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Contemporary School Administration: An Introduction

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CHAPTER **9**

Challenges of Leadership

Chapter Content

Leadership has previously been described in this book as a social influence process in which a person steers members of a group or organization toward a specific goal. Although conceptually this may seem like a straightforward and relatively simple task, in reality it is much more complex. Indicative of leadership's complexity is that it has been called one of the most observed and least understood phenomena (Burns, 1978). Bass (1981) cited over 5,000 studies related to leadership in his review of leadership research.

This chapter will provide an overview of some of the challenges that confront leaders. Specifically, the chapter will discuss the complexity of leadership as evidenced in decision making, change, motivation, communication, and time management. The chapter is written from the premise that leadership is a problematic undertaking with few easy answers. The presentation of chapter topics attempts to blend a sampling of the most significant theory and research, problematic aspects, and practical advice.

THE COMPLEXITY OF LEADERSHIP

The complexity of leadership is illustrated by the following example.

> Mr. Jones is the principal of a large elementary school in an affluent suburban area of a large city. Several weeks into the school year, Mr. Jones received a complaint from the father of a third-grade student in Mrs. Smith's class, expressing concern that his child never had any homework. When Mr. Jones discussed the complaint with Mrs. Smith, she explained that she did not feel that homework was appropriate for third-graders after spending a full day in school. She felt that after-school hours should be spent in play and related activities that were developmentally appropriate. Believing that teachers should be given as much freedom as possible to determine instructional philosophy and methodology, Mr. Jones dropped the matter, simply sending a note to the complaining parent to indicate that he had spoken to Mrs. Smith.
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> A number of weeks passed before Mr. Jones received any more complaints about Mrs. Smith. This time, several parents visited him simultaneously to complain not just about the lack of homework but also about the "low academic standards" in Mrs. Smith's classroom. They complained that students were engaged in far too many physical activities and in discussion, and were essentially given a free hand in choosing what they read and wrote about. The parents were very concerned that students were missing the skills that were included in workbooks, worksheets, and basal readers and would not perform well on the upcoming standardized tests. This could have a ripple effect in years to come and ultimately affect their access to the best universities. Mr. Jones responded that Mrs. Smith was concerned with the total needs of the child—academic, social, and emotional.
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> The parents were not satisfied with this response. They noted that the school was biting off more than it could (or should) chew. The school should be concerned with academics, and as parents they would provide the rest. The parents threatened to take the matter to the superintendent and the school board if a satisfactory resolution was not accomplished immediately.
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> After the meeting Mr. Jones contemplated possible courses of action. He agreed with Mrs. Smith—they must be concerned for the total child. On the other hand, the parents had a point about the importance of standardized test scores in the "real" world. Students certainly were rated by how well they scored on standardized tests. Financially, the school's merit money, which made many of the enrichment programs possible, was dependent on the students' overall performance on the tests. Complicating the situation even further was Mr. Jones's current status in the superintendent's dog house regarding an unrelated matter. The easiest solution might be simply to tell Mrs. Smith to toughen up and focus on skill-oriented instruction. But . . . was that the right thing to do?[1]

The decision Mr. Jones faces is illustrative of the problematic nature of leadership. Although Mr. Jones may fully intend to influence Mrs. Smith or the parents in a specific direction, in whose direction does he influence them? Does he support his teacher (right or wrong), or does he side with the parents? Does he follow what he personally believes in, or does he do what is consistent with

[1] Adapted from Kowalski (1991).

the school's or district's philosophy? Does he do what's politically expedient, or does he do what is right and just?

Schon (1987, 1989) noted three characteristics that make the work of professionals in fields such as education especially challenging. First, he noted that these "minor" professions frequently are characterized by an absence of widely accepted, unambiguous purpose. The preceding example clearly illustrates the ambiguity of purpose faced by educational leaders. Should the goal of schooling be high test scores? Or should the goal be the development of the total person? Educational historians have observed that unlike early nineteenth-century educational leaders who shared a common religious and political conception of the role of public education and the purposes of schooling, today's public school leader "resembles an heir receiving a handsome legacy from a distant relative whose purposes now seem unclear or even quaint" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 4).

Second, Schon noted, social sciences such as education lack a basis in systematic, scientific knowledge; and even if such knowledge were available, the nature of social reality has created problems of complexity and uncertainty ill suited to traditional cause-and-effect solutions. Others have described the era in which we live as one characterized by "rapid and spastic change" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 10) in which traditional ways of addressing problems are ineffective. The discrepant views regarding appropriate instructional content and methodology held by Mrs. Smith, Mr. Jones, and the parents in the previously cited example provide one example of the uncertainty of professional knowledge in education.

Finally, Schon argued that there are two types of problems and that leaders have a choice about which type they will choose to spend the bulk of their time addressing. The first type of problem is simple and manageable, has a clear solution, and thus lends itself to research-based or technical solutions. Scheduling, budgeting, accounting, facilities management, and miscellaneous paperwork and managerial tasks are typical problems of this type that educational leaders would face. The second type of problem is complex, messy, and time-consuming, and is incapable of being solved with a clear-cut solution. Problems dealing with motivation, conflict, organizational direction, ethical behavior, and other "people" issues are typical of this type of problem.

The dilemma faced by leaders is that characteristically the easily solved problems are relatively unimportant, whereas the complex problems with only ambiguous solutions generally are critically important. Thus, leaders have a choice. They can choose to spend their time addressing "high hard ground" problems or they can immerse themselves in the messiness of "the swamp" (Schon, 1987, 1989). Principals and superintendents frequently choose to immerse themselves in the former type of problem because they are solvable and thus provide a sense of safety, comfort, and the satisfaction of seeing what has been accomplished. In effect, principals and superintendents who select this choice relegate themselves to being little more than managers who only minimally fulfill the leadership responsibilities of their position. However, opting for more complex problems is likely to lead to frustration due to frequently unsatisfactory solutions, and ambiguity resulting from indiscernible effects of actions.

