

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AS PERCEIVED BY PRINCIPALS IN HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

The Hong Kong Government first introduced school-based management (SBM) to the education profession in 1991. The principal is a pivotal factor in fostering an environment for change. SBM and teacher empowerment calls for new modes of leadership: teachers lend their expertise, and principals become facilitators rather than directors. The purpose of the study as reported on the research paper was to examine the principals' perceptions and understanding of teacher empowerment. Secondly, it was also aimed at looking for the essential conditions at the administrator level which are necessary for teacher empowerment. A questionnaire survey was adopted to collect the required data. The principals' perceptions were assessed through a written survey consisting of 34 statements of which 14 statements concerning SBM, the empowerment of teachers, and the relationships between SBM and empowerment. The other 20 statements were set to tap the respondents' opinion on their work and working environment. As supported by the survey findings, the responding principals were characterized by their open-mindedness and acceptance towards SBM in a general sense. Though the respondents had a good knowledge of SBM, they held a less confident attitude towards teachers' role in decision making. With regard to the essential conditions for empowerment at the administrator level, the findings are also rather positive. It is highly recommended that practitioners should make use of those favorable conditions when turning the concept of teacher empowerment into practice. (Contains 10 tables, 24 references, 1 appendix)

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INTRODUCTION

Education reform is an issue which interests almost every country. Like other developed countries in the world, Hong Kong has undergone a huge amount of educational reforms since the early 1990s in response to the public's concern about the quality of school education. The Hong Kong Government first introduced the "quality movement" in 1991 with the publication of the *School Management Initiative* (SMI). According to Dimmock (2000, p. 193), "[the] SMI restructuring policy gives each school greater flexibility and responsibility for managing its own affairs in return for rendering greater accountability for its performance to the central bureaucracy as well as to newly empowered school management committees." Apparently, the SMI was aimed at introducing: (1) a system of school-based management (SBM) to local schools (Dowson *et al.*, 2000), and (2) more teacher participation in school administration (Cheng, 2002, p. 50). Six years later in 1997, the Education Commission presented its Report No. 7 (ECR7), titled *Quality School Education*, to the government. The ECR7 was generally regarded as a set of far-reaching policy proposals to improve the school system under the quest for quality education.

With several years of actual experience, and as more and more responsibilities were devolved to schools in the use of public funds, the government considered that the time is ripe to set out a more clearly defined institutional framework for SBM, and to apply SBM on a wider scale. In 1999, an Advisory Committee on School-based Management (ACSBM) was set up to develop a framework of governance for SBM. Based on the recommendations

made by the ACSBM, the government drafted the Bill about the SBM governance framework and tabled it to the territory's legislature in 2002. Finally, the Bill was passed in mid-2004 and came into operation on January 1, 2005. To protect the rights of participation of key stakeholders in school management, the SBM Ordinance requires all aided schools to establish an incorporated management committee (IMC) to manage the school. It also stipulates clearly the functions and powers of school sponsoring bodies and the IMCs.

From the SMI to the SBM Ordinance, the policy makers, scholars, school sponsoring bodies, and school administrators have engaged themselves in vigorous debates concerning the implementation of SBM. However, these debates have mainly focused on issues such as school leadership, school autonomy, quality of school personnel, and performance indicators. Teacher empowerment, which is one of the most popular issues in Western SBM literature, has received little attention. Teachers are the key actors in the education arena, without whom reform measures are unlikely to work. Nevertheless, school principals are apparently in the best position to initiate action regarding changes, they are often expected to play a central role in any school reforms. The principal is a pivotal factor in fostering a supportive environment for change. This study is an exploratory investigation of school principals' perceptions of teacher empowerment in the context of Hong Kong. No similar study has been conducted in Hong Kong. The research questions that guided this descriptive study were: (1) how do the principals perceive and understand the relationship between teacher empowerment and SBM, and (2) how do the principals perceive the essential conditions necessary for teacher empowerment? From the research findings, this study broadens the understanding of factors that may impede or promote empowerment of teachers in the context of Hong Kong. In particular, the study offers insights on how school principals can better manage teacher empowerment at the administrator level in their respective schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SBM, defined as the decentralization of decision making authority to the school site, is one of the most popular strategies that came out of the 1980s school reform movement took place in the United States (Oswald, 1995). SBM is expected to improve schools through decentralization of administration, participation by staff, parents and the community in the administration of the school, making schools more effective and competitive (Phillips, 1997). However, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1994, p. 1) remind practitioners that SBM holds the promise of enabling schools to better address students' needs and it is not an end in itself. They claim that this promise is more likely if a "high-involvement" model of SBM is followed. This model envisions teachers and principals being trained and empowered to make decisions related to management and performance. In the context of SBM, "shared decision making" (SDM) refers generally to the involvement of teachers in the processes of school-wide decision making (David, 1993; Weiss, 1993). Structures or mechanisms for SDM give teachers a voice in what had largely been principal-led administration. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1993, p. 6) point out that the transition to SBM cannot be understood simply as a transfer of power from the central authority to the school site. The implementation of SBM or SDM should go along with "teacher empowerment," providing power to those who traditionally have not had a role in managing schools.

