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## Application of progressive business management practices to public school administration

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## Application of progressive business management practices to public school administration

### Abstract

Administrators and teachers have been rebuffed, as illiterate graduates and teachers who fall basic skills tests have led the American public to turn increasingly towards private solutions to our public education problems. As private schooling has become increasingly available, public schools have been squeezed further by shrinking budgets and the flight of some of their most capable students to those Institutions (Jordan & Webb, 1986; Nebgen, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1986).

THE APPLICATION OF PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT  
PRACTICES TO PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

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Presented to  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

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by  
Lorene Whitehouse Dykstra

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The Application of Progressive Business Management  
Practices to Public School Administration

Administrators and teachers have been rebuffed, as illiterate graduates and teachers who fail basic skills tests have led the American public to turn increasingly towards private solutions to our public education problems. As private schooling has become increasingly available, public schools have been squeezed further by shrinking budgets and the flight of some of their most capable students to those institutions (Jordan & Webb, 1986; Nebgen, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1986).

At the same time, bookstores have borne witness to a renaissance in American business management. Their shelves have been crowded with the stories of modern business management techniques that have led to greater worker satisfaction as well as booming enterprises. This juxtaposition has not been overlooked by those who seek new solutions to our educational problems. While there are those who feel that business metaphors stifle the ability of education to grow (Guay, 1987) and decry their application in education, others have begun to apply these business principles to the administration of schools. Indeed, the failure to look beyond traditional sources for answers to education's woes may

spell further disaster for a system already burdened by undertrained and overworked teachers, low morale and overcrowding.

One of the first business management books to make an impact was Peters and Waterman's In Search of Excellence (1982). Others have included Moss-Kanter's The Change Masters: Innovation for Productivity in the American Corporation (1983), Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives by Naisbitt (1984), Theory Z--How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge by Ouchi (1981), and the sequel to In Search of Excellence (Peters and Waterman, 1982), A Passion for Excellence (Peters & Austin, 1985). This latter volume directly addressed the applications of management techniques to education (Snyder & Anderson, 1986).

The basic principles of good management gleaned from these books can be summarized as productivity through people, remaining close to the customer, hands-on, value-driven management, a bias for action, autonomy and entrepreneurship, sticking to the knitting, simple form-lean staff, and simultaneous loose-tight properties (Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters &

Waterman, 1982). While many have protested that our endeavor is sufficiently different from business as to make these principles inapplicable, a host of educators have begun to apply them.

#### Productivity through People

In schools, educators have suggested that this means administrators must allow top-down management styles to yield to more participative management methodology. Good leaders are not order-givers, but role models and facilitators with vision. They guide and direct teachers, empowering their faculties to make decisions that have real effect (Bacharach & Conley, 1986; McDaniel, 1984; Snyder & Anderson, 1987). An administrator keeps in mind the long-range plans for a school as he bridges the gaps between groups formed to meet short-term goals. These groups, often called quality circles, or networking, in business establishments, are trained in group techniques, and formed for short periods of time to meet clearly-defined needs (Cunningham, 1985; Hawley, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1987). Dillard and Kritsonis (1986) and Snyder and Anderson (1986) suggested that cross-disciplinary structures were most often successful; and heterogeneous mixes might include

teachers from one discipline across many grade levels, one grade level of teachers from a variety of subject areas, or a mix of department heads. These groups meet for a limited time, with clearly-defined objectives understood and agreed upon by everyone. When their task has been accomplished, they are disbanded (McDaniel, 1984; Hawley, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1986, 1987).

Snyder and Anderson (1986) were among those who emphasized the importance of giving real weight to the decisions made by these task forces. The groups were chosen for their expertise, and administrators followed up on all their recommendations. The knowledge that effort was worthwhile and work was respected led to greater job satisfaction and increased teacher effort and productivity (Arons & Papadales, 1986; Banach, 1986).

Brown (1985) explained that administrators could compound the results of effective effort by rewarding excellence when they saw it. By letting evaluations reflect positive effort, consistently and frequently using "one minute rewards", and letting others know of teachers' or groups' positive contributions to the school, they encouraged others to contribute more.

Everyone's efforts were valued and teachers were more willing to take risks, be creative, and volunteer to try new ideas. What began with honest trust by administrators that teachers could participate in management led to teachers trusting administrators enough to take risks themselves (Allison & Ononye, 1986; Arons & Papadales, 1986; Daugherty, 1987).

#### Close to the Customer

The growing enrollment in the private school system is witness to the fact that parents still value the educational process--perhaps now more than ever--but are seeking alternatives to a system which they perceive as comparatively unresponsive to their needs (Hawley, 1985, p. 22).

New demands placed upon schools to educate an increasingly diverse population have strained education's resources. The problems of an increasing number of minority and low income children, and children who lack a grasp of the English language have created a requirement, as educators such as Dillard and Kritsonis (1986) have suggested, that schools assess whether or not they are meeting the educational needs of their students. In addition, the changing mores of

our society demand that administrators have the vision to sense what is needed for the future (DuFour, 1985; Greenfield, 1986; Nebgen, 1985).

