SCHOOL' LEADERSHIP

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The most successful school leaders are those who are open-minded and willing to learn from others. Their thinking is flexible within a framework of core values and they are characterized by sticking to their goals, expecting high-level motivation from the staff, commitment, study and being infused with the wish for everyone to reach high levels of achievement and optimism. Effective leadership arouses motivation and commitment among school staff members, since if it doesn't, it may reduce the required effectiveness. Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achieveme nt.

Keywords: *school leaders, comprehensive leadership, sustained innovation, instructional leaders, systemic impro-vement, peer learning, individual coaching.*

LIDERISMUL ŞCOLAR

Liderii şcolari de succes sunt cei care sunt deschişi şi dornici de a învăţa de la alţii. Gândirea lor este flexibilă, într-un cadru de valori de bază şi este caracterizată prin aderarea la obiectivele lor, expectând de la personal o motivare de nivel înalt, angajament, studii şi dorinţa, însoţită de optimism, de a atinge un nivel ridicat al realizărilor. Conducerea efectivă generează la corpul didactic din şcoală motivare şi angajament; în caz contrar se poate reduce eficacitatea aşteptată. Numai directorii care sunt preocupaţi de realizarea unor schimbări complexe în mediul în care activează pot implementa reformele ce duc la o îmbunătăţire durabilă a rezultatelor elevilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *lideri şcolari, liderism comprehensiv, inovaţie durabilă, lider instrucţional, îmbunătăţire sistemică, învăţare la egal, instructor individual.*

Introduction

The topic of leadership has been studied extensively. Still, beyond all the theories and definitions that have been put forth thus far, Shortzold, Y.'s definition prevails: Leadership is the functioning process that is essential to the proper running of any group or organization. Leadership is the dynamic part of role allocation that exists/presides in any type of social interaction. The primary roles of the leader include directing, filtering and timing of the group members' activities, to construct and preserve its goals, to create motivation, to reward worthy parties and to reprimand bodies who interfere with or disrupt the group's processes. In addition, the leader is responsible for the communication between all members of the group and to provide appropriate opportunities for them to identify with the group and its goals.

In an age when the education system is implementing new reforms and strategies with the aim of improving school effectiveness in general, and transforming teaching into a profession in particular, researchers agree that students will achieve the best and most effective outcome when teachers work together, learn together, and suggest improvements and changes to ensure constant advancements in teaching (Cole, 1993) [4].

Effective school leaders are keys to large-scale, sustainable education reform. For some time, educators have believed that principals must be instructional leaders if they are to be the effective leaders needed for sustained innovation. Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) [11], for example, found that school capacity is the crucial variable affecting instructional quality and corresponding student achievement. And at the heart of school capacity are principals focused on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources.

Fink and Resnick (2001) [3] examined school districts' efforts to develop principals into instructional leaders who could achieve a large-scale turnaround in literacy and numeracy. They described some core strategies for developing the role of the principal as instructional leader, including five mutually reinforcing sets of strategic activities: nested learning communities, principal institutes, leadership for instruction, peer learning, and individual coaching.

Characterizing instructional leadership as the principal's central role has been a valuable first step in increa-sing student learning, but it does not go far enough. Literacy and mathematics improvements are only the beginning. To ensure deeper learning – to encourage problem solving and thinking skills and to develop and nurture highly motivated and engaged learners, for example – requires mobilizing the energy and capacities

of teachers. In turn, to mobilize teachers, we must improve teachers' working conditions and morale. Thus, we need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself.

The role of the principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kinds of reforms that will create the schools that we need for the future.

Principals Who Lead Cultural Change

Leaders have a deeper and more lasting influence on organizations and provide more comprehensive leadership if their focus extends beyond maintaining high standards. Collins (2001) examined 11 businesses with a minimum of 15 years of sustained economic performance each. The study identified the effective leader, who "catalyzes commitment to a compelling vision and higher performance standards," as well as the executive leader, who goes beyond performance standards and "builds enduring greatness" [1, p.20]. The best examples of school system success represent accomplishments at the effective level; high performance standards with corresponding results. These accomplishments may be impressive, but they do not represent the kinds of deep, lasting reforms implemented by executive leaders, who establish the conditions for "enduring greatness."