"Empowerment" as a term has been frequently used in management circles since the 1980s. It requires individuals to make appropriate decisions that result in improved processes or products, which, in turn, contributes to organizational objectives (Scarnati & Scarnati, 2002, p. 115). Although the empowerment management approach emerged from the business world, the concept of teacher empowerment parallels employee empowerment in a business.

In the United States, there has been an increasing acceptance of the idea that good schools must treat their teachers with respectful regard, allowing them to exercise their judgment in matters related to instruction as well as school-wide issues that extend beyond their individual classrooms (Zeichner, 1991, p. 365). Advocates see teacher empowerment as a means of overcoming the existing administrative order and gaining increased control of the profession. The involvement of teachers in the process of school-wide decision making means the establishment of bonds to connect teachers with other teachers, their principal, the parents, students and community. They also argue that granting new respect to teachers may help to attract and retain more capable teachers (Bolin, 1989, p. 81). Oswald (1995) claims that teacher empowerment is a cornerstone of teacher professionalism.

Empowerment can be thought of as a process whereby school principals help to develop teachers' competence to take charge of their own work and resolve their own problems. Several researchers have looked into the process of empowerment at different levels (e.g., the teacher level, the administrator level, and the school level) and concluded a number of conditions that are essential to the implementation of teacher empowerment in any particular school. This study has attempted to group those conditions at the administrator level into seven dimensions as below. The first four dimensions of conditions can also be regarded as human-side conditions/factors, while the remaining three are operational conditions/factors.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

A vision constitutes the expression of what the organization needs to be and is capable of becoming at a specific point in the future. Vision can also be viewed as the shared values and beliefs of a group of people, and thus in any educational reform it helps schools to define

their own direction (Stoll & Fink, 1995, p. 51).

To become visionary leaders, principals should take the following actions (Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1997, pp. 35–36): (a) establish a sound vision for their school; (b) communicate this vision in a way that secures commitment among members of the school; and (c) communicate the visions with a clear focus on meaning. On the other hand, visionary leaders have to help teachers articulate and question their own visions and then consider how these might relate to those of others (Stoll & Fink, 1995, p. 52). Organizational effectiveness is partially dependent on the degree of congruence between the values of the organization and the personal values of its members (Potterfield, 1999, p. 56).

The formulation of a shared vision is no easy task. Principals are reminded that the vision must be constructed with substantial input from school participants, be reflected in important actions, and incorporate the key values that drive school participants in their tasks (Wall & Wall, 1995, p. 129).

EMPOWERING MENTALITY

An empowering mentality can be viewed as a personality characteristic and refers to the innate attributes of the leader that motivate behavior in various interpersonal situations. Before leaders can create an environment through which others can be empowered, they must first empower themselves (Appelbaum et al., 1999, p. 245). That is to say, principals must adjust themselves intrinsically at the very beginning of the empowerment process. The content of an empowering mentality might include such elements as (Appelbaum et al., p. 250) (a) a sense of self-determination: leaders are free to choose how to do their work; (b) a sense of meaning: leaders feel that their work is important to them; (c) a sense of competence:

leaders are confident about their ability; and (d) a sense of impact: leaders believe they can have influence on their work.

EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Maslow's need hierarchy theory has become a widely discussed perspective in the study of human motivation. Needs refer to internal factors that determine the direction and goals of behavior. Many of these factors are emotional by nature, such as enthusiasm, interest, and excitement. Empowerment, obviously, is closely related to the emotional dimension of organizations. Bearing this in mind, principals motivate teachers by emotions more than by tangible rewards in completing their tasks. To this end, Lashley (2001, pp. 176–177) suggests the following methods for leaders in the service sector to demonstrate emotional leadership: (a) appeal to emotional responses from subordinates by involving the use of mission statements which convey the vision and values of the organization and (b) use of emotional language: showing complete confidence and trust in subordinates.

TRUST

Visionary leadership, empowering mentality, and emotional leadership are all associated with the element of trust. At the administrator level, what can school leaders do on their attitudes in order to enhance mutual trust among all school participants? Under humanistic management, workers are seen as liking work, which is as natural as rest or play; they do not have to be controlled and coerced, if they are committed to the organization's objectives; under proper conditions they will not only accept but also seek responsibility (Robbins, 1994, p. 467). Incorporating humanistic attitudes into a principal's leadership style can thus

enhance trust among all school participants.

DECENTRALIZATION

Schools are formal organizations with highly centralized management authority and highly bureaucratic structures. By decentralization is simply meant that decision-making authority is passed down to lower organizational levels (Robbins, 1994, p. 281). Teacher empowerment, at its core, requires teachers to participate in a more central way in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise their professional judgment about the content of the curriculum and the means of instruction (Zeichner, 1991, p. 363). Decentralization is therefore an important operational factor of empowerment at the administrator level.

INFORMATION SHARING

Because of bureaucratization in schools, determining the content of information sharing has rested in the hands of principals. This responsibility must be moved downward to school participants if empowerment is to be meaningful. Crucial content has to do with the school's mission and performance and the knowledge and skills that enable teachers to understand and contribute to organizational performance (Lawler, 1992, in Appelbaum et al., 1999, p. 240; Potterfield, 1999, p. 54).

Johnson and Redmond (1998, pp. 12–13) further elaborate the process of information sharing and explain how empowerment happens: A manager might (a) provide information about the job to be done, the methods to be used, and the training provided; (b) discuss with

the individual how the work is to be done, and how the job holder's knowledge and skills can be enhanced.

COLLABORATION

If leaders are to create an empowering organization, they need to establish a supportive working environment, develop individuals or groups that work collaboratively, and inspire the organization (Davis & Wilson, 2000, p. 350). Collaboration can be characterized as a relationship wherein all parties involved use shared means, such as information and other resources, to accomplish mutually defined ends (Hayes & Lunsford, 1994). From this perspective, leadership has another meaning in operational terms. Apart from being defined as the personal characteristics of a leader, leadership is now described as a process of coordinating efforts and moving individuals together as a group (Appelbaum et al., 1999, p. 243). When school participants collaborate, they bring their own vision and talents to solving mutual problems. An understanding and sharing of each other's experience increase trust. Therefore, collaboration brings definite benefits, both as ends in themselves and as a means of improving performance (Evans, 1996, p. 242).

The study reported on here was designed within the context of the literature covered above.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The purpose of the study was to examine the principals' perceptions and understanding of teacher empowerment. Secondly, it was also aimed at looking for the essential conditions at the administrator level which are necessary for teacher empowerment. A questionnaire survey was adopted to collect the required data. The principals' perceptions were assessed through a written survey consisting of 34 statements of which 14 statements concerning SBM, the empowerment of teachers, and the relationships between SBM and empowerment. The other 20 statements were set to tap the respondents' opinion on their work and working environment with the hope that this would reveal their attitudes towards the essential conditions for empowerment. The full list of survey statements is provided in appendix A. The respondent was asked the degree he/she agreed or disagreed with the statements. The respondent had to indicate his/her feeling on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale with four and five indicating the positive responses (agree, strongly agree), three indicating a neutral response (no opinion), and one and two indicating the negative responses (strongly disagree, disagree). After the statements, a few lines were given to the respondents to write additional comments on teacher empowerment if they wanted to do so.

