

ANALYZING THE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS*

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Abstract

The authors describe various methods of measuring a principal's leadership behavior. They have developed a new survey instrument that can be used to analyze the leadership behavior/style of a principal. The instrument consists of 49 positive and negative behaviors that measure how a principal interacts with staff in the following five leadership domains: human relations, trust/decision making, instructional leadership, control, and conflict. A correlation coefficient of $+0.95$, as measured by the Cronbach alpha, was obtained indicating the instrument has excellent reliability. Reliability on each of the five factors ranges from a high of $+0.86$ to a low of $+0.81$. The instrument has adequate construct validity in terms of those behaviors principals practice that teachers like or find offensive (as reported by 375 teachers). The behaviors measured by the survey are listed along with the average response of the teachers who responded to the survey. The authors also describe some results with the first use of the survey in a Louisiana study where a $+0.95$ correlation was found between scores on the leadership behavior survey and scores on a culture and climate survey. The authors conclude that the survey can be used to measure a principal's leadership behavior, as an early indicator of what is happening to a school's culture and climate and eventually student achievement.



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Leadership behaviors that allow principals to create positive school cultures and learning environments have often been the subject of much investigation. The National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) have developed comprehensive leadership assessment processes to identify leadership strengths and areas needing improvement.

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Bulach and Potter (1998) describe how the NAESP model could be used to improve the effectiveness of educational leaders. Practicing and/or prospective leaders are exposed to a number of activities during a one day experience in which data are generated on 13 skill dimensions such as planning, organizing, decisiveness, etc. The NASSP model uses a similar process to collect data on various skill dimensions. An advantage of these two processes is that they are comprehensive and tend to yield reliable and valid data about what each participant does on the day of the assessment. Disadvantages are that they are time consuming and expensive and depend on the events that happen on the day(s) of the assessment. For example, if an assessee is having a bad day, the data would not be a valid measure of a person's leadership abilities.

Other methodologies for investigating leadership behavior involve leadership style inventories. One of the early inventories was developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories (1978). It provides a description of a person's leadership style on the following two dimensions: introvert versus extrovert and people versus task dimensions. The instrument was used by Bulach, Lunenburg, and McCollum (1995) to investigate the impact of leadership style on school climate and achievement. Their findings revealed that leadership style did not make a difference in climate or achievement. One interesting finding of the study was that 14 of the 20 principals involved in the study were extroverts.

Other leadership style inventories have been developed by Blake and Mouton (1994) and by Hersey and Blanchard (1996). Blake and Mouton's inventory provides a measure of five different leadership styles on two dimensions as follows: people versus task orientation. They maintain that the best leadership style for an effective organization is one where the leader has a high task and a high people orientation. This could be called a collaborative leadership style. Hersey and Blanchard, on the other hand, have an inventory that provides a measure of four leadership styles on the same two dimensions. Additionally, their inventory measures how adaptable or flexible leaders are with their leadership style. They maintain that the most effective style varies according to the situation, the task, and the maturity of the follower. For example, with a simple task, an emergency situation, or a very immature follower, a directive style is best. Whereas a delegating style would be used with a complex task, when there is time to plan, and when the followers are motivated, experienced, and responsible. The advantage of these inventories is that they are readily available and easy to administer and score. The disadvantage is that they are frequently a self report, and this could lead to a false impression of the true leadership style. A second disadvantage is that the data generated by the inventory does give the leader any strategies for changing his/her style.

Another method for partially measuring leadership behavior is the use of climate inventories. One such inventory, the Tennessee School Climate Inventory (TSCI) developed by Butler and Alberg (1991), provides a measure on seven indicators of school climate. Two of those measures provide data on instructional leadership behavior in the areas of instruction and maintaining student discipline. Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1995), in using this instrument, found a strong positive correlation ($+ .52$ $p < .05$) between the overall climate score on the TSCI and achievement.

More recently, Bulach and Berry (2001) presented data using "The Instructional Improvement Survey," that measures four culture and seven climate factors. The instrument consists of 96 items and has an overall reliability of $+ .95$ as measured by the Cronbach alpha. Reliability on each of the subscales varies from $+ .79$ to $+ .85$. Leadership behavior is measured in the following two culture and two climate factors: group atmosphere, group cooperation, instructional leadership, and discipline. Bulach and Berry's findings indicated that females and more experienced teachers were more positive about leadership behavior than males and teachers with less than ten years experience. In related research with the same instrument, Bulach and Peddle (2001) found a positive relationship ($+ .96$) between leadership behavior associated with instruction and the overall culture and climate of the school. Their study involved 20 schools and 1163 teachers.

