

Volume 2, Issue 1

June 1, 2002



A Research Publication of SCOPE

Long Island Education Review

LONG ISLAND'S FIRST PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

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Study of High Involvement Behavior among Shared Decision Teams in Long Island Elementary Blue Ribbon and Non-Blue Ribbon Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the extent to which the factors of Wohlstetter and Mohrman's High Involvement Management model of shared decision making were present in the shared decision making practices of five Long Island, New York Blue Ribbon elementary schools and in five Long Island, New York Non-Blue Ribbon elementary schools. A survey of forty-seven questions asked shared decision-making team members of each school type to describe their perceptions of these seven elements: power, knowledge, information, leadership, instructional guidance, resources, and rewards. A factor analysis revealed that these seven elements were not present. Instead three elements emerged. These were Organizational-Structure, Communications, and School-Community Relationships. ANOVAs and Chi-Square analyses revealed that Blue Ribbon Schools in this study practiced those activities associated with Organizational-Structure to a greater extent than Non-Blue Ribbon schools. It also revealed that Non-Blue Ribbon schools in this study practiced those activities associated with School-Community Relationships to a greater extent than Blue Ribbon schools. Neither school type appeared to practice those activities specifically associated with shared decision making to a significant extent.

Introduction

America's recent dissatisfaction with its schools is traceable to the Sputnik era, when our collective dismay for falling behind in the space race caused some commentators to blame our educational system. In the Reagan era, the national committee authoring *A Nation at Risk* declared our schools in crisis. In the 1990's, there were many attempts at school reform. Some focused on the school; others attempted to reengineer entire school systems. School vouchers, home schooling, national and state standards, high stakes testing programs, and charter schools represent some of these initiatives. School reformers have also sought to recognize exemplary schools for others to emulate such as Edmonds' Effective Schools and the Federal Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence.

Shared decision making in school based management teams has been touted as a successful reform alternative (Drury, 1999). By decentralizing authority and increasing responsibility to a school's stakeholders, reformers hoped to improve schools.

In an age of democratization, shared decision-making in school-based management was popularly embraced. Authority figures throughout America lost their perceived right to decide for others as diverse groups challenged decisions others formerly made for them. The democratization of education has been evolutionary, and administrators lead the way as they include more input from teachers, staff, and parents in their approaches to shared decision making. By the early 90's many forms of shared decision-making in schools were operating across the country (David, 1995). New York instituted its shared decision making system under Commissioner's Regulation 100.11, A New Compact for Learning, in 1994, under the leadership and direction of Commissioner of Education, Thomas Sobol.

Research in the early nineties did not demonstrate that shared decision-making raised student achievement (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Drury (1999) identified a variety of reasons for this apparent failure to raise student achievement: political and institutional restraints, limitations on authority, lack of trained leadership, deficiencies in crucial resources – information, knowledge, rewards, and a lack of focus on achievement. In addition, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) pointed out that shared decision making often fails to affect learning because it is viewed as an end in itself rather than as a process by which schools can improve themselves. Wohlstetter adapted Edward E. Lawler's research about high involvement of workers by applying his model of power, knowledge, information, and rewards and adding three additional factors that should exist in schools in order for shared decision making practices to be effective: leadership, instructional guidance, and resources. Her research about the presence of "restructuring" and "struggling" schools appeared to

demonstrate the presence of these factors in models of restructuring schools (Wohlstetter, 1997).

Methodology

Shared decision making has been considered a factor that distinguishes schools as worthy of Blue Ribbon recognition. For example, there are eight criteria for Blue Ribbon Schools. The seventh criterion specifically addresses school, family, and community partnerships (Marske, p.12).

This study sought to use the Wohlstetter-Mohrman model of high involvement and shared decision making to compare the perceptions of stakeholder members of shared decision making teams in Blue Ribbon and Non-Blue Ribbon schools. A factor analysis performed on the survey data revealed that the intended seven original factors were not replicated in the data from the schools studied. New factors were identified as a result of a data reduction statistical procedure. These factors were: Organizational-Structure, Communications, and School-Community Relationships.

