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Principals as effective leaders

Abstract
The only thing constant in the world is change. An innovative principal in the 1980's must be prepared to do more than maintain the status quo. To be successful, principals will need to re-educate themselves to cope with the changing demands of their roles. They will have to become knowledgeable and skillful community leaders as well as the educational leaders of their schools (Drake and Miller, 1982). It has been said that some people are born leaders, others are trained leaders, and others have leadership thrust upon them. But in any case it is opportunity, vision, action, and followers that make a leader. It is impossible to imagine a leader or leadership in the absence of these factors (Alvino, 1987).
PRINCIPALS AS EFFECTIVE LEADERS

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The only thing constant in the world is change. An innovative principal in the 1980's must be prepared to do more than maintain the status quo. To be successful, principals will need to re-educate themselves to cope with the changing demands of their roles. They will have to become knowledgeable and skillful community leaders as well as the educational leaders of their schools (Drake and Miller, 1982).

It has been said that some people are born leaders, others are trained leaders, and others have leadership thrust upon them. But in any case it is opportunity, vision, action, and followers that make a leader. It is impossible to imagine a leader or leadership in the absence of these factors (Alvino, 1987).

This paper will first examine the definition of leadership and characteristics of leaders. It will then discuss leadership styles, power, and the implications for principals. Finally, this paper will focus on five areas where principals are challenged to become effective leaders. Those areas are setting goals and objectives, staff selection and development, evaluation, instructional leader, and communication.

Defining leadership is just as hard as defining talents, giftedness, aptitude, and ability. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985) there are more than three hundred fifty definitions of leadership recorded in the literature. Defining leadership involves an examination not only of what a leader is, but also
what he/she does under particular circumstances.

Leadership is probably the most talked about, but least understood concept of all management topics. As an example, the following four authors all have unique ways of defining leadership. Tenninbaum and Massarik (1957) state that leadership involves an attempt on the part of a leader to influence the behavior of a follower; and leadership is influencing people to follow the attainment of a common goal. Weschler, Tenninbaum, and Massarik (1959) define leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed toward the achievement of a specialized task or goals. Terry (1960) explains leadership as the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives.

Stogdill (1974) describes leadership as:
- a focus of group processes
- a personality and its effects
- the art of inducing compliance
- the exercise of influence
- a form of persuasion
- an instrument of goal achievement
- the initiation of structure

According to Blanchard (1987), a good leader can be a virtual dictator one minute and a highly supportive delegator the next, even when dealing with the same person. The behavior variations
are necessary, because no single type of behavior can meet all needs. According to Bennis (1987) leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right. Both roles are crucial and they differ profoundly. Principals and all building administrators need management, authority and leadership behavior. First and Carr (1987) agree with Bennis and point out that leaders are people who do the right things. A leader involves himself or herself in activities with vision and judgment, while a manager is concerned with efficiency, the mastery of routines.

The commonality of these definitions is the word "influence," which certainly is the very heart of leadership. For the purpose of this paper leadership is defined as the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group of individuals in efforts towards goal achievement in a given situation.

After having defined leadership, to fully understand it one must examine the behavior and characteristics of effective leaders. Different labels for leadership behavior support the observation that leadership is a complex issue. Leadership is a tool of management that can be developed (Scotti, 1987). Conrath (1986) points out that leadership is personal and behavioral, a set of learned and practiced skills.

Effective principals traditionally have been described in terms of their personality traits (firm, but fair; decisive;
sensitive) rather than in terms of functions or skills. As a result, it has been relatively difficult for observers to agree on what to look for when differentiating between more and less effective principals (Duke, 1982).

Leaders share some common denominators, usually specific competencies. For example, good leaders are organized. However, effective organization can mean neat, complete files to one person and an effective management team structure to another. Good leaders have good human relations skills; some are friendly, gregarious, and outgoing, while others operate more behind the scenes, supporting people by their attention to task. The examples can go on and on. Effective leaders in education should have some common basic competencies, but they may exhibit these skills in different ways (Guild, 1987).

