Evaluating school principals

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Abstract
Private industries insure that organizational goals are achieved through a variety of mechanisms including supervision, rewards, sanctions, and evaluations. Duke and Stiggins (1985) reported that as employees move from positions of minimal authority to more responsible posts, they tend to be subjected to more performance evaluations and less direct supervision. In schools, the principal presents an interesting focus for the study of performance evaluation in complex organizations.
EVALUATING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Private industries insure that organizational goals are achieved through a variety of mechanisms including supervision, rewards, sanctions, and evaluations. Duke and Stiggins (1985) reported that as employees move from positions of minimal authority to more responsible posts, they tend to be subjected to more performance evaluations and less direct supervision. In schools, the principal presents an interesting focus for the study of performance evaluation in complex organizations.

During the first years of the accountability syndrome that engulfed the education profession, the emphasis was placed specifically on teachers. When the public extended this accountability beyond the classroom, the principal became the next legitimate target. Since the principal was accepted as the leader and specialist within the school (Zakrajsak, 1979), it was deemed necessary that their performance also be evaluated. In theory, the evaluation process, deciding on how well a principal was performing their duties, appeared to be a relatively simple process.
Unfortunately, some evaluations were accomplishing just the opposite of what was intended. Rather than provide direction and suggestions for improvement, evaluations tended to criticize the principal's performance by emphasizing weaknesses or gave all superior ratings, both of which were equally ineffective for the improvement of principals (The National Institute of Education, 1980). Zakrajsak (1979) found that this due to emphasis being placed on the data received from the evaluation staff that used poor evaluation instruments. Bottoni (1984) stated that principals felt the community was the major source of evaluation data with respect to management decisions. Principals also felt that they were being evaluated indirectly in terms of their ability to satisfy or please their superiors. Neither the evaluators nor the evaluation instrument seemed to reflect on the present educational needs of schools.

Current reasons for principal evaluations were to provide feedback to the principal from the evaluators appraising the areas requiring improvement, and to acknowledge and appraise the
areas of strength (Duhamel, Cyze, Lamacraft and Rutherford, 1981). Along with this feedback it was necessary to suggest strategies to utilize the principals strengths in order to bring about an overall improvement for the principal in each area requiring improvement.

The National Institute of Education (1980) found that many board members and administrators condemned principal evaluations claiming they were "a white wash", unfair, completely subjective or that the evaluations protect the incompetents. Herman (1977) indicated many evaluation schemes only reflected the historical events of that district with very little thought given to the evaluation items themselves.

Hardy (1986) felt that the evaluation instrument should reflect detailed expectations deemed necessary for goal achievement and for professional growth of the principal. Hardy also stated that a district's performance expectations should be consistent with the standards set by the state, with exceptions for unique circumstances surrounding various districts. There are many intricate details that needed to be carefully
analyzed before a meaningful evaluation of the principal could be initiated.

In the face of all the variables influencing a useful evaluation instrument or modifying the existing one, it is necessary to answer the complex questions of who will do the evaluation, what will they evaluate, how will the evaluation be carried out and why evaluate at all? Look and Manatt (1984) indicated that although it was not possible to design an evaluation program that was perfect, factual, unbiased and useful in all situations, there were a number of guidelines to follow in developing a program to meet the needs of any given school situation.

Buser and Banks (1984) indicated that the questions of who, what, how and why, of an evaluation program could be best answered by the use of a steering committee who's task it was to set goals and objectives for the evaluation instrument. All individuals selected for this committee need to meet and discuss the various evaluation criteria that will emphasize continuity and compatibility with the school districts goals. Buser and Banks (1984) also stated that the
committee should be comprised of individuals that were directly associated with the school system as some of them would be involved later on in the actual evaluation process itself. The number and make up of members on the committee should be adequate to offset any possible biases.

It was critical for the principal to recognize that those who set the evaluation criteria possess certain values and priorities they feel should be reflected in that organization (Duhamel, Cyze, Lamacraft and Rutherford, 1981). Those values and priorities were often the basis of judgement as to the effectiveness of that principal within that system. This made it necessary that the principal be involved in the committee to help with the design of the instrument to be used in the evaluation (Busser and Banks, 1984). If principals were unaware of the criteria they were to be evaluated on and the standards they were expected to reach, they may not utilize their energies in the specific directions desired by the district. Harrison and Peterson (1986) reported that principals often anticipated vaguely, and many times less that
accurately, what was required of them as opposed to being able to respond concretely to what has been outlined as goals to pursue. By becoming involved, principals knew what the committee though should be evaluated, as well as being able to offer their own input as to importance or lack of importance of specific criteria.