THE NATURE OF DECISION MAKING

One aspect of the complexity of leadership is the nature of decision making. Traditionally, decision-making research has been predicated on the dual assumptions that decision making is an orderly rational process of choosing from alternative means of accomplishing objectives and that the steps in the decision-making process follow each other in a logical, sequential flow (Owens, 1987). For example, Simon (1977) has divided decision making into four phases: (1) intelligence activity, which involves identifying problems; (2) design activity, which consists of identifying possible courses of action; (3) choice activity, which involves deciding on a course of action; and (4) review activity, which is the evaluation of the results of choices made. In a similar vein, Drucker (1974) listed the following steps in the decision-making process:

1. Define the problem.
2. Analyze the problem.
3. Develop alternative solutions.
4. Decide on the best solution.
5. Convert the decisions into effective actions.

An Alternative View of Decision Making

Recently, however, scholars have noted a widespread disparity between rational models of decision making and the way practitioners actually make decisions. For example, some scholars have likened the decision-making process to a garbage can that attracts problems, solutions, and participants, and results in choice opportunities (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). Unlike the assumption that decisions are the result of a consciously determined selection of alternatives to achieve objectives, the garbage can process holds that solutions may precede problems and individual participation is determined more by happenstance than by reason for participation.

The following example is illustrative of the garbage can model of decision making.

> Washington Elementary School is in need of a kindergarten teacher. Suzy, a college senior completing her work for a kindergarten certification, is returning to her dorm from her student-teaching assignment at a nearby school. On a whim she decides to stop by Washington School and introduce herself to the principal. The principal, who is in a meeting with the school's single, young, male art teacher, interrupts his meeting to call Suzy into his office since the secretary has already gone home for the evening. He is impressed with Suzy and decides that she is an outstanding prospect. Aloud, he muses to the art teacher, who has remained in the office, that he might hire Suzy, and what did he think of her. The art teacher thinks Suzy is cute and agrees that she should be hired.

The example illustrates a solution (Suzy) finding a problem (a kindergarten opening), with one of the participants in the decision (the art teacher) being involved not for rational reasons but simply because he happened to be in the principal's office at the time.

The Political Model of Decision Making

A third view of decision making is the political model. This model argues that decisions are the result of bargaining among competing interest groups. Rather than organizational goal achievement, achieving the goals of special-interest groups is the basis for making decisions (Estler, 1988). In the political model of decision making, Suzy would have been hired not because of a happenstance matching of a solution with a problem, but rather because her father was an influential school board member who agreed to support the principal's bid for a district-level post if he hired Suzy for a teaching position.

Limitations of Individual Decision Making

Other scholars have discussed the limitations of individuals as rational decision makers. For example, Simon (1957) concluded that people, at best, are "boundedly rational." He argued that in order to make objectively rational decisions, an individual must (1) view all decision *alternatives* in panoramic fashion prior to making a decision, (2) consider all *consequences* that would follow each choice, and (3) assign *values* to each alternative and select one alternative from the set. Simon noted that actual behavior falls short in at least three ways:

1. Rationality requires a choice from among all alternatives when in actuality only a few of the alternatives come to mind.
2. Rationality requires a complete knowledge of all the consequences that will follow each choice when in actuality knowledge of consequences is only fragmentary.
3. Values attached to consequences can only be imperfectly anticipated.

Additionally, scholars have noted that frequently decisions made are the result of "satisficing," that is, choosing the first acceptable solution rather than searching for the best possible solution. March and Simon (1958) describe satisficing as "the difference between searching a haystack to find the sharpest needle in it and searching the haystack to find a needle sharp enough to sew with" (pp. 140–141).

Suzy's hiring in the previously cited example is an example of satisificing. The principal hires her because she is an acceptable solution to his problem. Searching for the best solution would have required an extensive screening and selection process of all available candidates.

Participative Decision Making

Recently, increased attention has been given to involving teachers more extensively in school decision making. Although some principals have long used a participative decision-making style, the concept did not receive widespread attention until the publication of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986), which advocated extending teachers a role in school governance. Some principals perceived the advocacy of increased teacher participation in school governance as an attempt to rob them of their power.

Arguments for expanding the scope of teacher decision making are grounded in several reasons:

1. It will make teaching a more stimulating and professional occupation.
2. It will increase teacher autonomy and thus result in better attitudes and resulting improved performance.
3. As human beings we should have a right to control our own destiny.
4. Increasing teacher participation in school decision making will expand the scope of expertise that is brought to bear on decisions and, thus is likely to result in improved decision making.

Research on participatory decision making has been inconclusive in verifying the validity of the arguments extended on its behalf. Firestone and Herriott (1981) have cited the need for further research to clarify participatory decision making's effects.

INSTITUTING CHANGE VERSUS MAINTAINING STABILITY

As effective school leaders engage in the process of making decisions, they attempt to set a consistent direction for their schools or districts. Clark and Astuto (1988) have noted that in setting school direction, leaders are faced with sets of conflicting choice options that are paradoxical in that either choice is supportable by research and theory. One choice option that poses a particular challenge for school leaders is the choice between activity and stability (Clark & Astuto, 1988). Activity can be described as initiating or stimulating change, or promoting attempts to innovatively alter curriculum or instructional delivery. In contrast, stability is a focus on maintaining the core of existing programs and delivery. The two choices can be illustrated by the slogan "Do it, fix it, try it" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 13) as contrasted with "Why fix it if it isn't broken?" Contemporary critics would, of course, argue that the American system of public education is "broken."

