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The Lens Of Decision Making: The Intuitive Leader

Effective decision making is the cornerstone ability for any effective leader. What approaches are utilized in effective decision making? Does experience drive all decisions or are there specific strategies that are employed that help guide the process? Do leaders possess an instinctive ability to recognize the problem and act accordingly? This chapter focuses on the principal's ability to approach problems in a variety of ways: from an experiential, retrospective, and intuitive base.

Themes addressed in this chapter:

- Understanding your faculty
- Identifying significant community members
- “Gut reactions” and decision making
- Utilizing experience to recognize distinctions in school organizations and cultures
- Not overreacting; keeping perspective

Profile of the Intuitive Leader

Principal: female

Age: 55

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Experience: 3 years as principal at this site; 4 years in staff development prior to this appointment; 10+ years related administrative experience at the district level; one additional principalship

Schools: elementary alternative K–6; student population: 600; elementary; population: 825

You need to pay attention, to some degree, to everything that is going on until you find out what is happening with all the groups that are related to the school, for example, the PTA, teachers, site council, student council, safe route to school, disaster plan: there's a lot. At some level you have to pay attention to all of it while still getting the big picture. I think that my recommendation going into a job, and I did this and I still think it is quite valid, is try not to go into a situation and rock the boat too much right away. I see it happening so many times. People do that. Be flexible; be willing to change your priorities. Don't be so tight. Be a good listener.

I guess the first principalship was a real eye-opener for me. Although I felt I was very trusting of everyone at the school site, in retrospect I was really doing a lot. In the second principalship, it really gave me the perspective of understanding that I didn't have to do so much. There were a lot of capable people around the school, a lot of empowerment by letting people do a lot.

If you want to change something, make sure it is something several people want, not a few people. Does the staff support this particular change? Otherwise, even though you may have a wonderful idea and it the best thing that should be happening at the school, if the change creates discomfort before you have a level of trust with the people, then you're interfering with their job . . . they'd likely complain about you and everyone else. That is negative energy and you don't need that. So do yourself a favor, buy them some sweet rolls. Give them some coffee, you know. Paint the staff room, do something that they will like, get to know the place, build some trust. Get them to realize that you all want the same thing and that you should do it together. Otherwise, it will just create a lot of animosity and you'll have to backtrack.

You see, there are times when something happens in your school and you'll have a sense of it, for example, with a teacher, student, or whomever. Normally, the best thing is to respond to it based upon this intuitive sense.

Well, it is the best job I've ever had, actually. It is not the same as teaching. Teaching is its own thing; personal, but on a smaller scale. . . . But the site administration, that relationship that you have with those people and school over time, the accomplishments that you can achieve related to the quality of instruction is phenomenal. It's a wonderful and very unique job.

School Context

Principals must be able to balance the many demands of their school. Ideally, they must also have a clear sense of who they are and what priorities are in the interest of the school. To do this they must be responsive to all groups.

The pressure to be a micromanager can be an overwhelming need that inexperienced leaders often bring to their first principalship. They often want to know exactly what is transpiring at all levels at their site and initially do not have a grasp of the abilities of their faculty in order to assign relevant duties.

This principal's first school had no significant behavioral issues. Test scores were quite strong, and parents had high expectations for student performance and success. Prior to this assignment, she had worked at the district level in staff development.

Her second principalship was at a school far more diverse in population. She had also been pursuing her doctorate prior to assuming this position and returned with stronger expertise in school organizations and a more grounded professional understanding of her own capabilities and school operations.

School Characteristics

Her first elementary school consisted of approximately 600 students with a significant White population. There were small populations of Latino, Asian, and African American students.

Her second elementary school was quite diverse with 30% to 40% representing a White population and almost 60% to 70% representing Latino, African American, and Asian students.

School Climate

The administrator explained that in her first administrative position she was highly uncertain about the power bases in the school. It was a very wealthy district, and the children represented a more privileged population. Over time she understood the ethos of the school.

In her second administrative placement, the school was far more diverse and her understanding of her own capabilities and those of her faculty were significantly enhanced by her professional and personal growth due to the additional time between positions.

School Organization

In her first principalship, the district did not provide any administrative support, although she was supported by a lead teacher.