Schiller and McGrarry (1986) concluded that the principal did not necessarily need to be involved in the actual evaluation process itself. Self-evaluations were not a reliable indicator of the kind of job the principal was doing, rather, their involvement depicted how well they perceived they were fulfilling their duties and how aware they were of their strengths and weaknesses.

Parents, students, and community citizens were considered inappropriate members to serve on the committee (Buser and Banks 1984). They could be used for informal input and their advice given consideration accordingly, but this group of people tended to over emphasize those areas of schooling that affected them directly. These areas may be legitimate and appropriate to them, but the public lacks familiarity in other
professional areas germane to the total evaluation process. Buser and Banks (1984) finished by adding that to invite the public into professional school matters, such as evaluations, would open the gates for a flood of responses unrelated to the task at hand.

Buser and Banks also indicated that school board members vary greatly in their comprehension of the internal components that make a school system operate. As a result, they should not be selected at random to serve on the committee or to be used in the evaluation process. They need to have been carefully scrutinized as to their understanding of the internal affairs of the school. The National Institute of Education (1980) indicated that alert, professional, tenured members needed to be able to sense what the public needs and wants are, and decide what duties a principal should perform, and translate these into evaluative objectives.

Superintendents were essential when designing an evaluation instrument and were also essential in the actual evaluation process through out it's entirety. This was not only because of their
experience and training, but because their expertise in designing and implementing the evaluation instrument which keeps the process flowing toward a productive finish (Harrison and Peterson, 1986; Buser and Banks, 1984). The National Institute of Education (1980) pointed out that the superintendent knows what is to be included in an evaluation, and also know a number of methods for gathering data for the evaluation of principals, with most emphasis being placed on quality of leadership skills that they take directly from the actions of the principal.

Schiller and McGrarry (1986) stated that teachers were a necessary source of information for items that needed to be in an evaluation instrument. The research showed that teachers made the best evaluators because they knew first-hand what was essential to make an effective school operate, and this made them experts on items which needed to be evaluated. However, the amount of expertise varies with each teacher as it did with the school board.

After careful selection of a steering committee to decide on goals and objectives of the
evaluation, the "what do you evaluate" question should be confronted. A generic list of performance criteria is not only difficult to generate but also inappropriate. Ideally each district will have its own instrument unique to that district. This "what do you evaluate" question needs to emphasize continuity and compatibility with each district's expectations for desirable attributes and behaviors of the principal (McIntyre and Grant, 1980). Evaluations need to be comprised of many objectives each of which contribute to the final product. If the parts will not interact to produce a reliable and effective evaluation, all the school would be left with when the actual evaluation was over, would be an unreliable, counterproductive assessment. The criteria included in an instrument used for an evaluation, needs to be selected with care as it could be a powerful diagnostic tool (Redfern, 1986).

Anderson and Bartlett (1985) stresses that no single function of the principal can serve as the most important item to be evaluated, but there were some areas that should be stresses as more
essential to the overall functioning of the school. A priority of needs has to be established as to level of importance of each item, and the more important items need to be assigned a heavier evaluative weighting, indicating an area as being more crucial in the overall effectiveness of the principal to the school. Lesser duties would correspondingly receive less weight.

Harrison and Peterson (1986) and Look and Manatt (1984) suggested that items to be evaluated should be subdivide into two major categories: (A) instructional leadership and (B) management duties. They stated that developing a manageable list of key competencies to fit these two major categories was not easy. They found that this was because the principal's responsibilities ranged from serving as a school's instructional leader to acting as a manager, personnel director, technician, banker, school-community relation's expert, human relations consultant, media specialist, etc. After the committee developed an extensive list of possible competencies, they had to gradually succeed in identifying those that would be most important and separate the list from
items that would not be evaluated at all (Harrison and Peterson, 1986).

The items listed in each of the two major categories could then be sub-divided into statements such as, emphasizes achievement, sets instructional strategies, supports teachers, coordinates instructional programs, provides orderly atmosphere, promotes professional growth, maintains plant facilities, maintains school and community relations, evaluates pupil progress, and supervises student personnel. Look and Manatt (1984) said that even those sub-headings should be broken down to give more detail, which would add clarity and ease when evaluating. The more specific each item was to observe, the less ambiguous it was to the evaluators and in turn each would know precisely what was to be evaluated. Specificity also kept the interpretation of each category consistent with all the evaluators. Each group of evaluators were asked to judge only those areas of principal performances with which they were most familiar. The clarity, specificity and reliability of the
objectives affect the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation (Harrison and Peterson, 1986).

