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Co-principals: Characteristics of Dual Leadership Teams

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Co-principals: Characteristics of Dual Leadership Teams

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A co-principal leadership model has been suggested as one way to address the shortage of qualified educational leaders for our schools and the increased demands on those leaders. The purpose of this study is to describe co-principals in terms of their personal and professional characteristics; the types of leadership models implemented in the schools of the respondents; their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the co-principalship; the factors that contributed to the implementation of the model in their school districts; and their levels of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction. Data were collected from co-principals of public and private schools throughout the United Sates. A variety of schools, in terms of size and grade level, have adopted the co-principalship leadership model. Findings indicate strong job satisfaction.

Introduction

As a way to address the growing shortage of qualified candidates and the increasing demands imposed on those serving as principals, there has been a call for a "restructuring" of the role of the school principal (Barth, 1999; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Kennedy, 2002; Naso, 2005; Pierce & Fenwick, 2002). The co-principalship, a shared leadership model, has been suggested as one of the ways to restructure the principalship. Although the co-principalship model was first proposed over thirty years ago (Korba, 1982; Shockley & Smith, 1981; West, 1978), few school districts have actually adopted such a model.

Consequently information about the co-principalship as a leadership model and the characteristics of those who serve as co-principals is lacking (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004).

The purpose of this study of the co-principalship is to describe: (1) the personal and professional attributes of those currently serving as co-principals; (2) the leadership models followed in schools with co-principals; (3) the co-principals' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the model; and (4) the levels of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction experienced by co-principals. Knowing more about the individuals who serve as co-principals will provide insight in developing the theory of dual leadership. If distributed leadership theory, in the form of dual or shared leadership, is feasible, we need to more thoroughly understand the dynamics of the co-principalship.

Related Literature

Barth (1999) calls for a "community of leaders" where the principal and teachers share leadership as one means of replacing the traditional top-down leadership model found in most schools and as a means of distributing leadership in the school. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) argue that a distributed perspective of leadership allows practitioners to think beyond their solo practice. They claim, "school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, stretched over the school's social and situational contexts" (p. 23). According to Gronn (2002), distributing leadership in this way "invites consideration of an organization's overall capacity for leadership, rather than helping to perpetuate the idea of the power of one" (p. 668).

The idea of looking beyond the model of solo leadership has similarly been proposed and practiced in the business community. Heenan and Bennis (1999) argue, "Co-leadership is not a fuzzy-minded buzzword designed to make non-CEOs feel better about themselves and their workplaces . . . In this new organizational galaxy, power doesn't reside in a single person. Rather power and responsibility are dispersed . . ." (p. 5). O'Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler (2003) note that the trend in the business world during the past fifty years has been to "expand the capacity for leadership at the top of business organizations" (p. 252). They found examples of shared leadership models in over twenty-five major companies and argue that

coleadership occurs "when the challenges a corporation face are so complex that they require a set of skills too broad to be possessed by any one individual" (p. 254). In order for shared leadership to be successful, O'Toole et al. note that the individuals involved must "manage their egos: . . . Can they come onstage and take their bows together?" (p. 259).

In the last twenty-five years, the work of the principal has expanded to include increasingly complex demands in areas such as: responding to accountability measures, reporting frequently to state and federal agencies, providing instructional leadership, ensuring all children achieve at high standards, meeting needs of children with disabilities, maintaining safe school environments, responding to increased expectations for home-school communication, and serving as change agents and visionary leaders (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). For principals, meeting these growing demands has lead to increased role conflicts between their personal and professional lives, increased conflicts over role commitments, and decreased levels of job satisfaction (Eckman, 2004).

Some researchers in educational administration argue that the current workload of the principal may simply be too large for a single person (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Grubb et al., 2003; Kennedy, 2002). Pierce (2000) notes that the role of the "super principal" as the single individual who carries all the burdens of running and improving a school is the result of an organizational model with a traditional hierarchical arrangement. Her suggestion that two principals are now needed in schools, one for instructional leadership and one for administration or management, harkens back to the co-principal leadership model first suggested by West (1978). Finally, Gronn and Hamilton (2004) suggest that a "co-principalship is an important attempt to institutionalize a culture and a practice of distributed leadership" (p. 33).

