

Why We Should Seek Substitutes for Leadership

Teachers become more committed and self-managing when schools become true communities, freeing principals from the burden of trying to control people.

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Improving schools is difficult because we give too much attention to direct leadership.¹ We focus almost exclusively on leadership as something forceful, direct, and interpersonal, instead of paying at least equal attention to providing substitutes for leadership. The more successful we are in providing these substitutes, the more likely it is that teachers and others will become self-managing. Principals will be able to spend more time on issues of substance (*What should we be doing to improve teaching and learning? How can I learn more about it?*) than process (*How can I get people to do what I think is best?*). Further, they will not have to give nearly as much attention to formal systems of supervision and evaluation and to providing inservice training. Quality control and professional development, after all, are natural expressions of good self-management.

Whether one is willing to let go of the concepts of command and instructional and interpersonal leadership and accept the viability of substitutes for leadership depends on one's mind-scape. Leadership mindscapes are shaped by what we believe and value and by our understanding of the world. They create the reality that drives our

leadership practice. Accordingly, I propose two questions that reveal different leadership truths depending upon how they are answered:

- Should schools be understood as formal organizations or as communities?
- What is most important when it comes to motivating and inspiring commitment and performance?

Community or Organization?

Both the organization and the community metaphor ring true for certain aspects of how schools function. But it makes a world of difference which of the two provides the overarching frame. The literature in educational administration, for example, is heavily influenced by the belief that schools are formal organizations. And today's prescriptions for school leadership are based on this assumption.

Organization is an idea that is imposed from without. To ensure proper fit, schools create management systems that communicate requirements to teachers in the form of expectations. Organizations use rules and regulations, monitoring and supervising, and evaluation systems to maintain control over teachers. Leadership in organizations, then, is inevitably control driven.

In this system, principals and supervisors, by virtue of their rank, are presumed to know more than teachers and staff. Each hierarchical level is responsible for evaluating the level immediately below. Command and instructional leadership as they are now understood in schools are products of this logic.

All of this would change if community became the metaphor for schools. Communities are not defined by instrumental purposes, rationally conceived work systems, evaluation schemes designed to monitor compliance, or skillfully contrived positive interpersonal climates. Communities are defined by their centers. Centers are repositories of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed cement for uniting people in a common cause.² Centers govern the school values and provide norms that guide behavior and give meaning to school community life. They answer questions like, *What is this school about? What is our image of learners? How do we work together as colleagues?*

Community Norms

Community norms provide the school with substitutes for direct leadership. In describing her efforts to transform the Griffin Elementary School in Los Angeles into a community, for example, then-principal Yvonne Davis noted:

We went from each teacher doing his or her own thing to teachers sharing ideas and knowing what was going on in others' rooms and

throughout the different grade levels. Working together by grade levels, teachers identified pivotal concepts and skills and shared ideas on how best to teach them. Teachers felt a strong sense of accountability for students' success . . . *It was no longer a voice concerned only for "my class" or "my kids."* Instead, all efforts and energies joined forces to improve the school as a whole.³

As Griffin became more and more a community, the practice of teaching became less individual and more collective. As a collective practice becomes established, a principal can afford to give much less attention to the traditional management functions of planning, organizing, controlling, and leading. As Davis explains:

My role became "acknowledger." I recognized and acclaimed good teaching, positive student results, caring parents, and progress toward our goal at every available opportunity. As people felt more appreciated, I think they worked harder and felt more confident to try out and share new ideas. At that point, my role became "supporter," "reinforcer," and "facilitator."⁴

Teachers have a special obligation to help construct the center of shared values. This center defines certain morally held responsibilities and obligations of teachers. Among these are commitment to do one's best to make the community work and work well. This means teachers work diligently, practice in exemplary ways, keep abreast of new ideas, help other members of the learning community to be successful, and do whatever else is necessary for the community to function and flourish.

Copperopolis, California, principal Ann Leonard believes that schools should "use shared leadership with a heavy emphasis on following a vision

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rather than a person." Initially Leonard worried that community-building was taking precious time away from her management and supervisory responsibilities. She sees things differently now: "I've watched a metamorphosis occur. Those less-than-committed staff members who I thought needed closer supervision than I could manage are now working harder and putting in more work hours because of a shared vision we have developed together."⁴

How does she explain what is happening? "The staff is not working harder and longer because I'm a charismatic leader or because I'm using a carrot or a stick. These people are working toward realizing a goal that they believe in; their internal motivation takes much of the burden of motivation and management off me. That gives me more time to devote to finding the resources we need to realize our dreams."

A key question is whether the norms and core values of the community center will continue to act as substitutes for leadership even after the leader leaves. Newton, Massachusetts, superintendent Irwin Blumer thinks so.⁵ As an administrator in the Concord and Concord-Carlisle School District, he worked to make respect for human differences and commitment to fully integrating

minority students into the ongoing life of the school a core value that would guide everything that was done in the school. Reflecting on that experience he notes:

One always wonders whether a core value has really become deeply embedded in a school system or whether it is simply something staff and others respect as long as "the leader" is there to push it. . . .