School leaders opting for activity are faced with several considerations:

1. What should be the extent and nature of the leader's role in the change effort? That is, should leaders initiate and mandate change, or should they stimulate and support good tries in subordinates? How active should the leader's involvement and support be in tries initiated by subordinates?
2. What role should followers play in initiation and implementation of change? Since they are most closely involved in the technical core of education (i.e., teaching), should they initiate grass-roots efforts to

improve programs and delivery? Or should they simply be supportive of change efforts originating from formal organizational leadership?

3. How does one balance what is best for the organization in terms of sought-after organizational outcomes, with ethical and moral responsibility to honor the professional beliefs of individuals working in the organization?

Research on Planned Organizational Change

One of the key findings of research on planned organizational change in schools is that the principal's support is integral to successful change efforts. Tasks that principals can perform to facilitate successful change include obtaining resources, buffering the project from outside interference, encouraging and supporting staff, and modifying standard operating procedures to fit the project where necessary (Firestone & Corbett, 1988). Peters and Waterman (1982) found that leaders of excellent business organizations promoted "a bias for action"; that is, they encouraged and stimulated employees at all levels of the organization to attempt innovative practices and supported successful tries as well as aborted attempts.

In instances where leaders initiate and mandate change, it is important for them to analyze the match among the intervention, the context, and the characteristics of the intervention itself. Fullan (1982) found that the presence of four characteristics enhances the potential for successful implementation: necessity, clarity, complexity, and practicality.

Although it may seem obvious that to be successful a change intervention should be needed, realistically many change efforts are not initiated in response to necessity. For example, the extensive Rand Corporation-sponsored change studies (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) found that many change efforts were opportunistically initiated in response to available grant funding. The Rand studies found that these projects were far less likely to be successful than those initiated in response to organizational need.

A second characteristic noted by Fullan (1982) that enhances a change effort's potential for success is clarity of purposes and procedures. Those implementing the change should be clear about the purposes of the change and the procedures for implementing it. On the other hand, too rigidly packaged innovations may detract from success. The adaptation of the innovation to local conditions and the development of materials to address local needs have been found to be characteristic of successful innovative program implementation efforts (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975).

A third characteristic for successful change efforts is complexity. Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984), in a synthesis of change research, noted that an innovation is more likely to be *adopted* if it is simple, that is, easy to understand and use. An innovation, however, is more likely to be *implemented* if it is complex, that is, if it is perceived as being ambitious. They hypothesized that a change has to be worth the effort to attract the energies of those adopting and implementing it, and thus the relative advantage of complexity outweighs the obvious advantage of simplicity.

Practicality is the fourth characteristic cited by Fullan (1982) as essential for successful change. Practicality can be thought of as the extent to which an innovation is capable of being put into practice (Firestone & Corbett, 1988). For example, if a school attempts to go from a half-day kindergarten program to an all-day program but has grant funding to pay the salaries of the additional teachers for only the first year of the change, the innovation is unlikely to stand the test of time. On the other hand, if the change in the kindergarten program is to modify curricular philosophy and subsequent practice from a skills-based approach to a developmental focus, and grant funding is available to make the initial purchase of nonconsumable materials required by the developmental program, then the innovation has greater practicality since future additional funding will not be required.

Leaders initiating and mandating change must also be cognizant of the appropriate time to involve subordinates, in order to increase the probability of the intervention's success. Although some previous research on change (for example, Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) indicated that teachers needed to be actively involved in decisions to adopt change interventions, more recent research argues that it is more essential for them to be involved at the stage where the change most directly affects them (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). In most cases this would correspond with the implementation phase of the change effort.

The necessity of involving teachers in change efforts at the point in time where the change has personal ramifications for them highlights the essential concern that most individuals have early in any change process—that is, how will the change affect me? What will it mean to my life? Will I have to work harder or smarter? What benefits does the change hold for me?

Ethical Considerations of Change

As administrators strive to improve the attainment of organizational outcomes through stimulating, initiating, or mandating change, they must be cognizant of ethical issues involved in planned organizational change. For example, what responsibility do school administrators have to honor (and, indeed, solicit) the professional beliefs of individuals working in the organization? Is appointment by a school board sufficient warrant for school administrators to assume that their beliefs and plans of action are superior to those of subordinates?

Sergiovanni (1991) called change a form of "social engineering" and asked, "Are we talking about leadership, or are we really talking about manipulation?" (p. 267). The implication is that whether change is mandated or whether subordinates are in some fashion "sold" on the value of a change may not be essentially different since both are socially engineered manipulations of individuals' beliefs.

An Alternative Model of Change

Sirotnik (1989) suggested that schools and the people working in them traditionally have been viewed as centers *for* change rather than centers *of* change. The distinction is that in the former case people and schools are the targets at which change is directed from some external source (e.g., government regulation, school board, superintendent, or principal mandate). In the latter case, individuals and schools become the sources in which change is generated and developed. Sirotnik suggests that this might occur by schools' becoming centers of inquiry where teachers critically study their practice and that of their school in collaboration with appropriate others (for example, colleagues, principals, university researchers). The objective would be to challenge dominant ideas and ideologies as well as taken-for-granted assumptions of schooling for purposes of exploring new arrangements (Foster, 1986).

No matter what change philosophy and strategies leaders adopt, they would be well served by remembering the following story Eric Hoffer (1952) told in his discussion of change.

> Back in 1936 I spent a good part of the year picking peas. I started out early in January in the Imperial Valley and drifted northward, picking peas as they ripened, until I picked the last peas of the season, in June, around Tracy. Then I shifted all the way to Lake County, where for the first time I was going to pick string beans. And I still remember how hesitant I was that first morning as I was about to address myself to the string bean vines. Would I be able to pick string beans? Even the change from peas to string beans had in it elements of fear. (p. 1)

The point is that all changes, even minor changes like switching from picking peas to picking beans or from teaching math from one textbook rather than another, invoke a degree of fear in individuals. School leaders must be sensitive to this factor if they are to lead schools that are both productive and humane.