Much of the published information that is available about co-principals is found in the popular press as personal accounts (Brown & Feltham, 1997; Cromwell, 2002; Flemming, 2003; Harrell, 1999; Helfand, 2003). In a few articles, information on the factors leading to the implementation of a co-principalship has been presented. Chirichello (2003, 2004) described a school district in Massachusetts where a superintendent initiated a co-principalship model. Naso (2005) explained that the decision to implement the co-principalship model in

his district followed two failed searches for a principal. Muffs and Schmitz (1999) described initiating a co-principalship model for their school in response to their own child rearing needs.

There have been some descriptive studies of the co-principalship. Grubb, Glessa, Tredway, and Stern (2003) studied seven schools that are using co-principalship teams in California, describing the model implemented and the district support needed to maintain the model. Court (2003) did a case study of a primary school in New Zealand where a three-person coprincipalship team had been implemented. Gronn (1999) presented an historical account of an Australian boarding school that appeared to have operated under a dual leadership model. Gronn and Hamilton (2004) described the distributed leadership practiced in a Catholic secondary school in Australia that used a co-principal model for several years. In addition, four dissertations from United States institutions describe the co-principalship. Groover (1989) presented a case study of the implementation of the co-principalship model in a school district in North Carolina. Dass (1995) described the first year of a co-principal team in a public high school in Oregon. Gilbreath's (2001) study of the co-principalship model at nineteen schools in California described the reasons for implementing the co-principalship and the operation of the model at the schools. Jameson (2002) completed a case study that focused on the strengths and weakness of the co-principalship model in a comprehensive high school in California. What is missing is a national cross-sectional study of the co-principal leadership model.

In my earlier work, I examined the relationship between gender, role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction for high school principals (Eckman, 2004). My findings indicated that both women and men have difficulty in balancing their personal and professional lives as high school principals. The increased role conflict that came with that struggle was associated with their job satisfaction; both groups experienced only moderate levels of job satisfaction as principals. I suggested at the time that in order to attract and retain qualified applicants for the principalship some of the calls for reforming and reinventing the principalship must be considered in terms of their ability to impact role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction.

It is within this context that I began my investigation of the co-principal leadership model. In an effort to understand the co-principalship, information was gathered regarding the personal and

professional attributes of those serving as co-principals, the types of co-principal models used, the reasons for implementing a co-principal model, and the perceptions of the co-principals of the strengths and weaknesses of the model. Additionally, information on the levels of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction experienced by these co-principals was examined.

Background to the Study

Job satisfaction is considered an important and desirable goal for organizations because satisfied workers perform at higher levels than those who are not satisfied (Chambers, 1999). Barth (1999) noted that the "greater participation in decision-making, the greater the productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment" (p. 134). There have been several studies of job satisfaction in the principalship; most of the studies include all administrators as a group, not differentiating among elementary or secondary school levels (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1983, Fishel & Pottker, 1979, Gross & Trask, 1976; Malone, Sharp, & Thompson, 2000). Bacharach and Mitchell (1983) in their study of principals and superintendents in New York State found that principals had low levels of job satisfaction because they felt overburdened by the role and its responsibilities. Malone, Sharp, and Thompson (2000), in their study of principals and superintendents in Indiana, found the respondents generally satisfied with their positions, though the principals indicated they would not remain in their jobs longer than ten years. In their synthesis of research findings on job satisfaction, Thompson, McNamara, and Hoyle (1997) found that the strongest predictors of decreased job satisfaction were role ambiguity and role conflict (p. 27).

Role conflict occurs as individuals attempt to balance their family and home roles with their professional work. Work-time studies indicate that both single-parent families and dual-parent families are working longer hours and feeling more conflicted (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Gerson & Jacobs, 2001). In their study of elementary and secondary school principals, Kochan, Spencer, and Mathews (2000) found that the primary issue facing principals was "managing their work and their time and coping with the stresses, tasks and responsibilities of the job" (p. 305). Other studies call for more reasonable parameters for the role of the principal, so that principals

can manage the demands of their professional and personal lives (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002; Hurley, 2001; Riehl & Byrd, 1997).

