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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the perspective of planned change as a conscious, deliberate effort to improve systematic operations and to explore assumptions implicit in theory and literature regarding readiness for change. Entry data were collected at orientation and planning workshops for 42 League of Professional Schools teams from Georgia districts. The schools were represetned in three regional 2-day orientation and planning sessions. Each of the 214 attendees was asked survey questions focusing on: happenings in participating schools with respect to instructional changes, decision-making processes, priority instructional initiatives, and perceptions regarding enhancing or impeding factors in terms of the project. The discussion compares and contrasts responses from schools electing to join the League and those choosing not to join. The survey yielded identification of elements of readiness for administrators and staff members planning to engage in large school-based improvement projects. The analysis revealed that such distinct phases and elements relate to and may influence entry decisions and project success, thus raising questions about ways of assisting school personnel to prepare for major improvement efforts. (Author/LL)

SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS:

INDICATORS OF READINESS

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ABSTRACT

Research on innovation indicates that change consists of distinct phases, the first of which is initiation, or when a decision is made and plans are developed (Fullan, 1982). The study used the perspective of planned change as a conscious, deliberate effort to improve systematic operations to explore assumptions implicit in theory and literature regarding readiness for change. Entry data collected at orientation and planning workshops for 42 League of Professional Schools Teams from various locations yielded identification of elements of readiness for administrators and staff members planning to engage in large school-based improvement projects. The analysis revealed that such distinct phases and elements relate to and may influence entry decisions and project success, thus raising questions about ways of assisting school personnel to prepare for major improvement efforts.

SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS: INDICATORS OF READINESS

Reform initiatives of the last two decades have increasingly limited local educators' choice and responsibility for the improvement of teaching and learning, and have led to educators' alienation and despair (Glickman, 1989a). Believing that teachers and administrators hold the key to improvement (i.e., are the solution rather than the problem), Georgia educators joined with colleagues at the College of Education of the University of Georgia to form the Program for School Improvement (PSI) in 1984. In 1990, this effort was expanded to form the League of Professional Schools. These educators are committed to engaging in inquiry-oriented work which is focused on instruction in their schools and in which collective decisions reflect shared governance processes.

This study examines the readiness of League school participants to engage in empowered decision-making activities focused on the core of education, teaching and learning, and illuminated by the use of action research in the schools.

Related Project Achievements

In addition to establishing shared governance processes, early participants in the Program for School Improvement collected and analyzed data related to their school's goals. Notable among these were projects centered on teachers' conceptual thought (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1978), locus of control (Robinson & Shaver, 1973), and organizational climate (Hoy & Clover, 1986). The following gains were noted:

- peer coaching participants gained in cognitive development level;
- teachers gained a more internalized locus of control;
- organizational climate improved in three categories: collegial behaviors of staff members increased, intimate behaviors of staff members increased, and restrictive behaviors of the principal decreased.

(Glickman, 1989b)

While related accomplishments centered on student achievement, student attitudes, and student success rates, and because these accomplishments likely emerge from staff efforts, the potential of unlocking teacher capacities--<u>when teachers are interested and ready to do so</u>--is intriguing. When the League of Professional Schools was formed in 1990, data were gathered which shed some light on the element of staff readiness to engage in all-school improvement projects of this type.

Method

Forty-two schools from Georgia districts were represented in three regional, two-day orientation and planning sessions. As part of the project's on-going research effort, each of the 214 attendees was polled as to his/her perception of the reason(s) for participating in the workshop or the project. Additional survey questions focused on:

- recent instructional changes in the school;
- decision-making processes currently operating in the school;
- the school's priority instructional initiative;
- perceptions about possible enhancing and impeding factors regarding the project.

Responses were coded for individuals and then pooled for school groups. The following conceptual frameworks structured the analysis of project data and provided "readiness" snapshots of participating school groups:

1. Implementability of the Innovation. The survey data were searched for evidence of "implementability," which included four criteria (Fullan, 1982). First, needs of schools vary. Innovations which are in line with local conditions and needs are more likely to succeed. Certain participants or school groups in the League orientation meeting clearly indicated this fit (hence higher implementability between their school's situation or needs and the project goals.) In other school groups, participants were just coming to an awareness of their need for more teacher involvement or shared decision-making.

   Second, implementability relates to clarity. Participating schools whose faculty members demonstrated understanding of the definition, purposes, and procedures in

shared governance were rated more likely to attain significant change.