MOTIVATING FOLLOWERS

Argyris (1964) noted that organizations are formed when tasks needing to be accomplished are too complex for one individual to achieve. As society became less agrarian, the educational needs of the populace changed and the concept of universal education emerged. Individuals sought positions in schools for reasons similar to those for which individuals joined other organizations. Primary, of course, was the need to earn a living. However, since multiple options existed for earning a living, individuals also looked to organizations to fulfill other personal needs.

The need for individuals to fulfill diverse personal needs frequently clashes with the organization's need to accomplish a specific task. In striving for efficiency, organizations develop rules, regulations, standard operating procedures, and other mechanisms that prescribe how individuals in the organization must comport themselves and accomplish their tasks. For example, schools and school districts have policy manuals and teacher handbooks that specify how teachers should conduct themselves in various situations, and curriculum guides that indicate what should be taught. Compliance with organizational policies and practices is enforced by an individual who is the "boss" (in schools, the principal). Regularly, the organization's need for standardization of employee behavior, and the individual's desire to be autonomous, come into conflict.

Argyris (1957) likened the relationship between employees and organizations to a developmental continuum from infancy to adulthood. He noted that the more formally structured the organization, the more its tendency to force employees to be like infants, that is, to be dependent and submissive to the organization. Adults, on the other hand, seek autonomy, independence, and control over their immediate worlds. Discussions in recent years about school site-based management and teacher empowerment have been based in part on efforts to establish greater congruence between the adult developmental needs of teachers and the way schools are governed.

Principals, superintendents, and other school leaders face the challenge of motivating teachers and other subordinates when organizational needs may be incongruent with their individual needs. The challenge lies in structuring daily school life in a manner that allows schools and districts to accomplish the organizational need to educate students while still satisfying the personal needs of individuals.

Hierarchy-of-Needs Theory

Maslow (1970) theorized that the behavior of individuals is motivated by a number of needs, which are arranged in hierarchical order from basic physiological needs such as food, clothing, and shelter at the lowest level to self-actualization at the highest level. Intermediate-level needs are security and safety (physical and financial), social affiliation (love, belonging, acceptance), and esteem (recognition by others). (See Figure 9–1.) Once a need has been satisfied, it no longer serves as a motivator, with the next-higher-level need becoming the prepotent motivator. For example, teachers who are considering school administration as a career are likely to have fulfilled basic physiological needs and to feel relatively safe, physically and financially. In most cases they have also achieved a degree of personal and professional acceptance by others, fulfilling the need for social affiliation. In some cases these individuals are motivated to pursue school administration because of a striving for esteem or recognition from peers which they feel the visibility of a position in school administration will provide them. In other cases, individuals may have achieved adequate esteem as teachers but see administration as an opportunity that provides greater autonomy and more opportunity for self-direction, and that increases the likelihood for them to reach their fullest capabilities.

Maslow's hierarchy-of-needs theory has achieved great popularity and is widely accepted, although little research exists to support it (Miskel & Ogawa, 1988). Some attribute the dearth of supporting research to definitional and methodological problems, but it is also possible to imagine practical difficulties. For example, although many teachers who are considering a school administration career are undoubtedly motivated by the needs outlined in the figure, others may have achieved social affiliation and simply see school administration as an opportunity to receive a bigger paycheck, reflecting a lower level of need on Maslow's hierarchy.

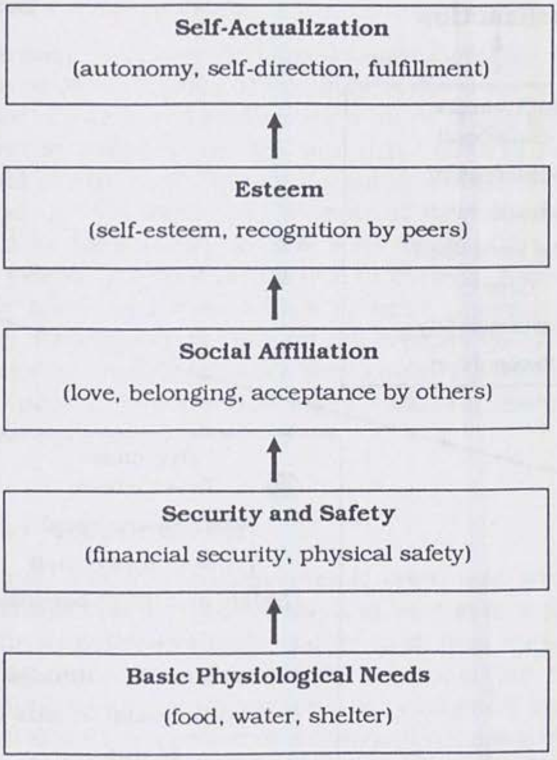

FIGURE 9–1 Hierarchy of Needs as Used in Maslow's Theory of Motivation

Two-Factor Motivation Theory

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) provided a different conceptualization of job motivation. Their theory states that two separate factors are involved in motivation and employee satisfaction. These have been termed *motivators* and *hygienes.* Motivators include achievement, advancement, the work itself, growth, responsibility, and recognition. Hygiene factors include the work environment (for example, organizational climate, physical conditions), the type of supervision, salary, job security, status, and attitudes and policies of superiors. Simply stated, improving hygiene factors causes employees to be less dissatisfied but does not motivate them to better job performance; improving motivators motivates employees to perform better and feel more job satisfaction. (See Figure 9–2.) Thus, hygiene factors have little to do with employee performance, since improving them will not motivate employees to perform better. However, if hygienes are too strongly negatively present, they block motivators from having an effect. In essence, they serve as a prerequisite for motivators. That is, adequate satisfaction with hygiene factors is necessary before other factors can be put into play to

