

CHALLENGES FOR LEADING, MANAGING, AND ACCOMPLISHING
IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This paper stresses the need for moral leadership in schools (Burns, 1978; Sergiovanni, 2000) grounded in individuals' aspirations, needs, goals, values, and commitments to perform competently. It focuses on the role of teachers and school principals in fostering learning environments that engender student competence.

Using personal reflections on teaching and learning along with notions about individual's repertory of behavior and supporting environment (Chevalier, 2003; Gilbert, 1978), data from 27 teachers and school principals are analyzed. The paper concludes that high-performance school systems should have the greatest impact on student performance and the "E-factor" (Handy, 1993) in schools.

Increased calls for accountability in school systems have in extreme cases prompted some school districts to doctor school graduation and dropout rates ("Houston's School Dropout Debacle," 2003; Lewin & Medina, 2003), some schools to administer multiple practice tests to raise scores (Berendt & Koski, 1999), some dropping subjects such as science that are not currently tested at all grade levels, and some "teaching to the test." On the contrary, teachers and school principals should be able to raise the overall achievement levels of students across all grade levels by facilitating student involvement and engagement, consciously using more formative evaluation strategies, and "teaching to the whole person." In this paper, we articulate characteristics that we have used to help students succeed, clarifying how they might be used to improve professional practice.

Objectives

The purpose is to develop positive ways in which teachers and principals might impact student learning. We identify and comment on key characteristics that would help teachers and principals foster self-directed learning, increase student achievement, evaluate learning competencies, and demonstrate continual improvement in their schools. Clearly, teachers and principals have to understand the importance of these characteristics and then apply them consistently in their own individual professional contexts to influence students' academic performance and social competence.

Two of these characteristics: self-development and building relationships are particularly important. Nias (1985) observed that the self is both a social product which is constantly being shaped by the responses of others, and a reflexive product capable of initiating behavior and reflecting upon it. For this study, we devised a survey instrument to facilitate reflection and promote self-development.

Building relationships is the fundamental means of drawing out collegial participation and getting things done in educational organizations (Fisher, 2000; Louis & Miles, 1990). Teachers and principals focused on nurturing relationships strive to provide individuals with appropriate information, resources, and incentives needed to perform well in their tasks (Everard & Morris, 1990). The study illustrates how this might be accomplished in practice.

Framework

Leading, managing, and accomplishing in school systems constantly challenge teachers and school principals to seek ways to enhance student learning. Amrein and Berliner (2003), citing results from 18 high-stakes testing states, have underscored how this cannot be achieved by "testing for accountability," because it merely reduces student motivation to learn and drives more students and teachers away from schools.

Bailey, Berc, and Sandy (2001) concluded from their three-year study of 45 firms that high-performance work systems, organizations that prize employee participation,

fostered “creativity, imagination, and problem-solving abilities” in its employees and benefited both employers and the employees (pp. 540-541). Extending this idea to schools, we have defined *high-performance school systems* (HPSS) as educational organizations in which teachers and school principals use decision-making by consensus to foster student engagement through self-directed learning, and rely on extensive formative evaluations techniques to evaluate student accomplishments.

In the following table, we identify and define various characteristics that might impact HPSS and consequently influence students’ academic outcomes.

Table 1: Characteristics that impact academic outcomes.

	Teachers	Principals
Leadership	<i>Subject expertise</i> that help teacher’s use their competence for providing effective instruction, developing students’ confidence, relating subject matter to students’ personal experiences (Dewey, 1933), and helping them set and achieve realistic academic goals.	<i>Doing the right thing</i> (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) by outlining school’s broader purpose, mission, vision, and values (West-Burnham, 1994) after consultation with teachers and district personnel.
Management	Displaying a wide variety of teaching strategies that <i>engage students academically</i> (Jones & Jones, 2001) and providing them with challenging learning environments.	<i>Doing things right</i> by clearly defining who will do what and when (Drucker, 1977) and paying attention to specific details with regards to execution, planning, organizing, networking, deploying, and building relationships (Kotter, 1988).
Accomplishment	Motivating students to achieve beyond their previous performance levels.	Stimulating colleagues towards exemplary performances (Gilbert, 1978).
Performance	Assuming personal responsibility for achieving personal goals, teaching and learning standards, and enhancing student achievement.	Delivering sustained success (Armstrong & Baron, 1998) of the school in measurable outcomes by developing the capabilities of individuals and work teams.

