

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL CULTURE FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP*

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1 Introduction

In this paper, I review pertinent traits and skills of leaders, perspectives of leadership from several theorists, and focus on multiple perspectives and the significance of instructional leadership. In the conclusion, the importance of culture is discussed as a variable that is prevalent in multiple perspectives of instructional leadership as well as the link of culture in essential traits and skills of leaders. Effective leadership consistently emerges as a variable that is critical to effective schools. Recent data released from the Southern Regional Board of Educators (SREB) suggest that the school leader impacts as much as twenty percent of the achievement levels of students in schools. The challenge for schools to foster the development of highly educated and versatile students is greater now than ever before. Graham (1991, Nov.) suggested that it is no longer acceptable to allow children to slide through academically weak curricular. States have high accountability measures which set forth criteria for student outcomes that in many instances exceed competencies aligned with *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. The present accountability era focuses on what students can do, not only what has been taught in classrooms. Schools that fail to meet these requirements in many instances face dire consequences including but not limited to closures and reduction in funding.

Driven by the serious consequences of school accountability, school improvement is the focal point in the community of professional educators. Numerous programs and strategies for improving schools have been implemented over the years. While they differ in many respects, one common theme is the importance of

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the school leader. The principal (school leader,) it is said, is the critical component of school improvement (Rakiz & Swanson, 1996).

2 Skills & Traits of Effective Leaders

In 1948, Stodgill categorized personal factors associated with effective leadership into five general categories: capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, and status. His categorization was based on 124 trait studies conducted between 1904 and 1947. Stodgill (1948) provided descriptors of the five categorizations. Capacity is conceptualized as intelligence, alertness, verbal facility, and originality in judgment; achievement is defined as scholarship, knowledge, and athletic accomplishments. Participation is described as activity, sociability, cooperation, adaptability, and humor. The descriptors of status are socioeconomic position and popularity.

In the era of Stodgill's earlier work, the focus in leadership was scientific management and the rational systems' perspective. The key principles of the rational approach were on the organization. Goals, division of labor, specialization, formalization, and hierarchy of authority, narrow span on control, rationality, and formal organizations were guiding principles of this era (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). An obvious assumption for staff members in K-12 schools is that school staff members desire and have always desired such traits as capacity, achievement, most of the descriptors associated with responsibility and possibly status of their leaders. However, it is noteworthy that such a trait as participation was prevalent in a time period when so much emphasis in leadership theory was placed on the goals of the organization. Participation tends to be aligned with meeting the needs of individuals in the organization. For application in schools, some of the descriptors of participation – activity, adaptability, and humor definitely acknowledge the importance of relationship building to occur with school leaders and staff members. The relationship building and the addressing the needs of staff member are common traits currently emphasized as essential for the effectiveness of leaders.

The second generation of traits for leaders was developed by Stodgill in 1970 after his observations of 163 new trait studies. According to Hoy & Miskel (2008), these are a more consistent set of findings. The traits cited in 1970 include: a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals, venturousness and originality in problems solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other's behavior, and capacity to structure interaction systems to the purpose at hand. Similar concepts and descriptors from the 1948 perspective are prevalent and obvious in the 1970 traits like responsibility, capacity –vigor and pursuit of goals, and achievement is embedded in some of the concepts. Like the 1948 categorization, there is the link to relationship building and addressing the needs of staff members. The particular links are in the descriptors of drive to exercise initiative in social situations, ability to influence other's behavior, and the willingness to tolerate frustration and delay.

Yulk's 2002 perspective of leadership traits are categorized as personality and motivational. The personality traits are self-confidence, stress tolerance, emotional maturity, integrity, and extroversion. Task and interpersonal needs, achievement orientation, power needs, expectations, and self-efficacy are the motivational traits. Individuals with self-confidence are more likely to set high goals; individuals who are stress-tolerance leaders are good decision makers and provide direction to subordinates; emotionally mature leaders have an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and tend to be oriented toward self improvement; individuals with integrity are honest, ethical, and trustworthy; and individuals who exhibit extroversion are comfortable in groups. Like Stodgill's 1948 and 1970 categorizations of leadership traits (specifically the personality traits), the emphases on relationship building of leaders with employees surface in Yulk's trait descriptions- specifically, integrity and extroversion. Yulk suggested that integrity is essential for building and retaining loyalty as well as obtaining cooperation from others.

