Network Coverage: Administrative Collegiality and School District Ethos in High-Performing Districts

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We interviewed administrators in two high- and two low-performing school districts in British Columbia to see if interactions between district- and school-based administrators (and interactions within the latter group) would distinguish between these pairs of districts. We asked if administrator collegiality would characterize the first pair but not the second.

Respondents in high-performing districts often referred to their satisfying professional relationships with colleagues. Respondents in low-performing districts barely mentioned collegial contact except where principals thought they had to present a united front against district policy threatening their "turf." In high-performing school districts, collegiality included issues of school improvement. Superintendents act like effective principals—they create an "associative" climate at district level in which climate "district-regarding principals" seek the greater good.

There is greater similarity in district interaction patterns *within* the two performance groups than there are sharp distinctions between them.

Nous avons interviewé, en Colombie-Britannique, des administrateurs de quatre circonscriptions scolaires—deux à faible rendement et deux à rendement élevé—afin de vérifier si les interactions des administrateurs des circonscriptions et des écoles (et des administrateurs d'école entre eux) se distinguaient selon les deux paires de circonscriptions. Nous cherchions à savoir s'il y existait, dans la première paire, une collégialité chez les adminstrateurs, qui serait absente dans la seconde.

Les répondants dans les circonscriptions scolaires à haut rendement ont souvent fait allusion aux relations professionnelles satisfaisantes qu'ils entretenaient avec leurs collègues. Ceux des circonscriptions scolaires à faible rendement ont à peine fait mention des contacts avec leurs collègues, à l'exception des directeurs d'école qui estimaient devoir faire front commun contre les politiques des circonscriptions menaçant leur "territoire." Dans les circonscriptions scolaires à haut rendement, les questions ayant trait à l'amélioration de l'école étaient associées à la notion de collégialité. Les administrateurs en chef agissent comme le font des directeurs d'école efficaces: ils créent, au niveau de la circonscription,

un climat tel que les directeurs d'école cherchent ce qui contribue davantage au bien de la circonscription.

Il y a plus de similitudes que de grandes différences entre les types d'interaction au sein des deux groupes de circonscriptions.

We began with the proposition that quantity and content of interactions between district and school-based administrators, and within the latter group, would be different in low-performing and in high-performing school districts. This analysis of administrator interview data from two high-performing and two low-performing school districts in British Columbia tests that proposition. Our four-district subset represents the ends of the performance continuum of a sample of ten districts in a larger study (Coleman & La-Rocque, 1990).

The original study proposed a cluster of "ethos" characteristics of school districts analogous to the characteristics of effective schools. These characteristics may help to explain variations in school district performance on cost and achievement measures (Coleman, 1986).

TABLE 1

District Ethos and District Tasks

Six focuses (District ethos)	District Tasks		
	A. Be accountable	B. Improve/adapt	C. Set expectations
Learning Focus 1. Focus on instruction	program effectiveness assessed?	changes to improve instruction?	instructional goals most important?
Accountability Focus 2. School accountability	schools accountable for performance? for practices?	changes to improve school accountability?	monitoring and instructional goals linked?
Change Focus 3. Organizational change	changes as response to performance data?	changes as response to environment?	changes in goals/goal-setting processes?
Commitment Focus 4. Commitment to effort	commitment to accountability created?	commitment to change efforts created?	commitment to school/district goals created?
Caring Focus 5. Consideration	concern for community opinion on performance?	decisions reflect concerns of community?	emphasis on affective goals?
Community Focus 6. Community integration	schools/district involve community in monitoring?	community involvement in change efforts?	community involvement in setting goals?

"Ethos" is borrowed from the work of Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston, and signifies a set of shared norms, values, and attitudes manifested in practices that "become characteristic of the school as a whole" (1979, p. 179). The original B.C. study (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990) discriminated between high-performing districts and others, describing a productive ethos that consists of six activity and attitude "focuses" affecting the ways districts cope with common administrative tasks (Berman & McLaughlin, 1979; Coleman, 1972). The tasks and focuses combined yield a conceptual framework—and research questions (see Table 1). "Productive district ethos" conveys purposefulness of the organization's "shared understandings, norms, and values" (Jelinek, Smircich, & Hirsh, 1983), and links norms to administrative practices that embody the norms. Principal collegiality might constitute one means by which such sharing of values and practices occurs. Since only high-performing districts have productive ethos, then if collegiality discriminates between districts, such collegiality is important to district quality.