The third characteristic of implementability is complexity, which relates to the difference between old school practices and the new, proposed practices under shared governance principles. Greater change comes from trying, then learning more; so, baseline data on each school's operating procedures, especially decision-making, were analyzed and coded accordingly.

Finally, the surveys were searched for evidence of practicality. Would this project's goals fit with the reported organizational realities of the school? Would availability of time or existing school and district regulations conflict with the project goals? Also, did the project goals appear to be relevant to the participants' concerns?

2. Leadership Strength. While superintendents and teachers can play crucial roles in school change, research most clearly indicates that change efforts succeed with active principal support (Hall & Hcrd, 1984). Data were searched for reports of leader facilitation (or related plans), including the important tasks of obtaining resources, buffering the project from outside interference, encouraging the staff along the lines of school improvement and shared governance principles, and beginning to adapt daily operating procedures to the initiative.

3. Stages of Concern and Levels of Use. Two diagnostic components of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall, Wallace, & Dorsett, 1973) which have direct application to educational innovation and improvement of schools were used to identify teacher use and feelings about changes and programs. The SoC dimension allows categorization of persons' concerns into stages (awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration, refocusing). The LoU dimension (Hall, Loucks, Rutherford, & Newlove, 1975) identifies behaviors of users of an innovation (non-use, orientation, preparation, mechanical use, routine, refinement, integration, renewal).

4. Collegial Interaction. Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone's (1984) descriptors were used to code school personnel according to how well they appeared to facilitate collegial interactions. In the "Egg Crate" school, teachers are isolated from each other. The "Administrator's Delight" arrangement evidences rare interaction among teachers but high conformity to established procedures and administrative mandate. In the "Social Club", teachers discuss instruction, but do so informally. Last, on the "Professional Team", teachers talk and make decisions related to instruction. In the latter two, teachers can be sources of incentives and change is more likely to be encouraged.

5. Barriers to Change. Typical barriers to organizational change in schools (Lovell & Wiles, 1983) include a lack of commitment, inadequate feedback, negative attitudes about change, inadequate knowledge or skills, vested interest in the status quo, threat or fear of new situations, lack of support or endorsement, and inadequate expertise for solving problems. Information and data reflecting these barriers diminished total readiness scores for schools in the study.

The data were further subdivided between schools which subsequently chose to become fully participating members of the League of Professional Schools (24 of the 42 schools joined) and schools which withdrew after orientation (18 of the 42 withdrew).

Findings

Collegial Interaction. Schools which joined the League exhibited the characteristics of the Social Club and the Professional Team far more than the schools which withdrew (43% vs. 17%). In addition, a preponderance of "Administrator's Delight" traits appeared among those not joining (see Table 1).

	Egg Crate	Administrator's Delight	Social Club	Professional Team	TOTAL
Joined (n=24)	(10) 42%	(4) 17%	(3) 14%	(7) 30%	(24)
Did not join (n=18)	(10) 55%	(5) 28%	(3) 17%	(0) 0%	(18)

Table 1. Collegial interaction types by membership status in schools attending League of Professional Schools orientation sessions.

Leadership Tasks.

In schools which elected to join the League, leadership behaviors related to supporting innovation were far more evident (see Figure 1). In schools withdrawing, often the only support shown for the potential change was the tacit support for attendance at the orientation session. Participants from schools not joining were far more likely to report difficulties such as:

- top-down operations;
- feeling "rudderless" or lacking in group development;
- lack of time, money;
- lack of consensus, team effort, or administrator encouragement;
- new leadership and/or instability;
- recent traumas;
- central office interference, dictating, resistance to change;
- teacher resistance, entrenchment;
- bad timing for project consideration;

Participants from schools which joined the League were far more likely to report administrator/school harmony with central views, principal buffering faculty from central or state mandates, encouragement for risk-taking on the part of the principal, and principal decisions which changed standard procedures in favor of shared governance principles.

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Implementability

On facets depicting implementability, schools joining the League averaged almost three variables of four in place, notably complexity, clarity of the project, and the need for match with local conditions. Schools which did not join showed a critical lack of clarity, need (match), and practicality of engaging in the project.

Stages of Concern and Levels of Use

As might be expected, no school considering the LPS innovation was above stage 3 in the stages of concern or level 3 in the levels of use. However, the "joining" schools' staffs were clearly better informed about--and even engaging in--principles of the project. In this way, as well as in regards to leadership behaviors and implementability, they were more ready to fully embrace the innovation (see Table 2).