One of the earliest attempts to develop an instrument that focused solely on leadership behavior was the work of Halpin and Winer (1952), who developed the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). It provided a measure on nine dimensions of leadership such as communication, initiation, domination, etc. This instrument saw a lot of use initially, but has fallen into discredit because the data generated by the instrument frequently lacked statistical significance.

Wirt and Krug (1998) described an instrument they used to collect data from 3000 principals in a multi-

state area. The instrument measures self-reported principal responses on 15 behaviors. A factor analysis of their data revealed that the instrument measures the following five factors:

- monitoring student progress;
- defining mission
- managing curriculum;
- supervising teaching; and
- promoting instructional climate.

The alpha coefficients of reliability for these five factors varied from a low of .42 on instructional climate to a high of .76 on student progress. The advantage of this survey is that it provides principals with a profile of strengths and areas needing improvement on five dimensions and a score for each of the behaviors. Based on the data, it would be easy to develop a plan to improve leadership behaviors. Also, it would be possible to revise the wording of the survey so it could be administered to teachers who could report how they see the principal on these behaviors. This should result in a more valid measure. For example, one of the behaviors measured is “how often do you supervise teachers?” Principals would probably report a more positive response than would teachers. The disadvantages of this instrument are that it provides data on only 15 behaviors and the demonstrated poor reliability. Certainly, there are many more than 15 behaviors that instructional leaders use in order to create a positive learning environment.

A more recent study by Gruenert (2005), involving 81 schools in Indiana used a culture survey to investigate the relationship of a school’s culture with student achievement. The survey has the following six factors:

- collaborative leadership
- teacher collaboration
- professional development
- unity of purpose
- collegial support
- learning partnership

Correlations on the six factors, using Cronbach’s alpha, ranged from a high of .657 to a low of .201. Gruenert stated “This study shows how student performance in both math and language arts is positively correlated with a collaborative school culture” (p.46). He concludes that a collaborative culture depends on the leadership of the principal.

While numerous instruments have been developed to evaluate leadership behavior, these instruments are often of little benefit for principals who wish to improve their leadership behavior. For example, a principal who uses Hersey and Blanchard’s survey will get a score that reveals if they are high or low task and high or low people. It does not provide a strategy for changing or improving leadership behavior. It was believed that an instrument was needed that focused on specific behaviors that if changed, would improve a school administrator’s leadership ability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a survey instrument that could be utilized to measure behaviors principals use while supervising subordinates. The use or failure to use these behaviors creates a certain leadership style that positively or negatively affects the supervisory climate and learning environment in that educational setting. A positive score on this instrument should be accompanied by a more positive faculty morale and higher test scores. The instrument that will be described was developed by Bulach and colleagues at the University of West Georgia. Literature and research related to the behaviors measured by the survey will also be discussed.

Methodology

Bulach, Boothe, and Pickett (1998a;1998b) collected data from 375 graduate students in the educational leadership program at the University of West Georgia. They were asked to list the mistakes their principals made. The mistakes that occurred most frequently tended to be in the area of human relations and

interpersonal communications. Specific behaviors in the human relations area were a lack of trust and an uncaring attitude. The most frequently perceived mistake was failure to listen or a lack of openness. This finding was supported by the related research of Bulach and Peterson, (2001) where teachers reported that principals did not listen. Consequently, they were not willing to be open and trusting with their principals because of this perception.

The behaviors/mistakes described in the earlier studies (Bulach et al. 1998a & b) were used by Bulach, Boothe, and Michael (1999) to create a survey instrument. It was used to collect data from 208 educational leadership graduate students regarding the frequency their principals practiced the behaviors that negatively or positively affected them. The instrument consists of 49 positive and negative behaviors. The students were asked to respond on a Likert five-point scale ranging from “never” to “always” in terms of how frequently their principal practiced each behavior. A response of “never” was scored as a 1.0; “seldom” was scored as a 2.0; “sometimes” was scored as a 3.0; “often” was scored as a 4.0; and “always” was scored as a 5.0. Negative behaviors were reverse scored.