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In her second position, there were 465 students, and she had no administrative support.

Interview

The following interview was conducted as a retrospective on her administrative experiences as a principal and educator.

Dubin:

Please tell me about your educational experience in general, as well as your training and preparation to assume a leadership position.

Principal:

Well, currently I work at the university level focusing on teacher credentialing and the administrative program. My formal training after my undergraduate degree was in early childhood education and special education. After several years of teaching, approximately 18 years, I spent 3 years in a staff development project, working countywide in specific school districts with teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents to improve their education programs. After that I went to an elementary school principalship for 3 years after which time I took a leave to complete my doctorate. After receiving my doctorate I returned to the district to assume an administrative position overseeing categorical programs. I worked in curriculum development and categoricals for 6 years. At the same time, I was beginning my career as an instructor on the university level. Currently, I am working full time doing project coordination and teaching on the university level.

Dubin:

With respect to the principalship you served in for 3 years, could you tell me a little bit about that school?

Principal:

Yes. Actually, I served for 3 years at that school and then later on in my career, I was principal at a different school; very different populations at each school. The first principalship was considered an alternative school because students in the school selected the school. It's a school of choice in the district, not a neighborhood school. The population there was very clearly committed to the curriculum and very focused; kind of a back-to-basics approach. However, as time went on, the school became very much like all the schools in the district because the level of what had to be done in

California became more homogeneous. So our school was more and more like any other school. The population was still self-selected.

I guess the first principalship was a real eye-opener for me. Although I felt I was very trusting of everyone at the school site, in retrospect I was really doing a lot. In the second principalship, it really gave me the perspective of understanding that I didn't have to do so much. There were a lot of capable people around the school, a lot of empowerment by letting people do a lot. That was a very big lesson for me between the two principalships. Also, the interim between the two assignments was about 7 years. A lot happened during that time, including the completion of my doctorate. I did a lot of studying in various areas, particularly my area of specialty, intuition and decision making, which certainly affected the way I worked with people.

Dubin:

I see. Could you tell me a little bit more about the school, that is, the size, demographics, the staff?

Principal:

Of course. The first school was about 600 students, Grades K–6. The demographics were primarily White; that is, 90% Caucasian and very high achievers. We were a California “distinguished” school. Our scores compared to the scores of the top schools in California; we were almost always in the top 3%. It was that type of school. My second school was quite different and more closely reflected the population of California: 30% Caucasian; 60% to 70% everything else. The socioeconomic levels of the second school were quite mixed. We had kids who were living in cars under freeways and kids with intact families. That was a very mixed bag, very different schools, and the kids in the schools were quite different. The second school, I found the kids to be much more diverse, more open, warm and friendly; outgoing, not as stressed out. The first school, the kids were more reserved, not so open and friendly, and very high achievers.

Dubin:

Tell me about the staff, administrative support.

Principal:

We had no administrative support in my first school. The second school had about 465 students. At that time the district had changed configuration so that the sixth grade was no longer at the elementary school, and so the second school was a K–5 school rather than a K–6.

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Dubin:

Is there any formula for administrative help based upon numbers?

Principal:

Well, various districts had formulas. Our district did have something of a formula. If there were over 600 students, you wouldn't have additional administrative support, but rather a lead teacher released part of the day or possibly, if you could also use categorical money, have that lead teacher full time. This was not an administrator as a support person. I have had friends who, particularly in urban settings, didn't get any additional administrative support unless the student population reached over 1,000.

Dubin:

Incredible.

Principal:

Unbelievable. And those were urban school districts. And here we are in a suburban environment with not nearly the same issues and we're getting the support. It is terribly unfortunate. In fact, I supervise administrative candidates who are in schools where the student populations are about 400 students, and they have administrative support; an actual assistant principal. But those are in very high-wealth schools.

Dubin:

Have you any idea how the formulas are determined? This has come up several times. What is the rationale or thinking on the district level regarding the addition of an administrator? How do they come up with a number?

Principal:

In other words, how is it that an additional administrator can be placed in a school when the student population is 400 or 500 or 600?

Dubin:

Yes.