In general, three-fourths of the schools which later joined the League of Professional Schools' innovative shared governance project exhibited a "readiness" measurable by the conjunction of at least three of the following factors:

- implementability
- leadership strength
- stage of concern attained
- level of use attained
- collegial interaction
- few barriers to change

Stages of Concern						Level of Use					
Stage		n=24 joined		n=18 did not join		Level		n=24 joined		n=18 did not join	
--	-		--		--	renewal	6		0%		0%
collaboration	5		0%		0%	integration	5		0%		0%
consequences	4		0%		0%	routine-refinement	4		0%		0%
management	3	(5)	21%		0%	mechanical	3	(3)	13%		0%
personal	2	(6)	25%		0%	preparation	2	(7)	29%		0%
information	1	(9)	38%	(11)	39%	orientation	1	(7)	29%	(3)	17%
awareness	0	(4)	17%	(7)	61%	non-use	0	(7)	29%	(15)	83%

Table 2. Percent of schools at various levels of use and stages of concern at time of orientation session by schools' membership decisions.

In addition, when initially asked to report a focus for their instructional initiative, participants from "more ready" schools were more likely to be more specific, rather than general, about instructional improvement goals. Thus, it appears that election to enter large scale innovation projects is related to a general form of readiness; this readiness, while it may not be a necessity for entry, may be needed for later success.

A remaining question regarding readiness for implementation of an innovation such as shared governance and participative decision-making is this: In that some schools which elect not to participate still exhibit a moderate degree of readiness which matches others which have joined, what, if anything, can be done to assist these non-joiners to bring them into the project? How serious are the barriers for such schools? Three such schools in this study reported a lack of knowledge, lack of focus, or lack of stability related to current district changes; in that all three also exhibited "social club" interaction, it is possible that special efforts by the project staff could have successfully brought these schools along with project implementation. A fourth, "moderately ready" school, postponed joining until after the first year of the project, even though the principal was seen as a change agent; yet, two more schools, relatively unprepared but each led by encouraging and interested principals, joined a year later. What remains to be seen is whether or not readiness, defined as clear understandings about shared governance and related supportive structures such as described here, relates to project success.

Implications

The implications of this research for the League of Professional Schools and others planning to organize school-wide improvement projects include the following:

- Project staff members should consider advance distribution of literature and readiness assessment measures to any school considering participation. This provides an opportunity for the faculty and administrators to increase awareness and make better decisions about formal participation in upcoming orientation and planning workshops.
- Discussions about "readiness" and "necessary prior conditions" factors should be built into the orientation and planning workshops. This will also help school teams decide on their level of preparedness to engage in such a school-wide improvement project.
- Project staff should consider direct, on-site facilitation for schools which elect not to participate after orientation yet appear "ready." Implementation of innovations is often more likely with a little extra assistance.
- Schools electing not to participate should not be barred from entry to the project at a later date, when readiness factors may converge to make participation more fruitful.