I've been away from the district now for one and one-half years and am pleased to report that the commitment of the school district is as strong and as compelling as when I was present. While it has taken different forms and different shapes under the new superintendent of schools, the commitment to the value remains.

The Professional Ideal

Both professionalism and leadership are frequently prescribed as cures for school problems, but in many ways the two concepts are antithetical. The more professionalism is emphasized, the less leadership is needed. The more leadership is emphasized, the less likely it is that professionalism will develop. Some leadership can add a measure of quality to the most professional of school settings, but leadership becomes less urgent once the wheels of professionalism begin to turn by themselves. When this happens, superintendents and principals can spend less time trying to figure out how to push and pull teachers toward goals and more time dealing with the issues of teaching and learning and ensuring financial, moral, political, and managerial support for the school.

Schools considering professionalism often turn their attention toward issues of competence: Are teachers

competent? How can we ensure that they are competent? How can we increase their competence? Society, however, demands more than skilled service before it bestows the mantle of profession on an occupation. Professionals enjoy privileges because they can be trusted. It takes more than competence to earn trust—it takes virtue. Professionalism, therefore, is defined by competence plus virtue. Professional virtue is an idea much more at home in schools understood as communities than in schools considered formal organizations. In teaching, professional virtue is made up of four dimensions:

- a commitment to practice in an exemplary way;
- a commitment to practice toward valued social ends;
- a commitment not only to one's own practice but to the practice itself;
- a commitment to the ethic of caring."

The four dimensions provide the roots for developing a powerful norm system that, when combined with the school-as-community norm system, can greatly diminish if not replace leadership as it is now practiced.

A commitment to exemplary practice means staying abreast of the latest research in practice, researching one's own practice, experimenting with new approaches, and sharing one's insights. Once established, this dimension results in teachers accepting responsibility for their own professional growth, thus reducing the need for someone else to plan and implement staff development programs for them.

A commitment to work toward valued social ends is a commitment to place oneself in service to students and parents and to agreed-upon school values and purposes. When this ideal is in place, teaching is elevated to a form of stewardship, which in turn

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becomes a form of self-management.

The third dimension, a commitment to not only one's own practice but to the practice of teaching itself, forces teachers to broaden their outlook. This commitment requires that teaching be transformed from individual to collective practice. When practice is collective, the competent teacher offers help to those having difficulties. Teachers with special insights into teaching share them with others; they do not define success in terms of what happens in their own classrooms when the school itself may be failing. Teachers feel compelled to work together because of internally felt obligations.

A commitment to the ethic of caring, the fourth dimension of professional virtue, shifts the emphasis from professional technique to a concern for the whole person. Too often, schools view students as cases to be treated rather than persons to be served. Teachers, as Noddings observes, act as models of caring when they model "meticulous preparation, lively presentation, critical thinking, appreciative listening, constructive evaluation, general curiosity."⁷ An important purpose of leadership is to establish the professional ideal and community norms as conditions that make leadership no longer needed!

Collegiality

When we substitute community for organization as the metaphor for schools, we naturally turn our attention to the development of community norms and the development of the professional ideal. Somewhere along the progression toward this goal still another substitute for leadership is likely to emerge—collegiality. But to successfully take hold, collegiality must be understood as a form of professional virtue.

It seems that collegiality is now understood as a synonym for congeniality or as something that results when administrators arrange for teachers to work together.⁸ But neither congeniality nor contrived collegiality is powerful enough to function as a leadership substitute. Both fail the test of self-management.

Susan Moore Johnson considers teachers to be true colleagues when they are "working together, debating about goals and purposes, coordinating lessons, observing and critiquing each other's work, sharing successes and offering solace, with the triumphs of their collective efforts far exceeding the summed accomplishments of their solitary struggles."⁹ Her vision for collegiality requires that it come from within. Indeed, collegiality becomes a substitute when it is driven by internal forces. Internal forces emerge when collegiality becomes an expression of professional virtue; an expression consistent with being committed to the concept of collective practice as described earlier.

There are two dimensions to collegiality as professional virtue. One is the fulfillment of obligations toward the teaching profession and toward the school as community. Both memberships provide teachers with certain rights and privileges and extract in return certain obligations and duties.

Teachers have the right to expect help and support from other teachers when they need it; they are also obliged to give the same.

The second dimension involves why one behaves collegially. As Craig K. Ihara points out:

Collegiality must then be understood as more than proper behavior toward one's colleagues. Collegiality is better defined in terms of having the proper professional attitude or orientation. To take this approach to collegiality is to consider it a kind of professional virtue....¹⁰

Why behave collegially? Because it is effective to do so and it is good to do so. The more we come to understand collegiality in this way, the more likely it will function as a substitute for leadership.

What Matters Most?