The questionnaires were mailed to 102 principals. They were drawn from the following schools lists: (a) Recipients of the Outstanding School Awards, 2001; (b) Participating schools of the Accelerated Schools for Quality Education Project, 1998-2001; (c) Full model schools of the Quality Schools Project, 2001-2003; and (d) Full model schools of the Quality Schools in Action Project, 2003-2004. The Outstanding School Awards scheme was organized by the Quality Education Fund (QEF), Hong Kong. The winning schools list is available at the organization's webpage. The other three projects were implemented by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and were financed by the QEF. The said school lists are available

at the university's Education Faculty webpage. This group of principals did share certain common characteristics, since they had been leading their respective schools toward quality education and proactive to search for excellence. These principal participants were requested to complete the questionnaire in their personal capacity.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter that clearly stated the nature and purpose of the study. The letter stressed that the confidentiality of the individual responses would be maintained. A self-addressed postage-paid envelope was attached to each questionnaire with instructions to the respondents to complete the questionnaire, seal it in the envelope, and return it to the researcher within the prescribed period. The questionnaires were posted in late December 2004; returns were received within the first two weeks of January 2005. Of the 102 questionnaires distributed, 42 (return rate = 41.2 percent) were returned of which all of them were used for the study and further analysis.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

Since there were a few missing responses on demographic characteristics, frequencies may not sum to total number of respondents. Of the 42 respondents, 24 (57.1 percent) were female, 15 (35.7 percent) were male. 2 principals (4.8 percent) reported that they were in the 30 years-old group, 15 (35.7 percent) in the 40s group, and 24 (57.1 percent) in the 50s group. 26 principals (61.9 percent) were serving in primary schools; 16 (38.1 percent) were secondary school heads. The responding principals had been engaging in the profession on average 27.1 years ($SD = 5.97$, one missing response), joined their current school for 11.6 years ($SD = 9.00$), and had been serving as principal in their current school for 7.5 years ($SD=6.27$). 45.2 percent of the respondents reported that they were doing part-time studies.

4 principals (9.5 percent) had enrolled in B.Ed. programs, 11 (26.2 percent) in M.Ed. programs, 2 (4.8 percent) in doctoral programs, and 2 (4.8 percent) in other training programs.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The two research questions will provide the framework for presenting the findings. Statements 1 to 14 in the questionnaire were concerned about the respondents' opinion on teacher empowerment, whilst statements 15 to 34 were about respondents' work and working environment. The following sections provide a summary of the quantitative analysis of the survey. The descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and frequency were used in the analysis.

THE OBJECTIVES AND UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF SBM

Table 1 presents the summary of statistics on the respondents' perceptions of the objectives and underlying principles of SBM. 88.1 percent of the respondents agreed with Statement 2: "SMB's essence is school-level autonomy plus participatory decision-making." This statement had the highest mean rating ($M=4.12$, $SD=0.66$) among the five statements here. Also, the same percentage of the respondents agreed that SBM was a means of improving school performance (Statement 1, $M=3.98$, $SD=0.46$). While receiving a rather high rating ($M=4.05$), a smaller percentage of principals (81 percent) agreed that SBM was a measure to democratize the working procedures in schools (Statement 4). Statements 3 and 5, which included the wordings about teacher's role under SBM, received the lowest mean ratings (3.93 and 3.81 respectively). The written comments from two respondents gave some

hints on this. They said: “It’s rather risky allowing teachers, who are not equipping with adequate knowledge, to exercise decision making power.” Also, “Teacher empowerment and SBM require teachers’ participation. But they need time to learn and develop for this.”

Table 1. Respondents’ perceptions of the objectives and underlying principles of SBM (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
01	3.98	0.46	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	33 (78.6)	4 (9.5)
02	4.12	0.66	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	4 (9.5)	26 (61.9)	11 (26.2)
03	3.93	0.63	0 (0.0)	2 (4.8)	4 (9.5)	31 (73.8)	5 (11.9)
04	4.05	0.65	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (19.0)	24 (57.1)	10 (23.9)
05	3.81	0.70	0 (0.0)	3 (7.1)	6 (14.3)	29 (69.0)	4 (9.5)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SBM AND THE TEACHER

Table 2 figures out the respondents’ perceptions of the relationship between SBM and the teacher. As shown by the mean ratings on the four statements here, the respondents were more inclined to agree with substantial matters such as SBM might help teachers to gain a sense of ownership towards their work (Statement 9, M=4.00, SD=0.62, 80.9 percent), and might help teachers learn to accept responsibilities (Statement 8, M=3.95, SD=0.58, 85.7 percent). In contrast, other more abstract ideas like the promotion of teacher professionalism (Statement 6), teachers’ job satisfaction and morale (Statement 7) had lower mean ratings.