CRITICAL PRACTICES OF COLLEGIALITY

Little's (1982) work on teacher collegiality suggests some possible conditions of principal collegiality in districts:

1. frequent opportunities for focussed talk about instructional policies and practices;
2. district expectation of continuous improvement in core educational outcomes;
3. district expectation that principals work collaboratively toward solving problems.

Such opportunities and expectations may both support and reflect norms of collegiality, which can be said to exist when most principals in the district:

1. express respect for the work of colleagues;
2. describe peers and superordinates as resource persons and sounding boards;
3. refer positively to opportunities for collegial contact;
4. express instructional concerns in a shared language;
5. exhibit a common pool of information;
6. exhibit knowledge of, and commitment to, district goals and expectations;
7. refer positively to programs and practices in other schools in the district;
8. express support for district processes such as monitoring and assessment.

Professional collegiality among teachers is critical to school effectiveness (Little, 1982) and to a professional culture (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988).

Developing an "associative" climate among teachers is an important part of the work of the principal (Blase, 1987).

Opportunities for Collegiality

It is necessary to demonstrate, first, that there are sufficient opportunities and venues in the day-to-day life of principals corresponding with those available for teacher collegiality, and second, that principals use these opportunities to engage in collegial interactions with peers.

Wolcott (1973) notes the flexible nature of the principal's schedule. Principals also have access to a variety of suitable venues, including formal principals' meetings with central office staff, principals' association meetings, committee meetings, conferences, and retreats. A variety of informal occasions also provide opportunities for collegial interactions.

The second consideration is the question of preferred resources. Wolcott's study shows that principals tend to avoid initiating interactions with superordinates; they wish to avoid critical attention. Similarly, problems are not normally shared with subordinates. To do so might invite unwanted speculation on the principal's ability to lead. Peers are left as the most likely choices for interaction.

Previous Research on Principal Collegiality

Little research deals specifically with relationships between working principals. Principals are rarely helped by other principals or by central administrators in dealing with change (Fullan, 1982). Fullan contends that "teachers and principals desire more social contact about professional matters, if it can be done in a supportive climate" (p. 142). The cautious and restricted nature of principal-peer relationships is also revealed in studies by Licata and Hack (1980) and Johnson and Licata (1983). These researchers describe the informal communications network or "grapevine" among school principals. In both studies, patterns of informal interactions are typically issue-specific and limited to one or two trusted individuals.

The potential of informal networks in educational contexts is well known, and the deliberate strengthening of such networks frequently suggested. Goodlad (1984) recommends linking "key" or experimental schools to universities and to one another in a "communicating, collaborating network" (p. 301). The importance of collegial relationships is demonstrated in the implementation literature (Berman & McLaughlin, 1979; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Huberman and Miles (1984) "found that efforts to develop cooperation, coordination and conflict resolution across the differing worlds of administrators and users were often critical to successful implementation" (p. 280).

METHODOLOGY

Data for this reanalysis came from the original study, in which are found important differences between British Columbia school districts in both student achievement (the measure was of aggregated achievement data from provincial test series in reading, mathematics, and science) and in levels of expenditures (the measure used was district-level costs-per-pupil over several years) (Coleman, 1986). These differences persist even when two major and largely unalterable predictor variables, family education level (for achievement) and mean school size (for per-pupil costs), are controlled. Some districts succeed very much more than others in combining relatively high levels of student achievement with comparatively modest levels of expenditure.

Sample of Districts

For this study, districts R and J represent the high-performing group, M and H the low-performing group. These four districts also differ with respect to size and location. Districts R and J are medium-sized by B.C. standards (2101 to 5600 students). Each serves a small city and the surrounding rural area. District M, also medium-sized, is located in a well-established small city. Its schools serve a concentrated urban population. District H is a small rural district serving a resource-based community. It is composed of one high school and several scattered elementary schools.

