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A historical analysis of the characteristics of the effective school administrator

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A historical analysis of the characteristics of the effective school administrator

Abstract

Technology is constantly changing society as well as having a great influence on schools and education. Therefore the development of school leaders is needed to assist education in these changes. It is not easy to determine the procedures for selecting effective school administrators. In recent years there has been tremendous emphasis on improving those procedures including the adoption of psychological tests and "team ratings". The problem is how to choose those persons who possess the essential characteristics to be potential effective school administrators. There is no clear cut way for individuals interviewing candidates to select those best qualified to lead the schools. Therefore it is important that objective standards be established and adopted.

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS

OF THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Ali Salih Khamis

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Technology is constantly changing society as well as having a great influence on schools and education. Therefore the development of school leaders is needed to assist education in these changes. It is not easy to determine the procedures for selecting effective school administrators. In recent years there has been tremendous emphasis on improving those procedures including the adoption of psychological tests and "team ratings".

The problem is how to choose those persons who possess the essential characteristics to be potential effective school administrators. There is no clear cut way for individuals interviewing candidates to select those best qualified to lead the schools. Therefore it is important that objective standards be established and adopted.

Historical Behaviors

As early as 1947 Gibb identified the traits of leadership as general intelligence, socio-economic status, self-confidence, emotional maturity, aggressiveness, adjustability and enthusiasm. Hemphill (1955) and Kimbrough (1959) in their research, supported these traits.

In order to conceptualize the effective school administrator, it will be necessary to deal also with characteristics of ineffectiveness. The University of Tennessee conducted a study into the question of what

behavioral characteristics differentiate between effective and
ineffective school administrators.

The following were conclusions reached by the Tennessee
study which indicated effective and ineffective traits of
administrators (Kimbrough, 1959).

Most Effective	Least Effective
1. Steadily warm and appealing in relationship with others.	1. Tends to be a lone wolf.
2. Consistently seeks and considers the opinions of others.	2. Generally ignores the viewpoints of others.
3. Moves surely and judiciously in effecting policies.	3. Tends to ignore or defer action on policies.
4. Urges the use of processes consistent with best democratic practices.	4. Uses any expedient method available to attain a predetermined end.
5. Recognizes and analyzes problems.	5. Tends not to recognize the existence of problems.
6. Is dependable and predictable in word and action.	6. Supports conflicting ideas; action characterized by inconsistency.
7. Tends to try out new ideas after careful study and follows through on basis of experimental evidence.	7. Tends to operate within traditional practices or on basis of hunches.
8. Recognizes his mistakes and seeks to avoid repeating them.	8. Frequently makes the same mistake but seldom admits it.
9. Appears to meet crises with a contagious calmness;	9. Tends to be upset by everyday occurrences and

others feel at ease in his presence.

keeps staff in continuous uproar.

10. Places principle above his own personal advantages.

10. Tends to weasel out of situations.

11. Chooses words which clearly convey thoughts; is able to express abstract ideas.

11. Expresses himself in a fuzzy, incomprehensible manner and tends to puzzle listeners concerning what he means.

12. Is attentive in trying to grasp ideas expressed by others.

12. Tends to listen only to himself.

13. Facilitates a stimulating and well-ordered climate conducive to reaching group decisions.

13. Is either at a loss or monopolizes discussion when appointed official leader of a group.

14. Involves general public, staff members in major policy formulation.

14. Formulates policies himself; rarely discusses them with others.

15. Continually strives for careful group problem analysis; helps group recognize points of agreement.

15. Contributes little to help group arrive at a working consensus.

16. Consistently seeks and employs new data.

16. Disregards new data that challenge the status quo.

17. Discusses intelligently major social, political and economic issues.

17. Does not seem to be informed about or interested in contemporary events.

18. Is aware of and actively concerned with desires and interests of community groups, agencies and organizations.

18. Considers the school an island that is competitive with non-educational groups.

Common Characteristics

Hemphill, Griffiths, and Frederickson (1962) maintained that effective human relations were the first requirement of a successful school administrator. William Beck (1968) supported the view that skill in interpersonal relationships was a major characteristic of the effective administrator.