Role commitment is defined as how individuals prioritize between their work and their significant relationships (family or others). Burke (2002) noted that business organizations have only two types of employees—those who are work committed and those who are family committed. They do not have employees who are equally committed to both work and family. In studies of working women, Napholz (1995a) found that women who chose either their work first or their significant relationships first had a lower level of role conflict than did the women who committed to both work and significant relationships equally. A majority of the principals in Vadella and Willower's (1990) study indicated that their commitment to their role as principal had taken a toll on their families. Copland (2001) argued that there are such unreasonably high expectations for the role of principal that it has become increasingly difficult for principals to maintain a balance between the commitments of their professional and personal lives.

The personal and professional attributes of the principal contribute to and affect the role dimensions of role conflict and role commitment, which in turn contribute to or affect job satisfaction (see Figure 1). This conceptual framework is based on prior research about these constructs (Burke, 2002; Copland, 2001; Eckman, 2002, 2004; Gross & Trask, 1976; Kelly, 1997; Merrill & Pounder, 1999; Napholz, 1995a; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Schnedier, 1986). Thompson, McNamara, and Hoyle (1997) reported that as administrators experienced increases in role conflict, they reported decreases in overall job satisfaction. The principals in Vadella and Willower's (1990) study identified the excessive time demands of the principalship as one of the most dissatisfying aspects of their position, one that lead to conflicts between their personal and professional commitments. Though the results from previous studies were based on data from traditional principals and/or educational administrators as a group, one would expect job satisfaction for co-principals would be similarly related to their levels of role conflict and role commitment. This paper presents the results of a study examining the relationships of these constructs, as a means to further the understanding of the co-principal leadership model.

Methods and Procedures

Co-principals in public and private schools in the United States were surveyed during 2004–2005. The National Association of Secondary School Principals provided the names of fifty individuals who were serving as co-principals at that time. Using a snowball sampling technique and an internet search, an additional fifty-six co-principals were identified. Survey packets containing questions on personal and professional attributes and the co-principalship model, along with three established questionnaires measuring role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction, were mailed to the participants. Included in the mailing was an explanatory letter guaranteeing anonymity and a postage-paid self-addressed envelope.

The survey packet included previously tested instruments, which have been shown to be both reliable and valid, measuring: (1) role conflict (Nevill & Damico, 1974); (2) role commitment (Napholz, 1995); and (3) job satisfaction (Mendenhall, 1997, revised Schneider, 1984). The Role Conflict Questionnaire is a nine-item Likert-type scale used to delineate areas of role conflict where participants indicate their level of conflict from 1 (not at all conflicted) to 7 (extremely conflicted). This instrument included questions relating to time for privacy, social commitments, and others; concerns over household management, finances, and child raising; and personal issues over expectations for self, others, and feelings of guilt. Total scores were computed as the average of the responses; the higher scores in this instrument indicate a greater level of role conflict. This instrument has been used to measure individual well-being (Napholz, 1995; Riesch, 1981) and levels of role conflict for high school principals (Eckman, 2004). Cronbach alphas for this instrument have ranged from .70 to .73. For this study, the Cronbach alpha is .90.

The Role Commitment Question is a one-item measure developed by Napholz (1995) to subjectively identify how working women set priorities for work and significant relationships. Napholz offered three discrete choices to her participants: (1) significant relationships first, (2) work equals relationships, and (3) work first. When this question was used with high school principals no significant differences were found in their responses based on gender (Eckman, 2004).

The Job Satisfaction Survey (Mendenhall, 1977; Schneider, 1984) is a 27-item questionnaire that was tested and used to study

the job satisfaction of female and male educators. Modifications were made to the text of five questions to make them appropriate for principals (Eckman, 2002). This instrument included questions relating to community relations; work conditions; financial rewards; relationships with supervisors, coworkers, and pupils; school characteristics; and career opportunities. Participants used a 4-point Likert-type scale to indicate their degree of satisfaction from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Total scores were computed as the average of the responses; higher numbers indicated more job satisfaction. Rice and Schneider (1994) reported the overall scale reliability to be .90. The Cronbach alpha for this study was .90.