Organizational-Structure was defined as those aspects of high involvement behaviors that reflect knowledge about how schools operate, principals' leadership, and the schools' adherence to a strongly defined curriculum. It also consisted of stakeholders' perceptions of the degree to which schools set a mission statement and goals, shared a common understanding of the instructional direction of the school, used

district and state frameworks to guide their curricula, and the strength of leadership principals play in the schools.

Communications addressed issues of information and communication from the school to stakeholders. This factor also represented how information about the school's activities, performance, and goals were disseminated to all school stakeholders.

School – Community Relationships addressed how a school interacts with its community stakeholders. Examples of this factor include whether a school's shared decision making team seeks and obtains business partnerships and grants, surveys its community for input, exerts influence on budget and personnel, extensively involves parents and students, and uses reward systems.

Subjects

This study divided ten schools into two groups. The first group consisted of five award winning Blue Ribbon schools. The second group consisted of five similar schools that had not sought nor been recognized as Blue Ribbon schools. The respondents were the stakeholder members of the shared decision making teams in each school that agreed to participate in the study. For Blue Ribbon schools, there were thirty-eight respondents and thirty-three for Non Blue Ribbon schools who represented parents, teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff.

Table 1: Mean Scores for Involvement in Shared Decision Making Between Two Types of Schools

	BLUE RIBBON STAKEHOLDERS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	NON BLUE RIBBON STAKEHOLDERS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	ALL	3.11	.42	ALL	2.88	.51
	PARENTS	3.08	.19	PARENTS	3.06	.35
	TEACHERS	3.08	.44	TEACHERS	2.78	.61
	ADMINS.	3.43	.65	ADMINS.	3.05	.34
COMMUNICATIONS	STAFF MEMBERS	2.96	.39	STAFF MEMBERS	2.69	.65
	ALL	2.47	.63	ALL	2.53	.58
	PARENTS	2.15	.54	PARENTS	2.52	.43
	TEACHERS	2.43	.70	TEACHERS	2.53	.73
SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS	ADMINS.	2.83	.66	ADMINS.	2.46	.38
	STAFF MEMBERS	2.66		STAFF MEMBERS	2.64	.51
	ALL	1.99	.32	ALL	2.35	.61
	PARENTS	2.02	.50	PARENTS	2.25	.74
	TEACHERS	1.95	.29	TEACHERS	2.32	.63
	ADMINISTRATORS	2.07	.12	ADMINS.	2.3	.51
	STAFF MEMBERS	2.03	.27	STAFF MEMBERS	2.43	.75

Survey and Description of the Questionnaire

A survey instrument was adapted from Wohlstetter and Mohrman's model and employed a Likert type scale, one through four. There were forty-seven-questions in the survey that offered each respondent four choices: A one indicated "not at all". A two indicated "to some extent". A three indicated "to a large, but not total extent". A four indicated "to a maximum extent". Surveys were mailed to each elementary building principal. All stakeholder members of the shared decision-making teams completed the survey, and sealed it in an envelope that was returned to the principal.

Results

This study's three High Involvement Management factors that emerged as a result of factor analysis appear to exist in varying degrees in the Blue Ribbon Schools that were studied. In the Blue Ribbon schools, the Organizational-Structure factor appears more frequently than Communications and School-Community Relationships factors. The mean for all stakeholders for the Organizational-Structure factor was 3.11 on a 4.0 scale.

The mean for all Blue Ribbon stakeholders for the Communications factor was 2.47. All stakeholder respondents reported a mean that was between to "some extent" and "a large but not total extent."

The mean for all Blue Ribbon stakeholders for the School-Community Relationships factor was 1.99. This was below the "some extent" level. Parents and staff members rated this factor at just above the "some extent" level. Teachers and administrators rated this factor at just below this level. **Table 1** describes the mean scores and standard deviations comparisons for each stakeholder between the Blue Ribbon Schools and Non Blue Ribbon Schools studied.