Table 1 (Continued): Characteristics that impact academic outcomes.

	Teachers	Principals
Relationship	Facilitating learning and development of students (Rogers, 1969) by exhibiting traits such as genuineness, caring, and empathy, which bring out the best (Rogers, 1980) in them.	Operationalizes leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1997) by providing individuals and work teams with appropriate resources, experiences, and information to perform well in their tasks.
Self	Teaching and helping students make the right connections by being aware of students' inner scaffolding (Senge et al., 2000), reflecting on teaching practice, and inviting collegial observations for feedback on classroom practices.	Promoting a strong sense of personal identity and self, self being both a social product which is constantly being shaped by the responses of colleagues, and a reflexive product capable of initiating behavior and reflecting upon it (Nias, 1985).
Self-directed learning	Taking the initiative in diagnosing student learning needs, formulating learning goals, providing them resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975).	Aligning individual's disposition and activities with school's overall goals, and evaluating impact of learning processes on school's flexibility and innovative capabilities (Straka, 1997).
Work teams	Increasing individual student responsibility (e.g. by providing them opportunities to share interesting academic articles with classmates) for enhancing class performance and overall learning outcomes (Pounder, 1998).	Managing and supervising colleagues as a team rather than a collection of individuals, providing group reward system, training, and organizational support (Hackman, 1990).
High-performance work systems (HPWS) Or Self-directed work teams (SDWTs)	Developing and implementing effective teaching strategies that are aligned with developmental stage of students, developing necessary tactics to cope with student learning and/or behavioral problems, and providing coordinated communication with parents (Clark & Clark, 1994).	Dispelling seven myths about SDWTs outlined by Orsburn & Moran (2000) and promote teachers working on task teams, more open lines of management, and staff development (Harrison, Dobell, & Higgins, 1996).

Table 1 (Continued): Characteristics that impact academic outcomes.

	Teachers	Principals
Parity	Being fair to all students without exhibiting any favoritism and helping them understand the power of their accumulated accomplishments.	Establishing equal status among all (Mergondoller, 1981) the teachers, valuing individual’s contributions, and where appropriate providing them the ability to influence the behavior of others after mutual consultation.
Reciprocity	Listening to student viewpoints actively to verify if instruction was meeting their needs, and accomplishing both students’ and teacher’s goals (Burns, 1978).	Encouraging a collaborative atmosphere that supports an active exchange where all parties are receiving privileges, benefits, and rewards for the efforts that they provide (Crow, 1998).
Empowerment	Sharing the decision making with students and treating them as joint seekers of truth and mutual actualization (Burns, 1978).	Committing other to share the values and vision of the school, and making sure that none of the four variables: authority (A), resources (R), information (I), and accountability (Ac) in the formula $E = f(A, R, I, Ac)$ are zero (Fisher, 2000).

Gilbert (1978) observed that any school that could be characterized by descriptions in his *behavior engineering model* (BEM) would carry a guarantee of high competence, provided, of course, the school management focused on accomplishments and delivery of professional goals. By comparing the definitions of our 12 characteristics (Table 1) with the descriptors in Gilbert’s original BEM cells, we found that they could be conveniently nested inside the BEM cells. Table 2 shows how these characteristics are embedded inside an updated Gilbert’s BEM (Chevalier, 2003).

Table 2: Characteristics that impact academic outcomes nested in an updated Gilbert’s BEM (Chevalier, 2003).

Supporting environment	1. Information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed work teams • Empowerment 	2. Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Self-directed learning 	3. Incentives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work teams • Reciprocity
Individual’s repertory of behavior	6. Knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Parity 	5. Capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management • Self 	4. Motives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplishments • Performance

According to Gilbert (1978), human competence might be improved in organizations by altering either the supporting environment and/or an individual’s

