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# The Co-principalship: an Alternative to the Traditional Principalship

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## THE CO-PRINCIPALSHIP: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE TRADITIONAL PRINCIPALSHIP

### Introduction

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) surveys high school principals every ten years to gather a snapshot of the "typical" high school principal. The report from a recent survey characterized the principalship as a very complex and demanding position. "Today's principal must be a legal expert, health and social services coordinator, fundraiser, public relations consultant, parental involvement expert, and security officer, who is technologically savvy, diplomatic, with top-notch managerial skills, whose most important duty is the implementation of instructional programs, curricula, pedagogical practice, and assessment models" (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001, p. 1). The increasing complexity and time demands in the role of the principal has led many superintendents and policy makers to worry that only "supermen" or "wonder women" can fill the position (Pierce, 2000). Similarly, Lashway (2006) asked, "Given the increased complexity of today's schools and the relentless demands for deep reform, are traditional definitions of the principal's role adequate, or must the job itself be redesigned?" (p. 20).

Such questions regarding the role of the principal have led to proposals to distribute leadership across the organization. According to Spillane (2006), distributed leadership occurs when leadership functions are shared by a number of people in an organization or team with "leadership" emerging from the interactions within the group. A co-principal leadership model, where two individuals serve in one leadership position, is considered a special case of distributing leadership (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004).

The co-principal leadership model has been suggested as an alternative organizational form that re-structures the role of the principal by enhancing the positive aspects of the position (Chirichello, 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Co-principal models have been cited in the literature at schools in Australia (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; Thompson & Blackmore, 2006), China (Bunnell, 2008), New Zealand (Court, 2003), United Kingdom (Pateron, 2006), and United States (Eckman, 2006; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Houston, 1998). Although the co-principal model has been implemented, little is known about its effectiveness (Eckman, 2006; Gronn & Hamilton, 2004).

It is within this context that we undertook a study of traditional principals and co-principals. The purpose of this study is to compare traditional principals and co-principals with regard to their experiences of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction. The co-principal model may be a viable option for addressing the demanding and stressful nature of the principalship if co-principals experience less role conflict and more job satisfac-

tion than traditional principals. The results of this comparison provide a first step toward understanding the benefits of this shared leadership model.

## **Background to the study**

### *Leadership Models*

From its first historical designation as the “principal teacher”, the role of the principal has changed markedly (Matthews & Crow, 2003, p. 18). In the 20th century, the principalship has been “extremely malleable,” with successive generations emphasizing different roles for the principal. “During economic depression, principals were expected to be thrifty stewards of limited resources; in time of war, they were expected to mobilize the next generation to defend democracy; amid fears of declining achievement, they were expected to be instructional leaders” (Lashway, 2006, p. 27).

Scholars in educational leadership have conceptualized the role of the traditional principal in multiple ways. Leithwood and Duke (1999) identified six role conceptions for the principal: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent. Matthews and Crow (2003) defined seven role conceptions for the principal: leader, learner, politician, advocate, manager, supervisor and mentor. Sergiovanni (2001) described the principalship from a reflective practice perspective. Strike (2005) emphasized the role of the principal as an ethical leader. Others have described the heroic or charismatic principal who is responsible for all managerial and instructional functions along with providing vision and leadership for the organization and its community (Klenke, 1996). Regardless of how the role of principal is operationalized, the traditional principal has always been the solo leader at the top of the hierarchical organizational structure of the school.

The idea of looking beyond the traditional solo principal to a co-principal model is not new. A proposal to restructure the principalship by dividing the role into two positions was first suggested by Edwin West, the Superintendent of High Point Public Schools, in High Point, North Carolina (West, 1978). He portrayed principals as a “beleaguered, bewildered and beat species” because of the increasing expectations and demands placed on them by school boards, superintendents, and teachers (West, 1978, p. 241). West thought the solution to these demands was to have two principals—one for instructional functions and one for administrative or managerial functions. West implemented that co-principal model and it remained in place for 10 years, from 1976 to 1987. A few other school districts followed suit and co-principal teams were established in eight schools during that time period (Groover, 1989; Korba, 1982; Shockley & Smith, 1981).