Data Pool and Analysis

From the interview data files compiled in the Coleman and LaRocque study (1990) for these districts, the first four focuses (instruction, accountability, change, and commitment) were selected for investigation across all three district tasks (see Table 1).

We asked: Can consistent differences be found between the high-performing and the low-performing districts with respect to the frequency, content, and context of administrator interactions? If so, can these differences in collegial interaction patterns be connected by internal evidence with school district performance? Our procedure was as follows:

1. We identified interactions between administrators in the four selected districts, some by inference, most directly.
2. We then coded each interaction as to content, context, and focus. Coding included inferences/references as to inferred or explicit, structured or ad hoc, and two-way or one-way features. For example, we coded reciprocal (as opposed to one-way) interactions on the basis of principals' references to consultation, discussion, debate, input, feedback, and committee work; meetings the respondents described explicitly as primarily two-way

rather than informational; sharing of ideas; requests for assistance or information.
3. We analyzed interactions in each district as to their frequency, focus, venue, and consistency.
4. We compared interaction patterns both between and within the two performance groups.

The coded passages were collated into a chart for each district, labelled a Master Interaction Chart, showing each interaction as reported by a respondent. Our results are drawn from this chart.

RESULTS

Nature and Salience of Administrator Interactions

A simple tabulation (Table 2) of interactions per district shows differences between high-performing and low-performing districts in total number of interactions and in types of interactions from the transcripts. In particular, Explicit instances in districts R and J (118 and 113, respectively) outstrip those in either district M or district H by a ratio of about 3 to 1.

High-performing districts also provide many more structured opportunities, and more consultative (two-way) rather than informational (one-way) interactions. Workplace conditions in districts R and J satisfy one supporting condition Little (1982) identifies: relatively frequent opportunities for administrators to engage in focussed debate about instructional issues.

TABLE 2

Type and Frequency of Principal Interactions by District

Type of Interaction	District			
	M	H	R	J
Inferred	14	25	31	33
Explicit	42	38	118	113
Structured	39	42	111	86
Adhoc	17	21	38	60
Two-way	32	36	112	96
One-way	24	27	37	50
Totals	56	63	149	146

TABLE 3

Number of Interactions Reported by Respondents

	District			
Respondent	*M*	*H*	*R*	*J*
District Administrators				
1.01	15	9	9	21
1.02	6	—	23	11
1.03	1	3	12	18
Total	22	12	44	50
Average	7.3	6.0	14.6	16.6
Principals				
2.01	10	8	25	10
2.02	6	13	10	7
2.03	11	14	17	8
2.04	7	2	14	13
2.05	—	6	19	18
2.06	—	8	20	18
Total	34	51	105	96
Average	8.5	8.3	17.5	16.0
Overall district average	8.0	8.0	16.5	16.2

When interactions are analyzed by individual, respondents in districts R and J averaged twice as many per person as their counterparts in districts M and H (Table 3). Every respondent in districts R and J reported many interactions. However, for one district administrator in district H and for two principals in district M we could find no reported interactions at all.

An issue is described as "salient" when district administrators and principals agree on its importance and are positive about it. Table 4 gives an analysis of the range and salience of instructionally focussed issues to see if the sample districts had three of Little's (1982) normative conditions for collegiality and continuous improvement:

1. the range of instructional issues discussed among practitioners;
2. the salience of these issues both within and between respondent groups;
3. the consistency of opinion expressed with respect to the issues both within and between respondent groups.

