, bonding, and banking. Of these four, bonding is the cornerstone of effective long-term leadership strategy. Bonding involves both people's relations and task leadership.

The effectiveness of situational leadership is grounded in two steps: the accuracy of assessing the context of the problem and the selection and implementation of strategies that will solve the problem.

I applied situational leadership during practicum. I had two experiences with teachers at different levels of maturity in relation to a specific task. With one I only needed to communicate my expectations and then step

back and let him do the job. As a result, he exceeded my expectations.

On the other hand another teacher needed constant feedback and attention to complete a similar task. She was unwilling to accept ownership or responsibility for the task. The motivation was there, but the skill and confidence were not.

Situational leadership can apply to all administrative tasks. Every problem needs to be assessed first and then dealt with in the best possible manner. Assessing the problems and the consequences of the action are the keys to situational leadership.

Expert Thinking

The expert thinking leadership model has similarities to situational leadership, but its distinct difference is the emphasis on problem-solving skills. Lewis (1993) indicates that while the so-called situational leadership model prescribes given styles or skills for given situations, she suggests there can be no one-to-one correspondence, nor can situations or styles be prescribed. Instead, out of the myriad of possibilities within an organization's stream of experience, the leader defines the situation and

produces the appropriate response to it as a single act borne of experience, knowledge, insight, and confidence.

One could argue that the problem to be solved by leaders is how to move a group from low maturity to high maturity in the situational leadership context and that expert thinking would be an important component of this process pursued by situational leaders. Likewise, Leithwood & Steinbach (1993) posit that the problem is for these principals to figure out what leadership initiatives will move the vision forward (likely within a broad framework of transformational practices).

But the expert-thinking model is based more specifically on the cognitive processes that leaders use to solve problems. Leithwood & Steinbach (1993) make three assertions:

1. For school leaders to be most productive, they need to think expertly about their school contexts and the consequences for the practices that they choose.
2. Quality leadership combines expert thinking with the capacities to act transformationally, when such actions are warranted.

3. School leaders may be highly expert thinkers and yet not act as transformationally as do their less expert colleagues. Furthermore, in some circumstances high levels of transformational practice are not uncontested indicators of highly expert thinking. (p.312)

Expert thinking is the ability of a leader to use all of the knowledge, skill, and experience they possess to reach a goal. Leithwood & Steinbach (1993) assert that expert thinkers are able to do this because they:

- are better able to control intense moods and remain calm during problem solving,
- are more self-confident about their ability to solve ill-structured problems, and
- are more likely to reflect about their behavior, thoughts and moods. (p. 317)

Leithwood (1994) also adds six types of mental activities found in expert thinkers:

- **Problem interpretation:** a leader's understanding of specifically what is the nature of the problem.

- **Goals:** the relatively immediate purpose that the leader believes he needs to achieve in response to his interpretation of the problem.
- **Constraints:** barriers or obstacles that must be overcome if an acceptable solution is to be found
- **Solution processes:** what the leader does to solve the problem in light of his interpretation of the problem.
- **Principles/values:** purposes, principles, laws, doctrines, values, and assumptions guiding the leader's thinking.
- **Affect:** the feelings, mood, and sense of self-confidence the leader experiences when involved in problem solving. (p.512)

The expert thinking process involves assessing the situation, cutting to the heart of the problem, managing time constraints, and involving as much as possible those affected by the decision in making the decision. The expert thinker is knowledgeable of all of the leadership styles and their combinations and variances as he/she applies their problem-solving abilities. The expert thinkers' emphasis, however, is not on consciously choosing a style, rather it is on applying

all of their expertise and experiences to solve the problem.

The importance of quality experience is stressed by Leithwood, Begley & Cousins (1992) when they refer to a school-leader named Jack who after twenty-five years was so relaxed in his leadership style that they had to observe closely, to realize how much impact he had on his school. They observed that other less experienced leaders did many of the same things as Jack, but it required much more effort. Jack, for them, was "the Wayne Gretsky of school leadership."

Again, the expert-thinking style applies to all administrative tasks. Expert-thinking is founded on the core values of the principal. Identifying our core values leads to knowing ourselves. Once a principal has a good grasp of his own values then he will be better able to decide on problem-solving strategies that coincide with his values. Then principals will be able to remain calm make rational decisions based on solid core values.

As an administrative assistant, I soon realized that the day was a series of challenges or problems that I had planned to solve or that presented themselves to

be solved. Each was different and required different strategies. Expertise and experience were only going to come through doing it, reflecting, striving to improve, and doing it again.

Value-added

Value-added leadership or Sergiovanni's (1992) moral leadership emphasizes an in-this-together mentality. It also has many similarities to Deming's formula for improving our schools (Blankstein, 1992). Value-added leadership takes transformational leadership one step further. Eventually transformative leadership becomes moral because it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the group members. It focuses on higher-order, intrinsic, and ultimately moral motives and needs--esteem, autonomy, self-actualization--the moral questions of goodness, righteousness, duty, and obligation (Sergiovanni, 1990). Its philosophy is based upon Argyris and Schon's Model II beliefs and in the professionalism of teachers (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Lewis (1993) states that Sergiovanni was once a strong proponent of leadership skills, but he now favors

substituting them for true professionalism. A leader of this type has gone beyond transformational leadership.

Value-added leadership emphasizes the leadership of all the professionals involved. Under value-added leadership when someone asks, "Who shall lead?" One increasingly popular answer is, "Many different people" (Green 1994). Lewis (1993) further supports that leadership is not reserved for administrators alone--it is just as important for teachers and other educators to evaluate their leadership capabilities and adapt them to working with peers, parents, students, and the community. Each person brings an important perspective to the problem-solving process as professionals who are intrinsically motivated to constantly explore and experiment with the intent to improve. In the process of transforming, both leaders and followers are elevated to a new value-added level, which restores their spirit and heart.

Value-added leadership is in the realm of the ideal. It is everyone at their best and most motivated all the time. Every one with the same purpose, understanding, and intrinsically motivated work ethic. It is good to have perfection for which to strive.

My experience with human nature, my own included, leads me to believe that value-added perfection is unattainable, but worthy of the intent. We cannot honestly expect everyone to be perfect, but we can expect everyone to have perfect intentions. I will settle for people who are striving for perfection, are not discouraged by the inability to get there, but enjoy the challenge.

MY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

I will pursue the characteristics of an expert thinker as an educational leader. As a leader, I will strive to have everyone reach a state of professionalism that parallels value-added leadership. But in our journey I know that not everyone has the same maturity, skills, knowledge, professionalism, and experiences to operate at this level initially. My expert thinking would then help me assess the situation and choose strategies that would efficiently seek to solve the problems of change. I would like to have what French and Raven refer to as expert power (Guthrie, 1991)

I realize that change is a constant factor. As our world changes, so must our approaches, strategies, knowledge, and skills. As a leader, I must continually

seek to take risks, go beyond my comfort zone, change, and strive for improvement. As I have leadership experiences, it is important that I take the time to reflect in order to make them of high quality. Just as an unexamined life is not worth living, experiences without reflection lose their value to expert thinking.

I realize I have just begun to explore school leadership. Most importantly, my initial research has given me the terminology to use while reflecting on past experiences. The language has provided a tool for me to assess, reflect, explain, and grow from previous leadership experiences and apply to future opportunities. The course work, as a result, has made my past experiences even more valuable as I reflect upon them using this new information. I am looking forward to new challenges in leadership and to exploring leadership theories more deeply as I strive to become a successful leader through expert thinking.

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