The most prevalent form of the co-principal model occurs when two individuals each work as full time principals, sharing the role and the work with equal authority (Eckman, 2006; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). An-

other form of the model occurs when two co-principals divide the days of the week they are present and responsible for the school. In both forms the roles and authority of the principal are spread equally across the two individuals. The participants in this study made the decisions on how to divide the role of principal. They separated the roles of the principal on the basis of their individual strengths and interests rather than on the basis of administrative or instructional functions.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is considered a desirable goal for all types of organizations because satisfied workers perform at higher levels than those who are not satisfied (Chambers, 1999). Studies of job satisfaction in the solo principalship have examined factors that contribute to both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Friesen, Holdaway, and Rice (1983) reported that the main sources of job satisfaction for principals were their interpersonal relationships, achievements, responsibilities and autonomy. Elements of the principalship found to be the most dissatisfying were: the amount of work, overall time constraints, parental attitudes, and general working conditions. Bacharach and Mitchell (1983) indicated that principals experienced lower levels of job satisfaction due to feeling overburdened by the role and its responsibilities. Similarly, Thompson, McNamara and Hoyle (1997) noted that the strongest factors contributing to decreased job satisfaction for principals were role ambiguity and role conflict.

### *Role Conflict*

Role conflict occurs as individuals attempt to balance their family and home roles with their professional roles. Work-time studies indicate that single-parent families as well as dual-earner families are working longer hours and feeling more conflicted (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Gerson & Jacobs, 2001). The conflicts between the demands of work and personal life have always been a part of the working world. Most often these role conflicts have been resolved in favor of employers (Friedman, Christensen and DeGroot, 2005, p.97). Bailyn (2006) questioned why businesses operate in that manner and argued for "greater integration between the public domain of employment and the private domestic sphere" (p. 3).

Educational scholars have called for more reasonable parameters for the role of the principal that would allow principals to manage conflicts between their professional and personal lives (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Hurley, 2001; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). According to assistant high school principals and middle school principals, the least attractive job characteristic of the principalship is the difficulty experienced in balancing the demands of work and family, (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). In their study of traditional principals, Kochan, Spencer, and Mathews (2000) found that the primary is-

sue facing principals was “managing their work and their time and coping with the stresses, tasks and responsibilities of the job” (p. 305).

### *Role Commitment*

In their analysis of work and family life, Jacobs and Gerson (2004) noted that workers, regardless of gender, are increasingly torn over their commitments to their public and private worlds. They warned that “if workers are forced to choose between well-rewarded jobs with expanding opportunities and jobs that allow them to take their family commitments seriously, neither families nor the economy are likely to fare well over the long run” (p. 79). The increasing demands on the role of the principal have made it difficult for principals to successfully meet their commitments to their professional work and their personal lives simultaneously (Copland, 2001). Principals acknowledged that their commitment to their work had taken a toll on their families (Vadella & Willower, 1990). For this study, role commitment is defined as how principals choose between their work and their significant personal relationships.

### *Relationship of Role Conflict, Role Commitment, and Job Satisfaction*

The relationship of the type of leadership model (traditional principal or co-principal) to the role dimensions of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction is examined in this paper. The analysis presented addresses the following questions: (1) does the co-principal model contribute to lower levels of role conflict and higher levels of job satisfaction than the traditional principal model and (2) how does role commitment impact role conflict and job satisfaction for co-principals and traditional principals?

### **Methods and Procedures**

This paper presents the findings from a secondary analysis of data previously reported in two studies on the principalship. The focus of the original studies were as follows: (1) an exploration of the relationship of role conflict, role commitment and job satisfaction in traditional principals in schools in three Midwestern states (Eckman, 2004); and (2) an examination of co-principals from schools throughout the United States (Eckman, 2006). Subjects for these studies were identified by their respective state departments of education, national principal associations and Internet searches.