TABLE 4

Range and Salience of Issues:
Response Consistency by District and Respondent

Issues	Administrator Consistency Rating							
	M		H		R		J	
	DA	P	DA	P	DA	P	DA	P
Monitoring issues								
test score	+	X	X	S	++	++	++	++
school assessment	+	N	X	N	++	++	++	++
school goals	N	N	—	N	++	++	++	+
district goals	N	X	S	N	+	+	++	++
Evaluation issues								
principals	N	N	N	+	++	+	+	+
programs	N	N	N	N	++	++	++	++
teachers	+	X	N	N	+	+	++	+
report cards	N	N	N	+	+	N	N	N
Decision-making issues								
text selection	+	++	+	++	++	++	++	++
d-m process	+	—	+	+	++	++	++	++
staffing	N	S	++	+	++	++	+	+
principal input	++	S	S	S	++	++	++	++
improvement programs	+	N	N	N	+	++	++	++
test selection	N	N	--	S	++	++	+	+
pro-d topics	N	N	N	N	+	++	++	++
principal transfers	+	+	N	N	N	N	N	N
Relationship issues								
communications	++	—	—	S	+	++	++	++
P/P relations	N	X	N	N	+	++	+	++
DA support	N	N	N	N	+	++	++	++
principal autonomy	+	—	N	N	++	++	N	+
DA leadership style	+	—	N	+	++	++	++	+
DA/P relations	+	—	N	S	+	++	++	++
attitude to change	N	S	--	—	++	++	++	++
effects of restraint	N	S	N	N	N	N	+	N

Key: **++/--** two thirds or more of the respondents commented positively/negatively
      +/— one to two thirds of the respondents commented positively/negatively
      N not mentioned by two thirds or more of the respondents
      S split opinion among the respondents
      X specifically mentioned by one third or more of the respondents that the issue is not discussed

High-performing districts differed from low-performing districts on all three of these conditions. Of the 24 issues extracted from the Master Interaction Charts, respondents in district R reported interactions in connection with all but two: principal transfers and budgetary restraint. Similarly, district J respondents reported interactions on all issues except two: principal transfers and report card development.

District M respondents did not mention interactions associated with 8 of the 24 issues: district goal review, principal evaluation, program evaluation, report card development, test selection, professional development, collegial contact among principals, and district support for school initiatives. Of these, district goal review and principal collegiality were specifically not discussed.

I can't think of what [the district's goals] would be. I don't think they have ever been stated, unless they were in the Superintendent's message in September. (M2.02)

We are not a collegial district at any level. . . . Nobody trusts anybody else, and it goes all the way from bottom to top. (M2.01)

(Quotations are broadly representative of respondents' commentary in a district. Each quotation identifies the district and speaker in parentheses.)

Administrators in district H did not mention interactions associated with 10 issues: school assessment, program evaluation, teacher evaluation and report writing, instructional improvement programs, professional development, principal transfers, principal collegiality, district support for school initiatives, principal autonomy, and the effects of restraint. One district administrator stated explicitly that school improvement was *not* discussed: "Self-improvement has not been a focus in the district" (H.1.03).

As Table 4 shows, district R administrators agreed on 16 of the 24 issues. That is, at least two-thirds of respondents in each group were positive in discussion of interactions about 16 issues. There was relatively close agreement (one-third of the respondents) about the remaining eight issues. There were no instances of split opinion in a respondent group.

Responses in district J were also remarkably consistent. There was agreement as to weighting and stance between administrator groups with respect to 18 of the 24 issues, and close agreement (within one-third) about the remaining six issues. As with district R, district J respondents reported a uniformly positive stance on the issues.

Districts M and H vary markedly from R and J with respect to salience of issues. District M respondents were in agreement about only one issue—principal transfers. Opinion is divided between district administrators (positive) and principals (negative) on several important issues. District H is characterized by a similarly divided response pattern. Respondent groups agreed positively on only one issue: the decision-making process. District administrators referred specifically to test score analysis and school assessment as issues not discussed in the district. Their opinion was split on the issues of staffing and district goal review. Since there were only two respondents in this group, divisiveness must begin at the top. Principals were divided on the issues of test score analysis, principal input, test selection, communication, and collegial relations between administrators.