When the goal is sustainable change in a knowledge society, business and education leaders increasingly have more in common. Like the business leader, the principal of the future – the Cultural Change Principal – must be attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams (Fullan, 2001) [6]. Cultural Change Principals display palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope. In addition, five essential components characterize leaders in the knowledge society: moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making.

Moral Purpose

Moral purpose is social responsibility to others and the environment. School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students. They are concerned about closing the gap between high-performing and lower-performing schools and raising the achievement of – and closing the gap between – high-performing and lower-performing students. They act with the intention of making a positive difference in their own schools as well as improving the environment in other district schools. Let me be clear: If the goal is *systemic* improvement – to improve all schools in the district – then principals should be nearly as concerned about the success of other schools in the district as they are about their own school. Sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward.

Student learning is paramount to the Cultural Change Principal. This principal involves teachers in explicitly monitoring student learning. But the Cultural Change Principal is also concerned with the bigger picture and continually asks, How well are other schools in the district doing? What is the role of public schools in a democracy? Are we reducing the gap between high-performing and lower-performing students in this school? district? state? nation? The Cultural Change Principal treats students, teachers, parents, and others in the school well. Such a principal also works to develop other leaders in the school to prepare the school to sustain and even advance reform after he or she departs. In short, the Cultural Change Principal displays explicit, deep, comprehensive moral purpose.

Understanding Change

Having innovative ideas and understanding the change process is not the same thing. Indeed, the case can be made that those firmly committed to their own ideas are not necessarily good change agents because being a change agent involves getting commitment from others who might not like one's ideas. I offer the following guidelines for understanding change:
- The goal is not to innovate the most. Innovating selectively with coherence is better.
- Having the best ideas is not enough. Leaders' help others assess and find collective meaning and commitment to new ways.
- Appreciate the implementation dip. Leaders can't avoid the inevitable early difficulties of trying something new. They should know, for example, that no matter how much they plan for the change, the first six months or so of implementation will be bumpy.

- Redefine resistance. Successful leaders don't mind when naysayers rock the boat. In fact, doubters sometimes have important points. Leaders look for ways to address those concerns.
- Reculturing is the name of the game. Much change is structural and superficial. Transforming culture – changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it –leads to deep, lasting change.
- Never a checklist, always complexity. There is no step-by-step shortcut to transformation; it involves the hard, day-to-day work of reculturing.

The Cultural Change Principal knows the difference between being an expert in a given content innovation and being an expert in managing the process of change. This principal does not make the mistake of assuming that the best ideas will carry the day. Instead, the Cultural Change Principal provides opportunities for people to visit sites that are using new ideas, invites questions and even dissent, and expects the change process to proceed in fits and starts during the first few months of implementation. Nevertheless, such a principal forges ahead and expects progress within a year because he or she has nurtured the conditions that yield results sooner rather than later.

Improving Relationships

The single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, schools get better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus, leaders build relationships with diverse people and groups – especially with people who think differently. In complex times, emotional intelligence is a must. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to build relationships because they are aware of their own emotional makeup and are sensitive and inspiring to others (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) [7].

The Cultural Change Principal knows that building relationships and teams is the most difficult skill for both business and education leaders (Hay Management Consultants, 2000) [9]. This leader works hard to develop the full range of emotional intelligence domains, especially self-management of emotions and empathy toward others (Goleman et al., 2002) [7]. Focusing on relationships isn't just a matter of boosting achievement scores for next year, but rather a means of laying the foundation for year two and beyond. The Cultural Change Principal's efforts to motivate and energize disaffected teachers and forge relationships among otherwise disconnected teachers can have a profound effect on the overall climate of the organization. Well-established relationships are the resource that keeps on giving.

Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a *social* process. For this reason, relationships and professional learning communities are essential. Organizations must foster knowledge giving as well as knowledge seeking. We endorse continual learning when we say that individuals should constantly add to their knowledge base – but there will be little to add if people are not sharing. A norm of sharing one's knowledge with others is the key to continual growth for all.

The Cultural Change Principal appreciates that teaching is both an intellectual and a moral profession. This principal constantly reminds teachers that they are engaged in practicing, studying, and refining the craft of teaching. The Cultural Change Principal is the lead learner in the school and models lifelong learning by sharing what he or she has read lately, engaging in and encouraging action research, and implementing inquiry groups among the staff. Teachers who work with the Cultural Change Principal know that they are engaged in scientific discovery and the refinement of the teaching knowledge base. Knowledge creation and sharing fuels moral purpose in schools led by Cultural Change Principals.