Principal:

I don't really know. I think it's really arbitrary. I think it depends upon how much the principal and parents in that community complain about the level of attention they are getting. I think that the parent community is the most important factor that could influence the administration, who would

then go to the board. I don't believe that there is a real rationale as to the number of kids and what the work load might be. You see, in some settings you could have 400 kids, but the complexity of the issues are such that you need support. Certainly, if there were 1,000 kids. . . . In thinking about another principal I had worked with, well she had 960 students and had to wait until she got to 1,000. That was yet another district.

Dubin:

That was an elementary school.

Principal:

Yes. That was an elementary school.

Dubin:

And she was the only administrator in that school. She was the only one, essentially, responsible for almost 1,000 students.

Principal:

Yes. It's very scary and overwhelming and now especially, because you have the reduction in class size, the K-3 teacher populations which have doubled and the retirees. We also have interns, new teachers to the profession, who are required to have two formal observations before the deadline of March 1 when a principal turns in their evaluations. So when you increase the number of visitations and observations that are supposed to be happening, I do not see how the principals can do it.

My last year at my first principalship there were 22 teachers on the staff, and there was a point where I had 11 who were non-tenured: half of the teachers. I could barely make the required number of visits for those people, let alone the full-time, tenured teachers who simply had to wait after March 1. That was not good. You need to do formal observations starting in October, and it was impossible to do it. Remember, for each observation you had a pre-conference, the observation, and the post-observation. That's a lot of appointments to set up.

Dubin:

It's easy to see how these young principals are overwhelmed, immediately burned-out, and stressed.

Principal:

Yes. We know that many of our very best young administrators don't last more than 2 or 3 years before they find something else to do. A high

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percentage of them find something else to do rather than continue the principalship.

Dubin:

Let me ask you to reflect back on either principalship regarding your priorities. How did you set up your priorities for the year and how did you communicate that to your various constituents?

Principal:

Well, I think I got better at it over time. The 1st year I knew there were certain problem areas when I came into the school, certain groups that needed to be calmed down. I really had to make that the priority. The group had become very difficult. A group of parents were affecting the work teachers were doing in the classroom. The teachers were concerning themselves too much with what these parents were doing. I wanted them to focus on the kids and what they were doing in the classroom. That was my priority and, as a result, what happened was I overlooked the PTA. In the meantime, a little revolution was forming that I didn't see.

The 2nd year it really came to me. I realized then that when you set priorities you cannot completely devote your efforts in one direction, you have to look at everything. You need to pay attention, to some degree, to everything that is going on until you find out what is happening with all the groups that are related to the schools, for example, the PTA, teachers, site council, student council, safe route to school, disaster plan. There's a lot.

At some level you have to pay attention to all of it while still getting the big picture. I think that my recommendation going into a job, and I did this and I still think it is quite valid, is try not to go into a situation and rock the boat too much right away. I see it happening so many times. People do that. Be flexible. Be willing to change your priorities. Don't be so tight. Be a good listener. I was fortunate in that teachers would come into my office and tell me that they wanted to do this or that. Being able to listen to what people are saying and make adjustments to those requests that seem logical is the right thing to do.

Dubin:

In setting up those priorities, how do you think you spent most of your time? For example, were there district reports that needed to be attended to that required much time, or the management of the plant, safety issues, budget, personnel, and so on?

Principal:

Well, honestly, in the beginning, most of the time I spent was in classrooms. I just made myself do it. I wanted the teachers to see me as a person who knew what I was doing. I wanted for kids and teachers to be comfortable with me walking in and out of the classrooms. I did that a lot, every day. The other work, reports and such, well I did that before and after school. I was there every day until after 7 almost every night, especially the 1st year.

As I gained more experience I found ways of shortcutting. One of the things I found that I was able to do was, during the classroom observations, I wouldn't leave the classroom until I wrote the draft of the comments. I originally left the classroom with my notes and worked on it in my office, but I was always interrupted. When I had an observation and was in the classroom, the secretary knew not to interrupt me unless there was an emergency. She knew to leave me alone when I was in the classroom. That's where I needed to be. And so I found [that] using the time to write up the observation saved me time later on. Little things like that you get better at.