TABLE 5

Opportunities for Interaction:
Mechanisms and Efficacy

| | Administrator Efficacy Rating | | | | | | | |
| | M | | H | | R | | J | |
Mechanism	DA	P	DA	P	DA	P	DA	P
Structured								
meetings	—	S	—	+	++	+	++	++
committees	++	S	N	+	++	+	++	++
DA formal visits	N	N	N	N	++	++	++	++
retreats	N	N	N	N	N	N	+	N
workshops	N	N	N	N	+	++	+	++
evaluation team	N	N	X	—	N	+	++	++
P formal visits	N	N	N	+*	N	N	N	N
Ad hoc								
DA informal visits	N	N	N	+	++	+	++	++
other DA informal	++	+	++	++	++	++	++	++
P informal visits	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
other P informal	N	N	N	+	+#	++	+#	++

Key: ++ two thirds of the respondents commented positively
+ one to two thirds of the respondents commented positively
N not mentioned by two thirds or more of the respondents
— one to two thirds of the respondents commented negatively
S split opinion among the respondents
X specifically mentioned by one third or more of the respondents that the mechanism is not in place
+* one third of the principals reported visiting schools, but only in other districts
+# one third of the district administrators reported informal contacts between principals

Interaction Mechanisms

The range of mechanisms or venues available to district administrators and principals for interaction purposes characteristic of districts in the sample, together with administrator attitudes about the efficacy of these mechanisms, appears in Table 5. High- and low- performing districts differ in responses about the range and efficacy of mechanisms. Administrators in districts R and J reported that 8 of 11 mechanisms were used and useful. In district R all respondents strongly affirmed district administrators' formal visits to schools, and their informal contacts with principals. Respondent groups in district J agreed strongly about the efficacy of six mechanisms: meetings, committees, district administrator formal visits to schools, evaluation team visits, and other district administrator informal contacts with principals.

Excerpts from the transcripts show not only the range of issues and mechanisms available to respondents, but also evidence of collegial norms.

The fact that no interview questions called for these comments strengthens their credibility as descriptions of characteristic district practice.

I think we work at [problems] with [principals] as colleagues. The principals will call one or the other without hesitation; they know they won't be judged badly if they call for help. (R1.02)

The administrators talk together a lot and many have taken courses together, so they have a common language. We support one another's efforts; we share a lot. (J2.03)

The response pattern in district M is markedly different. Respondents in district M reported positive support for only 1 of the 11 interaction mechanisms—informal district administrator contacts. The one issue in district M that prompted considerable discussion among principals was a proposed new policy concerning principal transfers. The interactions generated by this issue illustrate what can be labelled "territoriality" or the "dark side" of collegiality.

The principals have a strong sense of territory—"this is my school." Therefore, although they do not always agree with one another, there is an unwritten law that we hang together at meetings with district staff. We agree on a position and hold it in meetings with central office. (M2.01)

Principals describe themselves as engaged in a continuous struggle for control of the schools. Similarly, the one mechanism for interaction that prevails in district M—one-on-one negotiation—contributes to a destructive use of "end runs" and a general lack of commitment to district decisions.

There seems to be, to almost every decision made, one or more schools who have a reason for not abiding by the decision that everyone else has to live by. There are always concessions, amendments, a reluctance to say, "We've heard everyone, considered all the information, this is the decision, now do it." (M2.04)

Divisiveness among this district's respondents is unsurprising considering comments of the following sort (the interviewers in the original study, Coleman and LaRocque, noted that such comments were frequently heard in district M):

I don't think we have an obligation to a C-minus teacher just because my colleague down the road is not screening properly. (M2.02)

Similarly, in district H both respondent groups were strongly positive only about informal district administrator contacts. Both respondent groups in district H describe administrative meetings as less interactive than desired.

Sometimes things are floated out and reaction is gauged. After-the-fact testing of ideas. Some of the process of consultation is window-dressing. (H2.05)

The dark side of collegiality identified in district M also surfaces in district H, although the divisiveness is here less pronounced.

Most of the time when we meet we don't come to a consensus. I guess we all have our territory to protect, and we seem to be concerned just with our territory when we meet. (H2.03)

One-on-one negotiation, rather than the more difficult group consensus-building carried on in high-performing districts, characterizes district H, as it does district M.