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions of the relationship between SBM and the teacher (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
06	3.69	0.60	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	13 (31.0)	26 (61.9)	2 (4.8)
07	3.74	0.73	0 (0.0)	3 (7.1)	9 (21.4)	26 (61.9)	4 (9.5)
08	3.95	0.58	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	5 (11.9)	31 (73.8)	5 (11.9)
09	4.00	0.62	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (19.0)	26 (61.9)	8 (19.0)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SBM AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

In general, the overall response on the statements appeared here was less positive as compared with the two sub-groupings of statements shown above. Notably, there were altogether 18 respondents had no opinion or disagreed with Statement 11: "Teacher empowerment representing a managerial shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top management" (M=3.52, SD=0.73, 9.5 percent disagreed, 33.3 percent no opinion). Consistent with their responses to Statements 3 and 5, only 64.3 percent of the respondents agreed with Statement 10 which was about providing power to teachers (M=3.62, SD=0.69). On the other hand, statements concerning certain aspects of school effectiveness received a much higher mean rating. Such aspects included: (1) organizational effectiveness and teacher empowerment were related to each other (Statement 12, M=3.98, SD=0.60); (2) teacher empowerment could help to retain capable teachers (Statement 14, M=3.82, SD=0.72); (3) teacher empowerment might help teachers to take charge of their own work (Statement 13, M=3.81, SD=0.70).

Table 3. Respondents' perceptions of the relationship between SBM and teacher empowerment (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
10	3.62	0.69	0 (0.0)	3 (7.1)	12 (28.6)	25 (59.5)	2 (4.8)
11	3.52	0.73	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	14 (33.3)	22 (52.4)	2 (4.8)
12	3.98	0.60	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (19.0)	27 (64.3)	7 (16.7)
13	3.81	0.70	0 (0.0)	2 (4.8)	9 (21.4)	26 (61.9)	5 (11.9)
14	3.83	0.72	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	12 (28.6)	22 (52.4)	7 (16.7)

Statements 15 to 34 were concerned about the respondents' work and working environment. They were written according to the seven dimensions of essential conditions at the administrator level for teacher empowerment. The analysis below follows this conceptual framework. The ninth column in Tables 4 to 10 shows the overall mean ratings of the seven dimensions.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Table 4 presents the summary statistics on the respondents' attitudes towards visionary leadership. First, the overall mean rating on visionary leadership was the highest (4.37) among the seven dimensions of conditions. Second, a remarkable percentage (over 90 percent) of the respondents were agreed or strongly agreed with the statements appeared here. They agreed that: (1) a sound vision was necessary for the school (Statement 15); (2) the vision was constructed with the involvement of school members (Statement 16); and (3) the vision incorporated the key values that drove the school moving forward (Statement 17).

Table 4. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Visionary leadership (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
15	4.36	0.65	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	19 (45.2)	19 (45.2)	M=4.37
16	4.36	0.65	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	19 (45.2)	19 (45.2)	
17	4.38	0.65	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	18 (42.9)	20 (47.6)	

EMPOWERING MENTALITY

Table 5 shows the respondents' status of empowering mentality. Over 80 percent of the respondents: (1) felt that their work was meaningful (Statement 19, M=4.29, SD=0.66); (2) could perceive that they had an impact on other school members (Statement 21, M=4.19, SD=0.66); and (3) were confident about their ability (Statement 20, M=4.12, SD=0.66). Though a smaller percentage of the respondents agreed that they felt free to choose how to do his/her work (Statement 18, M=3.76, SD=0.78, 73.8 percent), the overall mean rating (4.09) received was rather positive.

Table 5. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Empowering mentality (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
18	3.76	0.78	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	7 (16.7)	26 (61.9)	5 (11.9)	M=4.09
19	4.29	0.66	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	20 (47.6)	17 (40.5)	
20	4.12	0.66	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (16.7)	23 (54.8)	12 (28.6)	
21	4.19	0.66	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (14.3)	22 (52.4)	14 (33.3)	

EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 6 figures out the respondents' attitudes towards emotional leadership. This dimension had the lowest overall mean rating (3.60), reflecting the fact that the respondents were not so keen on exercising emotional leadership. Nearly half of the principals had no opinion or disagreed with Statement 22: "I often motivate teachers by emotions in completing their tasks" (M=3.40, SD=0.93, 21.4 percent disagreed, 26.2 percent no opinion). Nonetheless, around 65 percent of the principals still agreed that they had used emotional language to show confidence and trust in subordinates (Statement 24, M=3.71, SD=0.76), and teacher empowerment was closely related to the emotional dimensions of the school organization (Statement 23, M=3.69, SD=0.77).

