

Effects of Three Principal Styles on School Improvement

Initiators are more successful than Managers or Responders in facilitating change.



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The need for more and better information about the leadership role of principals in school improvement efforts sparked the research now under way at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas.

One of the objectives of this research has been to identify the specific kinds and combinations of behaviors that principals can and should exhibit on a day-to-day basis to bring about improvement in schools. Our research group wanted more than vague concepts of leadership or lists of global variables and strategies that all principals should use. If the role of the principal is critical, then it should be possible to identify and relate principals' daily interventions to what happens in classrooms when teachers attempt to implement new practices.

To date a series of three studies have been conducted to explore and describe the way principals work. One key to the success of these studies has been limiting the scope of the studies to the role of the principal as change facilitator. Our staff had concluded that in addition to definitional problems, one of the likely reasons for the absence of significant findings in so many previous studies of

principals was the tendency to study all parts of the principals' work simultaneously. The staff also realized the importance of obtaining firsthand documentation of the daily behaviors of principals, rather than conducting an after the fact debriefing or surveying teachers for their perceptions of what principals did.

Another factor in the success of these studies came from an obvious finding of the first study (Hall, Hord, and Griffin, 1980)—*all principals are not the same*. Principals view their role and priorities differently and operationally define their roles differently in terms of what they actually do each day. This perspective of the principalship suggested that in studies of principal effects, normative sampling would not work. Principals should be systematically selected as different in terms of some independent variable, such as change facilitator style. By studying sets of principals who worked in different ways it should be easier to identify systematic effects and to compare differences.

The Concept of Change Facilitator Style

The idea of leaders having a style is not new. However, when various bodies of literature were examined—particularly

research on industrial organizational leadership, change process and educational administration—it became clear that there was no operational definition of style. Further, and more troubling, a careful distinction had not been drawn, either conceptually or methodologically, between leader behaviors and leader style (Rutherford, Hord, Huling, and Hall, 1983). The concepts were used interchangeably and often the measures appeared to have little relationship to

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the variables being described in the study hypotheses.

The shortsightedness of many studies in their treatment of style is suggested by McCall and Lombardo (1978) who point out that, "leadership researchers may see delegation activity as a leadership style and correlate it with group productivity, while, in many cases, delegation is a political tool used by leaders to create a desirable situation" (p. 158). Not only does a particular behavior not represent an overall style, but one cannot accurately describe or understand the behavior without understanding the motivation behind it. The importance of motivation in understanding style has been emphasized by others including Fiedler (1978) and Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958). Fiedler contends that effective group interaction is dependent on "... leader personality attributes, reflecting his or her motivational structure ..." (p. 60) and the situational control and influence of the leader. Tannenbaum and Schmidt maintain that a manager must consider three forces or motivations when deciding how to manage, and one of these they term "forces operating within his own personality" (p. 98). In contrast, others (Jago and Vroom, 1977; Hill and Hughes, 1974) seem to view style as a set of behaviors without reference to motivation. With this background for the RDCTE studies change facilitator style was defined in terms of a combination of principals' behaviors, concerns, and knowledge, and the tone of their actions.

Besides being plagued by definitional and conceptual difficulties, the idea of style has another serious problem. Invariably research on leadership styles has begun with an identification and description of a style or elements of a style. Leaders were then observed or subordinates and leaders questioned to see if the leader might or did exhibit the described style in different situations. To further complicate things, in many of these studies followers were asked about individual behaviors of leaders rather than being surveyed about a gestalt of the leaders behaviors and motivations. This more multivariate approach to defining leadership has emerged recently in several research studies (Thomas, 1978; Hall, Rutherford, and Griffin, 1982) and a literature review (Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982).

The Principal as Director, Administrator, or Facilitator

In Thomas' (1978) study of more than 60 schools, the focus was on the role of school principals in managing diverse educational programs. Out of this study she identified three patterns or classifications of principal behavior related to the facilitation of alternative programs: Director, Administrator, and Facilitator.