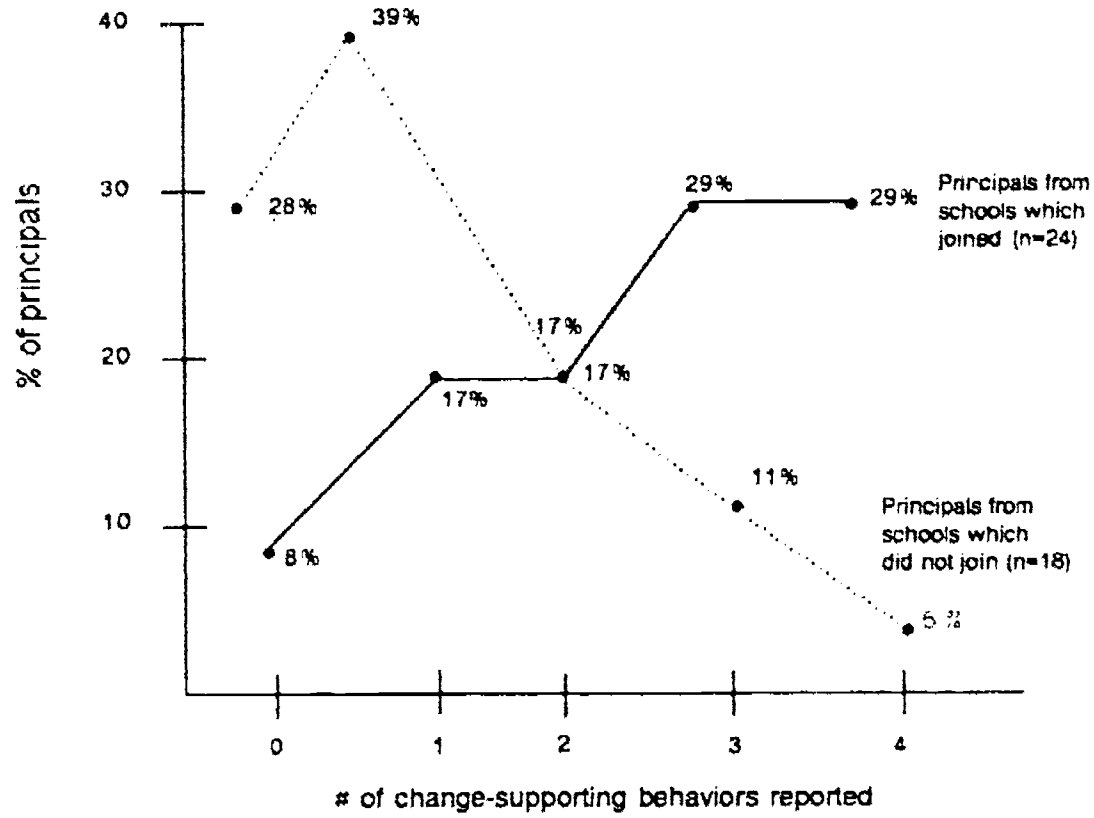

Figure 1. Percent of principals exhibiting 1-4 change-supporting behaviors, by schools' decisions to join/not join the League of Professional Schools' shared governance project

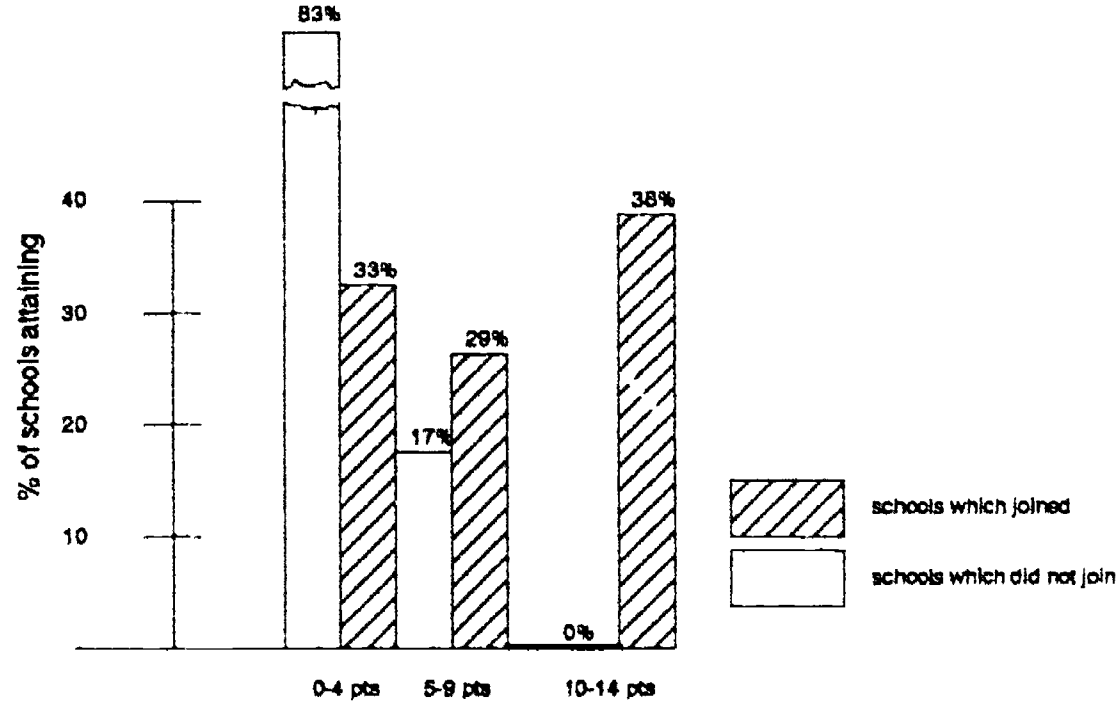

Figure 2. Percent of Schools Achieving Total Readiness Scores Prior to join/not join decision

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