Survey packets for the two studies, containing instruments measuring role conflict (Nevill & Damico, 1974), role commitment (Napholz, 1995) and job satisfaction (Eckman, 2002; Mendenhall, 1977; Schneider, 1984) as well as demographic questions, were sent to eligible participants. Participants provided written comments regarding what they found both

satisfying and dissatisfying about their work as principals. Additionally, the co-principals were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses associated with the co-principal leadership model in their schools.

The survey instruments used in the study were: Role Conflict Questionnaire, Role Commitment Question, and Job Satisfaction Survey. The Role Conflict Questionnaire (Nevill & Damico, 1974) is a nine-item Likert-type scale where participants delineate their level of conflict from 1 (not at all conflicted) to 7 (extremely conflicted). The instrument includes questions relating to time for privacy, social commitments, and others, in addition to concerns over household management, finances, and child raising, along with personal issues such as expectations for self, others, and feelings of guilt. Total scores were computed as the average of the response to these questions with higher scores on this instrument indicating a greater level of role conflict. Cronbach alphas for this instrument have ranged from .70 to .90.

The Role Commitment Question is a one-item question where participants are offered three discrete choices: (1) significant relationships first, (2) work equals significant relationships, and (3) work first. It was developed and tested by Napholz (1995) to identify how working-women set priorities for their work and significant relationships. Napholz found that those who chose either their work first or their significant relationships first had a lower level of role conflict than did those who chose to commit equally to work and significant relationships.

The Job Satisfaction Survey (Mendenhall, 1977; Schneider, 1984) is a 28-item questionnaire that was used to study the job satisfaction of educators. Modifications were made to the wording of five questions to make them appropriate for principals (Eckman, 2002). This instrument included questions relating to community relations, working conditions, financial rewards, personal relationships, 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 to these questions; higher scores reflect more job satisfaction. Rice and Schneider (1994) reported the reliability co-efficient to be .90.

### *Sample*

The sample for this secondary analysis was created from the data collected in two prior studies. In the study of the co-principal leadership model, 87 co-principals responded to the survey, 51 females and 36 males. In order to create groups of comparable size, a random sample of 51 female traditional principals and 36 male traditional principals was selected from the 339 traditional principals (164 females and 175 males) who participated in the original study. The total population for the findings presented in this paper is 174 (87 traditional principals and 87 co-principals).

There were no significant differences between the 87 traditional principals selected for this analysis and the remainder of the traditional principals (252) with regard to age,  $t(337) = .266, p = .709$ ; role conflict,  $t(337) = .055, p = .956$ ; role commitment,  $\chi^2(1, N = 339) = 3.06, p = .082$ ; and job satisfaction,  $t = .449, df = 337, p = .653$ .

### Data Analysis

Analyses were performed using SPSS® for Windows Version 17. Descriptive statistics appropriate for the level of data were computed. The Chi-square statistic was used to test differences between role commitment for traditional principals and co-principals. To examine the impact of gender and leadership model (traditional or co-principal) on job satisfaction and role conflict, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each measure. The relationship of role commitment and leadership model to job satisfaction and role conflict was also examined using two-way ANOVAs. *T*-tests were performed for comparisons after stratifying the sample due to a significant interaction effect. Pearson product moment correlations were calculated to examine the bivariate relationship between personal and professional attributes with the role dimensions of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction. Partial eta squares as a measure of effect size are presented. It is expected that effect size in social science research will fall between 0 and .5 (Cohen, 1988). A hierarchical linear regression was performed to examine the contribution of the leadership model and role conflict on job satisfaction, controlling for demographic characteristics. Significance of alpha was set at .05. Written responses to questions were analyzed using standard qualitative content analysis procedures. These written responses provided insights into the quantitative data.

### Findings

A description of personal and professional attributes of the participants is presented, followed by the findings regarding role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction. Role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction are described in terms of their relationships to each other and to the type of leadership model (traditional principal or co-principal).