Principals who were *Directors* maintained an active interest in all aspects of the school from curriculum and teaching to budgeting and scheduling. They also retained final decision-making authority in the school although teachers contributed to decisions affecting the classroom. *Administrators* made decisions in areas affecting the school as a whole, leaving teachers with much autonomy in their own classroom. These principals tended to identify with district management rather than with their own faculties. *Facilitators* on the other hand, thought of themselves as colleagues of the faculty. They perceived their primary role to be supporting and assisting teachers in their work. One way they did this was to involve teachers in the decision-making process.

Thomas concluded that although many factors affected implementation, the leadership of the principal appeared to be one of the most important factors in the success or demise of an alternative program. Schools under the leadership of a Directive or Facilitative principal had a greater degree of implementation of alternative programs than did schools headed by an Administrative principal. Furthermore, in those schools that had a single alternative program (versus multi-building programs), when strong leadership was lacking program offerings tended to drift toward something different from that originally intended and teachers within the program tended to follow disparate classroom practices. However, Directive principals had more difficulty managing multi-building alternative programs than did Administrators and Facilitators.

The Principal as Initiator, Manager, or Responder

Working independently of Thomas, researchers at RDCTE (Hall, Rutherford, and Griffin, 1982) identified three change facilitator styles that are very

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similar to Thomas' styles. As a result of this research, we now have operational descriptions of the three styles, which we call Initiator, Manager, and Responder.

Initiators have clear, decisive long-range policies and goals that transcend but include implementation of current innovations. They tend to have very strong beliefs about what good schools and teaching should be like and work intensely to attain this vision. Decisions are made in relation to their goals for the school and in terms of what they believe to be best for students, which is based on current knowledge of classroom practice. Initiators have strong expectations for students, teachers, and themselves. They convey and monitor these expectations through frequent contacts with teachers and clear explication of how the school is to operate and how teachers are to teach. When they feel it is in the best interest of their school, particularly the students, Initiators will seek changes in district programs or policies or they will reinterpret them to suit the needs of the school. Initiators are adamant but not unkind; they solicit input from staff and then make decisions in terms of school goals.

Managers represent a broader range of behaviors. They demonstrate both

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responsive behaviors in answer to situations or people and they also initiate actions in support of the change effort. The variations in their behavior seem to be linked to their rapport with teachers and central office staff as well as how well they understand and buy into a particular change effort. Managers work without fanfare to provide basic support to facilitate teachers' use of an innovation. They keep teachers informed about decisions and are sensitive to teacher needs. They will defend their teachers from what are perceived as excessive demands. When they learn that the central office wants something to happen in their school they then become very involved with their teachers in making it happen. Yet, they do not typically initiate attempts to move beyond the basics of what is imposed.

Responders place heavy emphasis on allowing teachers and others the opportunity to take the lead. They believe their primary role is to maintain a smooth running school by focusing on traditional administrative tasks, keeping teachers content and treating students well. They view teachers as strong professionals who are able to carry out instruction with little guidance. Responders emphasize the personal side of their relationships with teachers and

others. Before they make decisions they often give everyone an opportunity to have input so as to weigh their feelings or to allow others to make the decision. A related characteristic is the tendency toward making decisions in terms of immediate circumstances rather than in terms of longer range instructional or school goals. This seems to be due in part to their desire to please others and in part to their more limited vision of how their school and staff should change in the future.

Leadership Styles Verified

These descriptions were derived from earlier descriptive studies of principals and refined in the more recent comparative studies. The first study was the secondary analyses of data (Hall, Rutherford, and Griffin, 1982) from a study of the implementation of a curriculum innovation in one large school district (Loucks and Pratt, 1979). The data from nine elementary schools out of a larger sample were reanalyzed to gain an understanding of the implementation process in these schools.

Out of this analysis the hypothesis emerged that implementation success varied in the schools because of the concerns and behaviors of the principals. Since all the study schools were similar in context, implemented the same curriculum, and received the same amount and kinds of support, this seemed to be the only direct explanation for why implementation had varied. Interestingly, the schools sorted into three groups in terms of implementation at the classroom level, and the principals appeared to group in the same way in terms of their “style.” Thus, the three change facilitator styles were initially sketched out.