Cohen (1982) listed dependability, daring, self-confidence, physical drive, quick and decisive judgment, honesty, pleasant disposition, sociability and appearance as major characteristics of effective administrators. Sara (1981) identified the following traits as significant when discussing administrator capabilities: intelligence, self-confidence, initiate, responsibility, persistence, ambition, socio-economic status, physical status, and social participation. The research of Erickson (1979), Farley (1983), and Gronn (1984) supported those traits as essential to good school administrators.

Some leadership positions have called for a strong individual leader. However, their appears in the literature a shift in the notion of the "devine right" to a more careful assessment of the person as a performer. Robinson (1977) identified effective administrators as individuals who have personalities that stimulate, challenge and allow subordinate employees to perform at their highest level of competence.

The following table illustrates the type of information which the writer found in reviewing the literature that identified historically the most common characteristics of educational administrators.

Table 1

Common Characteristics of Educational Administrators

Author and Year	Characteristics of Effective School Administrators
Lahti (1973)	Persistence, confidence, ambition, Visibility, solve problems, sympathy, and charismatic
Jeswald (1977)	Decisiveness, problem analysis, judgment, and sensitivity
Petrie and Burton (1980)	Plan, communicate, establish, and control
Fryer (1980)	Communicate, sensitive, and human relations
Neville, Alfonson, & Firth (1981)	Decisiveness, self-confidence, sociability, and respect of others
Giammatteo (1981)	Sensitivity, communication, problem analysis, planning, and motivation
Persell and Cookson (1982)	Have a vision of what their school should be like
Peterson, Kathry and Donovan (1982)	Decisiveness and communication

Klopf and others (1982)	Judgment, communicates effectively in writing and speaking, sensitive, holds vision of excellence, relates to others as equals and as individuals
Sergiovanni (1982)	Purposing, planning, persisting and organizing
McCoy and Shereve (1983)	Communications, accessibility, contributions, growth and development, motivation and risk taking
Lemley (1983)	Decisiveness, creative, persistence, extract authority, problem solving, and planning
Scarr and Hager (1983)	Planning, organizing, human effectiveness, controlling and monitoring
A Nation at Risk (1983)	Persuasion, goal setting, and developing community consensus
Curran (1983)	Visible and human relation
Jwaideh (1984)	Interpersonal relationship, communication, provide support and direction for change
Cawelti (1984)	Monitoring and vision
Manasse (1984)	Personal vision, monitoring, and problem solving
Rutherford (1985)	Visibility, human relationship and supportive
Sir Marks and Stoops (1985)	Confident, tact, self-control, delegate responsibilities, plan, sensitive, and strong motivation
McIntire (1985)	Motivation and interpersonal relations
Couture (1985)	Sensitive, diverse and knowledgeable

Wiles and Bondi (1986)   Planning, communication and effective
                          interpersonal relations

Strub, Dykstra, Junker,
  Baker (Personal
  Communication,
  4/8/86)   Good communication

The National Association
  of Elementary School
  Principals (NAESP report
  1986)   Effective human relations, analyze
                          problems, visibility and delegate
                          responsibility

Effective school administrators run schools when their

decisions are based on human understandings and behaviors.

Marhsal and Jacobson (1984) contended that an effective

principal uses the following strategies to provide

administrative behaviors:

1)   The King Solomon Strategy

      (Determine the real motive behind a request.)

2)   The Masada Strategy

      (Never defend an indefensible position.)

3)   Sir Walter Raleigh Strategy

      (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.)

4)   The Marine Strategy

      (Overcoming significant obstacles helps reduce the

      fear of future obstacles.)

5)   The Anti-Cannibal Strategy

(In certain situation members of any species will

destroy each other.)

6)   The Lost-Sheep Strategy

(A wise principal learns to save the 99 rather than

accommodate the 1.)

7)   The Penicillin Strategy

(Diversions make unpleasant experiences agreeable.)

8)   ·The New Pet Strategy

(We promise to police our own ranks. . .

temporarily.)