As shown in Table 1, the mean age of the population for the study is 48.44 ( $SD = 8.97$ ). In regard to job satisfaction, the mean score for the group was 2.95 ( $SD = .38$ ), indicating moderate satisfaction. For role conflict, the mean score for the group was 3.67 ( $SD = 1.16$ ), indicating moderate role conflict. Eighty-three percent of the group were married or living with a partner, with 53% choosing to balance family and work equally. The years of teaching experience of the entire group ranged from 1 to 30 years ( $Mdn = 10$ ).

**Table 1**

*Description of Constructs (N = 174)*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Min.	Max.	%
Age	48.44	8.97	50.00	28.00	74.00	
Job satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	2.95	0.38	2.91	2.04	3.89	
Role conflict <sup>b</sup>	3.67	1.16	3.69	1.00	6.56	
Role commitment (balance of work & family)						52.90
Gender (female)						58.60
Marital status (partnered)						82.80

<sup>a</sup>Scale: 1 = very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied

<sup>b</sup>Scale: 1 = not at all conflicted; 7 = extremely conflicted

### *Personal and Professional Attributes*

There was no significant difference between the ages of the traditional principals ( $M = 47.73$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ) and the co-principals ( $M = 49.15$ ,  $SD = 9.66$ ),  $t(172) = 1.04$ ,  $p = .302$ . Traditional principals and co-principals served schools ranging in size from 26 to 4800 students ( $Mdn = 578$ ). To compare school size, based on student enrollments, four groups were created, following criteria established by an interscholastic athletic association for creating competitive athletic divisions. The schools were placed in four categories: (1) 1–230 students, (2) 231–430 students, (3) 431–930 students, and (4) more than 931 students. There were significantly more large schools lead by co-principals than traditional principals,  $\chi^2(3, N = 174) = 16.87$ ,  $p = .001$ . Thirty-four percent ( $n = 29$ ) of the co-principals were leading schools with more than 931 students as compared to 22% ( $n = 19$ ) of the traditional principals.

### *Role Conflict*

A two-way analysis of variance was performed comparing the level of role conflict by type of leadership model (traditional principal or co-principal) and by gender, as shown in Table 2. There was a significant difference in the level of role conflict based on the type of leadership model,  $F(1,166) = 11.92$ ,  $p < .001$ , with co-principals ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.177$ ) experiencing significantly less role conflict than traditional principals ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.061$ ). There was no significant difference in role conflict based on the gender of the respondent,  $F(1, 166) = .051$ ,  $p = .822$ .



**Table 2***Role Conflict by Gender*

	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	Male ( <i>n</i> = 72)		Female ( <i>n</i> = 102)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 174)	
Traditional Principals ( <i>n</i> = 87)	4.00	(1.142)	3.92	(1.010)	3.95	(1.061)
Co-Principals ( <i>n</i> = 87)	3.35	(1.039)	3.35	(1.272)	3.35	(1.177)
Total	3.69	(1.136)	3.65	(1.174)	3.66	(1.155)

Leadership model,  $F(1, 166) = 11.92, p < .001$ , Gender model,  $F(1, 166) = .051, p = .822$   
 Scale: 1 = not at all conflicted; 7 = extremely conflicted

*Role Commitment*

The answers to the role commitment question were treated as two responses: (1) those who chose work first combined with those who chose significant relationships first and (2) those who chose work equals significant relationships. There was a significant difference between the traditional principals and the co-principals, with 60% of the co-principals choosing work equals significant relationships as compared to 40% of the traditional principals,  $\chi^2(1, N = 164) = 4.72, p = .030$ .