This study's three High Involvement Management factors appear to vary in the Non-Blue Ribbon Schools that were studied. The Organizational-Structure factor and the Communications factor were similar in both types of schools. The School-Community Relationships factor was significantly higher in the Non Blue Ribbon schools. The mean for all Non- Blue Ribbon stakeholders for the School-Communi-

ty Relationships factor was 2.35. This was above the "some extent" level. All stakeholders reported their perception of this factor in the above "some extent" level.

Comparative Analysis

ANOVA analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the Blue Ribbon stakeholders' perceptions of the three High Involvement Management factors and the Non-Blue Ribbon stakeholders' perceptions of these factors in two of the three factors. Blue Ribbon stakeholders perceived the existence of those high involvement behaviors associated with the Organizational-Structure more extensively than did Non-Blue Ribbon stakeholders. Non-Blue Ribbon stakeholders perceived the existence of high involvement behaviors associated with School-Community Relationships more than the Blue Ribbon stakeholders. Table 2 below, demonstrates ANOVA differences between school types that were significant.

Organizational-Structure differences

Stakeholders in Blue Ribbon schools felt their principals were the curriculum and instructional leaders of their school to a greater extent than Non-Blue Ribbon stakeholders. In addition, stakeholders perceived that Blue Ribbon staff members participated in professional development to a greater extent than their Non-Blue Ribbon counterparts.

School-Community Relationships

Non-Blue Ribbon stakeholders reported the School-Community Relationships factor as evident to a greater extent than the Blue Ribbon stakeholders.

Summative

As a result of the descriptive and comparative analyses of the data, this study presents the following conclusions:

1. Blue Ribbon schools in this study tend to practice the behaviors of the Organizational-Structure factor to a greater extent than did Non-Blue Ribbon schools.
2. Non-Blue Ribbon schools in this study tend to practice the behaviors of School-Community Relationships to a greater extent than did Blue Ribbon schools. Neither school type appeared to practice these activities more than to "some extent".
3. Non-Blue Ribbon schools tend to practice those activities typically associated with New York State's Compact for Learning expectations for shared decision making teams more than Blue Ribbon schools.
4. Blue Ribbon schools in this study earned recognition as exemplary schools and tended to emphasize behaviors within the High Involvement Management Organizational-Structure factor more than the School-Community Relationships and Communications factors.

Table 2: Significant ANOVA Differences Between School Types

	ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	SCHOOL COMMUNITY	DIFFERENCE
BLUE RIBBON	**		.004
NON BLUE RIBBON		**	.003

Discussion

Organizational-Structure Practices of Blue Ribbon Schools:

The schools studied, both Blue Ribbon and Non-Blue Ribbon, appeared to practice those activities associated with the Organizational-Structure factor to “some extent.” Blue Ribbon schools emphasized the leadership role of the principal, staff development, goal setting, and the instructional mission of the school. Non-Blue Ribbon schools tended to emphasize community relations.

Significant differences were found in questions related to behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals. Six questions asked respondents to assess whether their principals: promoted staff development, obtained resources, promoted a positive school climate, were leaders of curriculum and instruction, managed change, and communicated with school and community about their schools.

The mean for the composite of these questions about principals’ leadership for Blue Ribbon Schools was 3.22. The mean for the composite of these questions about principals’ leadership for Non-Blue Ribbon schools was 2.92. The ANOVA, in **Table 3** below demonstrates a significant difference at the .048 level of confidence. This statistic indicates that members of the shared decision making teams perceived a statistically significant difference in the principals’ leadership behaviors related to Organizational-Structure for Blue Ribbon schools. Such data indicate that Blue Ribbon school principals tend to exert stronger leadership in the areas of staff development, obtaining resources, positive school climate, curriculum and instruction, managing change, and communication than Non-Blue Ribbon school principals.