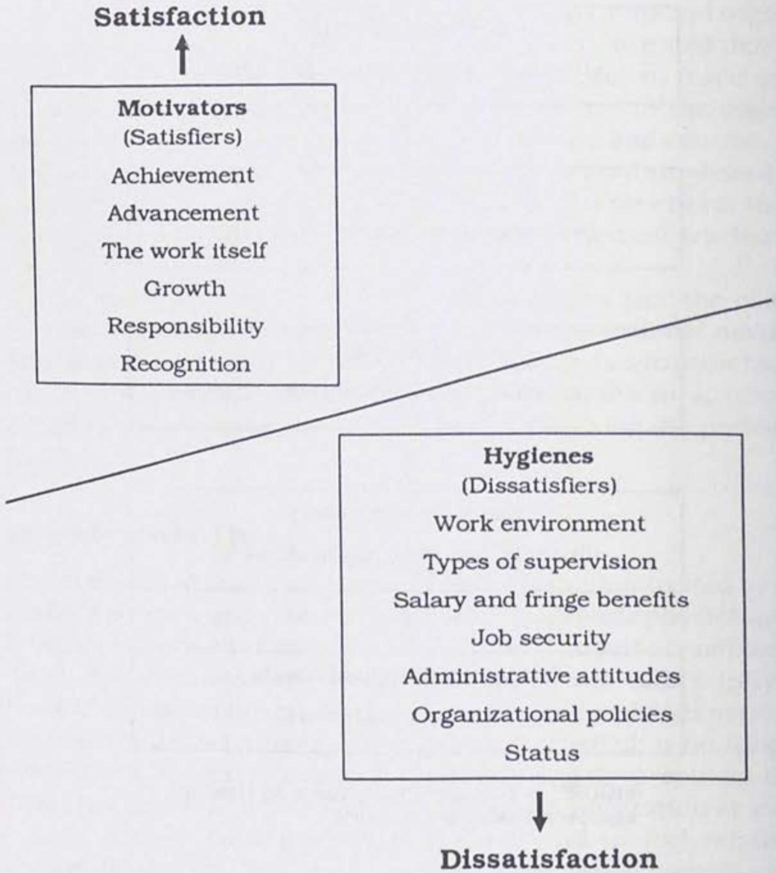

FIGURE 9–2 Model of Herzberg et al., 1959 Two-Factor Motivation Theory

motivate employees to improved performance. Similar to the hierarchy-of-needs theory, the two-factor theory is popular yet highly criticized.

Perhaps more important for school administrators than analyzing motivators and hygienes, or studying the operating needs levels of individual employees and attempting to develop congruent motivational strategies, is simply to be cognizant that physiological needs, security, salary, supervisory style, organizational climate, affiliation, responsibility, opportunities for growth, esteem, and self-actualization all are factors that motivate employee behavior. Individuals likely are motivated by several needs in varying strength valences in any given occurrence. For example, an individual who is considering accepting a job offer is likely to include factors dealing with finances, affiliation with colleagues, esteem, and opportunities for self-actualization in his or her deliberations.

A Contemporary Perspective

Peters and Waterman (1982) have developed a more simplistic but practical notion of motivation based on their study of excellent business corporations. They note that "all of us are self-centered suckers for a bit of praise and generally like to think of ourselves as winners" (p. 55), and that "none of us is really as good as he or she would like to think, but rubbing our noses daily in that reality doesn't do us a bit of good" (p. 55). Peters and Waterman found that excellent companies are characterized by their ability to deal with this paradox. These companies recognized that people are very responsive to external rewards, but that they are also strongly motivated from within to serve organizations that provide meaning for them. Excellent companies set achievement quotas that are attainable by the vast majority of employees rather than only by the elite few, have frequent celebrations of success, and provide many symbolic rewards (for example, certificates, ribbons, buttons).

Efficacy versus Accountability

Although frequently rewarding employees is consistent with the concept of positive reinforcement that prospective teachers learn in their preservice preparation, the norm in schools for administrators in dealing with teachers and for teachers in dealing with students frequently is incongruent with this concept. That is, meaningful praise of performance is the exception rather than the rule. Even those administrators who make conscious and continual efforts to recognize and reward employee performance find themselves in a paradoxical situation that forces them to choose between bolstering subordinates' feelings of efficacy (that is, professional effectiveness) and serving formal and informal demands for accountability (Clark & Astuto, 1988). The paradoxical nature of the choice between efficacy and accountability can be illustrated by the following example.

Almost every principal has been faced with considerations of how to motivate the marginal teacher. On the one hand, principals can take the route of efficacy—providing positive supervision, opportunities for professional development, and praising even minute examples of productive teaching performance. However, most school districts have policies that require principals to administer a formal evaluation to each teacher annually. If the principal practices consistent efficacious behavior, then the evaluation must be positively based, no matter how marginal the teaching performance. The positively based evaluation, however, does not serve accountability since it does not hold the teacher responsible for marginal teaching performance. If the principal opts to accurately portray the teacher's marginal teaching, then the evaluation does not serve efficacy since it will be negatively based.

Principals who may in the future be faced with initiating formal dismissal procedures against marginal teachers are confronted with an additional consideration. Past positive evaluations in a teacher's personnel file or examples of principal praise intended initially to develop feelings of efficacy may be cited by the teacher as evidence of teaching effectiveness. The principal will be hard-pressed to explain the sudden dramatic change in teaching performance suggested by the discrepancy between the past positive evaluations and the recent negative ratings. Dismissal proceedings are likely to be even more of a problem than usual.