You also begin to realize that teachers can do a lot. You don't have to do it all. I was very fortunate in both settings that I had teachers who could handle things, for example, the science fair, the technology lab, while other teachers handled a lunchtime program with clubs. Sometimes there was a stipend involved or they were just into it.

Dubin:

As a general rule, your experience allowed you to focus on accessibility, visibility, observations, and so you dealt with curriculum and instruction, essentially, rather than plant management, safety, and so on.

Principal:

Yes, that's right. We did deal with those other things. We added new landscaping, classrooms repainted, furniture, put in power lines, and so on. Those things did go on, but I really made an effort on doing those other things.

Dubin:

You alluded to this before but, what would you say the major issues are to those first pursuing administration and also to those who had been involved in administration through the years?

Principal:

The requirements from the state, at the moment, the whole emphasis on standards, and the obvious lack of trust from the legislature and on down is

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dreadful. How can administrators help their staff do their jobs the best they can with this level of stress over the standards? The performance index, which is so public, is a huge deal. It affects people so they're simply not thinking about kids.

The administrative job is to help put that in perspective and to get the job done at the same time. I think if the administrator truly understands the curriculum and knows what good instruction is and has respect for that and the staff's view, I think it could happen, and they would stay in the profession. The issues, whether you are brand-new or experienced, are very similar. The difference is what you bring to it, your level of experience, and how you put it all in perspective. You would imagine that for someone who's done it longer it would be easier, not necessarily better, but with more ease than someone who is first coming into it.

Dubin:

With that new person coming in, if you were to provide some advice, you mentioned earlier about something you had learned, that is, don't rock the boat. Don't try to take on too much too soon. Don't try to initially change things, first get the lay of the land. Is that something you would want to convey to a new administrator?

Principal:

Yes. I strongly recommend that. If you want to change something, make sure it is something several people want, not a few people. Does the staff support this particular change? Otherwise, even though you may have a wonderful idea and it might be the best thing that should be happening at the school, if the change creates discomfort before you have a level of trust with the people, then you're interfering with their job. They would be in the survival mode. Their attitude would not be very good; they'd likely complain about you and everyone else. That is negative energy and you don't need that. So do yourself a favor, buy them some sweet rolls. Give them some coffee, you know. Paint the staff room, do something that they will like, get to know the place, build some trust. Get them to realize that you all want the same thing and that you should do it together. Otherwise, it will just create a lot of animosity, and you'll have to backtrack.

Dubin:

Now you alluded to developing trust first, and you mentioned some examples. Is that what you meant by trust, that is, connecting with them and getting their support? Doing things that would make the environment more pleasant, those kinds of things?

Principal:

Yes. Let them know what you know about curriculum and let them know what you don't know. They have been teaching for a while and have information, and you should be humble. Your staff will be teaching you something, and you're all in a learning environment together. It's important that that be communicated as soon as possible. Your administrative leadership behavior will be communicating that, not what you say. Everybody learns the buzzwords, and you can say the right story, but it's the behavior that people will see. They will know that you're an honest, capable person. The words alone won't be the only thing.

Dubin:

That's usually the paradox with a new administrator. New administrators want to convey knowledge and information but they also need to be honest, open, and flexible about what they know and don't know. Often, these things are at odds.

Principal:

Yes, and they need to be willing to say when they're wrong publicly. I made that mistake. It's modeling and it's what we want them and the kids to do.

Dubin:

Yes. On another topic, it's been said that the position is a political one; if so, in what way?

Principal:

Yes, because you must keep your various constituents happy; it's political. You're juggling a lot of people who are coming at you from different perspectives and with different needs. You have parents, teachers, kids, special-education personnel, cafeteria people, custodians, the superintendent, downtown administrators, the school board members who'll know who you are, the local police and fire people because, more than once, you'll need to call 911. You've got to deal with all those people. You've got bus drivers, yard supervisors, and you've got to balance them all out. You want them all to respect you and help you out because at some point you're going to need their cooperation to run that place. You simply can't do it by yourself. So you've got to buy them some candy once in a while and bring it to the maintenance department, for example. Tell them how wonderful they are and thank them for their help. You must learn to ingratiate yourself,

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and it reflects on your school. Everything that you do to ingratiate yourself is putting your school in the same limelight, and that's what you want.