A two-way analysis of variance was performed to examine the relationship of role conflict based on role commitment and leadership model, as shown in Table 3. There was a significant interaction between the leadership model and role commitment,  $F(1, 153) = 5.88, p = .016, \eta^2 = .037$ . Therefore, a stratified analysis was performed to examine the relationship of role commitment and role conflict for each leadership model (traditional principal or co-principal). The traditional principals who chose work equals significant relationships experienced significantly more role conflict than the traditional principals who chose work first or significant relationships first,  $t(77) = 1.96, p = .05$ . For the co-principals, there was no significant difference based on their choice of work or significant relationships first as compared to those who chose work equals significant relationships,  $t(76) = 1.51, p = .135$ .

**Table 3**

*Role Conflict by Role Commitment*

	<i>M (SD)</i>						<i>t</i>
	Work or sig- nificant other ( <i>n</i> = 77)		Work equal sig- nificant other ( <i>n</i> = 80)		Total		
Traditional Principals ( <i>n</i> = 79)	4.20	(.986)	3.75	(1.061)	4.01	(1.037)	<i>t</i> (77) = 1.96 <i>p</i> = .05
Co-Principals ( <i>n</i> = 78)	3.11	(.996)	3.52	(1.283)	3.35	(1.184)	<i>t</i> (76) = 1.5 <i>p</i> = .135
Total	3.75	(1.12)	3.62	(1.192)	3.68	(1.157)	

Scale: 1 = not at all conflicted; 7 = extremely conflicted

*Job Satisfaction*

A two-way analysis of variance was performed to examine job satisfaction by gender and type of leadership model (see Table 4). There was no significant difference in job satisfaction based on gender,  $F(1, 170) = .185$ ,  $p = .67$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ .

**Table 4**

*Job Satisfaction by Gender and Leadership Model*

	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	Male ( <i>n</i> = 72)		Female ( <i>n</i> = 102)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 174)	
Traditional Principals ( <i>n</i> = 87)	2.87	(.34)	2.82	(.37)	2.84	(.36)
Co-Principals ( <i>n</i> = 87)	3.05	(.34)	3.05	(.40)	3.05	(.37)
Total	2.96	(.35)	2.94	(.40)	2.95	(.38)

Leadership model  $F(1,170) = 13.25$   $p < .0005$ , Gender  $F(1,170) = .185$   $p = .668$

A two-way analysis of variance was performed to examine the relationship of job satisfaction based on role commitment and type of leadership model (see Table 5). There was no significant difference in job satisfaction based on role commitment,  $F(1, 160) = .466$ ,  $p = .487$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$ . Regardless of the choice made on the role commitment question, work equals significant relationships or work first/significant relationships first, co-principals experienced significantly more job satisfaction than traditional principals,  $F(1,160) = 13.86$ ,  $p < .0005$ ,  $\eta^2 = .080$ .

**Table 5***Job Satisfaction by Role Commitment*

Leadership model	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	Work or significant other ( <i>n</i> = 79)		Work equal significant other ( <i>n</i> = 85)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 164)	
Traditional Principals ( <i>n</i> = 79)	2.83	(.352)	2.85	(.375)	2.17	(.360)
Co-Principals ( <i>n</i> = 85)	3.10	(.365)	3.00	(.360)	3.04	(.363)
Total	2.94	(.381)	2.93	(.371)	2.94	(.374)

Scale: 1 = very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied

*Correlations*

Pearson correlations were computed to examine the bivariate relationships between (1) personal and professional attributes of age, gender and school size, (2) type of leadership model (traditional or co-principal), and (3) role dimensions of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction (see Table 6). Role conflict was inversely associated with job satisfaction, age, and school size. For the combined group of traditional principals and co-principals (*N* = 174), as job satisfaction, age, and number of students increased, role conflict decreased. The type of leadership model was directly associated with job satisfaction and inversely related to role conflict; co-principals experienced higher levels of job satisfaction and less role conflict.