Coherence Making

Because complex societies inherently generate overload and fragmentation, effective leaders must be coherence-makers (Fullan, 1999, 2001) [5, 6]. The other characteristics of the change leader–moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to build relationships, and the creation and sharing of knowledge–help forge coherence through the checks and balances embedded in their interaction. Leaders with deep moral purpose provide guidance, but they can also have blinders if their ideas are not challenged through the dynamics of change, the give-and-take of relationships, and the ideas generated by new knowledge. Coherence is an essential component of complexity and yet can never be completely achieved.

Principals not attuned to leading in a culture of change make the mistake of seeking external innovations and taking on too many projects.

Cultural Change Principals, by contrast, concentrate on student learning as the central focus of reform and keep an eye out for external ideas that further the thinking and vision of the school. They realize that overload and fragmentation are natural tendencies of complex systems. They appreciate the creative potential of diverse ideas, but they strive to focus energy and achieve greater alignment. They also look to the future and strive to create a culture that has the capacity not to settle for the solution of the day. Cultural Change Principals value the tensions inherent in addressing hard-to-solve problems because that is where the greatest accomplishments lie.

Developing the Social Environment

Those concerned about the depletion of resources in the physical environment were the first to discuss the issue of sustainability. Our concern is the depletion of resources in the social and moral environment (Hargreaves, in press). In the social and moral environment of the school, we need the resources to close the achievement gap between high and low performers, to develop all schools in the system, and to connect schools to the strength of democracy in society. Further, if school leaders do not concern themselves with the development of the social and moral environment of the entire district (in addition to the development of the environment within their own school), then not only will the school system deteriorate, but eventually their own school will also fail.

Learning in Context

Recruiting top-performing principals and rewarding good principal performance are both important. Providing strong principal training is useful, too. But as Elmore (2000) [2, p.25] points out, what's missing in this view [of focusing on talented individuals] is any recognition that improvement is more a function of learning to do the right thing *in the setting where you work* [my emphasis].

Learning at work–learning in context–occurs, for example, when principals are members of a district's inter-visitation study team for which they examine real problems – and the solutions they have devised–in their own systems. Learning out of context takes place when principals go to a workshop or conference. Such learning can be valuable for further development, but it is not the kind of applied learning that really makes a difference.

Learning in context has the greatest potential payoff because it is more specific, situational, and social (it develops shared and collective knowledge and commitments). This kind of learning is designed to improve the organization *and* its social and moral context. Learning in context also establishes conditions conducive to continual development, including opportunities to learn from others on the job, the daily fostering of current and future leaders, the selective retention of good ideas and best practices, and the explicit monitoring of performance.

Cultivating Leaders at Many Levels

An organization cannot flourish–at least, not for long–on the actions of the top leader alone. Schools and districts need many leaders at many levels. Learning in context helps produce such leaders. Further, for leaders to be able to deal with complex problems, they need many years of experience and professional development on the job. To a certain extent, a school leader's effectiveness in creating a culture of sustained change will be determined by the leaders he or she leaves behind.

Also crucial to sustained improvement is the effective succession of leaders. Leadership succession is more likely if there are many leaders at many levels. Organizations must set their sights on continual improvement at all levels, and for that they must nurture, cultivate, and appoint successive leaders who are moving in a sustained direction.

The good news for most of us is that charismatic leaders are actually a liability for sustained improvement. Collins (2001) compared 11 companies with long-term, positive financial performance profiles (a minimum of 15 consecutive years) with other companies that made short-term shifts from good to great, but failed to sustain their gains. Collins suggests that leaders who build enduring greatness are not high-profile, flashy performers but rather "individuals who blend extreme personal humility with intense professional will" [1, p.21]. Sustainability depends on many leaders–thus, the qualities of leadership must be attainable by many, not just a few.

Enhancing the Teaching Profession

We will not have a large pool of quality principals until we have a large pool of quality teachers because quality teachers form the ranks of the quality principal pipeline. Individualistic strategies–signing bonuses, pay hikes–will not work to boost the ranks of quality teachers; the *conditions* of teacher work must be conducive to continual development and proud accomplishment. And this is certainly not the case now.