The characteristics or competencies which help to identify leaders are as many as those defining leadership. Clark (1983) and Thompson (1985) provide a fairly complete list of the characteristics of a leader. The following is a synthesis of these two lists:

1. above average intelligence, with the ability to think expansively
2. skills in decision making
3. task commitment
4. self-confidence, knowledge of self
(5) enthusiasm

(6) ability to work harmoniously in a team
   (emphasize cooperation)

(7) ability to communicate clearly and
   comfortably with individuals

This list is not all inclusive. It provides a brief summary of those common characteristics that all effective leaders need.

Principals are under increasing pressures to be leaders. They are expected to be the leaders in creating educational excellence in the face of overwhelming demands. Understanding the concepts of power and types of leadership is to their advantage. Relationships with staffs, faculty, parents, school board members, and other administrators can be enhanced with this understanding.

Leadership Styles

When leaders and/or prospective leaders are conscious of their own processes of perception and thinking, they are in a better position to use their strengths. Self-awareness will lead to a better understanding of each individual's strengths in dealing with reality, being able to see a situation practically, and having the ability to make quick decisions. Leaders need to develop long-range goals, to find new ways to solve old problems, to deal with nuances, and to understand the complexities of situations. Self-awareness helps people articulate their
strengths and use them for effective action (Guild, 1987).

Terry (1960) says leadership involves influencing people's behavior. Style of leadership concerns the methods by which one attempts to influence the behavior of others. There are three generally accepted styles of leadership, though each style has many different names. The three styles are:

1. **Autocratic** - authoritarian, leader-centered, boss-centered, directive, task-oriented, organization-oriented, nomothetic.
2. **Democratic** - participatory, employee-centered, supportive, group-centered, needs-oriented.
3. **Lassiez-faire** - non-directive, absence of leadership, free reign.

**Power**

Herlihy and Herlihy (1985) state that power is one of the most crucial, yet most discomforting, dynamics of educational leadership. Although it carries undesirable connotations of dominance, control, and manipulation for many people, principals cannot avoid confronting power issues.

They go on to say that there are five types of power:

1. **Legitimate Power** - power assigned to people based on their position in a hierarchy.
2. **Reward Power** - power based on the ability to give rewards.
3. **Coercive Power** - power based on the ability to punish.
(4) Expert Power - power based upon a person's knowledge or expertise.

(5) Referent Power - power based on a feeling of closeness or identification.

Under pressure to produce quick, direct, and visible results, principals may be tempted to take an increasingly autocratic approach by attempting to impose needed change and reform. Such an approach may accomplish the task expeditiously, but ultimately it is self-defeating (Herlihy and Herlihy, 1985).

Implications

Principals employ each of these types of power at various times according to the task at hand. Principals who rely on a combination of expert and referent power and who minimize reliance on legitimate and coercive power are more effective leaders. Herlihy and Herlihy (1985) noted: "Principals who take the authoritarian posture neglect to realize that their teachers, like themselves, have needs for power. Thus, an approach is needed to meet the power needs of both principals and teachers. This premise is basic to an empowering approach, giving principals power with, rather than power over, their teachers. It requires an understanding of the powers available in principal/teacher relationships and methods by which these powers can be shared rather than imposed" (p.96).
To maximize referent power which is personality based, principals need to attend to personal and social aspects of principal/teacher relationships. Robertds-Baxter in 1985 explained: "A sensible and productive approach to leadership is to recognize the basic differences among people and to assign tasks and committee service that allow teachers to use their natural skills in areas most interesting to them, and then, appreciate them with praise which will be internally integrated and valued" (p.15).

Major Challenges

There are many challenges that face principals today, and therefore, a principal must become the educational leader. The literature is full of research studies that report that one of the variables that contributes to an effective school is effective principal leadership. The remainder of this paper addresses five of those areas: 1. goals and objectives, 2. staff selection and development, 3. evaluation, 4. instructional leadership, and 5. communication.