A factor analysis was used to analyze the data and determine how many factors were being measured by the instrument. A factor analysis revealed that nine factors account for 64% of the variance in the instrument. Four of the factors that accounted for smaller amounts of variance were consolidated with other factors reducing the instrument to five factors. The five factors were the following: human relations, trust/decision making, instructional leadership, control, and conflict.

Human Relations

The factor that accounted for 38% of the variance measures a domain called “human relations.” There are 13 items in this domain and the average response was 3.63. They are rank-ordered in terms the frequency principals practiced these behaviors. A Cronbach alpha on this factor yielded a reliability coefficient of $+.86$. The average score and the behaviors in this domain are in Table 1.

Table 1

The Behaviors and Average Score for Behaviors in the Human Relations Domain

	Average Score
• My principal calls me by name	4.43
• My principal uses eye contact.	4.00
• My principal demonstrates a caring attitude.	3.78
• My principal involves me in decisions.	3.68
• My principal interacts with the staff.	3.66
• My principal does not listen.	3.65*
• My principal models good communications skills.	3.61
• My principal tells teachers to make do with what they have.	3.56*
• My principal provides positive reinforcement.	3.46
• My principal remains distant.	3.43*
• My principal compliments me.	3.38
• My principal remembers what it is like to be a teacher.	3.27
• My principal has not supported me when parents were involved.	1.88*

*Note: All negative behaviors were reverse scored. The higher the number, the more positive the response.

As can be seen from the above data in Table 1, there are no behaviors in this domain that principals “always” practice (a score of 5.0). There are three behaviors that the principals in this study “often” practice,

e.g., “calls teachers by name,” “uses eye contact,” and “demonstrating a caring attitude.” Heller (2002) talks about the importance of caring as a school leader. He stated that teachers often do not want advice, they only want someone to listen to them.

Practicing the behaviors in the human relations’ domain is a very important leadership skill. According to Sass (1989), interpersonal communication skills, human relations, and leadership are the most important skills for educational leaders. His findings were based on the results of a survey that was sent to superintendents and professors of leadership training institutions across the U.S. This has been supported by many others who investigated competencies and skills critical for educational leaders. Stanton (1994), in a survey mailed to all South Dakota school board members and superintendents, also found that the most critical competencies for leader effectiveness were skills in human relations, communication, and leadership. A South Carolina study by Harrill (1990) that investigated competencies and skills needed by district level curriculum and instructional leaders, found that interpersonal communications, human relations, and management were the most important competency areas. Harrison (1993), in an investigation of effective principal preparation programs, had similar findings. The research of Harrill (1990), Hutchison (1988), Jolly (1995), and Rouss (1992) also support the premise that human relations and interpersonal skills are competencies needed for effective leadership. The above research shows that, when it comes to human relations, there is a need to decrease the use of negative behaviors and increase the use of positive behaviors.

Trust/Decision Making

A factor/domain labeled “trust and decisions” accounted for 8% of the variance and had a mean response score of 3.72. The average score and the 12 behaviors in this domain are in

Table 2

The Behaviors and Average Score for Behaviors in the Trust/Decision Making Domain

	Average Score
• My principal corrects me in front of others instead of privately.	4.31*
• My principal “nit picks” on evaluations.	4.25*
• My principal gossips about other teachers or administrators.	3.96*
• My principal uses coercion to motivate me.	3.82*
• My principal implements the latest fads without thorough knowledge.	3.80*
• My principal makes decisions as “knee jerk” reactions to an incident.	3.65 *
• My principal displays a lack of trust.	3.62*
• My principal listens to both sides of the story before making a decision.	3.60
• My principal evaluates situations carefully before taking action.	3.58
• My principal makes “snap judgements.”	3.43*
• My principal bases evaluations on a short observation.	3.23*

A Cronbach alpha on this factor yielded a reliability coefficient of $+0.84$. While the item that indicated principals do not correct teachers in front of others received the most positive score in this domain, the least positive behavior cited in the human relations’ domain, was that principals do not support their teachers when parents are involved. It might seem that these two are incongruous, but maybe not. Principals apparently do not take sides in parent conferences, and because of this, teachers do not feel supported, but they are also not corrected at that time.

It was interesting that the way principals make decisions aligned with the trust behaviors. Such behaviors as “making snap judgments” and “evaluates situations carefully before taking action” apparently can cause teachers not to trust the principal. Bulach (1993) stated that “ability” was part of the trust construct. It would follow that if principals were to be perceived as making bad decisions, their ability would not be trusted. This would explain why trust and decision-making are in the same domain.