9)   The Deadline Strategy

(Others tend to believe that an established limit is

always negotiable.)

The NASSP Assessment Center

The National Association of the Secondary School

Principals Educational Center (NASSP) was established in 1975.

The purpose was to develop a new approach for identifying

effective school administrators. This was brought to NASSP's

attention by the Psychological Association's Division of

Industrial and Organizational Psychology (Hersey, 1977).

The potential administrators participated in a number of

activities designed to simulate behaviors which include

measurement techniques, group exercises, business games,

simulated problem-solving interviews, and basic interviews and tests.

The key to the assessment center process was the use of simulations, tapping a wide variety of behaviors. The participants were observed as they went through the assessment exercises, and the performance of the individuals were evaluated on a number of key dimensions, which were viewed as important for success.

The following traits have been identified by the NASSP Assessment Center as those areas which were critical to the success of school administrators:

1. Problem Analysis. Ability to seek out relevant and complex information to determine the important elements of a problem situation; the ability to search and analyze information, for a purpose.

2. Judgment. Skill in identifying educational needs and setting priorities; ability to reach logical conclusions and make high-quality decisions based on available information; ability to critically evaluate written communication.

3. Organizational Ability. Ability to plan, schedule, and control the work of others; skill in using resources in an optimal fashion; ability to deal with a volume of paper work and heavy demands on one's time.

4. <u>Decisiveness</u>. Ability to recognize when a decision is required and to act quickly (without an assessment of the quality of the decision).

5. <u>Leadership</u>. Ability to recognize when a group requires direction, to get others involved in solving problems, to effectively interact with a group, and guide them to the accomplishment of a task.

6. <u>Sensitivity</u>. Ability to perceive the needs, concerns, and personal problems of others; tact in dealing with persons and different backgrounds; skill in resolving conflicts; ability to deal effectively with people concerning emotional issues; knowing what information to communicate and to whom.

7. <u>Range of Interests</u>. Competence to discuss a variety of subjects (educational, political, economic, etc.); desire to actively participate in events.

8. <u>Personal Motivation</u>. Showing that work is important to personal satisfaction; a need to achieve in all activities attempted; ability to be self-policing.

9. <u>Educational Values</u>. Possession of well-reasoned educational philosophy; receptiveness to change and new ideas.

10. <u>Stress Tolerance</u>. Ability to perform under pressure and opposition; ability to think on one's feet.

11. Oral Communication Skills. Ability to make a clear
oral presentation of ideas and facts.

12. Written Communication Skills. Ability to express
ideas clearly in writing; to write appropriately for
different audiences - students, teachers, parents, other
administrators.

The judgments of the assessment center reflected a
composite view of the person's strengths and weaknesses in the
areas outlined above. They were made as a result of
independent observation and discussion by a staff of
previously identified successful administrators. Each
assessor received considerable training (a minimum of three
days is seen as essential for most programs) prior to
participating in the program as an evaluator (Moses, 1977).

Conclusion

The effective school administrator was difficult to
define. How can we know whether the individual was effective?
What administrative traits qualify him/her to be a potential
effective school administrator?

This paper responded to these questions historically.
The literature identified the effective administrator as the
individual who helps the entire school community to realize
its potential. Today, the effective administrator is a

forceful, dynamic person who actually plays an important role
in creating a successful school. He serves as a good model
for school norms, must be able to be visible to his school
family (students-teachers-parents) and the community. The
effective administrator helps to provide a healthy climate for
the school personnel and for the professional growth of
teachers, and supports them in their efforts. Likewise the
school administrator provides the direction needed for change.
Most of the authors in this review of literature judged human
relations as a prime factor in the success of any school
administrator. The authors agreed that effective
communication was an important trait of the school
administrator, together with decisiveness, sensitivity,
problem analysis, planning, visibility, persistence and
personal motivation.

The "assessment center" concept has been recognized in
recent years as the most significant technique for identifying
effective characteristics of the school principal and the
results of the Assessment Center are valid predictors of
his or her success.

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