The motivational traits identified by Yulk (2002) are energetic forces that initiate work-related behavior. According to Hoy & Miskel (2008), highly motivated leaders have high expectations and are goal-driven, but there is a tendency for these individuals to be more effective. Yulk (2002) suggested that effective leaders have a high drive for tasks, and they are concern for people (task and interpersonal needs). Achievement

needs refer to a need to achieve and a desire to excel. Individuals who are effective at leadership also have a greater drive for power needs; these individuals will seek positions of authority and influence others. High expectations are desired as the individual's belief in his or her ability to do the job with a valued outcome. Self-efficacy is characterized as one's ability to carry out an organized course of action (Bass & Riggo, 2006).

It is noteworthy that in the three discussed categorizations of skills and traits that there is at minimum one characteristic linked to the leader's ability to exhibit interpersonal relationships with staff members; this is so vital in the development of positive climates particularly in schools where staff members feel that they are valued. Obviously, teacher productivity is best in positive school cultures and climates, which ultimately leads to improved student achievement.

3 Perspectives of Leadership

According to Marzano & Colleagues (2005), many leadership perspectives and theories have guided school leaders. Burns (1978) defined leadership as:

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Including followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation – the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations-of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations. (p. 19)

Many of the perspectives and theories of leadership address characteristics and traits of effective leaders, and there are multiple categorizations of the multiple theories and perspectives of leadership. Hoy & Miskel (2008) presented three major categorizations of theories of leadership - transactional theory, transformational theory and contingency theory. The contingency perspective has five models. Instructional leadership, one of the models of contingency is discussed thoroughly in this paper as it is aligned with a core responsibility for school leaders in this era.

Both transformational and transactional leadership are derived from Burn's perspective of leadership. Transactional leadership is trading one thing for another, and transformational is more focused on change. Hoy & Miskel (2008) suggested that there are three components of transactional leadership – contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception. Simplistically, the contingent reward principle in action is a leadership behavior that gives followers things desired as followers give things desired to the school leader. A leader that actively monitors performance and takes corrective actions when necessary is a leader that is utilizing active management-by-exception. When the passive management-by-exception principle is used, the leader intervenes at the point when the problem is serious.

According to Hoy & Miskel (2008), transformational leadership is an expansion of transactional leadership. It goes beyond exchanges and agreements. There are four I's that comprise transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulations, and individualized consideration. Through the idealized influence, a leader builds respect and trust in followers for the different ways in which individuals perform work. Inspirational motivation is very important because the expectations of group members are changed so that individuals believe that the problems of the organization can be solved. Inspirational motivation exhibited by leaders challenge followers and plays a role in the central role of the leader in developing a vision. Leaders that exhibit intellectual stimulation stimulate creativity in followers; old assumptions, traditions, and beliefs are challenged. Attending to the needs linked to achievement and growth is accomplished through the individualized consideration. Higher levels of potential are achieved when leaders give individualized consideration.

4 Instructional Leadership (Contingency)

The general model of the contingency theory, which was very popular from 1970 into the 1980s addresses four sets of concepts – traits and skills of leaders, characteristics of situations, the behaviors of leaders and leader effectiveness. There are two hypotheses of the contingency approaches. First, characteristics of situations and

traits and skills of leaders combine to impact leadership behavior. Secondly, the effectiveness of the leader is directly impacted by situational factors. Hoy & Miskel (2008) suggested that contingency approaches tend to specify situational variables that moderate the relationship among leader behaviors, traits, and performance criteria. There are five contingency models; they are: instructional leadership, which is specific to educational organizations, distributed or shared that applies to schools, and the least preferred co-worker, substitutes for leadership and path goal theories that apply to a wide range of organizations. Instructional leadership is critical for schools in this era because of its link to performances of students.

As previously alluded to, instructional leadership is gaining more and more attention as linked to accountability and school improvement. Hoy & Miskel (2008) suggested that instructional leadership evolved from “simple heroic conception to rather complex contingency models of leadership.” Obviously, the roles of the principal (school leader) become critical in exhibiting dispositions associated with instructional leadership for school improvement in this era of accountability. An article published by e-Lead suggested that instructional leadership roles are those “actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning.” Principals who are instructional leaders become instructional leaders by making instructional quality the number one priority and incorporate this principle in their visions. The school leader must spend time redefining the role of school leadership as the instructional leader becoming the primary learner striving for Excellency. It becomes the responsibility of the school leader to define goals, work with teachers, provide authentic professional development and other resources for teachers and staff, and create new learning opportunities for staff members. McEwan (2002) suggested that successful instructional leaders attribute their success to having visions, having the knowledge base, are willing to take risks, are willing to put in long hours, are willing to change and grow constantly, thrive on change and ambiguity, and can empower others. According to Hoy & Miskel (2008), instructional leaders make improvements in schools using their personalities, motivation for success, and administrative skills. In both the 1948 and 1970 perspectives of Stogdill, there are skills and traits that appear to be obviously necessary for effective Instructional Leadership.