Table 6. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Emotional leadership (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
22	3.40	0.93	0 (0.0)	9 (21.4)	11 (26.2)	18 (42.9)	4 (9.5)	M=3.60
23	3.69	0.77	0 (0.0)	3 (7.1)	12 (28.6)	22 (52.4)	5 (11.9)	
24	3.71	0.76	0 (0.0)	3 (7.1)	11 (26.2)	23 (54.8)	5 (11.9)	

TRUST

The status of interactions between teachers and the school leader can be a good indicator of mutual trust. 88.1 percent of the principals reported that they had good interactions with teachers (Statement 26, M=3.98, SD=0.46). Furthermore, a substantial percentage (83.3 percent) of the principals believed that their leadership style could enhance trust among

school members (Statement 25, M=3.93, SD=0.51). A principal wrote in the questionnaire that trust was the prerequisite of any distinguished organization.

Table 7. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Trust (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
25	3.93	0.51	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (16.7)	31 (73.8)	4 (9.5)	M=3.96
26	3.98	0.46	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	33 (78.6)	4 (9.5)	

DECENTRALIZATION

Though the respondents were somewhat hesitated in confirming teachers' role in decision making, 90.5 percent of them reported that their teachers had been encouraged to exercise professional judgment about their works (Statement 28, M=4.05, SD=0.49), and had passed the decision making authority down to lower organizational levels in the school (Statement 27, M=3.76, SD=0.61, 76.2 percent of the respondents agreed). In addition, Statement 29: "The school operates efficiently and smoothly" also received a favorable rating (M=3.88, SD=0.62, 78.6 percent agreed). Interestingly, a principal, who wrote in the questionnaire, perceived teacher empowerment as a differentiated management strategy — only to empower those teachers who are occupying supervisory posts.

Table 8. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Decentralization (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
27	3.76	0.61	0 (0.0)	2 (4.8)	8 (19.0)	30 (71.4)	2 (4.8)	M=3.90
28	4.05	0.49	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	32 (76.2)	6 (14.3)	
29	3.88	0.62	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	8 (19.0)	28 (66.7)	5 (11.9)	

INFORMATION SHARING

Three statements were set for the information sharing dimension. The overall mean rating was 4.17, the second highest among the seven dimensions. A remarkable percentage of the principals replied that they were willing to share crucial information with the colleagues (Statement 30, M=4.29, SD=0.63, 90.4 percent). Most of the respondents also agreed that in practice they had provided information about the job to the teachers (Statement 31, M=4.14, SD=0.60, 88.1 percent), and discussed with them about their jobs (Statement 32, M=4.07, SD=0.55, 88 percent).

Table 9. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Information sharing (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
30	4.29	0.63	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	22 (52.3)	16 (38.1)	M=4.17
31	4.14	0.60	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	26 (61.9)	11 (26.2)	
32	4.07	0.55	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	29 (69.0)	8 (19.0)	

COLLABORATION

The two statements here also received positive responses. First, 90.5 percent of the respondents perceived leadership as a process of coordinating efforts and moving individuals together as a group (Statement 33, $M=4.17$, $SD=0.57$). A principal wrote, “The principal should has the ability to lead the school management in transforming its role from managers into school leaders.” Second, most of the principals agreed that school members would bring out their own talents when collaboration was in force (Statement 34, $M=4.10$, $SD=0.57$, 88.1 percent).

Table 10. Respondents’ perceptions of empowering conditions: Collaboration (N=42)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
33	4.17	0.57	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (9.5)	27 (64.3)	11 (26.2)	M=4.14
34	4.10	0.57	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (11.9)	28 (66.7)	9 (21.4)	

CONCLUSION

Principals are usually regarded as a somewhat conservative force within the school organization. In Maeroff’s (1988, pp. 84-85) words, “principals may not be inclined to support innovations...because such changes can increase uncertainty, multiply the complexities of normal school operations, and raise doubts about peer recognition.” However, as supported by the survey findings, the responding participants were characterized by their open-mindedness and acceptance towards the reform measure of SBM in a general sense. This may be the resulting effect of using the previously mentioned school lists as the

channels of selecting survey participants. In spite of this, the study represents a more focused investigation of the perceptions of innovative school principals towards SBM and teacher empowerment.

