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Summary of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to describe and compare the leadership succession plans currently in place in two school districts in Ontario. Two large urban school systems were selected for this study. Both districts have developed and implemented various strategies of leadership succession planning for the preparation of aspiring administrators as well as ongoing support structures for new and practicing administrators. The two districts were similar in size and began succession planning for administrators at approximately the same time. The study took place during the 2000-2001 school year.

This focus of the investigation was on succession planning, recruitment and selection of candidates, development and socialization processes, as well as accountability of school administrators. A purposive sample selection process was used to ensure a cross section of educators for the study. Data collection methods included individual interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and a review of documents. Principal, a principal), or represented central office personnel. There were 18 interviews, individual and focus groups, which were guided by the research questions.

A case study of each district was presented describing the leadership succession planning processes and structures, then the two districts are compared describing significant similarities and variations in succession planning strategies and priorities across both districts. The overall findings showed that school districts need to consider a leadership succession planning model that includes four aspects as they pursue leadership succession planning: principals and structure (philosophy, organization, and responsibility) for leadership succession planning; recruitment and selection; socialization; and accountability.

Leadership Succession Planning

The career development patterns of participants in both districts were similar. Most had achieved a mid-career stage before deciding on an administrator position. It is a common practice in both districts for practicing administrators and area superintendents to identify and encourage potential candidates to apply for administrative pools. In both districts there were promotional policies in place for internal candidates only. It was widely believed that promoting internally is favoured over "external" appointments because of familiarization with school district culture. External candidates were perceived not to have the knowledge of the school district's culture. Nevertheless, in District A there were guidelines in place for recruiting externally. District B did not have any written policy in place.

The policy on "systematic rotation" of practicing administrators created some unique problems for many of the participants in this study. Although both systems had been practising a "system level" approach to succession for administrator rotation for some time, both have done so without much consultation with school administrators or school communities to determine what professional and educational benefits for administrators, teachers, and others can be accounted for by a series of three-to five-year term appointments. Nevertheless, both districts have continued to rotate administrators with the belief that school communities profit from administrators who have had leadership experiences in a variety of school settings. Central office administrators in District A and District B believed that a policy requiring the rotation of administrators kept administrators alert and helped in the transplantation of change initiatives from one school to another.

The major differences in succession planning between District A and District B were found within the structure of the administration preparation program for candidates. In District A there was a structured administration preparation program in place where candidates assembled over a three month period and prepared for the short-listing process for the vice-principal pool. This was done twice a year. In District B, the administration preparation program was loosely structured and operated on a 'needs' basis. Both districts had invested emotional and financial support in preparing aspiring and practicing administrators for the changing roles. Both districts had a

'renewal' process in place for practicing administrators whereby professional activities were planned to keep them abreast of current issues in leadership development. However effective or appropriate succession planning activities seem from a central office perspective, a significant number of candidates and newly appointed administrators in the study felt unprepared for the first year in the administrative role. Role expectations were confusing and unclear. Participants felt that the district expectations must be made clear at the outset as to what the role of the administrator entails. Participants felt that in order to carry out effective training programs such as "mentoring", more "time" is needed to address the issue of "role expectation".

Recruitment and Selection of School Administrators

In both District A and District B, consideration was given to how the position demands, expectations, and responsibilities of school administrators have changed before launching what many senior administrators referred to as "appropriate" recruitment and selection processes. In District A and District B only internal candidates were recruited, trained and promoted throughout the ranks of teaching and administration. There was no written policy on external recruitment in District B. However, in District A there was a brief written protocol in place, but it was rarely needed. Usually, in District A and B, the tendency was to re-advertise rather than recruit and select external candidates.

While personnel in District A continued to seek ways to improve their recruitment practices. District B personnel had a structured procedure in place. In District A, the recruitment process involved conducting general information sessions for those who are considering the role of the school administrator. In District B there was a "project" team in place that was responsible for arranging all recruitment activities. There was also a PAR (Position of Added Responsibility) Selection "project" team in place in District B that was responsible for all activities for helping aspiring administrators to prepare for the short-listing process. Also, there was a Professional Growth Portfolio "project" team that introduced the portfolio development process to the candidates as these candidates prepared for the short-listing process. This team also used the professional growth portfolio in the renewal process for practicing administrators. In District A, the portfolio development process was an integral component of the administration preparation program.

