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The Development of an Instrument for Client Based Principal Evaluation

Howard Ebmeier

Alfred Wilson

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The Development of an Instrument for Client Based Principal Evaluation

by Howard Ebmeier
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas
and Alfred Wilson
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

I. Introduction

Within the last two years, there has been a resurgence of public concern about the effectiveness of schools and a renewed appreciation of the important role principals play in the educational process. This attention has been matched by research on principals' behavior, school effectiveness, and work outside of education focusing on leadership and organizational excellence in general. Although additional studies clearly need to be undertaken, sufficient data already exist to begin to define administrative behaviors, skills, and attitudes that are at least associated with academic, social, and physical development of students. (See Manasse, 1985 for a review).

Concurrent with this interest in describing characteristics of effective schools, there has been an increased interest in teacher, and more recently, administrator evaluation. For instance, between 1974 and 1984, the number of states that mandated formal evaluation of administrators increased from 9 to 27. Similarly, the number of school systems reporting that formal evaluation procedures existed within their districts increased from 39.5 percent in 1968 to 85.9 percent in 1984 (ERS, 1985). Unfortunately, although the frequency of administrative evaluations have increased markedly, the quality of the assessments does not appear to have substantially improved. Indeed, some (Bolton, 1980) have observed that all too often typical administrative evaluation can be viewed as a process in which an evaluator checks items on a rating scale whose categories are usually a conglomeration of criterion-and-norm-referenced items which are not necessarily based on hard data and do not provide much helpful guidance for improvement efforts. In addition, Bolton points out that the behaviors or characteristics that are typically used as the criteria are seldom well defined and are often trivial in nature. Thus, although there seems to be a substantial body of knowledge regarding effective administrative practice, the extant information does not seem to be well incorporated into existing instruments.

A second problem with administrator evaluation systems is their typical reliance on the superordinate as the sole source of input. For example, in a ERS survey (1985), peer evaluation of principals was used by only 4.9 percent of the districts; teacher opinion was employed by 10.9 percent of the responding districts; student input was considered 8.3 percent of the time. In contrast, observation by the superintendent was the most common method (85.7 percent) used to collect information in evaluating both central office administrators and principals/assistant principals. Interestingly, much of the professional literature supports the use of "client centered" evaluation data if for no other reason than to lend concurrent validity to the superordinate's evaluation (Licata, 1980; Wills, 1976; Kienapfel, 1984). Indeed, there is some evidence that "clients" are the best evaluators of principals (ERIC, 1980) at least in certain areas because they are in the best position to observe the behavior of the administrator in his/her daily work. Thus, while the superordinate may be a better judge of specific management skills, only students and the schools' staff can directly evaluate vision, communication of school goals, and other similar dimensions characteristics of effective administrators.

A third problem with existing administrative evaluation procedures is that they tend to be summative in design and practice. While summative decisions are obviously necessary for efficient operation of the school district, given the relative high inference measures characteristic of most instruments, it is difficult for individual administrators to identify specific behaviors or practices that need improvement. A similar problem exists with the goal-based evaluation systems. Although it is useful for principals to identify areas in which they can strive for improvement, frequently the goals selected (typically without any systematic diagnostic effort) only reinforce existing strengths and avoid weaknesses. In addition, unless the superordinate is especially skillful in helping the administrator identify areas of weakness, the selected goals tend to be more programmatic in nature (i.e., 3rd grade reading scores will improve 10 percentile points), have little connection to existing administrator deficiencies, and are so poorly constructed that they are almost impossible to measure.

Lastly, the validity of the majority of administrator evaluation instruments whether formative (diagnostic) or summative are simply unknown. (Possible exceptions would be the ROME Project, Ellett, 1974; the PAL Project, Tucker, 1984; and the NASSP Assessment Center.) To obtain sound

Dr. Howard Ebmeier is an Associate Professor in the Educational Policy and Administration Department at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. He is a former teacher and assistant superintendent in a suburban district of Chicago. His teaching, writing, and research interest areas are school effectiveness, staff development, and instructional leadership.

Dr. Alfred Wilson is presently a Professor on the faculty of Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. He has served as a public school teacher and administrator and as a university faculty member and administrator. He has authored numerous books, monographs, articles, and research papers. He maintains a keen interest in pre-service and in-service development for school administrators.

administrative evaluation instruments, it would be necessary to collect data from a number of sources to substantiate that the evaluation instrument actually measures what it claimed (concurrent validity); to conduct a thorough review of the extant literature to gather evidence concerning what constitutes effective administration (content validity); to employ several evaluations to offset potential biases of individuals (concurrent validity and reliability); and to collect data in as natural a setting as possible (ecological validity).