New demands placed upon adults require new teaching and learning styles for schools. Those demands can only be met by listening to the customers, that is, parents, students, and the community. Suggestions and complaints must be followed up, but more importantly, sought. DuFour (1985) and Nebgen (1985) both recommended that feedback from questionnaires directed to present faculty, parents, and students should be combined with follow-up from former graduates. Schools have a clear purpose--to serve the needs of their students, and their ability to meet those needs must be continually assessed.

In addition to actually meeting the diverse requirements of students, schools must project the image of fulfilling that standard. Nebgen (1985) has gone so far as to suggest that schools hire marketing specialists to ensure community support. There are many ways that schools can project the image of being responsive to the needs of communities simply by using available resources. Hooston and Ferguson (1986) were among those who recommended allowing groups

to use school facilities such as gymnasiums or computer labs, conducting inservices for businesses, or giving guided tours of educational facilities to interested parties. Schools can keep parents and non-parents informed of events through newsletters or taped phone messages, or by encouraging school visitation. Student art exhibits and community advisory committees serve to keep the public informed, as well, of the attempts by schools to provide differentiated services to meet the needs of various student groups (Dillard & Kristonis, 1986; Nebgen, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1986).

Above all, faculty have to be committed to students, as McDaniel (1984) pointed out. Inservices directed toward keeping teachers focused on student needs and achievement must be designed, but perhaps more important to an administrator was hiring teachers and other staff members who already had that attitude. A faculty that becomes actively involved in outside community activities can do much to enhance the community's opinion of the type of job a school is doing (Dillard & Kristonis, 1986; Nebgen, 1985).

#### Hands-On, Value-Driven

....any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a

sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Next, I believe that the most important single factor in corporate success is faithful adherence to those beliefs. And, finally, I believe if an organization is to meet the challenge of a changing world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except those beliefs (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 280).

Every member of a school's staff must focus on the credo of the school. Bacharach and Conley (1986) stated that only when there was consensus as to what the primary goal of the institution was could it move forward in fulfilling that mission. The administration has a central role to play in that movement. Cunningham (1985), as well as Allison and Ononye (1986), insisted that administrators take key responsibility for keeping a school moving toward its ultimate goals, even as they share decision-making responsibility with others.

Staffs must agree upon the ultimate goals of the school and the performance objectives necessary to achieve those, according to Bacharach and Conley (1986). Teachers will then share a common pursuit with

administrators, and status differences will be minimized. Administrators may assume the role of instructional leaders as they confidently share managerial authority with teachers who are kept focused on shared precepts. Evaluation of performance evolves from an understanding of performance objectives that grow out of those standards (Allison & Ononye, 1986; Bacharach & Conley, 1986).

Administrators are able to "manage by walking around," a key phrase in much of the literature, because of the decreased demands placed upon their time for managerial tasks (Allison & Ononye, 1986; Banach, 1986; Herman & Stephens, 1987). They become more sensitive to the needs of their school by being visible and available to both teachers and students. High visibility leads to a greater ability to keep the school focused on its mission and thus to greater stability. This encourages teachers to dare to try new methods, as the value-centered administrator protects risk-taking, given that the undertaking is consistent with the shared values of the institution (Arons & Papadales, 1986; McDaniel, 1984, Snyder & Anderson, 1986). DuFour (1985) suggested that administrators couple walking around with returning to the classroom

frequently in order to be even more aware of student and teacher needs as everyone seeks to uphold the core values.

#### Bias for Action

"When you want to get things done, you have an informed network of people who are ready to act" (DuFour, 1985, p. 18). Creating an informed network of people involves the development of communication in a school. An administrator must be visible and ready to listen at all times, as McDaniel (1984) pointed out. Frequent short meetings allow participants to make decisions and move on, whereas infrequent sessions allow problems to fester, and meetings deteriorate into long lists of grievances. Snyder and Anderson (1987) were among those who insisted that an administrator must get information out quickly since only an informed staff can assist their administrator in forming useful policies. Management by walking around coupled with an open door policy would assist an administrator in keeping the faculty informed and him/herself as well (DuFour, 1985; Hawley, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1987).

But the network of people must be ready to act. This can only be achieved by dissolving standing committees in favor of ad hoc task forces, quality

circles, or teams of people with a specific goal in mind. Often called chunking, breaking down problems into manageable units allows teams to make quicker decisions and get on to other things. These small teams can be formed from people who have proximity to the problem, in other words, expertise (DuFour, 1985; McDaniel, 1984). These teams must have a sense of control over their own destinies, hence administrators must listen to their recommendations and be prepared to act on them. An administrator's bias for action is shown by the quickness of response to decisions made by those teams (Hawley, 1985; Snyder & Anderson, 1986, 1987).