Demographic information regarding the personal attributes of age, martial status, gender, and gender of the co-principal, as well as the professional attributes of years of experience, career paths, aspirations, tenure as a co-principal, and type, size and location of the school was collected. Three open-ended questions were also included in the survey packet, enabling participants to address the strengths and weaknesses of the co-principal model, the methods used to distribute the role responsibilities, and the factors contributing to the development of the co-principal leadership model in their school setting. Data for this investigation were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v14.0 (SPSS, Inc., 2005).

Surveys were sent to 106 people identified as co-principals; 16 were returned but not completed. Forty-eight of the remaining 90 survey packets were completed for a return rate of 53%. This represented 31 co-principal teams from schools in California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Findings

Personal and Professional Characteristics

Of the 48 respondents, 46% percent were male and 54% were female. The ages of the respondents when they first became co-principals ranged from 25 to 63 years (M = 45.6, SD = 9.4). At the time of the study, the mean age for the respondents was 49.9 (SD = 9.3). The mean age of their co-principal was 48.6 (SD = 11.5). The majority of the respondents (90%) were married.

The number of years the respondents had been co-principals ranged from 1 to 15 years (*M* = 4.1, *SD* = 3.7). Fifty-six percent of the respondents had been principals prior to becoming a co-principal; the years of prior principal experience ranged from 1 to 32 (*M* = 8.3, *SD* = 7.9). Sixty-three percent had served as assistant or associate principal before becoming a co-principal, with a range from 1 to 9 years (*M* = 3.4, *SD* = 2.7). Ninety-six percent of the respondents had been teachers; their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 25 years (*M* = 11.9, *SD* = 6.9). The career paths of the respondents also included positions such as athletic coaches, department chairs, guidance counselors, and/or coordinators.

Seventy-three percent of the co-principals indicated an interest in serving as traditional principals. Thirty-three percent of the co-principals expressed aspirations for the position of superintendent. There were no significant differences in these responses based on gender. With regard to the gender of the co-principal, 35% were female teams and 17% were male teams. The remaining 48% of the respondents were members of male/female teams. Interestingly, 83% of the co-principal dyads had a female co-principal.

Description of the Schools

The co-principal leadership model was used in schools with a variety of grade level configurations. Thirty-eight percent of the co-principals were at high schools with grades 9–12; 8% were at schools with grades 7–12. Seventeen percent of the co-principals led middle schools with grades 6–8; 23% led elementary schools with grades K–6; and 15% were at elementary schools with grades K–8.
A majority of the respondents (71%) worked in traditional school settings; 29% worked in parochial, charter, or alternative schools. The co-principals were equally distributed in urban, small city, suburban, and rural schools.

The size of the student population in the schools led by the respondents ranged from 40 to 4,800 students: 15% had fewer than 200 students; 36% had between 201 and 750 students; 30% had between 751 to 2,000 students; and 19% had more than 2,000 students. The high schools were larger than the primary and middle schools. Seventy-three percent of the high schools had more than 750 students as compared to 28% of primary and middle schools with more than 750 students (*Chi-square* = 9.37, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.002).

Co-Principal Leadership Models

Full time co-principals. In the full time co-principal model, two principals serve simultaneously, sharing the position and the workload with equal authority and responsibility. Ninety-two percent of the respondents served in this type of co-principalship. This model was implemented in 16 high schools, 3 middle schools, and 6 primary schools (K–5 or K–8). In all but one case, the salaries for each of the full time co-principals were set at the same level as those of traditional principals in their school district. The one exception involved a co-principal team at a primary school where the salary range was established as the midpoint between the amounts paid a traditional principal and that paid to an assistant principal.

Part-time co-principals. In the part-time co-principal model, two principals share the position of principal on a half-time basis, sharing the days of the week they are present and responsible for the school. This time-sharing or part-time co-principal model was reported by 8% of the respondents and was implemented in three primary schools. One of these co-principal teams consisted of two previously retired principals who had returned to the workforce; they shared the principal position by dividing up the days of the week so that only one co-principal was in charge of the school on any given day. For the two other teams of part-time co-principals, the model was implemented to provide them flexibility to meet their familial responsibilities. In the part-time co-principal model, each co-principal received half of the salary a traditional principal in the district would receive. The part-time co-principals also shared the same office and phone.