If the principal chooses from the outset to hold the teacher accountable for marginal teaching performance, the chances of the teacher's improving teaching performance are decreased. One study cited found that 70 percent of the individuals surveyed rated themselves above average in leadership ability. Only 2 percent rated themselves below average. On other tasks, 60 percent rated themselves in the top 10 percent, 25 percent rated themselves in the top 1 percent, and none rated themselves below average (Myers, 1980, pp. 23–24). As individuals we engage in sense-making behavior that helps us to rationalize those aspects of our lives that are not totally understandable. Teachers who are judged by principals to be poor performers are unlikely to accept this external judgment. They are more likely to question the principal's knowledge of teaching, ability to be a principal, motives, or character, and develop a negative attitude toward teaching resulting in even lesser performance.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS

As was mentioned previously, individuals will sacrifice a great deal to organizations that provide meaning to their lives. Given the noble, service nature of education, developing meaningful organizations would seem a relatively easy task for school administrators to achieve. After all, one would assume that parents and most educators, whether teacher or administrator, have the best intentions of students in mind. Indeed, this may well be the case. What, then, prevents school faculties from developing strong core sets of beliefs that provide meaning and direction to daily life?

One of the difficulties may lie in the school's communication process. Although, on the surface, communication seems to be a relatively straightforward responsibility, Lysaught (1984) has noted that "problems of language, and meaning, and their transmission are among their [administrators'] most important, persistent, and ubiquitous organizational difficulties. More frequently than not, failures in communication lie at the heart of problems in organization, goal-setting, productivity, and evaluation" (p. 102).

Elements of Communication

There are a number of considerations related to communication that administrators must keep in mind. Lasswell (1948) succinctly stated these as "Who says What, to Whom, in Which channel, with What effect?" (p. 37). An additional consideration administrators may want to add is, "When should it be said?" Lasswell's formulation, however, captures only one side of the communication equation. The other side might be stated as "Who *heard* What, from Whom, When, through Which channel, with What effect?" This dual formulation of communication illustrates a number of aspects of the communication process. Communication includes a sender, a receiver, a sent message, a time when it was sent, a medium, and an outcome.

The school administrator has responsibility for sending messages to several different audiences. The most frequent audiences include teachers, parents, students, and the local community. In some cases, the principal may be responsible for communication but may decide that another party should do the actual communicating. For example, the principal may opt to let a teacher communicate information about a student's progress since the teacher has a more comprehensive understanding of the student's work. Likewise, the principal may let PTO officers communicate information about an upcoming PTO meeting.

Although principals should not feel the need to assume guilt for all that goes wrong in a school, ultimately they are the overseers of the entire operation and thus should be sensitive to all aspects of school operations. Thus, whereas teachers and PTO may accept primary responsibility for communicating the above information, the principal assumes secondary responsibility. Many principals require all written communication from the school or staff members to be funneled through their office for approval prior to being sent into the home or community. This helps the principal make sure that necessary information is being communicated and to ensure that a professional format is being used. The downside of following this procedure is that it may communicate a nonverbal message to teachers and others that the principal does not trust the quality of their communication.

Decisions over whether messages should be communicated in writing or orally; in person or by telephone; by informal note, memo, or formal letter are dependent on the substance of the message. For example, simply scrawling a note of reply or approval directly onto a letter of inquiry saves time and is acceptable in many cases. Replies that require greater length, might be publicly shared, or are written to outsiders or superiors who are not close acquaintances require a more formal response. Delivering a message in person (or even using the telephone) adds a personal touch to communication but should be followed up with written communication where documentation might be required or where misunderstanding could occur.

Simply communicating information is insufficient. Consideration should also be given to the appropriate time at which information should be communicated. For example, informing teachers on Monday that the school carnival is on Friday and that their class is expected to have a booth provides inadequate lead time. On the other hand, telling teachers in September that a booth is required in March should be succeeded by follow-up reminders as March approaches.

There will be instances when the answer to the question of when information should be communicated is "never." Principals are privy to various bits of information that need not go beyond them. A useful rule of thumb to follow is that if communicating information will not improve relationships or the process or product of schooling, then little is served by passing it on.

Problems and Strategies

Scholars of communication processes have identified a number of reasons why messages that are received do not always resemble messages that are sent. This section will briefly discuss several of these problems as well as present some practical communication strategies for school administrators.

Communication Oversight. A frequent communication problem is that administrators are closely involved with a number of different projects and may overlook communicating with some outsiders who are stakeholders but do not have direct involvement in the project at that time. For example, a principal may be working with a committee that is developing innovative math programming but neglect to keep math teachers not on the committee informed about the committee's progress. In such instances, the final recommendations of the committee may come as such a shock to noncommittee members that there is strong reactionary backlash against otherwise positive recommendations.

The problem of communication oversight is especially prevalent in school-to-home communication. For example, after working on a school project for several months and informing parents of the outcome only to meet with objections of "Why didn't you tell us you were working on this?" principals may wonder how it is possible that parents did not know about the project. After all, staff members had spent hundreds of hours on the project. Frequently it is easy to forget that the intimate familiarity we have with projects in which we are immersed is matched only by the total ignorance outsiders have of our work.

One strategy for minimizing communication oversight is to establish a written schedule of regular (and frequent) written communication with various audiences. This strategy provides several benefits. Establishing a schedule helps ensure that communication will take place on a regular basis. Having communication be in written form provides a record of what was communicated, and frequently permits mental review of noteworthy items that have occurred since the last communication.

Composing a written teachers' bulletin daily or every other day, although time-consuming, may actually save time in the long run by preventing misunderstandings and needless questions. It forces principals to ask themselves, "What is it that the teachers should know today? What should they know for the remainder of this week? next week? Of what previously mentioned items do I need to remind them today?" Daily communication allows details that contribute to the smooth operation of the school and might otherwise be overlooked to be noted.

