



School Leadership

ECRA Literature Review

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- The 360° Assessment

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Introduction: School Leadership and the 360° Appraisal

Qualitative studies of effective schools are unanimous in their linking of school quality to the importance of school leadership roles and to the increasingly intricate and multifaceted responsibilities of the principalship (Hall, 2002). School leaders are drivers of school improvement, determiners of achievement focus, and leaders of the school community (Hall, 2002). School leaders set the tone for their buildings, provide leadership and direction for their schools' instructional programs and policies, sustain professional development for school personnel and themselves, and nurture personalized school environments for all students (Tirrozi, 2001). School leaders, in sum, set forth the conditions necessary for teachers to implement change, the integral component of the school improvement process (Zepeda, 2007).

Though the research literature on school leadership clearly conceives of the principal as a multi-tasker whose job responsibilities are much too complex to be evaluated by a single source, many school leader appraisal processes remain top-down appraisals from superintendents, with little feedback from other stakeholders (Habegger, 2008; Moore, 2009). Further complicating effective leadership appraisal is the fact that many of the benchmarks states and national organizations have developed for school principals take an overly narrow view of leadership, focusing primarily on task-oriented skills rather than the impact the principal's leadership has on school functions; this makes it difficult for school leaders to translate the appraisal into meaningful change (Knapp et al., 2003; Moore, 2009). Indeed, an investigation into the standards and leadership appraisal methods of 44 states found that nearly half of these states fail to give their school leaders clear feedback on ways to improve teaching and learning (Goldring et al., 2008).

Though it is clear that the impact of leadership on school outcomes is indirect—that is, leaders influence the factors that, in turn, influence the outcomes—feedback systems for school leadership have remained simplistic, unable to offer a comprehensive perspective on a school leader's ability to facilitate instructional improvement (Murphy et al., 2007). As a result, though multiple-source feedback systems have come into widespread use in many United States institutions over recent years, the field of education has only recently begun to consider this assessment method (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000; Moore, 2009).

What is 360 Appraisal?

Multiple-source feedback systems, commonly referred to as 360° appraisals, refer to the process of collecting multiple viewpoints in order to provide a detailed and accurate picture of individual performance. When 360° appraisal is applied to school leaders, *teams* of evaluators—supervisors (school board members, superintendents, etc.), colleagues (assistant superintendents, curriculum directors, etc.), school personnel (educators, office staff), and community members (parents, students, etc.)—are utilized to gain the input of all members of the school’s professional community, thereby offering an overall assessment of how a leader performs (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000, Santeusanio, 1998). Because all participants respond to the same survey items, many perspectives and viewpoints on the actions and impact of the school leader are provided.

Because 360° appraisal focuses on feedback and subsequent action to strengthen school leadership, the method is best used as a formative appraisal tool to help school leaders focus on personal and leadership development and target particular areas to lead to specific behavior change (Santeusanio, 1998; Edwards, 1996; Alimo-Metcalf, 1998; Moore, 2009). Furthermore, by comparing a leader’s perceptions with the appraisal of the school community, schools encourage enhanced self-awareness and performance improvement from all participants (Carlson, 1998). Secure, anonymous participation ensures leaders get honest feedback; in turn, it can create a culture where individuals become more ready to commit themselves to seeking and accepting feedback (Moore, 2009; Fletcher & Baldry, 2000; Santeusanio, 1998).

- The 360 assessment is a system that collects feedback from multiple viewpoints to provide a detailed and accurate picture of individual performance.

Developing the School Leadership 360° Appraisal

The School Leadership 360° Appraisal is a comprehensive appraisal program that utilizes a multi-rater approach to measure the effectiveness of school leadership behaviors known to positively influence student achievement and school culture. The instrument consists of 50 items that comprise six core domains. In this 360° evidenced-based assessment of leadership behaviors, each respondent rates the school leader's effectiveness on a six-point level of agreement scale, with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 6 representing “Strongly Agree.” The reference period is the current school year.