A second study was a three-month pilot involving ten elementary schools in different communities each implementing different curriculum innovations (Rutherford, 1981; Hord, 1981). In this study the primary objective was to develop procedures for documenting the day-to-day intervention behaviors of principals. Again, the principals appeared to be representative of the same particular styles.

The existence of principal types or styles has since been reinforced in a carefully designed literature review by Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), who characterize principals as “effec-

tive” and “typical.” In their review of 29 studies, the authors used a framework for planned change to investigate existing knowledge about principal behaviors as they relate to effectiveness. One aspect of the review considered the role of the principal in general while two other strands attended to research on school change and innovation implementation, and school effectiveness.

Leithwood and Montgomery found that effective principals were pro-active, particularly in regard to instruction and the welfare of students. On the other hand they found that “Rather than being pro-active as the effective principal appeared to be, the typical principal tended to be primarily responsive—responsive to district demands and the demands from the many other sources of problems encountered everyday” (p. 27).

The types of styles found in these research and review efforts appear to have similarities. The Director, Initiator, and Effective Principals would seem to have like characterizations. The Administrator and Responder seem to have some similar characteristics, while the Facilitator and Manager are alike in many ways. Leithwood and Montgomery's Typical principal appears to span both of the latter groupings. Support for the Initiator principal is also found in the effective schools studies by Edmonds (1979) and Venezky and Winfield (1979). A logical next step would be to closely examine the day-to-day behaviors of principals using each of these change facilitating styles and to describe any effects. This was the objective of the third RDCTE study.



Refined Definitions of the Three Change Facilitator Styles

An important key to analyzing change facilitator style is identifying behaviors that are indicators of a particular style. Out of the morass of daily activities a system was needed for identifying and summarizing those behaviors that were considered to be representative of a particular change facilitator style. As a first step the array of data and findings from the three studies were used to develop the refined paragraph definitions of the Responder, Manager, and Initiator presented above. These descriptions represent a summary of the qualitative and quantitative data that have been collected and analyzed across all three studies of elementary school principals (N = 29). However, the paragraph definitions could not include all of the detail and richness of the full data set; they only represented brief summaries for grasping the gestalt of each style.

In order to more easily summarize the different aspects of the concerns, motivation, tone and behaviors of the three change facilitator styles, we developed a set of descriptive dimensions. We first identified an array of behaviors or indicators to contrast the styles. For each set of indicators we wrote a brief phrase describing the normative approach that appeared to be typical of each style. We then clustered the indicators around larger dimensions or competency areas that are similar to those frequently described in the literature and among practitioners. The resultant summary, included as Figure 1, provides a framework for relating individual behaviors to overall style. With this framework, it is then possible to explore many of the issues and implications of the principal's role in school improvement.

Some Implications of Principal's Change Facilitator Style

Considering particular aspects of the principal's role, such as change facilitator style, has turned out to be surprisingly productive. By concentrating on the principals' change facilitator style, we have learned much about key behaviors and the different ways principals can facilitate school improvement. The work has also helped clarify some of the distinctions that practitioners, researchers, and policy makers have been struggling with. Some of the findings and

Figure 1. Indicators of Change Facilitator Style.

Dimensions/ Behaviors	Responder	Manager	Initiator
Vision and Goal Setting	Accepts district goals as school goals	Accepts district goals but makes adjustments at school level to accommodate particular needs of the school	Respects district goals but insists on goals for school that give priority to this school's student needs
	Allows others to generate the initiative for any school improvement that is needed	Engages others in regular review of school situation to avoid any reduction in school effectiveness	Identifies areas in need of improvement and initiates action for change
	Relies primarily on others for introduction of new ideas into the school	Open to new ideas and introduces some to faculty as well as allowing others in school to do so	Sorts through new ideas presented from within and outside the school and implements those deemed to have high promise for school improvement in designated priority areas
Structuring the School as a Work Place	Future goals/direction of school are determined in response to district level goals/priorities	Anticipates the instructional and management needs of school and plans for them	Takes the lead in identifying future goals and priorities for the school and for accomplishing them
	Responds to teachers', students' and parents' interest in terms of goals of school and district	Collaborates with others in reviewing and identifying school goals	Establishes framework of expectations for the school and involves others in setting goals within that framework
	Grants teachers much autonomy and independence and allows them to provide guidelines for students	Provides guidelines and expectations for teachers and parents to maintain effective operation of the school	Sets standards and expects high performance levels for teachers, students and self
	Ensures that school and district policies are followed and strives to see that disruptions in the school day are minimal	Works with teachers, students and parents to maintain effective operation of the school	Establishes instructional program as first priority; personal and collaborative efforts are directed at supporting that priority
	Responds to requests and needs as they arise in an effort to keep all involved persons comfortable and satisfied	Expects all involved to contribute to effective instruction and management	Insists that all persons involved give priority to teaching and learning
	Indefinitely delays having staff do tasks if it is perceived staff are overloaded	Contends that staff are already very busy and paces request and task loads accordingly	Will knowingly sacrifice short term feelings of staff if doing a task now is necessary for the success of longer term school goals