Table 3

ANOVA Leadership Questions withing the Organizational-Structure Factor					
LEADER					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.519	1	1.519	4.069	.048
Within Groups	23.883	64	.373		
Total	25.401	65			

These findings support the criteria for Blue Ribbon selection that emphasize leadership and organizational vitality. Rogers’ (1993) study of the 1991-1992 Blue Ribbon School winners found that Blue Ribbon School principals perceived themselves as being strong transformational leaders. In this study, shared decision making team members reported that their principals engaged in activities that were associated with organizational structure more than the Non-Blue Ribbon schools’ team members did.

This study also indicates that Blue Ribbon schools engage in professional staff development to a greater extent than Non-Blue Ribbon schools. The responses to a survey question which asked respondents to assess the extent to which their schools conducted professional development activities, indicated that Blue Ribbon schools conducted staff development activities more frequently than Non-Blue Ribbon schools. The Chi-Square analysis of the response to this question demonstrated that the difference between the two school types was significant at .013 (Table 4).

Table 4

Question four; extent to which staff participated in professional development			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.744 ^a	3	.013
Likelihood Ratio	11.185	3	.011
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.346	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	71		

^a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.32.

In addition, statistically significant differences emerged in an ANOVA procedure, that asked respondents to assess whether their schools delineated their mission and goals and adhered to state and / or district curriculum frameworks. Respondents assessed the extent to which their teachers shared a common understanding of the instructional direction of the school. The mean for the composite of these three questions for Blue Ribbon Schools was 3.35. The mean for the composite of these three ques-

tions for Non-Blue Ribbon schools was 3.01. The ANOVA, in **Table 5** below demonstrates a statistically significant difference at the .037 level. This statistic substantiates that this set of High Involvement school-behaviors should be given consideration as an element for the Blue Ribbon / exemplary school recognition.

Table 5

SYS					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.900	1	1.900	4.544	.037
Within Groups	26.762	64	.418		
Total	28.662	65			

The composite variable of the seven questions demonstrated a mean of 1.84 for Blue Ribbon Schools and 2.12 for Non-Blue Ribbon schools. Although the ANOVA in Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference at .037 for the responding groups in the two types of schools, the actual difference is slight. Nonetheless the data suggest that Non Blue Ribbon schools appear to emphasize School-Community Relationships activities related to specific

Wohlstetter (1996) compared schools with academic success to struggling schools and found that successful, actively restructuring schools operated according to a set of curricular guidelines. Schools that were successful in both enacting a shared decision making model and in positively affecting student achievement had school stakeholders who knew and shared the vision of the instructional goals towards which they commonly strove. The fact that these practices tend to be more prevalent in the Blue Ribbon schools in this study gives further support to Wohlstetter's premise.

shared decision making functions to a slightly greater extent than do Blue Ribbon Schools. **Table 6** below demonstrates the difference.

Table 6

SDM					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.192	1	1.192	4.565	.037
Within Groups	16.190	62	.261		
Total	17.383	63			

School-Community Relationships Practices of Non-Blue Ribbon Schools

Non-Blue Ribbon schools appear to practice School-Community Relationships behaviors more than Blue Ribbon schools. An analysis of individual questions that asked stakeholders to assess the presence of the School-Community Relationship factor offers points for discussion.

The School-Community Relationship questions specifically asked for stakeholders' assessment of their schools' shared decision making teams' activities in curriculum and instruction, budget, and personnel, the level of parent, student, and community member participation, and the use of ad hoc committees.

Wohlstetter originally labeled each of these questions as Power questions. Wohlstetter (1994) indicated that power issues might dominate shared decision-making systems in schools. These data appear to substantiate that assertion. In this study, neither school type appeared to practice those activities associated with formal shared decision making beyond "some extent". This suggests that neither school type had accepted and practiced the premise of shared governance to any great extent.