Dubin:

Let me ask you this. You said earlier on that your research had a major component dealing with intuition. Could you elaborate on this and how it can be applied so that a new administrator could use it?

Principal:

Certainly. Actually, my dissertation dealt with that topic: specifically, principals' intuition, and I interviewed all the administrators in this county. You see, there are times when something happens in your school and you'll have a sense of it, for example, with a teacher, student, or whomever. Normally, the best thing is to respond to it based upon this intuitive sense. I mentioned earlier about my experience with the PTA when I entered the school that I had a sense of what was going on but didn't respond to it. Well I should have. That intuitive sense was what I was feeling, but I didn't follow through with this sense. I heard conversations in the faculty room; I saw parents talking with other parents outside the office and I knew the conversations were about leadership with the PTA. I heard certain names were going to be involved but I didn't follow through; I stayed out of it.

I really didn't want to stay out of it. I questioned whether or not I should get involved and ask questions. The answer was yes. I should have gotten involved but I didn't follow through because of my sense of apprehension, and it certainly came back to haunt me. I think that people who get a sense of something have to follow through in some way, whether it's having more information by observing it yourself. It could mean checking with people at your site as a reality check; whatever it takes, whatever is appropriate.

Dubin:

You would say it's a gut reaction or a judgment call.

Principal:

Yes, I would say it's a judgment call. Years ago, there was a screening process for administrators, something of an assessment center. There were several tasks, and I remember going there for 3 days and participated in these various activities. There was a rating. They were trying to determine whether you had the potential to be a particular type of administrator. There were characteristics, and judgment was one of the characteristics, that is, when to do what and what was appropriate were very important considerations.

Dubin:

As you reflect upon your career, which spans a considerable amount of time and territory, could you think of a particular or unusual issue or judgment call regarding a student, district, parent, teacher, and so on, that you could comment on?

Principal:

Yes, I can think of an incident. This dealt with summer school. It was the last day of summer school and the students went on a field trip to the beach. They were supposed to return from the trip by 2. At about 1:45, the parents started to arrive at the school to pick up their children, but the bus wasn't there by 2 or even 2:10. The parents were concerned, and I told the parents not to worry; there was traffic quite often, and it was a Friday afternoon. I kept the parents outside and went inside to my office to call transportation to find out about the bus and what was going on.

As it happened, the bus had been involved in an accident in town with a bicycle. The accident had occurred about a mile and one half from the school, but anytime a school bus is involved in an accident, the Highway Patrol has to be called because of state jurisdiction. And so they had to wait for the Highway Patrol and interview all the kids; it was a big deal. You see, I knew the kids were fine but that the bus wouldn't be there for a while. I went outside but I didn't want to tell them the whole story for fear that they'd drive over to the bus nearby and possibly, in their concern, create a problem for the authorities. At that point, the bus was only 15 minutes late anyway. So I went outside and explained that I would be checking with transportation. I reassured them that I expected that all was fine and went back into my office. Ten minutes later, at approximately 2:20, I returned outside and did inform them that there had been a minor accident and that no one was hurt. They had to remain there because the bus driver had to complete a report, and they would be coming shortly. At about 2:45 the bus finally arrived, and the parents took their children home.

In retrospect, I felt that I had made the right decision in parceling out the information to the parents. I felt that it was the right thing to do: There were no injuries, their kids were fine, and I did not want them to worry sooner than they needed to. Again, looking back on it, I still feel it was the right thing to do. If there had been a different circumstance where the kids were injured and the parents needed more information to be more involved, of course I would have told them right away. But I think that this was one instance where I felt the best judgment was not to create panic with the parents. I felt that I had enough information to give them that was accurate.

Dubin:

So that speaks well to the idea that judgment is extremely important and that trust has to be established with the parents so that information you determined would be given, ultimately, would be understood by the parents.

Principal:

Yes. That's right. It's very serious. And that decision making, making these judgments, is so important. Another general example, on-site, is if there are children who might be injured, judgment is so important. Often you read about schools where kindergarten children get in trouble. Well, you know situations happen with children constantly, and unless there is an issue with life and limb at risk, I tend to be very cautious before you rush to judgment and call for suspension or expulsion. You need to really check this out and determine the correct procedure. Of course, if it deals with a potential highly serious matter, that is, weapons and drugs, well that's automatic, that's out of your hands. But when you have a role to play and there's judgment involved, I would be very serious about it and give it some thought. You could produce the most serious consequences. You must really be careful.