Similarly, a written parent bulletin should be sent home every week with a more extensive newsletter monthly or quarterly. Questions to be addressed include "What is it that parents need to know? What is it that parents might want to know? What are we doing that shows that this school is moving forward? What good things have happened to teachers or students?" Consideration should be given to placing newsletters in businesses and stores in the school's attendance area.

Message Interpretation. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of communication is the effect it has on others. One would be naive to assume that the messages we send are always the same messages that are received. Frequently, there is a discrepancy between what an individual thinks is being communicated and the message that another individual is receiving. Conceptual models of communication refer to the factors that cause a discrepancy between the sent message and the received message as "noise" (Lysaught, 1984). Noise can be thought of as the influence of contextual factors on the message as it is received and decoded. For example, certain words such as *redistricting, busing,* or *AIDS* may engender emotional reactions in some individuals and cloud the substance of the message.

Symbolic interactionists have long held that the meaning of any event is not inherent in the event itself, but arises out of the interaction of the individual with the event. For example, a principal may frequently visit classrooms because of a strong interest in what students are learning and a desire to show teachers that he or she is interested in their work. Teachers, on the other hand, may interpret the principal's frequent presence in their classrooms as a lack of trust in them to do their jobs as they best see fit. The teacher who has received poor evaluations from the principal for marginal teaching performance may interpret the principal's classroom visits differently than the teacher who has become a friend of the principal through their working together on various professional committees. Some principals may decide to stay out of classrooms because of a concern that they will be perceived as distrustful or meddling. Conversely, teachers in these schools may perceive their principals as not being interested enough in them or the students to see how they spend their day. Obviously, the messages that are being received vary and may be different from the messages that are being sent.

Information Overload. Another barrier to effective communication is information overload. When the amount of information becomes more than can be dealt with effectively, the overload of communication engenders a response that results in less-than-optimal information processing. The complexity, specialization, and increasing regulation of today's schools result in principals and teachers being bombarded with information from a variety of sources. The amount of information coupled with time constraints on educators are likely to result in teachers and principals being periodic victims of information overload. Typical responses to information overload include omitting, erroring, queuing, filtering, generalizing, employing multiple channels, and escaping (Miller, 1960). Descriptions and examples of each response are provided in Table 9–1.

Given the variety of ways in which communication can and is likely to be distorted, principals would be wise to regularly solicit feedback from message recipients regarding their understanding of the message that was communicated.

MANAGING TIME

One of the biggest challenges faced by principals and other school administrators is managing time in a manner that allows them to accomplish those tasks which they feel are most important. Studies of managerial work (Mintzberg, 1973) and the principalship (e.g., Sproul, 1976, cited in Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1987; Wolcott, 1973) indicate that administrative work is characterized by many brief encounters generally of several minutes or less in length. Additionally, administrative work is fragmented; that is, the administrator deals with many different issues during the course of the day, but sees few of these to immediate completion. Work occurs at an unrelenting pace with one interaction followed in immediate succession by another.

TABLE 9–1 Responses to Information Overload and Representative Examples

Response	Description and Example
Omitting	Failure to process some information Teacher overlooks some sections of a teacher bulletin
Erroring	Processing information incorrectly Teacher reads "Tuesday at 10 AM" instead of "Thursday at 10 AM" as the time for a school-wide assembly
Queuing	Delaying the processing of information until a lull occurs Teacher delays reading the teacher bulletin because of other mail and demands
Filtering	Separating out less-relevant information Teacher skims teacher bulletin and only reads those sections that are personally most relevant
Generalizing	Reducing the level of specificity In response to a request for information, a teacher uses the same general response for a number of questions even though to be completely accurate the specifics of each response should vary somewhat
Employing multiple channels	Introducing alternative channels for information flow A teacher uses an instructional aid to read the mail with instructions for routing as appropriate
Escaping	Avoiding the information A teacher decides not to read teacher bulletins since they always result in additional tasks

Given the frenetic nature of administrative work, it is little wonder that studies have found a substantial discrepancy between how principals feel they should spend their time and how they actually spend it. For example, a study conducted by McCleary and Thomson (1979) found that secondary school principals ranked program development as the task area on which they would ideally spend the most time, but actually spent more time on school management, personnel, student activities, and student behavior. (See Table 9–2.) Increasing regulation of schools, changing demographics resulting in more at-risk students, and other factors that are increasing organizational complexity conspire to rob principals of an even greater percentage of their discretionary time in the future.

Time Management Tips

There are several strategies principals can adopt to shrink the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of time expenditure. One strategy is simply to become proficient in time management techniques. The following list provides tips that have been cited by time management studies (e.g., Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1983) or proven in the authors' experience to result in more efficient use of time:

1. Delegate.
2. Say "no."

TABLE 9–2 Rankings of Ideal and Actual Time Allocations of High School Principals*

Task Areas	Ideal Time Planned	Actual Time Spent	Difference
Program development	1**	5	4
Personnel	2	2	0
School management	3	1	2
Student activities	4	3	1
Planning	5	7	2
Professional development	6	9	3
Student behavior	7	4	3
Community	8	8	0
District office	9	6	3

*Data from McCleary & Thomson (1979).
**On scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being most important, 5 being least important

3. Double up; that is, do two things at one time (for example, complete paperwork while on hold on the telephone).
4. Achieve closure; that is, stop meetings, conversations, and other activity at the point where productivity breaks down.
5. Do not procrastinate.
6. Use creative time wisely; that is, use the time of the day when you work best to complete your most complex tasks.
7. Establish a tickler file to remind you of upcoming deadlines.
8. Have someone screen your phone calls.
9. Keep a "to-do" list.
10. Handle paper once (for example, dispense with routine mail and memos the first time you handle them).
11. Write brief letters and jot replies directly on incoming letters and memos where appropriate.
12. Do not sit down after greeting "unwanted" visitors (for example, a salesperson in whose products you have no interest).
13. Always carry a small notepad to jot reminders and follow-up items.
14. Use "down" time (for example, catch up on professional reading or go through mail while waiting in the doctor's office).
15. Skip meetings where appropriate (when you have little substantive or symbolic information to communicate).
16. Have someone screen your mail and separate it into piles (for example, personal correspondence, bulk mail, reply required)
17. Speed-read and skim where possible.
18. Get an excellent secretary.
19. Reduce sleep.
20. Decide how you want to spend your time and then do it.
21. Do not assume unnecessary "monkeys."