In 2001, PriceWaterhouseCoopers published the results of a teacher workload study they had conducted in England and Wales. The researchers concluded that if the government is to transform the teaching force, an essential strand will be to reduce teacher workload, foster increased teacher ownership, and create the capacity to manage change in a sustainable way that can lay the foundation for improved school and pupil performance in the future [12, p.2].

Principal-leaders should work to transform teachers' working conditions. From the standpoint of sustainability, the principal ship itself benefits from these improved conditions: We will only get quality principals when we have quality teachers.

The role of the principal as instructional leader has taken us only so far in the quest for continual school improvement. We now must raise our sights and focus on principals as leaders in a culture of change. School improvement depends on principals who can foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society. Never has the time been riper for change leaders than right now.

Development of school leadership according to international research

Leithwood [10] raises seven convincing assertions about successful school leadership:

1. School leadership is the second most important influence on student learning, after classroom teaching quality.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw from a common pool of basic leadership methods.
3. The different ways in which the leaders implement these basic leadership methods – rather than the actual methods – are evidence of them being attentive to the contexts in which they work, rather than the contexts dictating their actions.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning quality indirectly and with especially great effectiveness by their influencing staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
5. School leadership has a greater influence on the school and the students when it is broadly distributed.
6. Certain distribution methods are more effective than others.
7. Many of the effective differences between leaders stem from a handful of character traits.

These seven assertions are important because they are "strong" – they have firm proofs supporting them. Likewise, this was one of the first documents to outline research-based methods for successful leadership.

The National College for School Leadership research staff based themselves, among other sources, on a list of the seven assumptions, when it conducted a synthesis of the research on leadership.

Here is the list of the College's findings:

- The context is important.
- The core missions of the school leaders are clear.
- Learning-focused leadership is critical.
- Leadership distribution is important.
- School leadership is hard work, but it carries a reward.
- Leadership changes.
- Leadership development and creating a new generation of leaders were never more important.

Combining these two lists unifies current knowledge about school leadership convincingly and effectively. It declares that the issue of context is critical, because excellent leadership is characterized by "great sensitivity to the contexts in which it is used", to a person's location and the people with whom he is working. All of these greatly influence his actions and behavior as a leader. It is vital that the leaders understand the contexts they are working in, and are alert and react to them. Most leaders are very aware of their environment at the beginning of their professional path, if they were appointed to a new position in a new school – the fact that they arrived from the outside, in of itself, contributes to the context and their ability to distinguish between the differences and contrast this experience and previous ones in other schools.

This ability is expressed in that such principals enter a particular environment for the first time, and try to understand how things operate there. They analyze the buildings, regulations and principles operating the school, culturally and socially.

Organizational proficiency includes understanding of how a school operates and the reasons for this way, and studying the values on which it is based. Such proficiency also obligates leaders to thoroughly study the school social and interpersonal dynamics – the organizational structure, history and politics. They must become familiar with the various interested parties and understand the micropolitics within the school and its environment. Similarly, they face issues related to the school's performance level, its strengths and weaknesses, and the development and learning opportunities there.

They must also take economic factors into account and the type of community served by the school. The policies dictated by central, regional or local government directly affect the school, more than ever before, since they have now been delegated more powers. The more the education system awards greater authority, the more the school leaders must be aware of special developments and emphases in the area of policies.

We emphasize two more points in this context:

A. Organizational proficiency demands that leaders view each factor relative to the others, and develop a complete picture of the school. The leaders must avoid focusing on a few factors at the expense of seeing and understanding the whole.

B. The more the new leaders integrate into the school; they change from "looking from the outside" to "figures which are part of the school landscape". From this vantage point it is hard for them to see everything, since they have themselves become part of the landscape, and therefore:

They must ensure that they are also attentive to other people's viewpoints, and ask them their opinions. Surveys, questionnaires and interviews are beneficial tools for examining how to view the relevant bodies in the school system (parents, students, members of staff, members of the administrative staff etc.).

In the National Professional Qualification for Headship (from the National College for School Leadership) training course, organizational proficiency is considered a core skill as part of developmental leadership. Therefore time is devoted to the participants training and developing this skill and it is considered the first step in the process of determining priorities so that the leadership will be built on the existing needs. For this reason, the school's self-evaluations with data on student performance are used to identify trends and estimate performance, progress and the level of the school's improvement.

At the same time we can claim that the most important factor in the whole situation and environment is not just the leader's actions, but also how he does them; there is no one correct way to lead a school; leaders must act in ways which are in line with school requirements.

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