Dubin:

So the idea of patience is extremely important and also ensuring that you have all the information before you make a decision.

Principal:

Absolutely. I used to have this thing called the "big investigation." I would always have this big investigation. Sometimes with certain children, you could never get the true story no matter how much you investigate. You simply cannot get to the bottom of it. Usually, after a period of time when I was checking on a student problem or story, I would call the kids to the office and tell them that I couldn't discover the truth because their stories did not align. I would tell them that I was tired and that it was taking too much of my time. I would reprimand them and tell them to think very seriously about their behavior, and there would be other consequences if it happened again. Sometimes you simply couldn't really get to the bottom of it, and it had to be handled in that way.

Dubin:

With respect to these decisions and what we talked about earlier, particularly about numbers and student enrollment, which you felt was arbitrary, would you say that the position of principal was one of isolation? What are your thoughts regarding this perception?

Principal:

Yes. There's no question about it. You have constituents, but it is very vague and very isolating. It's very important to have some kind of a buddy; someone in the district or a friend, someone you could call any time. When I had a decision to make and I was wondering about it, I would call another principal or several in the district, and we'd talk about it, and I'd ask the same question. I always got advice from people in the same position, let alone those in the district office who were in different positions. My boss was a good example. But I always called people who held the same position. I think it is very important to have a buddy. If the district does not set it up for you, I would personally set it up with somebody.

Dubin:

That has come up on several occasions, the need to have some kind of support system because, indeed, it is a position where the buck stops there. Ultimately, you make that decision, but it is important for your own sense of being, sense of perspective to have a range of options from people with whom you can consult.

Obviously, we have covered a considerable range of topics, and I appreciate your breadth of experience. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

Principal:

Well, it is the best job I've ever had, actually. It is not the same as teaching. Teaching is its own thing; personal, but on a smaller scale. The level of impact expands when you are teaching at the university because you're influencing so many students who are going in so many different directions. But the site administration, that relationship that you have with those people and school over time, the accomplishments that you can achieve related to the quality of instruction is phenomenal. It's a wonderful and very unique job.

It's important to be in the right position, and that it matches who you are. The experiences that I had in different settings were dramatic differences. Except for personal things that were happening in my life at the time, I would have stayed in the second school and requested that I be a principal there permanently because I really liked it. It was great and very different from my first experience. Unfortunately, I was not able to at that time. It can be a very rewarding, energizing, and satisfying job, and certainly was for me.

Dubin:

Is it for everyone?

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Principal:

No. No job is for everyone. It has to be a match. Certain characteristics are important. Being organized and being able to “short-order cook.” You need to handle a lot at one time, and with a smile. If you get confused, overwhelmed, can’t do five things at one time, if you can’t answer 86 questions in 1 minute, if all those things drive you crazy, then it would be hard for you to be a principal.

Dubin:

Thank you very much for your insights and candid remarks!

Analysis

This very experienced and seasoned principal reflected on her administrative experiences at two different elementary schools. Her comments were quite rich because she was able to compare these experiences in the light of her professional development and personal growth, which took place between her two appointments. Each school offered different challenges to which she responded with varying degrees of success. Her administrative roles demonstrated the need for her to be flexible and understand the complexities demanded from the different school settings. She needed to implement appropriate decision-making processes. She had to build trust in her staff, provide legitimacy and a supportive and meaningful environment for her students, given their cultural and economic backgrounds. During the interview, she addressed many of the general leadership areas involved in administration: for example, school goals and priorities, personnel, budgetary decisions, participatory management strategies, politics, ethics, personal goals, as well as a host of other leadership considerations specific to her educational philosophy.

Assessing the organizational needs of a school in order to apply an appropriate decision-making process is critical. How do principals make decisions? Are there models that can guide the process? Who should be involved in the decisions of the school and should all decisions be approached in the same way? While these questions are interconnected with leadership style, we can separate the two areas by focusing on decision making in a more concentrated and linear manner.

