Managing and Leading Elementary Schools: Attending to the Formal and Informal Organization

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The Distributed Leadership Study
http://www.distributedleadership.org

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Theoretical & Empirical Anchors

Formal or Designed and Lived or Informal Organization

- Formal organization - organizational charts, formally designated leadership positions, formal organizational routines.
- Informal or lived organization - school as experienced by organizational members
- Informal not a mirror image of formal organization (Dalton 1959; Homans 1950; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Brown & Duguid, 1991)

A Distributed Perspective

- The Leader-Plus Aspect
- The Practice Aspect
A Distributed Perspective

- Conceptual framework for thinking about leadership and management.
- A diagnostic instrument that draws attention to particular dimensions of practice.
- A design framework for guiding leadership and management development efforts.
Research Questions

• Who has a formally designated leadership position in elementary schools and what are their responsibilities?

• Who takes responsibility for leadership and management work?

• To what extent does the practice of leading and managing involve co-performance?

• Do patterns of distribution vary from one school to the next?

• What types of leading and managing work are distributed across people and involve co-performance?
Research Methods

Sample

• 23 of 30 Elementary Schools in one mid-sized urban school district.

Data Collection:

• Mixed methods design - survey, observation, interviews & logs.

• Current paper:

  • School Staff Questionnaire (SSQ)

  • School Principal Questionnaire (PQ)

  • ESM log
## School Staff Survey

During THIS SCHOOL YEAR, to whom have you turned for advice or information about teaching Mathematics? Please write full first and last names, and give a brief description of that person’s role or position. You do not need to fill all the spaces.

- [x] I have not sought advice from anyone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim Spillane</td>
<td>principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Pustejovsky</td>
<td>6th grade teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Pitts</td>
<td>math coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Sigal</td>
<td>roommate - also a teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics for Elementary Schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elementary Schools in District¹</th>
<th>Elementary Schools in analysis²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>16,776</td>
<td>13,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of students/school</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student:teacher ratio</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage minority enrollment</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ All elementary schools in the district, including those with and without ESM data; N=30.
² Elementary schools in the district in which principal participated in ESM; N=23.
Research Methods

Response Rates

• SSQ – Overall response rate for 23 schools was 89%, ranging from 78% to 100%.

• ESM - Overall response rate for 23 principals was 64%, ranging from 25% to 93%.

• PQ – All 23 Principals completed the Principal Questionnaire.

Data Analysis

• Descriptive and correlational approaches by aggregating individual responses to school and sample levels.

• Non-parametric tests.
Overview: Findings/Assertions/Hypotheses

• Multiple formally designated leaders have responsibility for leadership and management.

• Responsibilities of formally designated leaders often overlap suggesting co-performance or parallel performance.

• Formally designated leaders not always prominent in who actually takes responsibility for leading and managing.

• *Co-performance* (collaborated distribution) of leading and managing activities was relatively commonplace in the 23 elementary schools.

• *How* responsibility for leadership and management is distributed and stretched over leaders depends on the type of activity.

• There is considerable between-school variation in how responsibility for leadership and management is distributed.
Today’s Focus

- Multiple formally designated leaders have responsibility for leadership and management.

- Responsibilities of formally designated leaders often overlap suggesting co-performance or parallel performance.

- Formally designated leaders not always prominent in who actually takes responsibility for leading and managing.

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- There is considerable between-school variation in how responsibility for leadership and management is distributed.
Leading and Managing from the Perspective of the Lived or Informal Organization

• The mean number of leaders was 3.7 for languages arts and 3.1 for mathematics.

• Between school variation ranged from
  
  • one to 11 leaders for language arts
  
  • zero to 12 leaders for mathematics

• Of those identified in language arts, 44% had formal position, 48% did not.

• Only 43% (13) of the 30 with formal language arts position were identified.

• Of those identified for mathematics, 45% had formal position, 49% did not.

• Only 36% (10) of the 28 with formal math position were identified.
The Formal and Informal Compared

Table 2. Presence of formally designated leaders in Language Arts and Math Networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Language Arts Leaders</th>
<th>Math Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole school reform program coach/ facilitator</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special program coordinator (e.g., Title I)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, Literacy, or English program coordinator/ chair</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math program coordinator/ chair</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subject area program coordinator/ chair</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement coordinator</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master/mentor teacher</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher consultant</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal and Informal Organizational Congruence: Between School Variance

• Across the 23 schools, formally designated leaders account for between 0% and 82% of language arts advice relations.

• Across the 23 schools, formally designated leaders account for between 0% and 77% of mathematics advice relations.

• While formally designated leaders were responsible for none of the advice giving interactions about language arts in one school, they were responsible for 82% of these interactions at another school.

• A measure of how leadership is distributed -- congruence of formal and informal arrangements.
Co-Performance of Leading and Managing: The Subject Matters

• Principals reported co-performing 48% of activities.

• Principals co-performed significantly more instruction and curriculum-related activities (56%) than administration-related activities (45%) (p<0.05)

• Principals most frequently reported co-performing with regular classroom teachers (32%) and teacher leaders (25%).

• For over 50% of co-performance situations, principals identified at least one individual with no formal leadership designation.
The Activity Type Matters

- % Not Leading
- % Leading
- % Leading Alone
- % Co-leading

Legend:
- Instruction & Curriculum
- Administration
- Any Activity
Co-Performance: Between School Variance

Figure 2(b). Frequency Distribution of Percentage of Principals' Activities Co-lead with Someone Else (N=23).
Conclusion

• Attending to both the formal and informal organization and relations among the two.

• Schools differ in how leading and managing is stretched over people

• The activity type matters.

• Ongoing work …