REFEREED ARTICLE

An Administrator's Role in Motivating Teachers

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Abstract

School administrators can take specific actions in the areas of goal setting, professional development, performance feedback, and collective teacher efficacy, which will increase teacher motivation. Positive relationships among staff, and between staff and administration, can be a product of a leader's actions in regards to these areas. This safe and supportive climate ultimately creates a positive school culture for improved teacher motivation.

The educational literature verifies that a school comprised of motivated teachers working with a collective sense of determination may be expected to increase student achievement. In order to create this environment, an administrator must craft a positive psychological culture that facilitates productive goal setting, professional development, performance feedback, and collective teacher efficacy. Diligent development of these four factors will cultivate the necessary positive relationships among teachers and administrators. Individually, these components affect teacher motivation, but when attended to simultaneously they have the potential to alter the learning landscape in a school. If leaders understand how these factors affect teacher motivation, they can take specific actions to create a narrative of achievement among the adults and children in a school.

Goal Setting

The pursuit of goals can be directed consciously, subconsciously with primes, or through the use of planning. Effective goal setting involves specificity, difficult pursuits, and a commitment from the person setting the goal (Locke, 1996). People are most likely to stay committed to a goal when they believe that they have the ability to achieve it, and when they think that the goal is important (Locke, 1996). An awareness of these key goal-setting characteristics may encourage leaders to ask their faculty what they want to work toward, or to provide a vision and listen to staff ideas of how to attain it. Numerous goals may arise from this type of brainstorming activity, but decisions about where to focus efforts and attention are necessary because conflict between goals can decrease teacher performance (Locke, 1996). Goal setting can be an effective motivational tool to create a desired trajectory of action taken upon by individual teachers, or large collectives, when properly facilitated by a leader.

Environmental cues, referred to as primes, can subconsciously help in maintaining the pursuit of consciously set goals (Latham & Piccolo, 2012). The successful use of word cues was found in an experiment wherein a CEO integrated 12 achievement priming words such as prevail, accomplish, and achieve in his 100-word Monday morning email to call centre employees. The employees who received the achievement email displayed a significant increase in efficiency in the call handling time and call resolution time measures in the experiment (Stajkovic et al., 2018). Administrators should therefore consider the language they use when addressing staff, because it can subconsciously affect their consciously set goals.

Similarly, an increase in productivity was found among call center employees who had a goal primed subconsciously by pictures (Latham & Piccolo, 2012). The pictures set in the top left-hand corner on each employee's daily call paper displayed a general achievement picture of a person running through a finish line, a context-specific picture of a group of call center employees engaged in work, or no picture at all (control group). The employees exposed to these primed goal pictures significantly outperformed the control group, suggesting that a

subconsciously primed goal has similar effects to motivation as a consciously set goal. Considering the subconsciously motivating characteristics of pictures, an administrator may want to pay close attention to the type of visuals displayed in school hallways and staffrooms.

A final key feature in regards to goal setting is that it stimulates planning (Locke, 1996). Time management planning (TMP) involves prioritizing specific tasks and creating time lines in which to accomplish them, and contingent planning (CP) is formulating how to deal with potential disruptions to one's work day (Parke et al., 2018). TMP and CP were both found to improve daily work performance through more time on task, with CP most effective in keeping work interruptions from interfering with performance. Once a goal is set, having a timed and action-oriented plan to keep focused on the goal will minimize off-task behaviours. Knowing that CP is shown to help one stay productive among distractions, administrators may use it to manage their own time in a dynamic and unpredictable school environment. Thus, a triad of best practices in goal-setting available for administrators include presenting TMP and CP as tools to help teachers stay focused, facilitating conscious goal setting, and being aware of the subconscious effects of visuals and language.

Professional Development

In order to yield the greatest results from professional development (PD), a leader should be cognizant of when it should be provided, and how to follow up with participants. When teachers do not believe that they have the skills to reach a goal, an administrator can support them by providing training through PD (Locke, 1996; Nordick et al., 2019). The teachers who thereby gain confidence in their ability will pursue goals with more persistence and effort. Additionally, effective PD needs to align with a teacher's identity and teaching philosophy (Osman & Warner, 2020). PD is beneficial when the teachers need the skill to reach a desired goal that aligns with their identity as a teacher.