Alternative models. Two additional models of co-principal teams were reported. In one instance a respondent noted that her primary school had a co-principal who worked full time and a co-principal who worked part-time. In the other case, three full-time co-principals initially led a middle school; eventually the model evolved to two full-time co-principals.

Division of job responsibilities. For all but three of the respondents, job responsibilities were determined by the co-principals themselves, based on their individual strengths and preferences. The co-principals did not describe dividing their job responsibilities on the basis of instructional or managerial roles. Rather, the participants explained they had deliberately chosen to experience all the

components of the principalship and collaborated with their co-principal on the division of the job responsibilities.

Two participants reported that the superintendent had determined their job responsibilities; one reported that it was the assistant superintendent who assigned job responsibilities to the co-principals. These respondents did not indicate if their responsibilities were divided in terms of instructional or managerial tasks.

Implementation of Co-Principal Leadership Models

Factors that influenced the decision by a superintendent and her/his school board to establish a co-principalship included difficulty in identifying and hiring skilled principals, the number of students at a single school, and the consolidation of several schools into one building. A large student population was the reason most frequently mentioned by the respondents for the implementation of the co-principalship. A respondent from a high school of over 2,000 students noted, "With the large numbers we have, if there were one principal we would at best maintain, with two we both feel we can move a school forward." According to several respondents, when smaller schools were consolidated, thus increasing student numbers, the desire to maintain accessibility to the principal became the main reason for implementing a co-principalship.

Several respondents reported that they had initiated the move to a coprincipalship because of community dissatisfaction with principals continuing to leave the district and/or because of a sudden vacancy in the principalship. According to these respondents, their districts saw the co-principal model as a way to provide leadership stability and to fill a leadership void. Two respondents noted that the co-principalship was initiated because their superintendents sought to replicate the model, which was being used in a neighboring school district. Only one co-principal noted that the decision to have a shared leadership model was based on a commitment to instruction: "we were asking our teachers to be trained and to become parts of teams. I contended that the only way to ask teachers to do that was to model with co-principals with equal authority."

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Co-Principalship

All but two of the participants provided responses to the question on the strengths and weaknesses of the co-principal

leadership model. A majority of the respondents named the ability to share decision making, problem solving, and the workload as important strengths of the co-principal model. Fourteen co-principals commented on the value of having collegial conversations and someone to "bounce ideas off." One co-principal noted, "I believe that we rarely make poor decisions because we are able to sound ideas off of one another and see things from multiple perspectives." Most of the respondents described the reduction of stress that came with shared decision making and with sharing the job demands; they described not being "lonely at the top." Many of the co-principals identified accessibility as a strength; there was always a principal at activities, in the building and available to parents, students, and teachers. Several respondents noted that a strength of the model was the potential for gender balance in the principal position.

The weakness that was identified most frequently was the perception of the co-principals that they were "being played off one another." Several co-principals described parents and teachers who would see one of the team members as "stricter" or would contact the co-principal with whom they were most comfortable. One respondent explained that she and her co-principal worked hard to overcome that challenge and to "always present a united front." Several of the participants commented that communicating with their co-principal was problematic. They recognized that communication was essential, but felt that it took time, a lot of meetings and required developing trust and shared values. Another noted, "I am not very happy as a co-principal. It is very difficult to have equitable responsibilities." Four respondents commented that a weakness of the co-principalship was that it required a "non-ego centered personality." They described the need to "leave one's ego at home." One participant declared, "I don't like to share being in charge." Other weaknesses mentioned by the participants were: sharing office space and phones, being misunderstood by other administrators in the district, concerns over compensation, feeling like an assistant principal, and having difficulty staying "fully connected."

Role Responsibilities

Role commitment was assessed by a single question (Napholz, 1995). Respondents were asked to prioritize their work and relationship roles by selecting one of three choices: (1) significant

relationships first, (2) work and relationships share priority, or (3) work first. Fifty-two percent of the respondents indicated they were committed to balancing work equally with relationships; 41% chose significant relationships over work commitments; and 7% chose work first.