Recurring Themes and Patterns

The major theme in from the data is the remarkable similarity in district interaction patterns *within* the two performance groups, as compared to the clear distinctions *between* them.

The high-performing districts R and J operate under a "monitored auton-omy" model (Cuban, 1984; Coleman & LaRocque, 1990). District adminis-trators are highly visible leaders.

We see a lot of [the District Administrators] in spite of the distance. I appreciate their presence; they are on top of things. They do get around and their follow-up is good. (J2.06)

[The Superintendent] spends a lot of time out in the schools rather than in his office. I think a lot of people appreciate that. (R2.03)

District administrator expectations of principals with respect to outcomes are clear and demanding. They ensure compliance with district objectives through well-defined monitoring practices. Commitment to these objectives is achieved through consultative decision making on substantive issues. Most principals in these districts consider their input meaningful.

I think we really are consulted. That is, I think we really are consulted although the direction has been determined by the Superintendent. (R2.05)

However, principals are also aware that if they do not work collaboratively to achieve consensus among themselves to produce workable process documents, a decision will be imposed. In this way, principals in districts R and J are given both the opportunity and the impetus to interact collegially.

A second interaction pattern characterizing the two high-performing districts is the tendency to a district-regarding perspective among principals.

[W]e would have to talk about [teacher transfers] with the Superintendent or at least with the Supervisor of Instruction and then look at the needs of the whole district, not just this school. (R2.04)

This tendency is reminiscent of LaRocque's (1983) district-level description of school-regarding teachers, who share a strong concern for the welfare of the whole school as well as for their own classroom.

The district-regarding perspective characteristic of districts R and J may be generated partly by district administrators' coaching/modelling leadership style, which encourages collaboration and sharing of ideas.

You're spread pretty thin [but] one of the priorities in my estimation is helping schools get off the ground with this effectiveness stuff. I don't just tell people things anymore, I coach them, provide them with feedback. I help them do what they set out to do. (J1.03)

Respondents in these districts respectfully acknowledge the work of their colleagues.

Our view of the school staffs by and large is that they are good people. . . . We have good teachers . . . good principals. We are impressed by their hard work. (R1.01)

A third common thread in the interaction patterns of high-performing districts is shared responsibility for initiating improvement programs. In-service programs for teachers are largely school-based, with district staff providing support.

We allow the principals a lot of autonomy, at the same time trying to give them as much support as possible. (R1.03)

You are encouraged to try things, and if an idea works, others will take it up. (J2.07)

Norms of continuous improvement (Little, 1982) are evident not only in their monitoring practices but also in the frequent discussions of instruction.

Administrators in districts R and J also believe in the efficacy of various interaction mechanisms available to them. They generally describe administrative meetings as moving toward a better balance between an informational type of agenda and a more participatory, two-way format. They see committee work as influential in developing procedures and sometimes policies. Involvement in decision making is described as high at all levels. Throughout the interview data, respondents in districts R and J refer frequently to their satisfying professional relationships with colleagues and to their belief that collaborative work being done in their respective districts is contributing to continual improvement in educational programs.

The patterns of interaction in low-performing districts M and H similarly indicate a top-down information-giving leadership model. Decision making on substantive issues is centralized at district level with little monitoring of decision implementation in schools.

(Probe re involvement of principals) Bad. Previously all school-related matters were taken to Administrative Meetings and decided there. That's no longer the case—it sometimes happens, but not always like it used to. (M2.04)

Because the district doesn't insist on conformity, commitment to decisions is further weakened. A district propensity for one-on-one negotiation rather than development of group consensus encourages principals to circumvent or to ignore district decisions.

Although central office administrators in districts M and H express concern for instructional issues, they are not particularly visible in the schools and are generally perceived as managers rather than as instructional leaders. There is virtually no mention of collegial contact in these districts. Principals tend to view their colleagues as allies of convenience in the struggle to maintain control over their schools rather than as partners in the educative process. Remarks alluding to the work of other principals are more often disparaging than respectful.