Actually, the scores in this domain are fairly positive, with all but two behaviors having scores above 3.5. This means that principals tend to trust their teachers and practice the positive behaviors in this domain while avoiding the negative behaviors, e.g., principals tend to avoid gossiping about teachers.

Instructional Leadership

A factor/domain labeled “instructional leadership ” had a mean score of 3.69 and accounted for 8% of

the variance. There are 10 items in this domain and they measure principals' knowledge of curriculum, teaching, and supervisory practices. A Cronbach alpha on this factor yielded a reliability coefficient of .85. The average score and the behaviors in this domain are in Table 3.

Table 3

The Behaviors and Average Score for Behaviors in the Instructional Leadership Domain

	Average Score
• My principal frequently interrupts my teaching.	4.18*
• My principal demonstrates a lack of vision.	4.00*
• My principal is knowledgeable about the curriculum.	3.86
• My principal is knowledgeable about instructional strategies.	3.82
• My principal applies procedures consistently.	3.76
• My principal shrugs off or devalues a problem or concern.	3.63*
• My principal fails to follow up.	3.63*
• My principal has rules but does not always enforce them.	3.55*
• My principal holds people accountable.	3.39
• My principal provides feedback regarding my teaching.	3.08

While the overall mean score for this domain is fairly positive, the two behaviors with the least positive scores are disturbing. If principals are being viewed as only holding teachers accountable "sometimes," (a score near 3.0) teachers are being given a lot of leeway in complying with expectations. Also, if principals are knowledgeable about curriculum and instructional strategies, but tend not to provide feedback to teachers about their teaching (a score of 3.08), then they are not sharing their expertise. Consequently, they are not being instructional leaders. In other research involving 1163 teachers, Bulach and Berry (2001) found that less than 50% of the teachers agreed that the principal knew what was going on in their classroom. Being an instructional leader is the most consistent leadership process found in academically high performing schools. They stated: "If administrators want to be instructional leaders, they will have to pay more attention to what is going on in classrooms" (p. 25).

Control

This leadership domain also had a mean score of 3.69 and accounted for 5% of the variance. There are 7 items in this domain and they measure the extent to which a principal controls or does not control teachers. A Cronbach alpha on this factor yielded a reliability coefficient of +.83. The average score and the behaviors in this domain are in Table 4

Table 4

The Behaviors and Average Score for Behaviors in the Control Domain

	Average Score
• My principal expects work to be done “yesterday” with no notice.	4.01*
• My principal delegates responsibility.	3.93
• My principal assigns duty during planning period.	3.74*
• My principal is rigid and inflexible.	3.74*
• My principal assigns too much paperwork.	3.60*
• My principal overemphasizes control.	3.58*
• My principal uses the words “I” and “my” too frequently.	3.25*

One of the major complaints from teachers is about principals who use “I” and “my” too frequently. They communicate the impression that they own the teachers and the building. Teachers resent this immensely. It also communicates a sense of an over-inflated ego. Principals are urged to substitute the pronouns “we” and “our” when talking about their teachers or school.

Conflict

A factor/domain labeled “dealing with conflict” had a mean score of 3.37 and accounted for 5% of the variance. There are seven items in this domain and they measure behaviors associated with whether a principal confronts or avoids conflict. A Cronbach alpha on this factor yielded a reliability coefficient of +.81. The average score and the behaviors in this domain are in

Table 5

The Behaviors and Average Score for Behaviors in the Conflict Domain

	Average Score
• My principal is able to keep a confidence.	3.93
• My principal is afraid to question his/her superiors.	3.70*
• My principal “passes the buck” rather than dealing with a situation.	3.70*
• My principal has double standards.	3.49*
• My principal is partial to influential parents.	3.07*
• My principal shows favoritism to some teachers.	3.00*
• My principal supports me even if I am wrong.	2.71

The average score for this domain was the lowest of the five domains measured by this instrument. This indicates that principals have a higher tendency to avoid conflict than to cope with it. According to Glickman (2002), conflict should not be avoided, but should be expected. He stated: “Any school leader planning to implement major school reforms will meet with confusion, skepticism, or outright hostility from some parents and staff members. . . . the leader must be prepared to deal with challenges from those who continue to resist or refuse to participate” (p. 42).