Goals and objectives

School districts, like all organizations, have certain goals. Goal setting and policy implementation are predicated on the ability to develop and implement policy and goals that are consistent with district philosophy (Drake and Miller, 1982).
The principal must help define and interpret district goals to the staff. Helping the staff to answer the question "What do we want this school to accomplish?" is essential in establishing instructional leadership. All decisions must be made with reference to what the school is attempting to accomplish. Through goal setting, priority areas in the curriculum are identified and targeted. Defining, implementing, and evaluating goals serve to improve communications and to promote unity of purpose among faculty members (Mendez, 1986; Finn, 1987).

**Staff selection and development**

The development of an effective teaching staff has little to do with luck. It results from at least three activities in which principals can play crucial roles - recruitment, inservice education, and staff motivation (Duke, 1982).

The principal should use systematic interviewing techniques to assist in the selection process, including a technique to evaluate how prospective employees respond to selected questions in the areas of empathy, rapport, individualized perception, listening, innovation, objectivity, and other areas related to the teaching-learning situation (Mendez, 1986).

In order to reduce conflict and stress dissatisfaction, it is an administrative responsibility not only to select and hire the best people but also to develop each individual to his/her utmost potential (Hampton, Summer, and Weber, 1973).
Once a strong faculty has been built, it must be maintained. Seeing that an active program of inservice activities is available to teachers may be one of the principal's most critical leadership functions (Duke, 1982). Teachers should be actively involved in planning and in some cases, executing inservice activities.

The principal should regard inservice activities as opportunities for teachers and other staff members to acquire the information they need to make sound decisions about personal and professional improvement. This implies that the way to maintain a highly professional faculty is to treat teachers as if they were capable of exercising leadership (Duke, 1982).

**Evaluation**

The principal can assist, evaluate, and improve the learning environment of the school. A comprehensive program of classroom observation must be supplemented by a thorough communication program that explains evaluative criteria and administrative expectations (Mendez, 1986).

No program can be termed effective unless there is a solid plan for program evaluation. It is imperative that the evaluation program be related to the district philosophy and goals. Such evaluation data can be used in modifying a school's program (Drake and Miller, 1982).
**Instructional leadership**

As instructional leaders, principals set an example for the students and staff, define scholastic goals for the school, and actively support the curriculum and teaching that promote those goals. Effective principals ensure that teachers have good instructional models, coaching, and developmental opportunities (Finn, 1987).

The effective principal creates an environment in which procedural obstacles to innovation are removed, an environment in which teachers are treated as professionals who can themselves improve instruction. Creating such a safe and professional climate is the first step that must be taken in order to bring forward the instructional leaders - the master teachers - who are already present in our schools (Rallis and Highsmith, 1986).

Although the principal is the key person in curriculum planning, a curriculum council of assistant principals, guidance personnel, department chairpersons, and other staff members represents a good technique through which the different components of a school can function in the development of curriculum practices (Mendez, 1986).

Perhaps the most important instructional support function which principals can provide is the establishment of an atmosphere of orderliness throughout the school. Recent research suggest
that orderliness is critical to student achievement, and the principal is the key to its realization (Duke, 1982).

Communication

A key ingredient in leadership, according to Bennis and Nanus (1985), is the ability to communicate a vision. Communication means organizing the meaning of your school and interpreting it to all the members of your organization. All organizations depend upon the existence of shared meanings and interpretations of reality.

Just as a crucial factor in instructional effectiveness is the communication of high expectations to all students, so it becomes vital that principals communicate high expectations to teachers (Duke, 1982). All strands of being an effective principal hinge on the ability to communicate a vision to others, whether it be to faculty members or community members. Principals can build a team concept by attending to their modes of communication, sending "we messages" rather than imposing their own wants (Herlihy and Herlihy, 1985).

Conclusion

The principalship is probably the single most powerful fulcrum for improving school effectiveness. In summary, it is suggested that principals view leadership not as a personal prerogative but as a set of functions that a competent individual can perform, and that they view power as dynamic with significant
positive potential when shared. Such a perspective will enable them to have power with their teachers and to create a school environment capable of responding to today's imperatives for educational excellence (Herlihy and Herlihy, 1985).
References


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