Finally, there is little evidence in the low-performing districts that instructional change, other than that mandated by the Ministry, is a priority. In fact, mistrust of and resistance to change is a more characteristic.

In this district we are very conservative and reluctant to change, to do anything differently from the way it's been done in the past. (M2.02)

A sense of powerlessness is evident at the central office level and appears throughout the district.

Morale is a real problem—there is a lot of uneasiness and anxiety. (M1.01)

Summary of Findings on Interactions

The high-performing districts R and J can be described as operating under a monitored autonomy model (Cuban, 1984). District administrators ensured compliance with district objectives through well-defined monitoring practices. Commitment to these objectives was achieved through a consultative approach to decision making on substantive issues and procedures. Principals were given both the opportunity and the impetus to interact collegially.

A second interaction pattern characterizing the two high-performing districts was a "district-regarding" perspective among principals. This was generated both by a strong district presence and by expectations of the principals communicated by district administrators. Principals in these districts have apparently agreed to subordinate their particular schools' priorities from time to time to meet the district's needs. They seek opportunities to create networks with other schools to stimulate staff development and to develop better articulation between system levels. Respondents in these districts respectfully acknowledged their colleagues' work.

Administrators in R and J also shared a belief in the utility of various interaction mechanisms available to them. They thought administrative meetings were participatory, committee work influential in developing procedures and policies, and involvement in decision making high at all levels. Respondents refer frequently to their satisfying professional relationships with colleagues. Principals link collegial interaction patterns amongst administrators, administrator efficacy, and district instructional effectiveness.

The low-performing districts M and H had a top-down informational leadership model, with decision making on substantive issues centralized at the district level. Commitment to decisions was weakened in these districts by the lack of district press to conform. The only mention of collegial contact was where principals believed they must present a united front against any district policy they thought might threaten their "turf." Remarks alluding to other principals' work were more often disparaging than respectful.

District Leadership

The data revealed that the district superintendent's leadership style had an important influence on interaction patterns between administrators. Several factors partly under control of the superintendent either constrain or promote collegial practices among principals. We now consider relationships between administrators from a number of perspectives, including characteristics of educational organizations and leadership styles.

Constraints on the development of collegial practices among school administrators may lie in school systems that are loosely coupled (Weick, 1976) or institutionalized (Rowan, 1981). Since collegiality is an instructional notion, in loosely-coupled systems one would expect relatively infrequent interactions between principals for instructional purposes. Yet superintendents in districts R and J emerged as highly visible instructional leaders who managed to spend a relatively large portion of their time on collaborative activities with principals aimed at improving school and district performance. As a result, districts R and J display simultaneous loose-tight characteristics (Peters & Waterman, 1982), as indicated by their decentralized decision-making models, and by the very high degree of agreement between principals on significant improvement issues.

Thoughtful principals and superintendents adopt leadership styles helpful in creating consensus. Blase (1987) examined effective school leadership from the teachers' standpoint. Teachers identified nine leadership dimensions associated with task-related competencies: accessibility, consistency, knowledge/expertise, clear and reasonable expectations, decisiveness, goals/direction, follow-through, time management, and problem-solving orientation. These factors were closely intertwined with five consideration-related qualities: support in confrontations/ conflict, participation/consultation, fairness/equitability, recognition, and willingness to delegate authority. Blase

found these "leadership factors affected teacher motivation, involvement, and morale and, in general, enhanced the possibility of productive interactions between teachers" (1987, p. 606). Superintendents in districts R and J act similarly by providing opportunities and establishing expectations for productive interaction.

SUMMARY

In high-performing districts there is a rich variety of collegial activity, much of it aimed at instructional improvement and at generating the shared working knowledge which is a critical element in a productive district ethos (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990). These conditions do not exist in the comparison districts. High levels of principal collegiality, of productive ethos, and of district performance go together. Superintendents act in ways resembling effective principals—they create an "associative" climate at district level, in which "district-regarding" principals seek the greater good, rather than protect their own turf. High-performing districts differ sharply from less successful districts with respect to principal collegiality.

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