McEwan (2002) suggested that Sergiovanni proposed one of the first models of instructional leadership. Sergiovanni identified leadership forces – technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural. He suggested that technical forces are aligned with the traditional practices of management. These topics include planning, leadership theory, time management, and organizational developments, which are topics generally covered in administrative theory courses. The human forces are the interpersonal components of instructional leadership aligned with communicating, motivating, and facilitating roles of the principal. The educational aspects are the instructional roles of the school leader; that is, teaching, learning, and implementing curricula. The symbolic and cultural forces are closely aligned; they combine the leader’s ability to become the symbol of what is important (symbolic) while articulating beliefs and values consistently (culture).

The role of culture is indirectly linked to the 1982 perspective of instructional leadership proposed by Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee in their inclusion of climate (from the assumption that culture is inclusive of climate.) The model makes a link from school climate to teacher behavior, which ultimately impacts student learning. Obviously, there will be a great performance level of teachers in schools when a positive climate is prevalent. The factors that impact climates of schools are the external environmental characteristics; which will influence/shape the behaviors of the leaders. Ultimately, the behavior of the leader initiates change in schools – positive or negative.

In 1989, Smith & Andrews suggested that there were ten attributes essential for principals who display strong instructional leadership. The attributes are:

1. Places priority of curriculum and instruction issues;
2. Is dedicated to the goals of the school and school district;
3. Is able to rally and mobilize resources to accomplish the goals of the district and school;
4. Creates a climate of high expectations in the school, characterized by a tone of respect for teachers, students, parents, and the community;
5. Functions as a leader with direct involvement in instructional policy;
6. Continually monitors student progress toward school achievement and teacher effectiveness;

7. Demonstrates commitment to academic goals, shown by the ability to develop and articulate a clear vision or long-term goals for the school;
8. Effectively consults with others by involving the faculty and other groups in the school decision processes;
9. Effectively and efficiently mobilizes resources such as materials, time, and support to enable the school and its personnel to most effectively meet academic goals.
10. Recognize time as a scarce resource and creates order and discipline by minimizing factors that may disrupt the learning process.

Sergiovanni suggested that there are leadership forces for instructional leadership; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) presented the sequence of variable that impact each other leading to instructional leadership; and Smith & Andrews (1989) suggested that there are ten attributes of the leader that impact instructional leadership. In 2002, McEwan provided a different perspective of leadership suggesting that there are seven steps to effective instructional leadership. McEwan's perspectives have some bases in the work of Bennis (1989), Nanus, and Sergiovanni. The following are the seven steps proposed by McEwan (2002):

- Establish clear instructional goals;
- Be there for your staff;
- Create a school culture and climate conducive to learning;
- Communicate the vision and mission of your school;
- Set high expectations;
- Develop teacher leaders; and
- Maintain positive attitudes toward students, staff and parents.

McEwan (2002) also proposed an Instructional Leadership Behavioral Checklist that has thirty indicators; there are several indicators for each of the seven steps (See Appendix A for a copy of the Leadership Behavioral Checklist). The checklist can be used in a variety of ways: (1) to self-assess present instructional leadership levels; (2) to gain information from members of the faculty regarding perceptions of leadership; (3) to help the leader to set goals for improving instructional leadership, and (4) to help the leader evaluate progress toward meeting the goals of becoming a true instructional leader.

Zapeda (2003) viewed instructional leadership as instructional supervision aligned with classroom observations and professional development for teachers; she said that it is not a linear, lockstep process. Zapeda (2003) presented a model in which instructional supervision, staff development, and teacher evaluations are unified. In this cyclic process, clinical supervision (pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observations) is coupled with a differentiated form of supervision. The principle aligned with differentiated supervision is that teachers are granted autonomy in deciding which additional methods (in addition to the classroom observations) will be used to assess the teacher's performances.

As instructional leaders, school leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to work together on the basis of needs linked to what is observed by school leaders in classroom observations. Study groups, learning clusters, and mentoring are some of the informal mechanisms for teachers to work together. On the basis of observations, school leaders can identify strengths and weaknesses of teachers, which lead to which teachers can serve as mentors and which teachers need mentors. Opportunities should also be provided for formalized professional development (Zapeda, 2003).