The type of statements made when evaluating a principal's performance on a judgement system, needed to reveal more than if he was doing good or bad, passing or not passing, or acceptable or not acceptable (Redfern, 1986). A principal needs to know specific levels of his performance. This was accomplished by telling the principal to what degree he was passing or not passing. Redfern (1986) explained that this could be accomplished by implementing a scale indicating to what degree the evaluators felt the principal was fulfilling the duties of the principalship. The evaluators assess the degree to which the principal had reached the standards or achieved the objectives and criteria established for performance.

Zakrajsek (1979) was convinced that all instruments should use checklists of specific skills and competencies rather than nebulous essay type descriptions of principal behaviors. This was best accomplished by merely giving the evaluators a range within each behavior statement from which to select. Usually no more than five
numbers or letters indicating the range were acceptable for this process. The checklist and rating scale format was perceived to be undeniably efficient. In a small amount of time, the principal could receive feedback and weighed judgement on his performance.

Principals do not want to receive all "superior" ratings as this provided them with no guidelines on which direction to go next (Gentry, Pellicer and Stevenson, 1985). Both positive and negative feedback were required to improve performance. With this proper feedback the principal could implement a system of reform which would allow themselves proper insight for considerations when improving their identified weak areas.

The reason the principal was being evaluated has to be understood by the evaluators in order to get a reliable set of judgements. Evaluations were most effective when the purpose was known and understood by all persons involved (Pellicer and Stevenson, 1985). Buser and Banks (1984) stated that evaluations should not be used for the purpose of dismissal, as a focus for criticism, to
fulfill legal mandates, or for demotions; nor were they best utilized as a basis for merit pay or advancements. The key purposes for an evaluation should be for promoting professional development and attainment of school goals (Duke and Stiggins, 1985; Buser and Banks 1984). When used correctly, it would identify points which the district feels were important aspects of the principalship and to what degree the principal was managing those concepts.

An effective evaluation begins with a positive approach to motivation (Harrison and Peterson, 1986). All principal evaluations need to begin with a desire to want that principal to be successful. Programs to evaluate and to motivate principals should be conducted and mutually and simultaneously. Pure evaluation would result in little more than institutional harassment while a purely motivational scheme would result in a motivated principal with little direction for their efforts.

Evaluative mechanisms were designed to sense deviation from a set of explicit or implicit standards and activate corrective actions to
return subordinates to acceptable levels of performance or to correct beliefs (Herman, 1977). The evaluation mechanism senses whether principals were following rules carefully, using resources wisely, effectively conforming to the norms and values of the district and if they were satisfying powerful reference groups in the environment (Bottoni, 1981). The evaluation instrument would also identify competencies that the principal was strong in as well as those that were not being performed up to the level of expectation of the school district.

Duke and Stiggins (1985) found that changes in any organization were often met with resistance. It was easy to feel safe and comfortable with the old evaluation schemes and assume everything was going just fine. A positive increase in productivity would reward the district for correcting specific areas in the evaluation scheme that needed improvement (Bottoni, 1984). Principals do realize the need for change and many would accept evaluative feedback, but they felt evaluations of any kind will not realistically work the way they were intended to work. Pellicer
and Stevenson (1985) cited shortages of time, corrective resources, and desire, along with inadequate standards for evaluation which most principals to feel that evaluation results were inappropriate and inadequate. Very few systems were being modified to accommodate these shortage situations, all of which were detrimental for planning improvement. This hindered attempts to take evaluations seriously. Keoner (1981), said that what was needed to remove these barriers were new district policies and procedures relating to the evaluation process. Keoner also found that revisions of district priorities to elevate evaluations to their proper place in the educational hierarchy, was imperative to the district's well-being as a school. Many times this has to include changes in personnel or at minimum, reassignment.

Evaluation of secondary principals should not be unique unto itself (Anzualda, 1984). It should be incorporated into the general organization of the entire school system. In this way, there will be more coordination of efforts and in the final
analysis, both the school system and principal will grow together.
References


system for administrators. The School Administrator, pp. 19-20.


