

## HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL AND FACILITATIVE LEADERS: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING

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**SUMMARY:** The essence of **instructional leadership** can be summarized in two dimensions: *authority dimension* which ranges from direct orientation to indirect orientation and *relation dimension* which ranges from unidirectional orientation to reciprocal or interactive orientation. These dimensions are briefly discussed below:

**Direct orientation:** Principals are hands-on leaders who free themselves of bureaucratic tasks and focus on the core business of schooling, i.e. teaching and learning

**Indirect orientation:** Principals create a positive learning climate by, for example, protecting teaching time and setting the school's direction

**Unidirectional orientation:** Principals make unilateral educational decisions and are highly directive and hardly solicit teachers' suggestions

**Reciprocal orientation:** Principals make sure that work is completed in cross-functional teams and through internal or external partnerships

**Facilitative principals** provide direction without totally taking the reins. They more often collaborate rather than tell teachers what they need to be doing and help them move forward rather than control their movement.

### INTRODUCTION

No doubt, principals of school are required to wear many hats. At various times, principals must be administrators, managers, diplomats, teachers and curriculum leaders—sometimes all within one school day. This calls for principals who are proficient in all of these

areas. Principals' ability to fluidly move from one role to another requires a balancing act.

Given that principals are expected to be jack of all trades, what factors lead some principals to be more effective than others?

While there are a large number of answers researchers have provided to this question, one echoed most often is that effective principals are effective *instructional leaders*. But no one individual, however hardworking or knowledgeable, can single-handedly lead an organization to success. In order to advance their schools' efforts, principals must exercise *facilitative leadership*. That is, principals must be able to actively engage others so their efforts and contributions are fully leveraged.

In its 2012, 2013 and 2016 national reports (posted on the Department of Basic Education website), NEEDU found that most primary and secondary principals are not instructional leaders. Other research studies also report that among the many tasks performed by principals, only one-tenth of their time is devoted to instructional leadership. Among the reasons cited in the literature for giving less emphasis to instructional leadership are lack of in-depth training, lack of time, increased paperwork, and the general perception of the principal's role as that of a manager.



This policy brief describes how principals in schools that work<sup>1</sup> seek and find a balance in their role as manager-administrators and instructional leaders.

### INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Instructional leadership is generally and narrowly defined as the class of leadership practices directly related to supporting classroom teaching and student learning. In schools that work, principals' instructional leadership practices fall into two dimensions, as outlined in Sithole's (1995)<sup>2</sup> two-dimensional typology of instructional leadership. These dimensions are illustrated below:

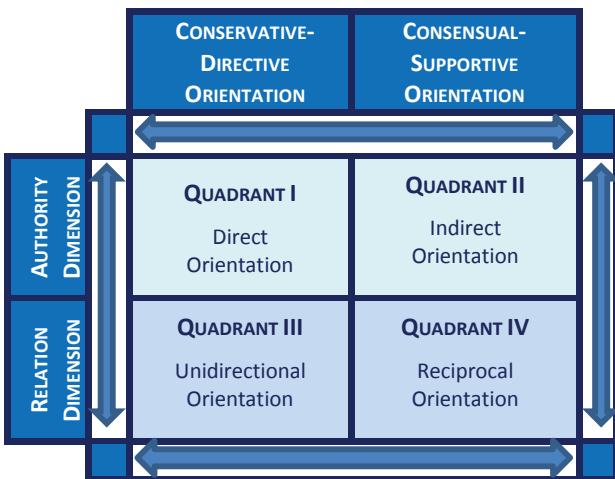


Figure 1: A Two-Dimensional Typology of Instructional Leadership



Authority dimension refers to the manner in which principals exercise power and influence others to improve and/or maintain high

<sup>1</sup> In April 2017, the Minister of Basic Education commissioned the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) to conduct the *Schools that Work II* study. This study sought to examine the characteristics of top-performing schools in South Africa. The best practices discussed in this advocacy brief are based on the findings of that study. The full report is available on the Department of Basic Education website: [www.education.gov.za/Resources/Reports.aspx](http://www.education.gov.za/Resources/Reports.aspx) NEEDU can be reached at (012) 357 4231

<sup>2</sup> Sithole, S (1995): "Definitions and characteristics of instructional leadership for school effectiveness: Research and practice." Electronic Ph.D Dissertation: Boston University (Boston, Massachusetts)

academic standards. Authority dimension involves direct-indirect orientations. All principals in schools that work influenced teaching and learning *directly* and *indirectly*.

#### DIRECT ORIENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP (QUADRANT I)

- Principals act as *direct* instructional leaders when they work with teachers and others to shape the quality of teaching and learning in their schools

In schools that work, principals' *direct* instructional leadership practices focus on the immediate interactions with teachers regarding classroom teaching, learner achievement, curriculum coverage, doing walkthroughs and monitoring and evaluation. Specifically, these principals:



- Review teacher's work regularly (on a weekly basis) with regard to the schemes of work or annual teaching plans (ATPs) and lesson plans. On a weekly basis, teachers submit their lesson plans to the HODs for scrutiny.
- Observe lessons. Principals walk into teachers' classrooms to conduct informal and unannounced classroom visits. In schools where team teaching is practiced, an open door policy allows other teachers to enter their colleagues' classrooms at any time.
- Ensure that progress in terms of content coverage is matched to the identified timeline (i.e. correct curriculum pacing).
- Scrutinise/monitor learners' work. Principals walk into any class, collect learners' work at random and establish curriculum pacing by matching the ATP and learners' written work.
- Moderate assessment tasks, collect and analyse assessment results to identify teachers and learners who are having problems with particular topics, identify topics or concepts which are commonly found to be challenging, and discuss results and actions to take (see Policy Briefs 7A & 7B)
- Award academic excellence by announcing high-performing learners at the assembly, award and prize giving day, honours day, or Principal awards day.