**Table 6***Correlations of Role Constructs and Selected Contextual Factors (N = 174)*

	Job satisfaction	Age	Number of students	Role commitment	Role conflict
Age	.19*				
Number of students	.172*	.088			
Role commitment <sup>a</sup>	-.007	.187	.090		
Role conflict	-.412**	-.284**	-.179*	-.057	
Leadership model <sup>b</sup>	.777**	.079	.284**	.170*	-.263**

<sup>a</sup>Work or Family First = 0, Work Equals Relationships = 1

<sup>b</sup>Traditional Principal = 0, Co-principal = 1

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .001

### Regression Analysis

A hierarchical linear regression was performed to examine the impact of the type of leadership model (traditional or co-principal) on the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction (see Table 7). In the first step, personal attributes of gender and age were entered as control variables. Next, the type of leadership model was entered with traditional principals coded as 0 and co-principals coded as 1. Leadership type was significantly associated with job satisfaction,  $\beta = .149$ ,  $p = .046$ , explaining 5.5% of the variance, and indicating a higher level of job satisfaction for the co-principals than the traditional principals. Role conflict was entered in the last step. Role conflict was significantly and inversely associated with the dependent variable of job satisfaction,  $\beta = -.358$ ,  $p < .0005$ , accounting for an additional 11% of the variance in job satisfaction. As role conflict increases, job satisfaction decreases for both traditional principals and co-principals. However, co-principals continue to experience more job satisfaction than traditional principals throughout the role conflict continuum,  $F(4,159) = 9.328$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

**Table 7**

#### *Regression Analysis of Role Conflict and Leadership Model on Job Satisfaction*

	B (std. error)	$\beta$	$R^2$ change
Personal Attributes			.025
Age	.002 (.003)	.045	
Gender	-.030 (.054)	-.040	
Leadership model <sup>a</sup>	.111 (.055)	.149*	.055*
Role conflict	-.116 (.025)	-.358**	.110**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

$F(4, 159) = 9.328$ ,  $p < .0005$

<sup>a</sup>Traditional = 0, Co-principal = 1

In summary, the co-principals experienced more job satisfaction, led larger schools, experienced less role conflict and could choose either their work first, families first, or to balance their personal and professional roles equally, without increasing role conflict.

#### *Summation of Written Comments*

The participants, both traditional principals and co-principals, provided written comments regarding what they found satisfying and dissatisfying about their work. Many of the traditional principals commented about their long days, the amount of supervision of extracurricular ac-

tivities, their attendance at numerous evening meetings, and the quantity of weekend work. They found the time demands of these aspects of the principal role were both stressful and dissatisfying. Some participants described concerns over their health, others worried about their lack of family vacation time. As a group, they were conflicted over their inability to balance their personal and professional lives and to fulfill their commitments to their professional goals.

Co-principals in the study commented that one of the most important factors contributing to their job satisfaction was their ability to share decision-making and the responsibilities of the position. They noted that they did not experience the "lonely at the top" phenomenon that characterizes the solo principalship (Jackson, 1977, p. 427). As one co-principal explained, "The most stressful aspects of the principalship are shared (such as discipline, parent issues, teacher evaluations, and supervision and attendance at extracurricular and evening events) which prevents burn-out." Another noted that the co-principalship was satisfying because having someone with whom to share the job allowed her time "to deal with the academic and administrative aspects of being a principal and to focus on being an educational leader." Several commented that the position was one of the best experiences of their careers. One wrote, "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 co-principals' availability to teachers, students and parents."

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The role of the principal has become overwhelming and fewer educators are willing to jeopardize their private lives to take a position where "the job description includes meager personal lives, professional isolation, and inappropriate expectations from the community" (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006, p. 73). Principals are expected to be the instructional leaders and managers of complex organizations during the day, while attending numerous extra-curricular activities, school board meetings, and community events on evenings and weekends.

The stereotypic description of the traditional principal is that of a solo decision maker who is isolated and alone at the top of the hierarchical organizational structure - a person who is "apart from others" and "lonely at the top" (Jackson, 1977, p. 427). This is not the case for co-principals. Indeed, co-principals in this study commented that for them the strengths of the co-principal leadership model included their ability to work with another person as an equal and to have "someone to confide in and commiserate with on a daily basis." They reported being satisfied sharing the role of the principal.