(continued)

related issues are particularly germane to the present wide reaching examination of principals and school effectiveness. Five of these issues are briefly discussed here.

What other styles are there? The styles described in Figure 1 represent three that were the subject of descriptive and quantitative studies. Other styles can be imagined and some defy categorization. Some of the more likely styles include the *despot*, who unlike the initiator, listens to no one and just decrees change. Various forms of resisters can also be imagined such as the *covert saboteur* and the *guerilla*. The opportunity for identifying and studying these styles is left to those researchers who have an interest in studying school improvement failures.

What is the relationship between change facilitator style and implementation success? In the most recent study of principals, change facilitator style data were collected about implementation of new curriculum programs (Huling, Hall, Hord, and Rutherford, 1983). Established procedures were used to periodically assess teachers' stages of concern about the innovation (Hall and Rutherford, 1976), their level of use of the innovation (Hall and Loucks, 1977), and the innovation configuration (Hall and Loucks, 1981) that each teacher used. The day-to-day innovation related intervention behaviors of the principals were documented and overall change facilitator styles rated. In this study all teachers in all schools implemented the new curriculum, which would suggest that at least in this case all three styles were "effective." However, there were different degrees of implementation in terms of concerns, use, and innovation configurations. The overall correlation between implementation success at the classroom level and principal change facilitator style was .74. This suggests, that although implementation was accomplished in all study schools, there was more quality and quantity in schools with Initiator style principals than in schools with principals using the Manager and Responder styles.

How does the climate compare across schools with principals using different change facilitator styles? Due to the tremendous cooperation and assistance provided by principals and teachers in the study schools and the pioneering work done by James and Jones (1974), it

Figure 1. Indicators of Change

Dimensions/ Behaviors	Responder	Manager	Initiator
Structuring the School as a Work Place	Allows school norms to evolve over time	Helps establish and clarify norms for the school	Establishes, clarifies and models norms for the school
Managing Change	Accepts district expectations for change	Meets district expectations for changes required	Accommodates district expectations for change and pushes adjustments and additions that will benefit his/her school
	Sanctions the change process and attempts to resolve conflicts when they arise	Maintains regular involvement in the change process sometimes with a focus on management and at other times with a focus on the impact of the change	Directs the change process in ways that aim toward effective innovation use by all teachers
	Relies on information provided by other change facilitators, usually from outside the school for knowledge of the innovation	Uses information from a variety of sources for gaining knowledge of the innovation	Seeks out information from teachers, district personnel, and others to gain an understanding of the innovation and its demands
	Develops minimal knowledge of what use of the innovation entails	Becomes knowledgeable about general use of the innovation and what is needed to support use	Develops sufficient knowledge about use to be able to make specific teaching suggestions and troubleshoot problems that may emerge
	Communicates expectations relative to change only in very general terms	Informs teachers that they are expected to use the innovation	Gives teachers specific expectations and steps regarding use of the innovation
	Monitors change effort primarily through brief, spontaneous conversations and unsolicited reports	Monitors the change effort through planned conversations with individuals and groups and informal observations of instruction	Closely monitors the change effort through classroom observation, review of lesson plans and student performance
	Information gained through monitoring may or may not be discussed with a teacher	Information gained through monitoring is discussed with teachers and compared with expected behavior	Information gained through monitoring is fed back directly to teachers, compared with expected behavior and a plan for next steps including improvements is established
Collaborating and Delegating	Ideas are registered by every staff member with one or two most heavily influencing the ultimate flow	Ideas are offered by both staff and the principal and consensus is gradually developed	Ideas are sought from teachers as well as their reactions to principal's ideas; then priorities are set

Facilitator Style, Continued.