The Role Conflict Questionnaire (Nevill & Damico, 1974) was used to quantify the magnitude of role conflict for co-principals. Participants were asked to indicate their level of role conflict based on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely conflicted). The total role conflict score for the co-principals averaged 3.2 (SD = 1.2) with scores ranging from 1.00 to 6.56. Many of the respondents noted that they experienced less role conflict because they had a partner. A co-principal explained, "With increased expectations to be instructional leaders, greater accountability and the size of my high school, this is a job that can't be done effectively by a standalone principal." Several respondents wrote that they were better able to balance their work because there was always a principal on site and accessible. One co-principal wrote, "It has enabled me to continue my career and yet have enough time for trips and family."

Job Satisfaction

The Job Satisfaction Survey (Mendenhall, 1977, revised Schneider, 1984) was a 27-item questionnaire. Participants used a 4-point Likert-type scale to indicate their degree of satisfaction with their job, from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). The co-principals in this study expressed strong satisfaction with their positions. On average the group scored 3.14 (SD = .39), with a range of scores from 2.27 to 3.89. A majority of the respondents wrote positively about their satisfaction with their experiences as co-principals. One stated, "Engaging in the co-principal model has been the most exciting part of my 34 year career. The plus of collegial conversation and joint problem solving is second only to the principals availability to teachers, students and parents."

Relationships between Role Conflict, Role Commitment and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction was examined by computing Pearson correlation coefficients. Job satisfaction was significantly and inversely related to role conflict for

the entire group of co-principals ($r = -.454$, $p < .01$). The lower the level of role conflict, the higher the level of job satisfaction. There were no associations between job satisfaction and the ages of the co-principals, or between the length of time served as a co-principal and job satisfaction.

Hierarchical linear regression was performed to further examine the relationship between role commitment, role conflict and job satisfaction. Age and gender accounted for 7.3% of the variance in job satisfaction. After adjusting for age and gender, role commitment explained 4% of the variance in job satisfaction. Role conflict explained an additional 13% of the variance, for a total of 24.3% of the variance in job satisfaction begin explained ($F = 3.21$, $df = 4, 44$, $p = 0.023$).

Following the work of Napholz (1995), co-principals who responded *significant relationships first* or *work first* to the Role Commitment question were combined as a group. The levels of role conflict of the group committed to *significant relationships first* or *work first* was compared to those participants who were committed equally to their personal and professional lives (*work equals relationships*). The participants in the group who were committed to *significant relationships first* or *work first* ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.99$) had significantly less role conflict than those participants who were trying to balance their *work and relationships equally* ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.32$), $t = 2.31$, $df = 44$, $p = 0.026$. There was no significant difference in regard to job satisfaction ($t = 1.12$, $df = 44$, $p = 0.269$).

Job satisfaction and role conflict were also examined in relation to the grade levels of the schools, either K–8 (primary and middle school) or high school (9–12). There were no significant differences in job satisfaction ($t = 1.042$, $df = 46$, $p = 0.303$) or role conflict ($t = 1.729$, $df = 46$, $p = 0.091$) based on the grade level of the school.

Discussion

Although the co-principalship model appears to be unusual, the schools where the respondents were leaders are typical private and public schools in urban, suburban, small cities and rural areas in the United States. The respondents led schools with traditional grade level configurations and with a wide range in student population. The respondents appear to have the same characteristics as solo principals in terms of their ages, marital status, and prior experiences as teachers (Eckman, 2004).

The respondents were aware that they were "doing" the principalship in a new way. The majority of co-principals in this study were not aware of other co-principals and schools using the same model. They expressed their appreciation for being included in the study and recognized the need to study the co-principal model in greater depth. Four respondents included their phone numbers so they could provide additional information; one respondent called directly to share her perspectives.

Not surprisingly, several respondents noted that their school or district adopted the co-principalship model with "little information on co-principals to draw from." The respondents indicated that the model was selected because of consolidations, the creation of larger schools, or the interest of a superintendent. The co-principalship model was considered by some school districts only because of a lack of viable candidates for the principalship. A respondent noted, "I think the co-principalship may be in our future due to increased job demands and limited numbers of interested, qualified candidates." In order to continue advocating the use of a co-principal leadership model, we need to increase our understanding of how the model is successfully implemented and what will make it sustainable and replicable.