Although additional shortcomings of administrator evaluation processes and instruments could easily be outlined at this point, it seems reasonably clear that the existing practices currently being employed in the school districts of this nation are generally inadequate for the professional development of the administrator. They may marginally serve for adequate summative evaluation purposes, but they are clearly inadequate as diagnostic tools designed to help administrators identify areas needing improvement and as instruments whereby administrators could obtain useful feedback concerning progress they are making in specific, previously identified areas.

Given the shortcomings of existing administrator evaluation instruments and in particular, those of a diagnostic nature, it is desirable to design a sound measurement instrument that can be used with confidence by practitioners. Fortunately, over the last nine months we have been involved with the LEAD project to develop such a diagnostic instrument. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to outline in detail the characteristics of this instrument, to describe work we will be engaged in shortly, and to describe the mechanism for instrument use in Kansas through the LEAD Program.

II. Instrument Development

Outcome Measures. As we began to formulate the design parameters for the development of an instrument principals could use in a diagnostic manner to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, it quickly became apparent that before we could identify "effective" principal behaviors around which we could construct an instrument, we first needed to define "effectiveness." As we reviewed the literature, it was apparent that "effectiveness" was defined differently depending on the criteria chosen. For example, the "Effective Schools" literature characterizes effectiveness as residual gain on standardized test scores while others shun that definition favoring instead a school known for its positive socializing effect on children. Hence, effectiveness is not unidimensional but rather a complex construct that is dependent on the criteria used, which may be independent on one another and indeed may be mutually exclusive. Without a theoretical model or framework as a guide it is impossible to state that one school is more effective than another or that a given set of principals behaviors' and leadership style is any better than another set of behaviors. To resolve this dilemma we examined the major models that characterize organizational effectiveness (Parson, 1960; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee, 1982; Duckworth, 1983; Ellett and Walberg, 1979; Pitner, 1988; and Hoy and Miskel, 1987) and constructed a revised version of the Hoy and Miskel framework with major input from the Pitner model. In essence, from our perspective school effectiveness can be characterized as the school's ability to control and adjust to the following constructs:

Adaption—ability to control, transform, or adjust to the external environment
Goal Attainment—ability to define objectives and mobilize resources to achieve these desired ends
Integration—ability to organize, coordinate, and unify social entities into a single unit
Maintenance—ability to create and maintain the system's motivational and value structure

Process Measures. To assist the principal in identifying school behaviors or routines that might contribute to increasing their effectiveness as defined above, the second phase of our development process involved a literature search to identify traits, characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes, that were thought to be important for effective leadership of a building as previously defined. To accomplish the task we followed the procedure identified by Kartis and Watters. We also employed the services of a reference librarian at the university to search over 32 data bases using 36 descriptors for articles that might be of interest. In addition, through personal contact across the United States we were able to obtain several hundred articles; thus, the total set of documents examined for this study exceeded 1,500. After the documents were obtained, we employed eight graduate students, college professors, and practicing administrators to read subsets of the total material to isolate attitudes, behaviors, and skills that were identified in the published work. Each article was read by two reviewers and a third if agreement concerning the desirable characteristics could not be reached. A matrix-type analysis system was then employed to identify commonalities and differences across recommendations, and the list was condensed based on a commonality analysis. The remaining competencies (N = 150) were then reviewed, modified, and validated by state and national experts who were representative of teachers, principals, superintendents, and college faculty who teach the "principalship" course. Lastly, a sample of practicing administrators in the state were asked, via a structured questionnaire, to identify those skills, behaviors, and attitudes which they thought were essential and those that were desirable but not critical. From an analysis of that data plus information compiled from prior consensus groups, a list of 60 basic competencies and subdescriptors was developed. The identified competencies were then classified in terms of the outcome goal they might best achieve; these competencies appear in Figure 2.

Context and Presage Measures. Because of our interest in defining effectiveness in situational terms and resisting the temptation to simply look at the overall summative scores on the four outcomes measures (adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and maintenance), after we had adopted a working definition of school effectiveness and isolated principal process behaviors that might be associated with achievement of these outcomes, we turned our attention toward identifying contextual and presage variables that might interact with the outcome measures or principal process variables in important ways. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, a new school with a relatively young staff might choose to focus more heavily on integration than a school with a stable veteran staff. We thought it would be important to gather background data about the school, the district, the students, the principal, and the community characteristics to help the principal better frame and interpret the results. It is our hope that when principals received the results from this instrument that they would examine them in light of their goal and the context in which they were working. We wanted to avoid a simple rush to see how they scored on the four outcome measures disregarding the situational factors involved.