The selection process of school administrators for both districts were similar and were generally structured around the work history and leadership experiences of the candidates, their formal education and training, motivation, and maturity. The central office personnel in these two districts agreed that teaching experience was essential. The candidates in this study were required to have qualities of leadership rooted established knowledge and skills that resulted in dedication to good instructional practice and learning. The senior administrators felt there was absolutely no need whatsoever to go outside of the education realm for potential administrators.

There were issues of "time" and "contractual considerations" that participants in both districts felt needed to be considered when planning the recruitment and selection process. More time for "mentoring" was needed to help candidates prepare for the selection process as well as more time needed to for practicing administrators to prepare to release their "mentee" to take on a new position. A few days to prepare was not considered adequate. Participants felt that there was inadequate consultation by the district office personnel on the issue of "placements". There was generally insufficient time to get prepared for new placements or to fill vacancies of candidates who had been placed. In both districts it had been a recent practice to permit unqualified aspiring administrators to take positions as "interim" vice-principals. There were stipulations attached to these agreements which involved consultation between the district office and the Teachers Federations as well as the Ontario College of Teachers.

Professional and Organizational Socialization of Administrators

Both districts offered similar professional development and training activities for aspiring and practicing administrators that ranged from formal activities such as training programs, deliberate mentoring and job-shadowing to informal activities such as administrator in-services, dialoguing, networking, study groups, relationship building with subordinates and super-ordinates, learning

about work settings and discussions on policies, procedures and priorities. In both districts it was the "mentoring-protégé" and "on-the-job" experiences that participants considered to be the most valuable in preparing them for the administrator role. However, the same participants felt that there was inadequate time for the mentoring process to be fully successful. Principals and vice-principals felt that sometimes when the relationship began to develop with their "mentee" (candidate and vice-principal or vice-principal and principal or candidate and principal) one of them would be notified that he/she was placed in a new school within days without any prior consultation. Consequently, they felt that effective as the "mentoring" program may be there should be ample notification on upcoming placements. Newly appointed administrators made reference to the importance of opportunities to discuss entry strategies with other colleagues through professional development opportunities. One experienced principal who had been recently transferred indicated that he/she generally had positive "entry" experiences. Newly appointed principals with less experience indicated they had no "entry" strategy in place and were uncertain what to expect. Many formal university courses and various components of the Principals' Qualification Program were considered of little value to the administrator role. Although there was not full consensus among participants these two socializing influences were noted by many participants as having little effect or impact on how well they performed their tasks as school administrators. However, there were some participants who felt that the Principals' Qualifications Program was very helpful depending on the venue where the program was offered. Many administrators in District A felt they had "just enough" professional development time while some principals in District B felt they were "PD'ed to death" and that "too much time away from school" had caused a concern for them and their teaching staffs. They felt that often administrators were spending so much time away from their schools that teachers felt they were lacking their own professional development on-site.

Leadership Accountability

Administrators in both districts did not understand how the accountability system worked. A common statement across districts was "We are accountable for everything that happens in the school". One participant stated, "I'm not sure what I'm accountable for but I do know that if I do something wrong it's not long before I know about it". All participants felt that the leadership succession planning-leadership development program should provide the opportunity for a clear understanding of individual district's accountability system. Principals and senior administrators seemed to understand the accountability process while many of the candidates and vice-principals were uncertain. All principals felt they were held accountable through their "site-plans" and performance appraisal protocols which were reviewed annually with their area superintendents. The principals explained how there was not enough time to evaluate their own vice-principals, nor many of their teaching staffs, due to their individual workloads. Perspectives varied among focus groups across districts concerning "to whom" they were held accountable, and "how" they were held accountable. A number of candidates and newly appointed vice-principals felt they were accountable to "everybody for everything done at school level", while other candidates and newly appointed vice-principals remained uncertain as to whom they were held accountable. Experienced vice-principals and principals felt they were held accountable to their student populations, communities, parents, area Superintendents, District Director of Education, EQAO, School Boards, and the Ministry. Senior administrators agreed with the experienced vice-principals and principals and added that all candidates and newly appointed vice-principals "should" know to whom they are accountable. Lack of frequent feedback was mentioned by administrators in both districts. Portfolio development was included as part of the succession planning in both districts. It had become an integral part of the "site plans" for each practicing principal and used as a tool for accountability by both the school administrators and the area superintendent. The participants in District B explained how the portfolio process not only could enhance personal and professional growth but could also assist in the re-certification process and accountability which were on the province's educational agenda at the time of this study (2000-2001).