The respondents reported high levels of job satisfaction. In writing about their work as co-principals, a majority of the respondents indicated that the strength of the shared leadership model was the ability to work closely with another principal: "I was able to share key decision making with an equally qualified peer." Indeed, sharing the workload meant that there were fewer role conflicts because the co-principal model "allows the 'principal' to be in two places at once and reduces (potentially) the number of meetings and activities to attend." There was also less stress associated with the role of co-principal because there was "someone to confide and commiserate with on a daily basis." By sharing problems and responsibilities and collaborating on decision-making, the co-principals are no longer the single isolated leader of their schools. There is always someone to "brainstorm with about same site issues." One co-principal noted, "we were able to sound ideas off of one another and see things from multiple perspectives." Finally, a co-principal wrote, the model "provides an opportunity for each 'co' to work and grow in areas of strength and interest."

Though as a group the co-principals were satisfied with the model, they were cognizant of the difficulties inherent in sharing their power and their positions. The respondents identified problems in communicating, defining responsibilities, developing trust, presenting a unified front, and being "played against each other" by parents, teachers and community members. Several of the respondents noted that the co-principalship required excellent personal and communication skills, similar in many cases to those needed for a successful marriage: "Communication is very important. You feel like you should discuss a decision with your partner before making it." Another commented, "We each have a healthy ego—healthy enough to put it aside to get things accomplished." However, one participant remarked that the co-principal leadership model was very inefficient: "when two different people with different styles are both 'the bottom line' it is not clear to staff. I feel that I am endlessly negotiating with my partner so we are sure we come off as one. What a waste of precious time."

As a group the co-principals felt that most of the problems of the co-principalship could be overcome and were outweighed by the benefits of this shared leadership model. One co-principal summarized the value of a dual leadership model:

> This co-principalship is a blessing to me personally and professionally, as well as a blessing to the school and district. Imagine two administrators, passionate, knowledgeable and energetic, philosophically aligned— working on school improvement in concert, and having each other to strategize with, share failures and successes with, and to grow with. We continue to challenge and support each other.

An additional benefit to having two people serve as co-principals is that it offers more opportunities for leadership experience— particularly for females, who were represented on 83% of the co-principal leadership teams. The low representation of women in the high school principalship is a problem that has persisted over time (Bell & Chase, 1993; Eckman, 2002; Mertz & McNeely, 1990; Porat, 1985; Schneider, 1986). The findings from this study suggest that an increased use of the co-principal model might be one way to increase the number of women as principals, particularly at the high school level.

Currently, there is limited information about the co-principal leadership model, the schools and districts where the model is being implemented, and the characteristics of those who serve as co-principals. One obstacle to conducting research in this area is the difficulty in locating those who serve as co-principals. For this study I was only able to identify 53 public and private schools in the United States where the co-principal leadership model was utilized. I suspect there are more schools using a co-principal leadership model as well as more schools that would be interested in learning about the successful implementation of such a model. The identification and description of co-principals and their schools will enable the discovery of the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of this model. There is also value in examining the various types of co-principalship as other school districts consider replicating the model.

To address the workload intensification in the principalship and the shortage of qualified candidates for that position, creative approaches to leadership must be explored. The co-principalship is one model that utilizes a more distributive and collaborative approach to leadership. The co-principals in this study experienced a high degree of job satisfaction with the model. Though the co-principals continued to experience role conflict as they worked to balance their personal and professional lives, they indicated that it was easier to do that balancing in a team setting.

However, as a co-principal observed, "We are concerned about the future of the co-principalship. How do we interview for a partner? It will take work to develop the next team into such a strong partnership." It is important to identify the factors that will sustain the model over time, especially for those schools where the co-principalship is already being implemented successfully. Further research is also needed to determine if the co-principal leadership model creates more stability for leaders in schools and districts. If indeed it does, then dissemination of the workings of the co-principal model may serve as a means to attract and retain highly qualified individuals to serve as educational leaders.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Relationship Between Role Conflict, Role Commitment, and Job Satisfaction