To ensure that the task forces themselves had a bias for action, they were chosen from among busy people with a stake in the problem. Their performance objective was clear, and successful completion was rewarded. Banach (1986) and Snyder and Anderson (1986) pointed out that an administrator who wanted to see action and accomplishment ensured that such things were made public and rewarded, even if only by praise.

#### Autonomy and Entrepreneurship

"People want to make a commitment, and take responsibility for achieving it--but too seldom does

the organization afford them the opportunity" (Snyder & Anderson, 1987, p. 24). Each individual needs to feel the support and trust of a leader in order to innovate. Arons and Papadales (1986) stated that one job of an administrator was to build the confidence of teachers so they felt able to experiment within their own areas of expertise. This feeling of challenge can only come about if an administrator maintains an atmosphere of stability and security by keeping the staff focused on the mutually agreed-upon vision for the school (Arons & Papadales, 1986; McDaniel, 1984).

As recommendations are listened to, and sincere effort is rewarded and praised, teachers will develop the confidence to take risks. Allowing teachers to assume more control in their own workspaces is possible when an administrator has hired competent teachers who share a view of the school's purpose. The administrator supports their efforts to assume responsibility, and in return, according to McDaniel (1984), gains a dynamic environment, more satisfied teachers, and the time to devote to important instructional tasks that need to be dealt with (Arons & Papadales, 1986; Herman & Stephens, 1987).

### Stick to the Knitting

When schools accept every mission thrust their way, they seem to tell teachers that 'everything is important--pay attention to everything.' As a result, teachers are left to struggle along with no clear direction (DuFour, 1985, p. 20).

DuFour (1985) continued to emphasize that to counter the feeling of floundering, administrators must hold as a primary responsibility the focus on core values. To enable the faculty to better define their own goals, Bob McCarthy of Brookline High School in Boston (Peters & Austin, 1985) had his faculty develop a simple philosophy for the school. His job, as any administrator's, was to see that that guide was at the core of what was done throughout his school. Mastruzzi at JFK High School in New York City (Peters & Austin, 1985) had as a major objective improved attendance. Mastruzzi's first task was to check the daily attendance figures. He publicly rewarded homerooms for achievement in this area.

As greater and greater demands are placed upon teachers by legislatures, schools boards, and society in general, one job of an administrator is to keep the

faculty focused on their shared vision and its objectives. Across disciplines and in individual classrooms, this means curriculum objectives should be spelled out. For schools, performance objectives should be mutually agreed upon. For administrators, sticking to the knitting means they should monitor their own time to ensure that it is spent on that which is central to the school's mission. This can only be accomplished when management is shared and autonomy is granted to faculty to make necessary decisions (Herman & Stephens, 1987).

#### Simple Form--Lean Staff

McDaniel (1984) and Dufour (1985) stated that giving teachers the autonomy to make decisions in their own areas of expertise would go a long way toward eliminating the need for a large (expensive) bureaucracy. Keeping the faculty focused on core values by high visibility and lots of informal communication allows an administrator to spend more time on important tasks and less on shuffling papers whose only purpose is to ensure that faculty are doing their jobs. A lean staff also refers to the use of ad hoc task forces to replace dormant standing committees. These smaller groups work more efficiently, and can be

formed when necessary from those closest to the problem needing attention (DuFour, 1985; McDaniel, 1984).

#### Simultaneous Loose-Tight Properties

Peters and Waterman (1982) acknowledged that each of the preceding sections involved a two-edged sword. Teachers began to assume autonomy in their workspaces, as long as their actions served to promote the central values of the school. Administrators kept faculty focused on those core values, assuming primary responsibility for them, according to McDaniel (1984), as they encouraged participatory management by distributing decision-making powers. Performance objectives were mutually agreed upon, but were then rigidly adhered to. A cooperative work climate, based upon mutual respect, carried with it high performance expectations. People were hired with or trained to possess the necessary communications and interpersonal skills to fully participate in decision-making, and then were entrusted with that power. Performance that enhanced the shared values was rewarded, but poor performance was quickly reprimanded (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982; Blanchard & Lorber, 1985; Brown, 1985; DuFour, 1985).

I believe that there is a great deal to be learned from these principles of management. Indeed, many of them seem to be expanded common sense. It would seem apparent to me that to treat professionals as such, give them the autonomy to do what they know is needed, and trust them to make wise decisions is not taking too large a risk. We expect that as children are accorded more responsibility, they will grow and contribute to society. No less should be expected of teachers.

Certainly public education is ready for a change. In the words of Snyder and Anderson (1987, p. 26):

"Effective corporate and school leadership in the late 1980s is a mixture of power, drive, and graceful delegation....Ultimately, schools...will survive to the extent that they discover, develop, and sustain creative workers and creative ideas. The message is very loud and very public. We ignore it at our peril."

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