ECRA Group, Inc. completed a multi-step development process to construct its 360° appraisal. The initial step of any 360° Assessment is to define the competencies of a school leader and to identify the learning outcomes that are the target of the appraisal (Cottrell et al., 2007; Santeusano, 1998). Building upon its experience constructing program and talent instrumentation, ECRA first reviewed proprietary leadership appraisal instruments, including earlier work completed for the IPA. Next, several leadership appraisal tools were consulted, including the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and the Val-Ed Assessment program. An analysis of these standards and instruments led to the classification of six domains of leadership criteria, performance areas that reflect the balance most school leaders seek in their role as both instructional leader and manager-administrator (Jenkins, 2009). Many current leadership assessments vary greatly with respect to how much they focus on the managerial work of schools or on learning outcomes (Wallace Foundation, 2009); the 360° Assessment of School Leadership, however, emphasizes leadership behaviors representative of *effective* schools leaders.

This focus on best practices acknowledges the multifaceted role of the school leader while prioritizing the instructional focus and school guidance responsibilities that commonly define the 21st Century school leader.

Vision and Values—Items in this category measure the school leader’s demonstration of leadership skills, his/her modeling of school and community values and professional behaviors, and his/her ability to set clear goals and directions for school improvement.

Instructional Focus—Items in this category measure the school leader’s role in the leadership, management, and appraisal of curriculum and instruction.

Professional Development—Items in this category measure the school leader’s role in enhancing the professional skills of school personnel, including the school leader him/herself.

Collaboration—Items in this category measure the school leader’s role in and the school leader’s ability, and to involve and inspire stakeholders in the school’s vision and improvement plan.

Culture and Communication—Items in this category measure the school leader’s ability to uphold the mission and vision of the school through the formation of positive relationships with faculty, staff, students, and community with stakeholders.

Management—Items in this category measure the school leader’s efforts to plan, manage, and supervise school operations in order to achieve instructional goals.

The following sections review the research literature supporting the inclusion of the six domains.

Vision and Values

School leadership has been identified as a significant driver of high-performing schools (Beck & Murphy, 1996). According to Murphy et al.(2007c), school leadership is defined by purpose: leaders set goals and focus their duties on reaching them (Murphy et al., 2007c). An integral component of this demonstration of leadership is the development of a vision, because the vision is a representation of the beliefs and ideals the organization embraces about learning, teaching, and relationships (Zepeda, 2007). Thereafter, effective leaders keep the school's vision, mission, and goals at the forefront of school personnel's attention and at the center of all the work the school does (Marzano et al., 2005); the leader must manage change in ways that ensure the school successfully realizes its established vision (Hall, 2002). Critical functions of the principal therefore include developing the methods by which the vision is carried out, mentoring in-school and external leaders, representing the school in the community, managing human resources and recruiting staff, and encouraging professional development (Portin et al., 2003). Goal setting and strong management of the improvement process allows principals to establish conditions that support teachers and that help students succeed (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

The research literature also indicates that interpersonal skills are intertwined with impactful leadership. According to Ramsey (2005), interpersonal relationships are the heart of an organization's culture that shapes everyone expectations and behaviors. School leaders who successfully promote leadership build and maintain trust, communicate more openly, build commitment and support for change (Short & Greer, 1997; Brewer, 2001). They demonstrate personal interest in staff and make themselves available to them (Marzano et al., 2005). Indeed, effective school leaders maintain trust, spur motivation, give empowerment, and enhance collegiality (Brewer, 2001). Strong principals take responsibility for their own behaviors and share leadership responsibilities with colleagues (Blase & Blase, 2000). In short, school leaders need to be perceived as people, rather than as a symbol the personnel's concerns towards the institution, in order to affect change (Blase & Blase, 2000).

Instructional Focus

Inherent in the concept of school leadership is the notion that learning should be given top priority; every other task of the school leader revolves around the enhancement of learning (Jenkins, 2009). School leader positions are often synonymous with “instructional leader,” a description comprising those actions a principal or assistant principal takes to improve student learning, including setting achievement goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, and evaluating teachers (DuFour, 2002). Leaders in high-performing schools devote considerable energy to the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996); leaders ensure that goals are clearly defined and focused on student achievement. It is thus the leader’s duty to create powerful, equitable learning opportunities for both students and personnel (Murphy et al., 2007b; Knapp et al., 2003).