Decision-making models have been utilized in the organizational literature, which identifies specific steps that effectively address all elements of a decision. Peter Drucker, a pre-eminent organizational theorist, offers a very clear yet basic approach to effective decision making. He identifies six steps

in the process: (a) define the problem, (b) analyze the problem, (c) develop alternative solutions to the problem, (d) decide on the best solution, (e) convert decisions into effective actions, and (f) monitor and assess the results.

As we review the interview with our elementary principal, the intuitive sense of decision making falls outside the normal construct identified in Drucker's (and others') model. In one situation she describes, while she did not fully grasp the problem on her school campus regarding community and parent involvement, she sensed that something was amiss. Had she paused for a moment to tap into these feelings and apply a behavioral model of decision making to her sensibilities, the exercise might have proven to be quite fruitful in identifying the problem that confronted her and what ultimately developed into a school issue.

A behavioral decision-making model approaches decision making differently. While the rational Drucker model, as described above, assumes that all solutions can be identified, evaluated, ranked, and ultimately selected, the behavioral model assumes the opposite. For one, it assumes that information will always be flawed or incomplete, and all potential alternatives never fully captured because all the consequences will never be understood and that, finally, evaluations will never be sound because of the insufficient data to begin with.

Both models are extremely useful in assessing decision making and could reasonably be applied to this principal as we examined her many decisions described in this interview.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the key issues this administrator raises in this interview?
2. What is the tone of this interview?
3. Did she not identify the role of parents in each of the school settings?
4. What is her perception of the school's infrastructure and how did it affect her leadership effectiveness?
5. Could you explain this principal's philosophy regarding curriculum?
6. What is her political view of the principalship?
7. What changes would this administrator recommend that would significantly change the effectiveness of new administrators?
8. Do you find her comments consistent with other schools or districts you've experienced?
9. If you were appointed principal in either of these schools, what would some of your 1st-year objectives be?

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Student Activities

1. Write a letter to the superintendent requesting additional administrative support.
2. Write a letter of introduction to the community indicating your philosophy, background, and goals for the upcoming school year.
3. Write a letter of introduction to the staff regarding your philosophy, background, and goals for the upcoming school year.
4. What agenda items would you include for your first faculty meeting at the beginning of the school year?
5. What funding sources would you pursue with the parent organization to support your school program?

Interview Question

What additional interview questions would you direct to this administrator?

Simulations

Role-play a discussion the principal would have with a colleague where she describes her intuitive sense of what she felt was transpiring with her parent community.

Role-play a conference she had with several of the students she was reprimanding in her office.

Role-play a meeting she would have with her faculty where she recommends a workshop for all teachers dealing with student cheating. Indicate the current research about frequency and what effective strategies have been found to be successful with elementary schoolchildren.

Developing Effective Decision-Making Abilities

Based upon the interview, how would you begin to develop effective decision-making skills?

What decision-making models are most frequently used and in what situations?

What decision-making model are you most comfortable with and why?

Principal Leadership Applications

At one point in the interview, the principal was asked about a tough decision regarding delaying a decision to communicate to the parents about a bus accident. She explained her rationale for delaying that decision.

Do you think she was justified in making this decision? What would you have done differently?

The principal spoke very honestly about the need to approach each school in which she had worked in a different way.

What were these differences in the schools?

What leadership approaches would you use that would mark these distinctions?

How could she have researched the school to better prepare for that position?

Questions Related to ISLLC Standards

See Appendix for ISLLC Standards.

1. How did this principal address Standard #3? Based upon the interview, cite at least one example that demonstrated that this standard was met.
2. Did you find that she also responded to other ISLLC standards? If so, which ones would you identify she addressed and please cite specific examples.

Readings and Resources

Drucker, Peter F. (2002). *The effective executive*. New York: Harper Collins.

A classic organizational analysis identifying rational and irrational decision-making processes. Drucker offers a particularly rich, descriptive, and far-ranging analysis of this process through the lens of a management expert and social scientist.

Zey, Mary. (1992). *Decision-making: Alternatives to rational choice models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

A review of decision-making models that takes into account variations of classic forms of decision making.