



A Response to Hogan: Merlin Understood!

Don't blame team management—
the magic lies in the mission!

GENE GEISERT

Camelot fell apart when its leaders lost sight of their mission, not because of the concept of the Round Table. Likewise, school organizations whose personnel lack a common philosophical commitment will have problems with any management approach.

Research conducted by Likert and others indicates that work groups operate best in identifying and resolving problems when organized under a management team model and, thereby, then active two-way communication exists. A management team that uses an interactive-collaborative model promotes two-way communication, one of the basic needs of any educational organization, as a team-building process.

When decisions are needed, the superintendent convenes group meetings rather than individual conferences, thereby drawing on the talents, skills, and knowledge of many individuals. Those affected by the policies have the opportunity to participate in their development. With a team approach, problems can be identified and resolved across major functional or organizational lines, and solutions found that are best for the total organization, rather than for a vested few.

Team management is effective and efficient in carrying out a mission precisely because it enables the organization to meet the needs of individuals

within the system, as well as those it serves. Policies that enable building administrators to exercise leadership, make program decisions, recommend personnel, and alter their practices to accommodate needs do not necessarily lead to Hogan's autonomous fiefdoms. On the contrary, given a clear statement of their mission and commitment to carrying it out, on-site management personnel are more likely to achieve the mission and accept responsibility for their efforts. They are much less likely to be either accountable or successful if they have had little or no input in the development of the decisions or policies they are to administer. More often than not, they will blame central office for their failures and adopt the "I had nothing to do with that" attitude.

Hogan is correct when she asserts that a superintendent needs the support and allegiance of the management team to survive in today's hostile educational climate. An inordinately high percentage of modern superintendents have followed Arthur to an early demise; modern Mordents are disguised in many forms both within and outside the "team" structure.

These combative Mordents gain reputations for "running off" superintendents. In the absence of a responsible, stable superintendent with reasonable tenure in office, the professional bureaucracy inevitably becomes stolid, reactionary, and fiercely protective of the status quo. They know they can outlast reform-minded chief executives who come and go.

Self-preserving bureaucrats are masterly at ignoring decisions they view as threatening. Unless they see their futures tied to the success of the superintendent and top management, those who have "been in the system forever" will not commit themselves to or feel responsible for new courses of action. Yet their cooperation and commitment are essential to effective team management.

Hogan is also correct when she states that team management approaches attract highly motivated persons with skill, initiative, commitment, talent, and ambition. Believe me, I'll seek the upwardly motivated administrator every time over the suspicious, "don't rock the boat," and self-aggrandizing bureaucrat who is protected by longevity and tenure.

Hogan views educational administration with an all-encompassing Machiavellian philosophy that emphasizes power and entrenchment but discounts any concern educators might have for children. The promise of more responsive education—whose ultimate mission is student success—lies in the understanding and acceptance of humanistic team management approaches by more superintendents, managers, principals, and school board members, not the contrary. **EL**

Reference

Likert, Rensis. *The Human Organization: Its Management and Value*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

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