## INDIRECT ORIENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP (QUADRANT II)

- Principals act as *indirect* instructional leaders when they facilitate leadership in others by shaping the conditions of teaching and by helping set school-level standards and procedures

Principals practices in schools that work involve doing things that, prima facie, do not seem related to instructional improvement because they are not easily observable, but, in essence, they do enhance teaching and learning indirectly (i.e., *indirect* instructional leadership). Indirect instructional leadership practices exhibited by principals in schools that work include:



- Ensure that standards of behaviour, as spelt out in the learners' code of conduct, are clear to all staff, parents and learners.
- Orientate parents of new learners at the school about "how things are run at this school" (Principal, **School KT**-Quintile 3).
- Set and meet high expectations for all learners. These schools challenge themselves to provide the expectations and opportunities they might reserve for "gifted" learners to all of their learners, including those considered disadvantaged or at-risk.
- Recruit qualified teachers with pedagogical training and teachers with university majors or specialisation in the subjects they are teaching.
- Specialise in a few subjects and do not spread themselves too thinly. "It does not make sense to offer too many subjects or streams and then struggle to recruit qualified teachers in those subjects." (Principal, **School LL**-Quintile 2).
- Develop a mission statement, which defines where the school is and where it is headed. Guided by their mission statements, schools judge decisions and actions resulting from strategic planning, i.e. whether decisions are consistent with the mission statement.
- Put emphasis on training staff in areas of most need as identified through the IQMS processes, the analysis of learner assessment results, and findings of SMT members' observations during class visits.

- Protect teaching time by managing teaching time tightly to make every minute count: "In our school, we don't have scheduled morning, afternoon, weekend and holiday classes because we strongly believe that if teachers use every minute of the seven hours each day to teach, they should be able to complete the curriculum comfortably" (Principal, **School GH**-Quintile 3)



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## •RELATION DIMENSION

Relation dimension refers to the way in which principals deal with human relations when they exercise their instructional leadership. Dealing with human relations can range from unidirectional orientation to reciprocal or interactive orientation.

## UNIDIRECTIONAL ORIENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP (QUADRANT III)

- Unidirectional approach reinforces the belief that instructional leadership is oriented downward in a vertical manner and is always clustered at the top of the organisation

In this orientation, there is only one person who is the instructional leader—the principal. Unidirectional orientation (Quadrant III) overlaps with direct orientation (Quadrant I) in the authority dimension. However, unidirectional orientation focuses more on the manner in which an instructional leader makes academic decisions. Unidirectional principals:

- Make a lot of unilateral educational decisions
- Are highly directive and hardly solicit teachers' suggestions
- Are less open to teachers' suggestions

Principals in schools that work avoided this style of leadership. As one principal notes:

*It is teacher leadership that continues to drive the reforms needed in the content areas and throughout the school* (Principal in **School WL**-Quintile 3).



## RECIPROCAL/INTERACTIVE ORIENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP (QUADRANT IV)

- In this approach, instructional leadership is seen a phenomenon that is shared by all educators, including principals, other members of the school management team (SMT) and teachers

In schools that work, instructional leadership resides with a team of leaders (i.e. deputy principals and heads of department) of which the principal serves as the "leader of leaders." Following are examples of reciprocal or interactive instructional leadership practices exhibited by the principals in high-performing schools:



- ♣ Work with teachers to identify and diagnose instructional problems and brainstorm strategies that need to be taken to ameliorate the problems.
- ♣ Delegate, but not abdicate, curriculum management responsibilities to other SMT members. They do this by ensuring that staff fulfil their responsibilities as follows:
  - 🕒 *Principals monitor the work of deputy principal and HODs:* Each HOD is expected to have a monitoring plan showing when he or she will collect various types of learners' work to monitor curriculum coverage.
  - 🕒 *Deputy Principals monitor HODs' work:* "Every second week, there is a one-on-one meeting with every HOD. I check how they control teachers' and learners' work, and how they support teachers." (Deputy Principal, **School FH-Quintile 1**)
  - 🕒 *Teachers are held accountable for learner performance:* Accountability and support are emphasised in each of the successful schools to determine where additional help is needed.
- ♣ Empower teachers and heads of departments to make educational decisions as teams.
- ♣ Schedule time for direct contact and sharing of ideas and good practices among teachers.



### FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP

While individual Principals sometimes have a direct influence on the quality of teaching, a growing strand of research suggests that

successful principals often cultivate the leadership of teachers to grow. *Facilitative leadership* is synonymous with *reciprocal* or *interactive instructional leadership* in that both emphasize that although the principal is in a critical position to lead change, he or she cannot do it alone. Following is a useful definition of *facilitative leadership*:

The behaviours that enhance the *collective* ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance.

Key strategies that are used by facilitative principals in schools that work include the following:



- ♣ Lead without controlling, while making it easier for all members of the school community to achieve agreed-upon goals.
- ♣ Let go of control and hold a belief that others can and will function independently and successfully within a common framework of expectations and accountability.
- ♣ Create environments in which teachers can work effectively.
- ♣ Spend much of their time negotiating decisions they could unilaterally make.
- ♣ Encourage competitive views from teachers.



In short, facilitative power is *power through*, not *power over*.

### CONCLUSION

Not every school is ready to embrace collaborative or facilitative leadership. Every organization goes through periods when highly directive leadership may be more appropriate. That is, depending on the situation, principals may find it necessary to lead from the front (i.e. by exercising direct and/or unidirectional instructional leadership) during a school's early stages of development. When a school reaches higher stages of performance, the facilitative principal can contribute from behind (through indirect and reciprocal/interactive instructional leadership) by offering insights and observations that add to the team's evolving momentum.