The results of the professional development- both formal and informal should be evident in classrooms as school leaders continue the cyclic process of observing classrooms. The additional important principle is that the professional development opportunities that teachers engage in should lead to individual goal setting for teachers which leads to professional development. Schools leaders should engage in conducting teacher observations and professional development opportunities in a cyclic manner; which aligns with the roles of instructional leadership. In this model, the alignment of professional development with the needs of teachers in the classroom is critical.

5 Culture and Its Implications to Instructional Leadership

The leadership traits, skills, and perspectives discussed throughout this paper address competencies and dispositions necessary for leaders to be effective. Effective leadership in schools in this era is linked to the leader's ability to facilitate school improvement. The obvious core of school improvement is the role of the leader as an instructional leader; which is such a complex role. The teachers, staff members, students, and pertinent stakeholders have to "buy in" to the vision of the leader and to assist the leader in the implementation of school improvement. A variable that is directly related to school improvement and to the roles, skills, traits, and perspectives of the leader is the culture of the school.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) present several perspectives of culture. The 1968 Taiguiran Typology of Climate embraces culture as an integral part of climate. There are several theoretical perspectives that link culture and climate and/or demonstrate an interrelationship between culture and climate. Taiguri (1968) suggests that ecology (building characteristics, school size); mileu (student and teacher characteristics); social systems (social interactions); and culture (belief systems and values) are the four dimensions of climate. In addition to including belief systems and values of organizations/schools, Hoy and Miskel (2008) suggest that culture includes the norms, shared beliefs, rituals, and assumptions of organization.

An obvious goal for school leaders is for schools to develop and maintain strong cultures. Schools with strong cultures will have effective leadership with exceptional student performance. Deal (1985) identified eight attributes of effective schools with strong cultures:

1. Shared values and a consensus on "how we get things done around here."
2. The principal as a hero or heroine who embodies core values.
3. Distinctive rituals that embody widely shared beliefs.
4. Employees as situational heroes or heroines.
5. Rituals of acculturation and cultural renewal.
6. Significant rituals to celebrate and transform core values.
7. Balance between innovation and tradition and between autonomy and control.
8. Widespread participation in cultural rituals.

Selznick (1957) suggested that organizations have distinctive identities; on the basis of practical experiences, Connors (2003) discussed the importance of the leader in monitoring the cultures of schools and responding appropriately. She provides measures that can be used to help promote positivism in cultures of schools. Phillips and Wagner (2003) emphasize that schools have unique cultures; the link is consistently made to demonstrate the impact of culture on the direct influences of both student achievement and job satisfaction of educators. In Phillips and Wagner's 2003 publication, an extensive model is provided to assess culture. Plans of action should also be established to address areas of culture needing improvement.

There are thirteen possible characteristics identified by Phillips and Wagner for cultural improvement in schools – collegiality (the way adults treat each other;) efficacy (the feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions;) high expectations (excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated;) experimentation and entrepreneurship (new ideas abound and inventions occurs;) trust and confidence (participants believe in the leaders and each other;) tangible support (efforts at improvement are substantive with abundant resources made available by all;) appreciation and recognition improvement (people feel special and act special;) humor (caring is expressed through "kidding;") shared decision-making by all participants (anyone affected by a decision is involved in making and implementing the decision;) protect what is important (participant keep the vision and avoid trivial tasks;) traditions (celebrations;) open and honest communication (information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels;) and metaphors and stories (evidence of behavior being communicated and influenced by internal imagery.)

Monitoring, assessing, and improving school culture is one of the roles of school leaders must assume pertinent to school improvement. As an instructional leader, the leader has to "set high expectations" for teaching and learning which requires the leader to engage in many facilitative roles in the context of the environment of the school. The manner in which the leader facilitates the environment will be dependent on the leader's use of leadership perspectives and skills and traits discussed throughout the paper.