When asked about "effective accountability" participants had a general understanding of what such a system should include. For them, it meant a system that linked standards, testing, professional development of administrators and teachers, reporting, and some form of consequences not only for failures but for successes as well. Without careful alignment of the component parts, testing alone was thought to have little effect. Senior administrators and many school administrators in this study felt that the professional development opportunities which resulted from administrator training in succession planning were directly linked to accountability. Most administrators agreed that there was a conscious attempt to align system expectations, accountability, and leadership development.

A New Leadership Succession Model The primary conclusion from this study is a model for leadership succession planning. Districts need to consider four aspects as they pursue leadership succession planning: principles and structure (philosophy, organization, and responsibility) for leadership succession planning; recruitment and selection; socialization; and accountability. Leadership Principles and Structure: Expectations, philosophy or guiding principles, organization and responsibility are four variables that guide and influence decision-making through all stages of the leadership succession planning process.

Insert Diagram - A Model for Leadership Succession Planning

Potential administrators, practicing administrators, and senior administrators need to know what leadership knowledge, skills, attitudes, and roles are expected and supported in the district. This is especially important as the role of the administrator is changing and expanding.

The philosophy of leadership succession planning also needs to be articulated. Some districts adopt the philosophy of internal promotion, some support external promotion, while others endorse a combination of internal and external promotion. The overall organization of the succession planning process needs to be clear outlining the structures, parameters, timelines, and events. Finally, the responsibility for leadership succession planning needs to be delegated or assigned. Some districts appoint the responsibility to a superintendent and organize centrally, while other districts employ a distributed approach and assign responsibility to assistant superintendents or to staff development coordinators.

Recruitment and Selection: Recruitment and selection involves attracting, screening, and identifying potential leadership candidates. It also involves administrator preparation and support. In order to attract potential administrators within a school district, there needs to be a process in place for identifying future leaders. Principals and superintendents need to recognize leadership qualities among their teachers and to encourage them to pursue and prepare for administrative roles. The application process must be made clear to all aspiring administrators and structured to suit the needs of the school district. The application process must be aligned with the selection process and must include any contractual considerations that may hinder and/or support the appointment of any administrator. As part of the recruitment process, school districts need to ensure emotional and financial support in the preparation of aspiring administrators. Districts need to consider how they prepare future leaders. Development of a structured administration preparation program for aspiring administrators is a key part of leadership succession planning.

Socialization: Socialization refers to the processes put in place by a district for initial and ongoing leadership development. Leaders participate in both professional and organizational experiences throughout their years as administrators. Professional socialization involves administrators in learning about learning. Organizational socialization involves understanding the culture, norms and values of the new school or the district. Socialization experiences range from formal activities such as certification requirements and deliberate mentoring opportunities to informal activities such as on-the-job experience and on-going workshops and other learning events.

Professional socialization begins at the recruitment stage of the process when aspiring administrators prepare for the selection process. Professional development activities and opportunities need to be available for aspiring and practicing administrators on a continuous basis. Organizational socialization begins once aspiring administrator has taken on a new role. Formal induction programs that are well structured are important to support new administrators in

the transition from a teaching role to an administrative role. It is important to plan for resocialization over the years as expectations and society changes.

Accountability: The accountability stage of the leadership succession planning process needs to be clear, transparent, and with the other parts of the leadership succession planning process. The purpose(s) of accountability (ie. Promotion, transfer, development, or termination) should be clear and communicated. Once expectations are clarified and leaders are provided with opportunities for professional development, then accountability is legitimate and necessary to ensure that all schools have strong leaders and that leaders are continuing to grow and develop. The accountability system should identify "what" school administrators are accountable for (expectations), "who" is involved in the accountability process (teachers, parents, students, district administrators, board members), "how" or the approach to accountability (leadership portfolios, surveys, 360 degree feedback, interviews, observations), and "when" the accountability process is carried out (annually, biannually, every three years). In defining the accountability system a number of issues must be considered including, but are not limited to, "fairness" of accountability systems, "internal versus external", "compatibility and alignment", and communication.