A school leader’s effect on student learning is largely mediated through teachers: by improving the quality of teaching in the school, the school leader improves student learning outcomes (Hall, 2002). Though an indirect influence, Leithwood & Riehl (2003) conclude that school leadership has significant effects on student learning: about a quarter of a school’s effect on learning is attributable to the quality of leadership. Specific instructional leadership behaviors that encourage improvement include making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, giving praise for effective teaching, and the distribution of needed instructional resources to teachers (Blase & Blase, 2000; Zepeda, 2007). Although not in the classroom, effective school leaders are knowledgeable about instruction and are heavily invested in their school’s instructional program, spending considerable work time on the instructional program and being personally involved with colleagues in crafting, implementing, and monitoring assessment systems at the classroom and school levels (Marzano et al., 2005; DuFour, 2002). Teachers participating in a research survey on school leadership reported that school leaders who practiced effective instructional leadership created cultures of collaboration, inquiry, lifelong learning, experimentation, and reflection consistent with positive visions and missions for learning (Blase & Blase, 2000).

In short, an effective leadership assessment must have a strong instructional focus, one that can identify and evaluate the behaviors most likely to drive better learning (Wallace Foundation, 2009).

Professional Development

Strongly linked to the school leader's instructional responsibilities is the professional growth of school personnel, including the school leader him/herself. It is the school leader's responsibility to develop people—to enable teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively, to offer intellectual support and stimulation to improve their work, and to provide models of practice and support (Leithwood et al., 2004). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2001) considers instructional leadership as synonymous with the leading of *learning communities*, in which staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, collaborate to solve problems, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn. Effective school leaders build these integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning (Goldring et al., 2006). They provide staff development opportunities that address emergent needs for teachers (Blase & Blase, 2000). Finally, they provide a common planning time for teachers to collaborate on ways of enhancing student achievement (DoFour & Eaker, 2006). Ultimately, learning communities are intentional and characterized by their commitment to continuous improvement, and to continuous learning for adults in order to maintain school success (DoFour & Eaker, 2006). Professional collaboration yields positive school culture and instructional improvement (Zepeda, 2007).

Collaboration

The literature on school leadership heavily emphasizes the principal's role in establishing and maintaining a positive school culture that promotes learning and engagement for students and adults (Goldring et al., 2006; Habegger, 2008). A positive culture is aligned to goals and objectives consistent with the mission and vision of the school (Zepeda, 2007). Indeed, according to Hall (2002), effective principals are those who have high expectations for students, as this belief about students' ability to learn is critical to school improvement. High-achieving schools are marked by a culture that empower and instill confidence in teaching, valued their students' and teachers, and sought the help of parents and community members to enhance the schools effectiveness—this creates a sense of belonging and providing a clear direction for all involved (Habegger, 2008).

Communication

Good principals understand that leadership involves influence; it requires interactions and relationships among people and achievement of goals via engagement, motivation, and collaboration (Murphy et al., 2007c). In order to manifest a positive school culture, principals need to be able to communicate his/her and the school's vision to others so as to engage them in the process of reshaping the organization and articulating essential beliefs regarding learning (Davies et al., 2005; Jenkins, 2009). Good communication skills help build consensus and buy-in among staff and faculty for the policies, practices, and supporting systems designed to achieve goals (Leithwood et al., 2004). Effective principals recognize that collaborative networks among educators were essential for successful teaching and learning: they modeled teamwork, provided time for collaborative work, and actively advocated sharing and peer observation (Blase & Blase, 2000). Additionally, leading a school with high expectations and academic achievement for all students requires robust connections to family and/or other people and institutions in the community that advance academic and social learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Management

Though the leadership roles of the principal have become more complex and multifaceted, the traditional conception of the principal as the manager of school operations is still important component of the position. The literature indicates that implementation of effective organizational processes influences student achievement (Davis et al., 2005). This includes *setting directions* for the organization (developing shared goals, monitoring organizational performance, and promoting effective communication) and *redesigning* the organization (creating a productive school culture, modifying organizational structures that undermine the work, and building collaborative processes) (Leithwood et al., 2004). According to Murphy (1999), these responsibilities are the “center of gravity” of the profession's role and tie the principal to the core role of learning. Ultimately, strong managerial skills allow all the other dimensions of schooling to work to improve student learning (Knapp et al., 2003).

Effective school leaders:

- Are knowledgeable about instruction and are heavily invested in their school's instructional program
- Encourage professional growth of school personnel
- Collaborate and communicate effectively with others to promote a positive school culture

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