With no surprise, the principals had a good knowledge of SBM. The reason is that they were in the best position to access to official documents and get involved in the relevant discussions about SBM. But they held a less confident attitude towards teachers' role in decision making, which is the core concept of teacher empowerment and SBM. A principal commented in the questionnaire that the school management was willing joining hands with the teachers to make the school better, but teachers were not eager to be empowered. From the standpoint of her subordinates, another principal reported that teachers did not accept school management as one of the areas for professional development. Teachers holding such beliefs and behaviors are of course being influenced by the familial traditions in the Chinese society. Other than this, the findings reflect the fact that the Hong Kong Government had not been correctly oriented its focus of work on the promotion of SBM among the teachers. The government should therefore take a more active role in leading principals and teachers to learn the very nature of SBM, and particularly, teachers' role in decision making.

Regarding the essential conditions for empowerment at the administrator level, the findings are also rather favorable. Though the respondents were not so certain about whether the implementation of SBM should go along with teacher empowerment, they demonstrated in their practice a high degree of existence of the empowering conditions as discussed in the Western literature. Among the seven dimensions of conditions introduced in the study, six of them received high overall mean ratings, namely visionary leadership, empowering mentality, trust, decentralization, information sharing, and collaboration. These therefore represent a set of foundations that can be used when realizing the concept of teacher empowerment. The principals' low level of interest in adopting an emotional leadership

may be the only barrier that practitioners have to overcome. Autocratic authority still prevails in school organizations.

Teachers have often been isolated from involvement in school-wide decision making and from meaningful contact with one another. SBM tends to change this situation. It is the role of the principal that is subject to the greatest degree of change.

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APPENDIX A — SURVEY STATEMENTS

The objectives and underlying principles of SBM

01. SBM is a means of improving school performance.
02. SBM's essence is school-level autonomy plus participatory decision-making.
03. SBM's goal is to empower school staff by providing authority, flexibility, and resources to solve the educational problems particular to their schools.
04. SBM is a measure to democratize the working procedures in schools.
05. SBM refers to the involvement of teachers in the processes of school-wide decision making.

The relationship between SBM and the teacher

06. Teacher professionalism will be promoted under SBM.
07. SBM is positively related to teachers' job satisfaction, the morale of teachers and their enthusiasm for the school organization.
08. SBM may help teachers learn to accept more responsibilities as school leaders.
09. Through SBM, teachers will gain a sense of ownership in their workplace.

The relationship between SBM and teacher empowerment

10. The implementation of SBM should go along with teacher empowerment, providing power to those who traditionally have not had a role in managing schools.
11. Teacher empowerment representing a managerial shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top management.
12. Teacher empowerment rests primarily on a belief that organizational effectiveness is enhanced by site decision-making by teachers about problems of practice.
13. Teacher empowerment may help teachers to develop their competence to take charge of their own work and resolve their own problems.
14. Teacher empowerment may help to attract and retain more capable teachers via granting new respect to teachers.

Visionary leadership

15. A sound vision is necessary for the school.
16. The vision is constructed with the involvement of school members.
17. The vision incorporates the key values that drive the school moving forward.

Empowering mentality

18. I feel free to choose how to do my work.
19. I feel that my work is meaningful with regard to my role in the school.
20. I am confident about my ability.
21. I perceive that I have an impact on other school members.

Emotional leadership

22. I often motivate teachers by emotions in completing their tasks.
23. Teacher empowerment is closely related to the emotional dimensions of the school

organization.

24. I use emotional language to show confidence and trust in subordinates.

Trust

25. I believe that my leadership style can enhance trust among school members.
26. I have good interactions with teachers.

Decentralization

27. The decision-making authority is passed down to lower organizational levels in the school.
28. Teachers are encouraged to exercise their professional judgment about their works.
29. The school operates efficiently and smoothly.

Information sharing

30. I am willing to share crucial information regarding the school with my teachers.
31. I provide information about the job to be done and the methods to be used to my subordinates.
32. I discuss with my subordinates about their jobs.

Collaboration

33. I perceive leadership as a process of coordinating efforts and moving individuals together as a group.
34. When school members collaborate, they bring their own vision and talents to solving mutual problems.