Dimensions/ Behaviors	Responder	Manager	Initiator
Collaborating and Delegating	Allows others to assume responsibility for the change effort	Tends to do most of the intervening on the change effort but will share some responsibility	Will delegate to carefully chosen others some of the responsibility for the change effort
	Those who assume responsibility have considerable autonomy and independence	Coordinates responsibilities and stays informed about how others are handling their responsibilities	Establishes first which responsibilities will be delegated and how they are to be accomplished, then monitors closely the carrying out of tasks
Decision Making	Those who assume responsibility are more likely to be from outside the school e.g. district facilitators	Others who assume responsibility may come from within or from outside the school	Others who assume responsibility are likely to be from within the school
	Accepts the rules of the district	Lives by the rules of the district, but goes beyond minimum requirements	Respects the rules of the district but determines behavior by what is required for maximum school effectiveness
	As the deadlines approach makes those decisions required for ongoing operation of the school	Actively involved in routine decision-making relative to instructional and administrative affairs	Routine decisions are handled through established procedures and assigned responsibilities. Non-routine decisions are handled with dispatch following solicitation of teacher ideas
	Decisions are influenced more by immediate circumstances of the situation and formal policies than longer term consequences	Decisions are based on the norms and expectations that guide the school and the management needs of the school	Decisions are based on the standards of high expectations and what is best for the school as a whole, particularly learning outcomes and the longer term goals
	Allows all interested parties to participate in decision-making or to make decisions independently	Allows others to participate in decision making, but maintains control of the process through personal involvement	Allows others to participate in decision making and delegates decision making to others but within carefully established parameters related to goals and expectations
Guiding and Supporting	Believes teachers are professionals and leaves them alone to do their work unless they request assistance or support	Believes teachers are a part of total faculty and establishes guidelines for all teachers for involvement with the change effort	Believes teachers are responsible for developing the best possible instruction and establishes expectations consistent with this view

(continued)

was possible to assess psychological climate as part of the most recent study.

The results are provocative: teachers perceive a more positive climate in schools with principals using the Manager style! Teachers in schools with principals using the Initiator style are somewhat less positive, and teachers in schools with principals using the Responder style are much less positive in their perceptions of the climate.

In hindsight, these findings make sense although they also raise a new dilemma. The most straightforward interpretation is that Manager style principals protect their teachers and strive to keep everything running smoothly. Thus teachers are more satisfied. Initiator style principals listen to their teachers but have high expectations and keep pushing. The constant pressure is not as well liked. Principals using the Responder style are most concerned about teachers' feelings and perceptions but tend to respond to them one at a time without coordinated or consistent communication and priorities. Thus teachers feel more job ambiguity and less control.

Can principals change their change facilitator style? This is a constantly asked question. Unfortunately, for the impatient, the available research and training experiences lead us to believe that one's style is so closely tied to personality and history that it is not easily changed. Individual behaviors can be changed, at least for a time, but the overall change facilitator style continues. Further, there is little likelihood that decrees, mandates, and two-day workshops will result in a major metamorphosis of style. With training, ongoing concerns-based coaching and support all of us can improve. This is an area where there clearly needs to be more research and careful evaluation of training programs.

What can be done for less effective change facilitators? If the findings from replications of the studies described here are consistent, then there will be a research base of identified facilitating behaviors that more effective principals use. None of the individual behaviors are that difficult to use. Thus it should be possible to develop training programs to assist principals and other change facilitators in becoming sensitive to the critical importance of these behaviors and in using them with greater ease. By

referring to the indicators listed in Figure 1 it is also possible to observe persons who aspire to be more effective in their change facilitator roles and to develop procedures for identifying those who have more potential. Some recent exploratory work in industry, where these findings have been used to select managers, indicate that something as simple as specially designed interview procedures can be helpful in identifying candidates who appear to already have mastered indicated behaviors. Of course, all of these possibilities must take into account which criteria of effectiveness are being emphasized.

