

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE **research**

THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

TITLE The Relationship of Principal Leadership to Organizational Learning and Sustained Academic Achievement

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OBJECTIVE The primary intent of this study was to learn how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects involved in this study represented a purposeful sampling of six title one elementary schools located in the north Houston area. Based upon data obtained from the state's Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007), three of these schools were recognized for sustained academic achievement, and three were not. Thirty-eight teacher volunteers who served as members of their school's Campus Improvement Plan Committee or Teacher Leadership Team completed the LPI Observer and participated in focus groups. The principals completed the LPI-Self.

KEY FINDINGS

Observer scores on all five leadership practices were all reported as higher in frequency than the scores from the principals (Self). The rank order for principals was Enable, Encourage, Model, Challenge and Inspire, while from the viewpoint of their constituents it was Enable, Encourage, Inspire, Model and Challenge.

Focus group (FG) members from high sustainability schools (HSS) reported their principals to demonstrate the LPI practices at a high level 60 percent of the time, moderately 33 percent of the time, and ineffectively only 7 percent of the time. Demonstrating a near inverse relationship, FG members from low sustainability schools (LSS) perceived their principals as demonstrating the LPI practices at a high level only 33 percent of the time and moderately 67 percent of the time.

The relationship between LPI practices and case study data reveals significant differences between the leadership practices of principals in HSS and LSS schools. Specifically, this relationship suggests important differences regarding the practices of Model and Inspire, and the subsequent impact of these practices on organizational coherence. The perceived

affects of Model and Inspire suggest a reciprocal effect on staff members' perceptions of Enabling. An analysis of the LPI practices of Challenge and Encourage found no significant differences.

Principal self reports among HSS identified Model as the most frequently practiced behavior and was considered by staff members as an important prerequisite in developing conditions for learning and leading. Focus group members of HSS perceived Inspire as the most frequently perceived leadership practice. "This finding reiterates the notion that modeling beliefs and expectations has a powerful effect on the creation of a shared vision. Similarly, this finding suggests that staff member perceptions are more strongly influenced by the leader's behaviors, than through his or her efforts to articulate a vision not yet internalized by staff members" (p. 170).

Among schools in this study, there appeared to be a strong relationship between the clarity of shared visions and the normative expectation for commitment among staff. In HSS schools where an uncompromised focus on student achievement was expressed as a shared vision, cultural norms appeared to influence expectations for commitment. In schools where a strong collective purpose was not evident, the normative expectation for commitment appeared less pronounced and fragmented. In HSS schools values which were translated into school visions were clearly presented as normative behaviors, attitudes, and generalizations about the way things were done on each campus.

The author concludes: "Continued professional development designed to help principals understand and apply leadership behaviors as indicated in the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) may serve to provide a simple yet effective skills base. Understanding the effects of Modeling, Inspiring, Challenging, Enabling, and Encouraging in the context of a practical leadership model would assist in providing a well rounded, flexible, and research based approach to school leadership" (p. 195).