Questionnaires. To gather descriptive data that would be useful for a principal's development, a set of questionnaires were developed that measure the outcomes, processes, and background variables previously described and

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listed in Figure 2. Information relative to these dimensions will be gathered from students, staff, parents, the principal's supervisor, and the principal. Some factors such as the effectiveness outcome variables will be included on all the questionnaires to afford the principal different views from their clients regarding the school and the principal's behaviors, while some factors are included on only one questionnaire targeted for a single constituent group. In each case, the choice of which client group would be asked to respond was driven by a consideration of which group would be able to provide the most accurate information in the most efficient manner. The principal process behaviors are typically assessed by a single question because they are of relatively low inference (i.e., How many times has the principal evaluated you over the last ten years). By contrast, the attitudinal data which call for relatively high influence judgments are assessed through a multi-item (five point Likert) scale with a minimum of 15 questions per scale and an alpha reliability estimate greater than 0.80. (based on pilot data).

III. Administration Procedure

Principals who wish to use the materials in the Diagnostic Instrument first contact the state principals' association who would then mail the questionnaires and instructions to the principal. Following the instructions in the packet, the principal will distribute the questionnaires to all staff members, his/her supervisor, a random sample of parents and students, and to himself/herself. When the questionnaires have been completed, they will be returned to the principal's office and sent to a university scoring service. After processing the results, which will include state norms, the questionnaires will be returned to the principal for his or her own use. The results will only be available to individual principals and will not be released to anyone else.

IV. Outcomes of this Project

We believe this study has importance for several reasons. *First*, it represents the first comprehensive attempt of which we are aware to integrate the findings of divergent studies which suggest or identify competencies principals should possess. Importantly, the study also attempts to categorize the various competencies into logical groups with each group of skills, behaviors, attitudes, etc., being important for, or contributing to, the accomplishment of a major outcome goal. *Second*, we believe that the results of this study could serve as a basis for program development. Curriculum programs might be structured around the identified competencies while instructional methods might be selected to promote and model the skill areas. *Third*, an analysis of the scope of the competencies might identify areas that have been systematically omitted from training purposes or the extant literature. *Fourth*, the evaluation instrument we believe will have immediate practical value and should improve current practice. *Fifth*, given that the evaluation instrument has the potential of collecting a wide variety of information (school climate, leadership emphasis, etc.) from a large number of schools, it could serve as a useful dependent measure for a variety of school effectiveness studies and as an alternative to sole reliance on residual gain on standardized achievement tests as the sole school outcome effectiveness measure.

Figure 1
Relationship Among Variable Categories

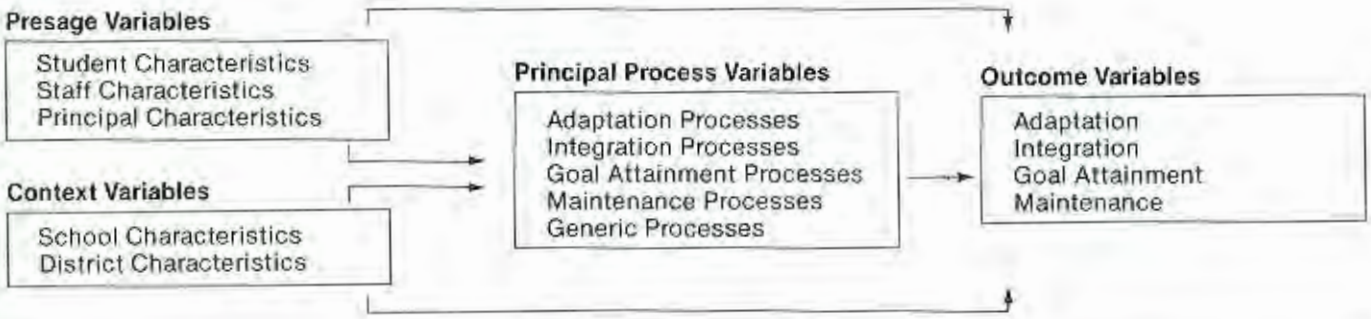

Figure 2
Summary of Variables Measured by the Principal Diagnostic Instrument

1. **Presage Variables**
   - A. Student Characteristics (student questionnaire)
     - —age
     - —social class (estimates)
     - —sex
     - —abilities (estimates)
     - —race
     - —attitudes and expectations (Academic futility, Future expectations, Academic Norms, Perception of Teacher Push, Self Concept, Motivation)
   - B. Staff Characteristics (staff questionnaire)
     - —teacher training background/Education level
     - —age
     - —sex
     - —race
     - —experience
   - C. Principal Characteristics (principal questionnaire)
     - —age
     - —sex
     - —race
     - —principal training background
     - —educational level
     - —areas of interest (Management, Instruction, etc.)
     - —experiences
2. **Context Variables**
   - A. Individual School Characteristics (principal questionnaire)
     - —ethnic composition

Figure 2 (con't)
Summary of Variables Measured by the Principal Diagnostic Instrument