In Summary

Much more research must be done before the total functioning of the principal as effective change facilitator can be described and understood. Also, the criteria of effectiveness that is used to make judgments must be considered most carefully. For example, if all teachers using a new program had been the criteria, then all three styles of principals were observed to be "effective." If implementation success were the criteria, then the Initiator style principal was most effective. However, if teachers' positive perceptions of their climate is considered important, then the Manager style principal seemed to be more effective. To make things even more complicated, none of these criteria directly address student achievement, which might require a different principal style for greatest effectiveness. The picture is rich enough to allow for many styles and combinations of people. The key appears to be in the blending, matching, and sequencing, rather than striving to maintain a particular snapshot.

The shared goal for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers is to identify programs and processes that contribute to increased school and teacher effectiveness. The studies described here demonstrate some ways that some principals made a difference. However, as with children and teachers, all principals are not the same and for each gain there is the risk of a loss somewhere else. The role of the principal in the school improvement process must be viewed in terms of the many factors that affect it rather than naively assuming that a quick cure can be made simply by changing one variable, such as the

Figure 1. Indicators of Change

Dimensions/ Behaviors	Responder	Manager	Initiator
Guiding and Supporting	When requests for assistance or support are received, attempts to respond in a way that is satisfying to one who made the request	Monitors the progress of the change effort and attempts to anticipate needed assistance and resources	Anticipates the need for assistance and resources and provides support as needed (whether or not requested) and sometimes in advance of potential blockages
	Relies on teachers to report how things are going and to share any major problems	Maintains close contact with teachers and the change effort in an attempt to identify things that might be done to assist teachers with the change	Collects and uses information from a variety of sources to monitor the change effort and to plan interventions that will increase the probability of a successful, quality implementation
	Relies on whatever training is available with the innovation to develop teacher's knowledge and skills	In addition to the regularly provided assistance, seeks and uses sources within and outside the school to develop teacher knowledge and skills	Takes the lead in identifying when teachers have need for increased knowledge and skills and will see that it is provided, most likely using the personnel and resources from within the building
	Provides general support for teachers as persons and as professionals	Support is directed to individuals and subgroups for specific purposes related to the change as well as to provide for their personal welfare	Provides direct programmatic support through interventions targeted to individuals and the staff as a whole

“The role of the principal in the school improvement process must be viewed in terms of the many factors that affect it rather than naively assuming that a quick cure can be made simply by changing one variable.”



Facilitator Style, Continued.

Dimensions/ Behaviors	Responder	Manager	Initiator
Guiding and Supporting	Tries to minimize the demands of the change effort on teachers	Modifies demands of the change effort to protect teachers from perceived overloads	Keeps ever present demands on teachers for effective implementation
Structuring their Leadership Role	Sees role as administrator	Sees roles as avoiding or minimizing problems so instruction may occur	Sees role as one of ensuring school has strong instructional program and that teachers are teaching and students are learning
	Maintains low profile relative to day-to-day operation of school	Is very actively involved in day-to-day management	Directs the ongoing operation of school with emphasis on instruction through personal actions and clearly delegated responsibilities
	Identification and accomplishment of tasks are determined by the opinions and concerns presented	Is consistent in setting and accomplishing tasks and does much of it himself/herself	Identified and accomplished tasks are consistent with school priorities but responsibility may be delegated to others
	Maintains a general sense of "where the school is" and how teachers are feeling about things	Is well informed about what is happening in the school and who is doing what	Maintains specific knowledge of all that is going on in the school including classrooms through direct contact with individual teachers and students
	Responds to others in a manner intended to please them	Responds to others in a way that will be supportive of the operation of the school	Responds to others with concern but places student priorities above all else

change facilitator style of the principal. School life is much richer and more complex than that. This is why our schools work as well as they do, why intelligent and sensitive school improvement is a very real possibility, and why simplistic ultimate solutions regularly fail. □

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