The co-principal leadership model is an effective way to reduce levels of role conflict and thus increase job satisfaction. The co-principals

indicated that the demands of their positions were manageable. Sharing the workload means "the principal can be in two places at once." It also means a reduction in the total number of meetings and evening activities that each co-principal must attend. When asked to commit to their personal or professional roles, the co-principals were able to choose to balance both work and personal roles equally. Regardless of their role commitment choice, co-principals experienced a greater degree of job satisfaction than did traditional principals. If the level of job satisfaction contributes to retention, one could expect a more stable leadership model with the co-principalship.

The impact of role commitment on role conflict was different for the co-principals and traditional principals. Regardless of how they chose between their personal or professional commitments, co-principals in this study had less role conflict than the traditional principals. For the traditional principals, there was a significant difference in their level of role conflict based on their role commitment. Those traditional principals attempting to balance equally their professional and personal lives experienced lower levels of role conflict than did the traditional principals who were choosing either their professional or their personal roles first. Unlike traditional principals, co-principals have the freedom to balance their personal and professional roles or to choose one role over the other, without incurring additional levels of role conflict.

Some co-principals in this study, who had previously served as traditional principals, indicated in their written comments that it was far easier for them to balance their personal and professional lives as members of co-principalship teams. Traditional principals respond to the demands of their job and the role conflicts they experience in a different manner than do co-principals, which was substantiated in this study by the statistically significant interaction effect of role commitment and type of leadership model (traditional or co-principal).

In order to further examine the impact of type of leadership model and role conflict on job satisfaction, a hierarchical linear regression was performed. After controlling for age and gender, the type of leadership model was added to the regression. Co-principals experienced a higher level of job satisfaction than traditional principals. Finally, the addition of role conflict in the equation contributed to explaining 11% of the variance in job satisfaction. The results of this analysis indicate that as role conflict increased, regardless of the type of leadership model, job satisfaction decreased. What we know from this study is that the co-principals were able to reduce role conflict regardless of their role commitments, whereas the traditional principals could not. This leads one to believe that the co-principal model is a preferred option for decreasing role conflict and increasing job satisfaction.

Interaction with parents, students and teachers contributes to job satisfaction for principals (Eckman, 2007). As their school enrollments in-

creased, traditional principals commented that they were no longer as accessible to teachers, students and parents and thus felt more dissatisfaction with their role. In this study, there were more schools with larger student enrollments that were led by co-principals than by traditional principals. Unlike the traditional principals, the co-principals experienced higher levels of job satisfaction regardless of school size. One of the results of the co-principal model is that with two principals leading the school there were more opportunities for each principal to interact with parents, students and teachers.

The sample of traditional principals for this study was randomly selected from a larger sample to provide an equal number of participants for the traditional principal leadership model and the co-principal leadership model. The sample was also purposely balanced with regard to gender. Although we found that gender was not a significant factor, it was used as a control variable in the analyses, insuring that there was no gender bias impacting the results of this study. Both male and female principals share the same experiences with regard to the role constructs.

This cross sectional study provides information about the relationship between the constructs of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction with type of leadership model (traditional or co-principal). We acknowledge the limitations of cross sectional studies and caution against any causal inferences. Additionally, as in any survey, the data were provided by a self-selected sample. Possibly those that did not respond differed in some way from the respondents. In this study, we found only a small effect size with regard to gender and role commitment. With such a small effect size a difference would have little merit. Finally, although the co-principal model is in practice in schools internationally, the participants in this study were principals and co-principals in schools within the United States.

We view this study as the first step at quantitatively evaluating the role of co-principals. We have provided valuable information regarding the co-principal leadership model by substantiating that the co-principalship increases job satisfaction and decreases role conflict. We are suggesting that the co-principal leadership model, no matter the context or the defined role assignments for the co-principals, is more desirable than the traditional principalship. Future studies should examine if in fact this organizational option is useful in reducing turnover in the principalship and serving as a means to attract more candidates to the position.

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