The last item in Table 5, indicate that principals do not support teachers when they are wrong. The behavior in the human relations factor “my principal has not supported me when parents are involved” also received a negative response. Principals must find ways to make teachers feel more supported even when they are wrong. This does not mean that teachers are allowed to get away with negative behavior. They need to be confronted and corrected for doing things wrong, but at the same time they must be supported as a person. The supervisory climate created by principals will improve if principals focus on the behavior that needs to be corrected instead of the person. For example, if a teacher is constantly late in arriving at his/her class, the principal should value them as a person, but request that the behavior change.

A Cronbach alpha was also used to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the total instrument. A correlation coefficient of $+ .95$ was obtained indicating the instrument has excellent reliability. The instrument has adequate construct validity in terms of those behaviors principals practice that teachers like or find offensive. This opinion is based on the premise that the behaviors in the instrument are the responses of more than 1000 teachers in the educational leadership graduate program at the University of West Geor-

gia who were asked over several years to identify the mistakes or negative behaviors of their principal. The instrument is not a valid measure of school climate. However, it is a valid measure of behaviors thought to positively or negatively affect the climate that exists between a supervisor/principal and a teacher.

Limitations of This Study

While this research identifies 49 behaviors related to a principal's leadership style, there are many more behaviors that determine effective leadership of the overall organization. Some of these behaviors are described by Bulach and Pickett (1995). For example, they share ideas such as talking too much, being visible, working harder than others, being selective in making your opinions known, etc.

Another limitation is that this study only measured one aspect of school climate. It did not measure the overall school climate, which according to Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1995) consists of nine variables. This study only measures the supervisory climate that exists between the principal and the teachers. There are many more variables such as order, expectations, parental involvement, etc., that make up the overall school climate.

In related preliminary unpublished research, Bulach, working with Corvers of the Louisiana Department of Education, investigated the relationship of a school's culture and climate to the principal's leadership style using the same survey described in this study. Six Louisiana schools that had not met AYP standards participated in a study to investigate the relationship of the principals' leadership style with the overall culture and climate of the school. A Pearson correlation of $+0.984$ was found between the overall culture and climate of the school and the leadership style of the principal. The two schools with the best culture and climate scores also had the highest scores on the Supervisory Climate Survey, and the two with the lowest scores on culture and climate also had the lowest scores on the Supervisory Climate Survey. While the small number of schools involved in the study is a limitation, it would appear that there is a definite relationship between the culture and climate of a school and the way the principal interacts with the teachers.

Conclusion

The opinions of the authors in this study are consistent with existing research that suggests a principal's human relations skills, levels of trust and the way decisions are made, the failure to empower subordinates, and deal with conflict are often the reasons why principals are either successful or not successful as educational leaders. It is important that schools become places where teachers are engaged in school reform or renewal efforts for improving the schools and where supervisory support encourages the entire staff to model behaviors that foster collegiality and a professional environment. The issue of teachers as a part of these professional communities must be addressed by principals who wish to improve their supervisory skill in building a more supportive climate that allows teachers to develop to their full potential. The collaborative culture described by Gruenert (2005) has to be created.

The instrument described in this study could be used by principals as a pro-active practice to gather self-analysis data regarding the impact of their leadership behavior on the supervisory climate that has developed. It could also be used by superintendents and other central office personnel to identify principals who are having problems creating a healthy supervisory climate that is conducive to positive staff morale and higher student test scores. This instrument provides principals and central office personnel an investigative tool that will identify a principal's leadership strengths and areas needing improvement. Based on this data, professional development plans can be made that target specifics rather than generalities.

The instrument can also be used as a research tool to examine relationships between leadership behaviors and teacher morale, teacher efficacy, test scores, overall school climate, etc. As the emphasis on school reform continues, there is a need to provide school administrators with data that will enable them to modify their leadership style to meet the challenges of the 21st century. While this instrument is no panacea, it will help educational leaders create learning environments that allow teachers and students to be more successful.

Finally, the strong relationship between the way principals interact with teachers and the overall climate and culture of the school has tremendous potential for taking a proactive approach in the leadership of school systems. Research has documented the relationship of student achievement and a school's culture and climate. The finding by Bulach and Corvers in six Louisiana schools that there is a strong relationship with the way principals supervise teachers and climate is worthy of future research. A principal's leadership behavior is as an early indicator of what is happening to a school's culture and climate and eventually student

achievement.

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