—free/reduced hot lunch
—percentage of bussed students
—percentage scoring at various stonines on standard achievement test
—size
—grade levels
—location (rural, suburban, urban)
—adequacy of plant (lack of impedance)
—community support and participation
—level of teacher union involvement
—coupling structure
—technical clarity
—technical complexity
—role definitions

B. District Characteristics (supervisor questionnaire)
—size of total school district (number of pupils)
—geographic size of district in square miles
—location (rural suburban, urban, large town, small town, etc.)
—degree of decentralization
—stability of board/top administration
—ethnic composition
—percentage on free/reduced hot lunch

3. **Process Variables** (staff, students, parents, supervisor, principal questionnaire)
A. Adaptation Related Principal Process Variables
—understands others (3)
—keeps abreast of current technology (5)
—recognize how political and societal changes impact the effectiveness of the organization (10)
—cognizant of needs and concerns of individuals served by the organization (13)
—engages in self development activities (16, B7)
—accessible to others (19)
—provides continuous development appointments for others (23)
—participates in professional associations and community groups (B1, C7)
—promotes discussions of issues, problems, and recommendations pertaining to education (B5)
—articulates the school's mission to the community and solicits support (C1, D5)
—cooperates with community agencies (C2)
—involves the community (C6)
—maintains a public relations program (C9)
—establishes parent/school organizations (C10)
—garners resources from the community (E4)
—copes with dynamic and diverse conditions (15)
—supports new and innovative projects
—encourages staff to assume new roles
—encourages different instructional strategies
—encourages peer improvement groups
—assists with coaching of teachers
—anticipates community problems as they influence the school

B. Integration Related Principal Process Variables
—combines staff contributions and resources to achieve goals (1)
—alleviates difficult conflicts (14)
—works hard to promote staff cohesion (12)
—entrusts and supports others (17)
—understands informal actions in organizations (21)
—recognizes how decisions and actions impact the organization (29, B3)
—appropriately utilizes personnel (A9)
—delegates appropriate responsibilities (B2)
—provides an atmosphere conducive to discussion of issues, problems, and recommendations (B5)
—urges group involvement (C4, E8)
—efficiently uses facilities (F2, F3)
—understands employee rights and due process (G4)
—describes how units interlock
—distributers workloads appropriately
—shows consideration
—promotes school spirit and moral
—promotes internal communications
—schedules appropriate group meetings
—shares decision making
—coordinates the curriculum
—initiates appropriate structure

C. Goal Attainment Related Principal Process Variables
—allocates time and resources to achieve goals (6)
—supervise and adjust agreed upon plans and actions (18)
—uses diverse techniques and methods with individuals to achieve a desired goal (26)
—holds high expectations for self and others
—provides for supervision of personnel (A1, A7)
—develops policy (A2)
—provides for the recruitment, orientation, development, and utilization of personnel (A6)
—diagnoses needs, prioritizes needs and resources to achieve goals (B4, E7, E9)
—supports and develops professional standards (B6)
—plans, implements, and evaluates programs (B9, E1, E2, E3, E9)
—demonstrates understanding of well-rounded educational attitudes and beliefs (C3, E10)
—coordinate the budget to support the programs (D7)
—sets and communicates school goals
—provides incentive for goal attainment
—encourages academic and non-academic achievement
—facilitates work
—emphasizes production

D. Maintenance Related Principal Process Variables
—assists staff with personal and professional concerns (2, 24)
—assists employees accomplish personal and organizational goals (32)
—understands diverse ethnic and multi-cultural backgrounds (E6)
—provides support to staff
—provides symbolic leadership
—provides positive reinforcement
—facilitates employee job satisfaction
—provides social leadership
—establishes and maintains systems value structure
—maintains high visibility and represents school
—shows an employee centered orientation

E. Generic Principal Process Variables
—understands and emphathizes with others (3)
—recognizes important data and integrates information to determine essential elements of a problem (4)
—writes concisely and correctly (8)
—orally communicates information to individuals and groups (11)

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Figure 2 (con't)
Summary of Variables Measured by the Principal Diagnostic Instrument

—demonstrates skill in problem resolution and decision making (B8)
—demonstrates effective interpersonal skills (31, A5, C5)
—demonstrates an understanding of legal concepts and how they might apply in schools (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6)

4. **Outcome Variables** (student, principal, supervisor, staff, parent questionnaire)
   A. Adaptation—ability to control, transform, or adjust to the external environment (adaptability-flexibility, innovation, growth, development)
   B. Goal Attainment—ability to define objections and mobilize resources to achieve these desired ends (achievement, motivation, creativity, self confidence, productivity, efficiency, quality)
   C. Integration—ability to organize, coordinate, and unify social entity into a single unit (satisfaction, turnover, conflict-cohesion, climate, communications)
   D. Maintenance—creating and maintaining the systems' motivational and value structure (loyalty, central life interests, sense of identify, motivation, role and norm congruency, support of principal)

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