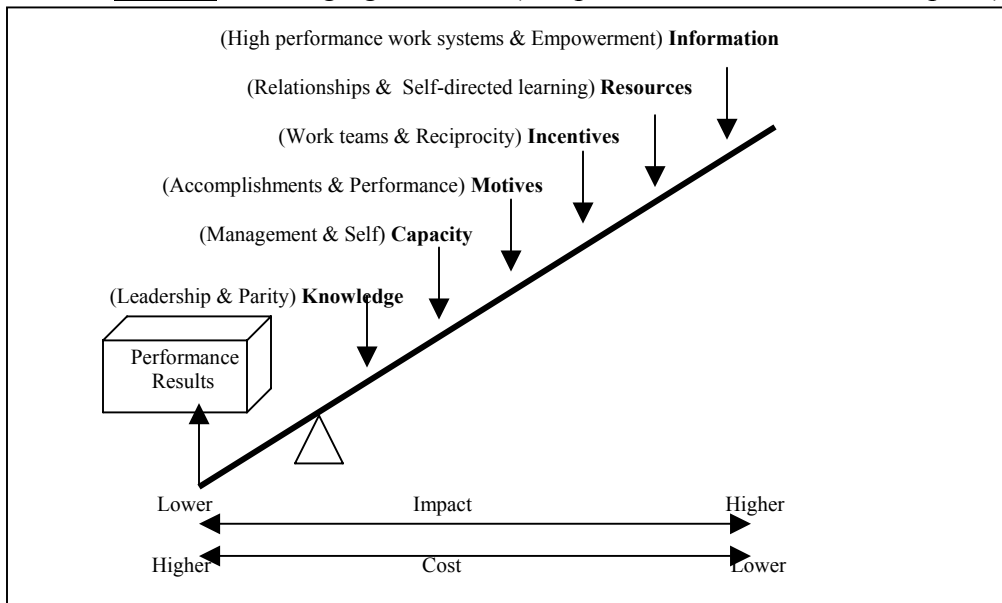
repertory of behavior. We mentioned earlier that teachers and principals, who strive to nurture relationships, provide individuals with appropriate information, resources, and incentives. Evidently, these strategies enrich the supporting environment within the framework of the updated BEM (Table 2). Further, Chevalier (2003) recommends that organizations seeking exemplary performance must start with the environmental factors because they “pose the greatest barriers” (p. 9).

Methods

We mentioned earlier that it is important for organizations to nurture the self-development of the individuals within the organization. The 12 characteristics defined earlier and the update of Gilbert’s BEM framework has led to a simple survey instrument (Table 4) to examine schools as a whole. We are using this instrument to collect data from teachers and principals in three school districts in Colorado and expect the results will familiarize teachers and school principals with Gilbert’s framework and give us feedback on key characteristics that affect a school’s academic outcomes. Also, this survey might facilitate reflection and promote self-development of teachers and principals in these schools.

Chevalier (2003) uses a model (Table 3), initially developed by the *International Society for Performance Improvement*, to illustrate the potential impact of various components of the updated BEM on performance. Evidently the least expensive solution and the greatest potential impact on performance is obtained by positively influencing the information component. Using the two characteristics in our study that describe information, it would appear that high-performance work systems and empowerment might produce the greatest impact on schools academic outcomes.

Table 3: Leveraging solutions (Adapted from Chevalier, 2003, p. 10)



Data sources

Three participating schools districts are providing nine candidates each (two teachers and a school principal from an elementary, middle, and high school) for the study. One district has a 68% enrollment of Spanish speakers. Another has a 22% enrollment of Spanish speakers and 23% of English Language Acquisition learners. The third has fewer than a third of its students from minority groups. The overall academic performance of several schools in these three districts are low, low, and high respectively, according to state reports. With nine candidates from each district (27 in all), the study will substantiate its findings with empirical data on how the performance in school systems might be enhanced.

Table 4: Survey instrument for study on high-performance school systems

<i>Supporting environment (E)</i>	Self-directed work teams	Relationships	Work teams																								
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<i>Legend for check boxes: E = Excellent; G = Good; F = Fair; P = Poor</i>																											
<p>Is there any other aspect that has helped you facilitate your accomplishment(s) and increase the "E-factor" (involving effort, energy, excitement, enthusiasm, and effectiveness) in your school:</p> 																											

Importance

As Lewin (1942) observes, teachers and school principals cannot succeed in helping students if they do not “learn to understand the psychological world in which the individual child lives” (p. 213). In this study, we seek to observe school systems as wholes and highlight the importance of both the supporting environment (high-performance work systems, empowerment, relationships, self-directed learning, work teams, and reciprocity) and a person’s repertory of behavior (leadership, parity, management, self, accomplishments, and performance) to engender student competence.

Unlike business organizations, schools have not systematically researched human competence and explored the use of high-performance work systems. Isolated studies on self-directed learning (Brown, 2002) and work group enhancements (Pounder, 1998) have been reported in the past. This study seeks to gather empirical data within the framework of an updated Gilbert’s BEM from practitioners in educational organizations and could inform best practices in schools.

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