The power of substitutes for leadership emerges as shared values take hold and as the idea of teachers as professionals becomes accepted. But skeptics might ask, "Are teachers able to respond to this optimistic and altruistic portrayal of leadership?"

To answer this question we need to ask another: "What motivates and inspires teachers anyway?" The rule of motivation basic to most of today's leadership practice is "what gets rewarded gets done." Though the rule works in practice, teachers wind up working for rewards rather than for the job itself. A busy kind of leadership is required to sustain the rule. Leaders must constantly monitor the exchange of rewards for work and guess which rewards make most sense for different people. As a result, teachers become increasingly dependent upon the rewards themselves and upon their leaders to motivate them. *What gets*

rewarded gets done discourages people from becoming self-managing and self-motivated.

Imagine, for example, a school that does not specify the exact hours of work. Teachers are expected to do their work and do it well and to define their own work day accordingly. Most

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of the teachers rarely leave the school before 5:00 p.m. — a full two hours after the students leave. They stay because they find the work interesting and derive satisfaction from doing a good job and because they feel a sense of obligation and duty to their students — for intrinsic and moral reasons. One or two of the teachers in the school, however, consistently leave five or ten minutes after the students leave. To correct this problem the administration issues a rule requiring all teachers to stay until 3:30, rewarding those who do and punishing those who do not. After a short time the vast majority of teachers now leave at or shortly after 3:30.

What has happened in this case? Once involved for intrinsic and moral reasons, teachers are now involved for

calculated reasons. Their tendency now is to calculate the payoff they receive in return for investments in their work. They are now involved for extrinsic rather than intrinsic and moral reasons.

What gets rewarded gets done assumes that people are motivated almost exclusively by self-interest. We do the things that provide the greatest gain or that incur the smallest loss. Self-interest, according to this theory of motivation, is always calculated on an individual basis. Teachers, for example, are presumed to be free-standing individuals who make decisions about gains and losses separate from others.

But self-interest is only a small part of the picture — the larger part involves our ability and desire to be morally responsive. Further, people do not calculate gains and losses alone but see their fate as connected to memberships in family, neighborhood, workplace, community, religious groups, and other groups. And when the larger interest conflicts with self, people are perfectly capable of sacrificing the latter for the former. To Etzioni,¹¹ for example, what matters most to people are their values, emotions, and social bonds. They are motivated in response to what they believe is right, good, and just, and to their sense of obligation. Sometimes these interests are compatible with self and sometimes not. When the two are in conflict, Etzioni argues, it is self-interest that typically loses out.

When Community Takes Hold

When we combine the human capacity to be morally responsive with the latest research from motivational psychologists such as Csikszentmihalyi¹² (which validates the importance of intrinsic motivation derived

from the work itself) two additional motivational rules emerge:

- What is rewarding gets done.
- What we believe in, think to be good, and feel obligated to do gets done.

In both cases people get things done without direct leadership, without close supervision, and without external rewards. These additional motivational rules are difficult to put into practice in schools understood as organizations.

When schools are understood as communities, however, the two additional motivational rules come alive. Shared values, the professional ideal, and collegiality as virtue place great emphasis on the importance of rewarding work and provide the framework for sorting out commitments, duties, and obligations. In time, direct leadership will become less and less important, self-management will begin to take hold, and substitutes for leadership will become more deeply embedded in the school. □

This article is drawn from T. J. Sergiovanni, (1992), *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), particularly Chapter 4, "Substitutes for Leadership."

² E.A. Shils, (1961), "Centre and Periphery," in *The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi*, p. 119, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).

The Davis story is from T. J. Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership*, op. cit.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The first two dimensions are from A. McIntyre, (1981), *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University). The third is from A. Flores, (1988), "What Kind of Person Should a Professional Be?" in *Professional Ideals*, edited by A. Flores, (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing). The fourth is from N. Noddings, (1984), *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics*

and Moral Education, (Berkeley: University of California Press).

⁷ N. Noddings, (1986), "Fidelity in Teaching, Teacher Education, and Research for Teaching," *Harvard Educational Review* 56, 4: 503.

⁸ R. Barth, (1990), *Improving Schools from Within*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers); and A. Hargreaves, (1989), "Contrived Collegiality and the Culture of Teaching," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Quebec City, 1989.

⁹ S. M. Johnson, (1990), *Teachers at Work: Achieving Success in Our Schools*, p. 148, (New York: Basic Books, Inc.)

¹⁰ C. K. Ihara, (1988), "Collegiality as a Professional Virtue," in *Professional Ideals*, edited by A. Flores, p. 57.

(Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company).

¹¹ A. Etzioni, (1988), *The Moral Dimension Toward a New Economics*, (New York: The Free Press).

¹² M. Csikszentmihalyi, (1990), *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (New York: Harper and Row). See also J. R. Hackman and G. Oldman, (1976), "Motivation Through the Design of Work: A Test of a Theory," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 16, 2: 250-279.

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