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# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

# research

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**TITLE** Leadership and Sustainable Change: The Relationship Between Leadership Practices of Principals and Reculturing Schools as Professional Learning Communities

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**OBJECTIVE** The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between leadership practices of principals and strength of schools as sustainable professional learning communities

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in a single mid-sized public school district in Texas where the researcher was currently employed. Principals at 12 schools participated along with 86 teachers from these schools. Strength of schools as professional learning communities was measured using the Professional Learning Communities Assessment (Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003) and leadership practices were measured using the Leadership Practices Inventory (Self and Observer formats).

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Enabling was the leadership practice reported by principals as most frequently engaged in followed by Modeling, Encouraging, Inspiring and Challenging. No significant relationship was found between principals' leadership practices and perceptions of their schools as learning communities.

However, 15 of the 30 paired relationships between leadership practices as reported by observers and strength of schools as professional learning communities (PLC) were significant. The strongest relationships were for Modeling the Way as it was significantly correlated with all six PLC dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions-relationships, and supportive conditions-structures. Relationships were also found between the Inspiring and Enabling and the PLC dimensions of shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, and supportive conditions-relationships. Significant correlations were found between Encouraging and the PLC dimension of shared and supportive leadership. No significant relationship was found between Challenging and any of the PLC dimensions.

The LPI statement (ISV): “Shows others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision” had a significant relationship across all six dimensions of the PLC assessment. Two LPI statements connected with Modeling: “Builds consensus around a common set of values for running our organization” and “Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect other people’s performance” had a significant relationship on five of the six PLC dimensions.

The author reports that:

Summed data indicates that strength in at least ten specific leadership behaviors appeared most highly related to strength of schools as professional learning communities. Four of those specific behaviors occurred within the leadership practice of inspiring shared vision, while three modeling the way behaviors appeared most related, and two challenging the process behaviors appeared most strongly related to strength as a learning community. One specific behavior within the practice of enabling others to act appeared most strongly related to strength of schools as learning communities, while no behaviors within the practice of encouraging the heart appeared most strongly related to strength of a school as a learning community. The ten behavior statements are presented here.

ISV (17): “Shows others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.”

ISV (7): “Describes a compelling image of what our future could be like.”

ISV (12): “Appeals to others to share an exciting dream of the future.”

ISV (22): “Paints the ‘big picture’ of what we aspire to accomplish.”

MTW (16): “Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect other people’s performance.”

MTW (21): “Builds consensus around a common set of values for running our organization.”

MTW (1): “Sets a personal example of what he/she expects of others.”

CTP (28): “Experiments and takes risks, even when there is a chance of failure.”

CTP (23): “Makes certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on.”

EOA (4): “Develops cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with” (pp. 140-141).

Further analysis of the two strongest learning community schools and the two weakest learning community schools confirmed that “three leadership behaviors are most likely to result in the reculturing of schools as sustainable professional learning communities. Principals who set a personal example of what they expect of others, who build consensus around a common set of values, and who develop cooperative relationship with co-workers are more likely to lead strong and sustainable learning communities” (p. 150).