The final item bears further explanation. As principal, it is not your responsibility to take care of all teacher, student, and parent needs that are brought to your attention. Many of these "monkeys" can be returned to the back of the person who tried to place the monkey on your back by directing that person to the appropriate information source or resources and letting him or her retain responsibility for follow-up. Be certain, however, that such people know it is their responsibility to follow up and are not assuming that you will do so. You can indicate your genuine interest in their well-being by asking them at a later time if they were successful in tracking down the information or resources.

Efficient time management is unlikely to totally provide principals with the curriculum and instructional development time they desire. Chapter 10 will discuss the concept of "overarching frameworks" (Dwyer, Barnett, & Lee, 1987, p. 33) and how they might serve as purposeful organizers to guide and connect administrator responses to the frequent, routine, frenetic, and seemingly fragmented interactions of which their days consist.

Finally, similar to the way solutions have a way finding problems in the garbage can decision-making model discussed earlier, so do additional tasks and problems have a way of finding principals who spend excessive time in their offices completing managerial responsibilities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This chapter dealt with some of the challenges of leadership. The central thesis of the chapter was that leadership is a complex and problematic undertaking. Those considering a career in school administration should be forewarned that it is not a profession for the light-hearted. Prospective school leaders should expect to encounter ambiguity in making optimal decisions and uncertainty in terms of who must, who might, and who should be involved in decision making. In their quest to keep organizational members working at peak performance and to move their schools forward through planned organizational change, future school administrators may face instances where issues of productivity confront issues of ethics. The nature of communication makes it likely that there will be instances where intents are misunderstood. Finally, in attempting to deal effectively with the various challenges of leadership, the school administrator can expect to confront role ambiguity brought on by the discrepancy between what is expected in terms of instructional leadership and what is required in terms of school management.

In a sense, a career in school administration is similar to the paradoxes of practice that school leaders frequently confront. Although the challenges and complexity of the people portion of the position make it difficult and periodically frustrating, they simultaneously provide the stimulation and the opportunity for service that make school administration an interesting and rewarding career.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. What are the characteristics of effective school leaders with whom you have worked? Contrast these with the characteristics of ineffective school leaders with whom you have worked. Based on these characteristics develop a personal definition of leadership.

2. Do you agree with Schon (1987, 1989), and Tyack and Hansot (1982) that today's schools do not have a clear sense of purpose? Provide examples to support your argument.
3. As you make decisions and take action in your professional practice, what information guides your decision making and actions? Do you agree with Schon (1987, 1989) that social sciences such as education lack systematic, professional knowledge? Support your answer.
4. Which model of decision making (rational, garbage can, political) do you feel is most frequently true of educational decision making? Identify examples that support each model.
5. How extensively do you feel teachers should be involved in school decision making? How can schools overcome the logistical difficulties inherent in shared decision making (for example, lack of teacher time)?
6. Which more closely resembles your philosophy of change: "Do it, fix it, try it" or "Why fix it if it isn't broken?"?
7. Do you agree with change research findings that indicate that the appropriate time to involve teachers in planned organizational change is at the implementation stage rather than at the decision stage? What are the advantages and disadvantages of teacher involvement at each stage?
8. How do you feel about Sergiovanni's (1991) statement that change is a form of "social engineering"? Is there a difference between leading people in the change process and manipulating them to change? If so, provide key distinctions and supporting examples.
9. What is motivating you to consider a career in school administration? How do your motivational needs compare with Maslow's (1970), Herzberg et al.'s (1959), and Peters and Waterman's (1982) theories of motivation?
10. What are some ways that schools can more effectively communicate with parents and local communities?

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Interview a principal in terms of (a) how he or she feels his or her time ideally should be spent and (b) how he or she feels his or her time actually is spent. Shadow the principal and compare how his or her time actually is spent with (a) how he or she perceives it is spent and (b) how he or she would ideally spend it.
2. Shadow a principal and record the types of situations he or she must address. Classify these situation according to degree of complexity and importance. Does Schon's (1987, 1989) hypothesis regarding simplicity/insignificance and complexity/importance hold true? What factors are involved in problems you classified as complex?
3. Analyze the main purpose of your school as reflected in the school's philosophy or mission statement (for example, high test scores, development of the total person). Recall some recent or significant school decisions and study instructional practices in your school. What do these suggest is the school's main purpose?
4. Study a recent decision that was made in your school. What was the process that was used to arrive at a decision? Who was involved in the process? What factors were taken into consideration in making the decision? Did the process most closely resemble the rational, garbage can, or political model of decision making?
5. Analyze policy and practice in your school and district to determine whether they are characterized more by change or by stability. When change occurs, how does

the change process compare with the various characteristics of change discussed in this chapter?

6. What are the formal and informal communication channels in your school? Do they seem adequate to communicate needed and desired information? How do various audiences (for example, teachers, parents, students, community) perceive communication from the school?
7. Analyze a situation in your school where communication went awry. What factors led to the miscommunication? How could the likelihood of future occurrences of this type of miscommunication be minimized?
8. Practice some of the time management tips provided in this chapter. Do they seem to provide you with additional time?

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