The Wohlstetter and Mohrman 1996 and 1997 studies of "struggling" and "restructuring" schools showed that restructuring schools acted to decentralize power within the school. Wohlstetter and Mohrman proposed that power

needed to be decentralized and extended beyond the formal shared decision making team. They pointed out that ad hoc committees are a good example of the decentralization of power. Neither school type studied appeared to use ad hoc committees in matters of high involvement shared decision-making. This suggests that high involvement shared decision making practices were not disseminated among school stakeholders to a significant extent other than to those limited activities of their schools' shared decision making teams. It appears that shared decision-making authority exists with a small group of decision makers.

Shared decision making systems in schools do not necessarily result in quality schools. Peter Robertson, a Wohlstetter associate and colleague in her UCLA Center for Educational Governance, confirmed this point of view to the researcher.

A key feature of Lawler's high-involvement model is that the decentralization of power must be accompanied by decentralization of information, knowledge/skills and rewards to be effective. Historically, many organizations attempted to decentralize, only to experience little in the way of process improvements, the diagnosis being that they focused primarily on the power variable with little attention to the other variables needed to support the decentralization of power. (phone interview June 20, 2000).

This point of view raises other questions. Is it possible that Non-Blue Ribbon schools spend more time on the human relations aspect of school governance in order to build constituent support for the school in spite of low student achievement? This Long Island study suggests that Blue Ribbon leaders tend to emphasize structural matters such as setting clear goals and that Non-Blue Ribbon school leaders tend to emphasize school community relations.

Perhaps the most salient applications of shared decision making depends on what may be called situational variables calling for such activity. Not all situations require nor benefit from shared decision making efforts. As Hoy and Tarter pointed out (1993) in their "zones of acceptance" concept, shared decision-making is appropriate in several, but not all administrative situations.

In like manner, Daniel H. Kim (1999) stated:

Fundamentally, empowerment is about the distribution of power. In organizations, this is most tangibly represented by decision-making authority - who has the power to make what kinds of decisions. But empowerment does not magically turn everyone into great decision makers, nor does it suddenly equalize differences in skills and experience. Unless the organization's decision processes are designed to ensure the quality of the deci-

sions, empowerment efforts are doomed to fail. Even worse, that failure can lead to bitterness and disillusionment (p.34).

Bolman and Deal (1996) stated that lateral coordination strategies appear related to the premise of "situational shared decision making." They wrote that:

Every lateral strategy has strengths and weaknesses. Formal and informal meetings provide opportunities for dialogue and decisions but may absorb excessive amounts of time and energy. Task forces provide a vehicle for creativity and integration around specific problems but may divert attention from ongoing operating issues.

The optimal blend of vertical and lateral strategies depends on the unique coordination of challenges in any given situation. Vertical coordination is generally superior when environments are stable, tasks are predictable and well understood, and uniformity is crucial. Lateral communications work best for complex tasks performed in turbulent, fast changing environments (p.67).

These points of view suggest that a major reason for the reluctance or inability of school systems to implement effective shared decision making practices may be the result of poor training for the school stakeholders.

In addition, Deborah Stone in *Policy Paradox* (1997) questions the premise of consensus, a component of most shared decision making models: "We can argue about whether consensus implies unanimity or only majority, or whether apparent consensus masks suppressed dissension" (p.86).

This assertion underscores the question of whether school reformers who advocate shared decision making have recognized that shared decision making does not guarantee collaboration, communication, and mutual support for the decision. Secondly, could the shared decision making teams have different purposes in Blue Ribbon schools and Non-Blue Ribbon schools? If shared decision-making is occurring to improve interpersonal relationships, the *quality* of the decisions may not be an issue. Only when the purpose of shared decision-making is to improve the teaching and learning will student achievement be an important factor. In the Blue Ribbon schools, there appears to be a focus on student achievement and organizational structure whereas the Non-Blue Ribbon schools seem to emphasize relationships.

This study demonstrated that a planned system for high involvement includes all of "us" as educational stakeholders. It also suggests that high involvement requires a specific design and commitment to implement elements essential to effective organizational structure. These elements include clear goals, transformative leadership, a col-

lective sense of mission, and a strong, focused program of staff development. These elements may create an environment that encourages our schools to become more effective places in which to learn.

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