Implications for Educational Practice

- Need for collaboration and support. The district office personnel need to foster school and district cultures that are collaborative and support an atmosphere of inquiry. They must encourage the talents, creativity and contribution of all school members within their districts.
- Address the issue of "time" and "costs". "Time" has always been a constraint for training as has "cost". These problems need to be addressed in creative ways in order to overcome that barrier.
- Relevance of Educational Administration programs and Principals' Qualification Course. University faculties and other providers will need to continue revisiting their leadership programs and recreate these components for more practical use to assist in the preparation of school administrators. The Principals' Qualifications Program, in all venues, needs to be revisited as well, to ensure that components are revamped to meet the changing expectations and accountability demands of the administrator's role.
- Leadership Development Series. Both school districts deliver a comprehensive leadership development series for current and aspiring school leaders. A "transition" series for cross-panel transfers might be considered in both districts. This program would include a series of professional development activities across panels and opened for all school administrators within the school district who may be interested in transferring from the elementary panel to the secondary panel of vice-versa.

Implications for Policy Makers

- Ongoing professional development. Policy makers need to continue to provide powerful, ongoing professional development focusing on effective strategies for improving student learning. In addition to the series of new programs and activities that support networking among administrators such as mentoring and coaching, systemic efforts might include a program whereby administrators evaluate each other's schools using an established protocol for observing instruction.
- Resources and flexibility. Policy makers need to alleviate the unnecessary stresses placed on their administrators by reconfiguring and supporting the primary role of the school administrator as leader for student learning.
- School system administration. Current districts' policies on regular rotation of administrators need to be revisited to determine the efficacy of a fixed term appointment to a school. If the school districts continue to enforce this policy, they need to define more clearly the objectives of this management practice and integrate these within the system's mission and vision.

- Professional accountability. School district personnel in school districts need to collect information on administrators, individually and collectively, to help them perform better. Principal and/or vice-principal evaluation, in most cases, is infrequent and not geared to promote professional growth. Many administrators go years without any evaluation whatsoever. When they are assessed, evaluations seldom incorporate professional accountability measures to spur improvement. The feedback administrators receive rarely provides the opportunities they need to reflect substantively on strengths, weaknesses, and ways to support student learning.

Recommendations on Leadership Succession

- Succession planning should allow aspiring practicing administrators to learn as much as possible about the communities they serve. It should be customized to the school and school district initiatives, mission and goals (tailored to the needs of the organization). Succession planning should focus on future strategy and culture. Long term focus is ideal. It must be aligned with future strategic direction.
- Succession planning should be driven by top management. Top management must be involved with and support the succession planning process. Central administration should provide more support for newly appointed administrators and planned programs of induction, including more official time for visits and interactions at the new school.

Recommendations For Further Research

Leadership succession planning is a relatively new field on inquiry in educational administration. There are relatively few empirical studies at this time on leadership succession planning as it pertains to school and school district administration. However, among the studies done in this area, primarily concerning the dynamics among teachers and school administrators, the research literature and expert opinion literature confirms "leadership succession" as an organizational event of great potential importance to those who work in schools (Hall & Mani, 1989; Hart, 1993; MacMillan, 1996; Johnson, 2001). To date it has been conceptualized as a crucial set of circumstances which are organized to ensure that leadership positions are appropriately filled when they become vacant. However, at this time there remains a need for considerably more research-based inquiry before a full-blown theory of leadership succession planning can emerge. The present study contributes in a modest way to this important knowledge base, however much more research is necessary on the success of leadership succession as well as on accountability. Other areas that emerged from the results of this study as requiring further investigation. One was the impact of regular administrator rotation on student learning. Is this a desirable component of a leadership succession process? Can administrative rotation be shown to have a positive effect on student learning outcomes? A second area that begs further inquiry is administrator preparation programs. What kinds of experiences are necessary to properly prepare candidates to be instructional, visionary, and community leaders? Finally, there is room for a lot more research on the range of practical yet effective strategies available to be employed by school districts to recruit and select school level administrators.

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