The leadership perspectives presented in the paper emphasize the role of the leader as “key” to school improvement; there is one perspective that challenges the assumption that one individual has to “make the change happen.” The distributive leadership model embraces the notion of leadership by teams, groups, and organizational factors as contributing factors to effectiveness in organizations. Therefore, multiple individuals are involved in the completion of leadership tasks. Proponents of distributed leadership suggest that this perspective is essential in schools because schools are so complex, and the tasks are so broad that many individuals must participate in accomplishing tasks (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

6 Conclusion

In the varying perspectives of instructional leadership, there is either a direct or indirect alignment to culture. In his perspective, Sergiovanni suggested that culture is a technical force of instructional leadership. Bossert and Colleagues (1982) suggested that culture (as a part of climate) directly impacts teacher behavior. Several of ten essential principal attributes of Smith and Andrews (1982) are inclusive of climate. McEwan’s (2002) step three addresses culture. The strong classroom connections of Zepeda’s (2003) model emphasize the importance of culture.

The link to culture in the varying models of instructional leadership obviously validates the importance of culture in school; particularly the link of culture to school improvement. The multiple perspectives of the skills and traits required for effective school leadership also validates the importance of leaders to develop and maintain relationships with staff members. The developing and maintaining of the positive relationships with staff is a critical component of developing and nurturing positivisms in cultures in schools. When there are cultures that are more positive, teacher performances will be better which will ultimately lead to improved student performances.

Culture is the distinctive identity of schools (Selznick (1957)); and it is definitely a critical component of school improvement. In this era accountability, school improvement is a focus for school leaders and often a measure of the effectiveness and success of schools and school leaders. As instructional leaders, it is so vital for leaders to monitor, assess, and implement changes, curricular, and programs on the bases of assessments. Culture is definitely a variable that requires monitoring, assessment, and the implementation of changes on the bases of the assessment and re-assessment. The skills, traits, and leadership perspectives embraced by leaders will influence the “how” monitoring and assessment occurs; however, these practices are essential for school improvement to occur and to be maintained.

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Appendix A: Instructional Leadership Behavioral Checklist

Step One:

1. Involves teachers in developing and implementing school instructional goals and objectives.
2. Incorporates the designated state and/or system curricula in the development of instructional programs.
3. Ensures that school and classroom activities are consistent with school instructional goals and objectives.
4. Evaluates progress toward instructional goals and objectives.
5. Works with teachers in improve the instructional program in their classrooms consistent with student needs.
6. Bases instructional program development on sound research and practice.
7. Applies appropriate formative procedures in evaluating the instructional programs.

Step Two:

1. Establishing inclusive classrooms that send the message that all students learn.
2. Providing extended learning opportunities for students who need them.
3. Observing and reinforcing positive teacher behaviors in the classroom that ensure an academically demanding climate and an orderly, well-managed classroom.
4. Sending messages to students in a variety of ways that they can succeed.
5. The establishment of policies on students progress relative to homework, grading, monitoring progress, remediation, reporting progress and retention/promotion.

Step Three:

1. Establishing high expectations for student achievement that are directly communicated to students, teacher, and parents.
2. Establishes clear rules and expectations for the use of time allocated to instruction and monitors the effective use of classroom time.
3. Establishes, implements, and evaluates with teachers and students (as appropriate) procedures and codes for handling and correcting discipline problems.

Step Four:

1. Provides for systematic two-way communication with staff regarding the ongoing objectives and goals of the school.
2. Establishes, supports, and implements activities that communicate to students the value and meaning of learning.
3. Develops and utilizes communication channels with parents for the purpose of setting for school objectives.

Step Five:

1. Assists teachers in setting and reaching personal and professional goals related to the improvement of school instruction and monitors the successful completion of these goals.
2. Makes regular classroom observations in all classrooms, both informal and formal.
3. Engages in preplanning of classroom observations.
4. Engages in post observation conferences that focus on the improvement of instruction.
5. Provides thorough, defensible, and insightful evaluations, making recommendations for personal and professional growth goals according to individual needs.
6. Engages in direct teaching in the classroom of his or her school.

Step Six:

1. Schedules, plans, or facilitates regular meetings of all types (planning, problem solving, decision making, or in-service training) among teachers to address instructional issues.
2. Provides opportunities for and training in collaboration, shared decision making, coaching, mentoring, curriculum development, and making presentations.
3. Provides motivation and resources for faculty members to engage in professional growth activities.

Step Seven:

1. Serves as an advocate of students and communicates with them regarding aspects of their school life.
2. Encourages open communication among staff members and maintain respect for differences of opinion.
3. Demonstrates concern and openness in the consideration of students, teacher and/or parent problems and participates in the resolution of such problems where appropriate.
4. Models appropriate human relations skills.
5. Develops and maintains high morale.
6. Systematically collects and responds to staff, student, and parent concerns.
7. Acknowledges appropriately the earned achievements of others.