Although teachers may be motivated to attend a PD event, their level of implementation may require further support from administration. The interplay between teachers' expectancy for success in using the newly acquired information and the value they assign to it is a good predictor of the level of implementation motivation a teacher will display (Osman & Warner, 2020). Teachers report a decrease in motivation after PD if the perceived cost, in terms of time lost for other activities or required for planning, and energy to implement the newly acquired information are deemed too high. A principal should confer with teachers, post PD, to offer support in terms of expressing confidence in a teacher or exploring the teacher's needs in an attempt to reduce the perceived cost of implementation, both of which can increase teacher motivation (Locke, 1996; Osman & Warner, 2020). These acts of genuine concern for the teacher's performance can increase a teacher's intrinsic motivation to work harder (Reaves & Cozzen, 2018), as opposed to abandoning the knowledge gained through PD. In summary, administrators play a vital role in identifying appropriate PD with teachers, and then supporting them as they evaluate the perceived costs of implementing what they have learned.

Performance Feedback

Performance feedback (PF) can positively affect teacher motivation and increase goal setting effectiveness, specifically when it is used to set subsequent goals (Locke, 1996). Not only can PF alter the course of action a person takes, but it is necessary for people to develop mastery (Brown, 2018). PF can be given in verbal and text messaging formats, among many others. Leaders should resolve to offer PF while maintaining their values and integrity, therefore giving feedback only when they are ready to listen, ask questions, recognize a teacher's strengths, talk about how the current challenges can be changed into growth, and own their administrative part in a particular problem. Conversely, there are strategies that can be learned to receive feedback effectively, such as using key words to remind oneself that feedback can

help one grow, asking questions for clarity, and considering someone else's perspective without becoming defensive. If an administrator is giving feedback and either person is having difficulties with the process, some of these methods could be discussed, learned, and practised in order to create the best environment in which to give and receive feedback.

Although one's experience with feedback may be predominantly in a verbal or written form, PF in the form of text messaging has been successfully used to produce positive changes in pre-service teachers (Barton et al., 2019, p. 100). The researchers posited that PF in the form of text messaging should be explored as an effective means of delivery because it offered immediate, non-intrusive feedback. A key component of this PF was that it was directed toward specific targeted behaviours identified as needing improvement by the teachers and their evaluator. Administrators working to be involved in the maintenance of teacher goals may assess the usefulness and acceptance of text messages for some of their PF.

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) requires not only a combination of proper goal setting, PD, and PF, but also the development of trusting and supportive relationships. CTE – the belief a group of teachers has in their ability to positively affect student learning (Goddard et al., 2000) – was found to be the top factor influencing student achievement in John Hattie's 2006 meta-analyses (Donohoo et al. 2018). Key components of CTE focus on teacher mastery of team-identified skills that improve student performance through learning, practice, goal adjustment, and a group commitment to the process (Donohoo & Katz, 2019). When a team of teachers perceives that their actions are positively affecting student achievement, their collective efficacy increases, motivating them to continue their development (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Creating time and space for teachers to collaborate is the first step in facilitating CTE, but most importantly a leader is required to shift the dialogue from what teachers need to do, to evaluating the effectiveness of what they are doing. Teachers need to become proficient at gathering evidence of student learning in order to inform their decisions about best practices, and change their methodologies if need be. Sharing this information becomes easier in a positive and trusting environment, established by a leader through setting high standards and clear communication about collaborative procedures (Nordick et al., 2019). Once the tone of the process is set, leaders need to resign the desire to control by giving staff opportunity to influence school decisions based on their ideas and findings from their conversations.

Successful PF, which includes openly sharing thoughts and ideas among peers, requires trusting relationships. The relationship a manager has with employees and the workplace culture are the two most important environmental factors under the manager's control (Heathfield, 2020). The actions that a principal can take to increase motivation will help to develop leader-faculty relationships, and the more committed a principal is to establishing CTE, the greater the likelihood of the development of positive faculty relationships. Ultimately, if teachers have high perceived CTE, they will more diligently and passionately pursue their goals, which in turn will positively affect a school culture (Goddard et al., 2004).

Conclusion

The literature confirms that an administrator should have a vested interest in motivating a faculty to strive to perform to the best of their ability in order to improve student achievement. Leaders need to guide staff in an effective conscious goal setting process while being aware of environmental cues that could be affecting motivation subconsciously. Administrators must support staff by providing PD when appropriate, and creating boundaries and processes for useful PF. Finally, it is necessary for leaders to establish a culture of trust and collaboration essential for CTE, and support teachers' efforts to achieve mastery experiences. The positive

relationships cultivated in these actions will fuel the cyclical nature of seeing results, generating efficacy, and increasing motivation.

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