Application of the Restitution Model to Staff Development

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Abstract

Staff development is most effective when undertaken in a supportive and respectful environment that promotes self-evaluation. These same principles are the basis of the Restitution model, which was created to provide specific direction for school staff in working effectively with students to address behaviour concerns. This model can be adapted to provide concrete steps for administrators to take when working with staff, thus ensuring that the ideal conditions are created for staff members to develop to their fullest potential.

The development of a skilled and collaborative staff team is a primary administrative concern in schools. Unfortunately, the practices that have historically been used in supervising and evaluating staff may not foster this desired outcome. While there are identified leadership qualities that are effective in assisting staff members to develop their capacity, a model that could be used by administrators in evaluation and problem-solving would provide specific and concrete direction for working with staff. Restitution is a model that was developed to provide teachers with specific steps to take in working with children to solve problems, build relationships, encourage self-evaluation, and strengthen skills. Because the basic principles of the Restitution model are identical with those that have been identified as important in an effective leadership approach, the model could be adapted to provide a structured format for administrators to take when working with staff.

The traditional approach to managing staff is based on external motivation (William Glasser Institute, 2010). The supervisor's role in this approach is to set the expectations for staff members, and evaluate their performance in meeting these expectations. When an individual meets expectations, he or she receives a reward; when expectations are not met, punishments are provided. The belief behind the traditional approach is that personal motivation comes from an individual seeking to acquire rewards and avoid punishments, and that without these motivators, people would be lazy and ineffective in their work (Pink, 2009). Part of the supervisor's role in this approach is to provide motivation for staff members.

The traditional approach is hierarchical because the supervisor has the power to make and enforce decisions. Information generally flows in one direction: from the supervisor down to the rest of the staff. Despite the significant problems with using this approach, it continues to be one that is valued in schools today (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). There is a perception that assertiveness, decisiveness, and powerful are traits that a leader requires in order to be an effective administrator.

There are flaws in applying external motivation and top-down management to Canadian schooling contexts. When external motivators are the focus, dishonesty may be bred as people attempt to hide their deficiencies. They may take credit for things that others have done, or blame others for mistakes that they have made. In this type of environment, co-workers are seen as competition, and cooperation and teamwork may suffer as a result (Brown & Gossen, 2011). People may become hesitant to take risks or try anything new for fear of failing and being judged (Starr, 2011). Thus, creativity and high achievement may be stifled (Dweck, 2006; Pink, 2009). Ironically, the very factors that many people believe are key to creating motivation, in fact, have been shown to result in the exact opposite outcome.

An additional problem with external motivation is that it requires supervision to be successful. When people are behind closed doors, and no one is there to judge them, they will act in whatever way they choose, not necessarily in the manner set forth by the administrator (Khoboli & O'toole, 2011). In contrast, when people decide for themselves that they want to

behave in a certain way, they do not require supervision, as they are internally motivated to reach specific goals.

When administrators take on the role of boss and evaluator, it creates a hierarchy within the team. Those with less power frequently feel that they have no voice, which creates an "us versus them" division between administration and teachers (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008, p. 127; Starr, 2011, p. 656). Unless all members of a team feel valued and respected, there is a great risk that potential will be lost due to the hesitancy of the less powerful people in sharing their ideas and opinions, and the administrator being closed to hearing those ideas and opinions. When people feel coerced by others, such as when an administrator makes decisions without input from the rest of the team, the natural reaction is open resistance (Brown & Gossen, 2011; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Starr, 2011). People do not produce their best work when they are working in an environment that they feel is not respectful of their needs (Pierce, 2007). Thus, the top-down management approach results not only in good ideas not being brought forward, but also in staff members undermining what could be a good idea because they were not involved in the process of developing a plan.

A different approach to management has emerged due to the problems with traditional leadership. In this approach, there is recognition that people perform best when they are in a supportive, caring environment, not one that is filled with fear ("Maslow's Hierarchy," n.d.). Instead of the administrator being at the top of the hierarchy and telling people what to do, this type of manager believes that there are multiple ways to solve problems, and that by eliciting the perspectives of different people, not only will better decisions be made, but staff members will feel more valued and engaged in their work (Khoboli & O'toole, 2011; Pink, 2009; Starr, 2011). The focus becomes one of building on people's strengths as opposed to confronting them on their weaknesses (William Glasser Institute, 2010). When individuals feel that they are valued and that others recognise the strengths they bring to their work, a sense of team is created. The administrator's role in this approach is to facilitate learning and sharing, building relationships within the team, and creating common, shared values and vision (Piggot-Irvine, 2010; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Instead of the focus being on the use of external factors, such as punishments or rewards, the focus is on helping people to self-evaluate, to reflect on their own personal values and beliefs, and to do their best work because they are internally motivated to do so.

Under this type of management, problems and mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and growth. People are encouraged to be creative, take risks, and try new things without fear of being judged (Wise & Jacobo, 2012). Instead of giving up and feeling hopeless when things do not work out, challenges are seen as part of a learning process, and not failures (Heath & Heath, 2010). Staff members are more likely to stay motivated and feel positive, even when faced with difficult circumstances.

The difficulty for many administrators is that this type of management does not come naturally. Most people are very familiar with the traditional management model, having experienced it themselves in schools and workplaces. Although administrators may express a desire to work in a collaborative and supportive workplace, the specific skills for creating such an environment may be foreign to them.

The Restitution model was developed to give teachers direction in creating a supportive environment wherein children can learn from mistakes and reflect on their personal values and beliefs in order to find the internal motivation to reach their fullest potential (Brown & Gossen, 2011). In order to achieve these outcomes, the model identifies three specific steps to take: stabilize the identity, validate the individual's needs, and encourage the examination of the personal beliefs and values that are important to the individual. Because effective leaders desire to create the same environment for their employees as Restitution aims to create for children, it follows that the use of these same strategies may provide direction for administrators in their work with staff.

The first step in the Restitution process is stabilizing the identity (Gossen, 2004). When people are asked why they are doing things the way that they are, or are asked to consider changing, it is natural that they may become defensive, and feel that they are being criticized. When people realize that there is a better approach to take than the one that has been utilized, they may feel guilty about having not done their best work. The step of stabilizing the identity reinforces to the individual that not being perfect is not an indication of inadequacy, but is simply a part of life, and that making mistakes can provide an opportunity to learn. If an open, low defensive and high trust environment does not exist, the process of evaluation and consideration of new learning may be hindered (Piggot-Irvine, 2010). People need to know that they are in a safe place, and are appreciated and accepted for whom they are before learning and problem-solving can effectively occur.

Administrators can achieve this step by speaking on a regular basis about their belief in lifelong learning, and that risk-taking and making mistakes are necessary components of improvement. The administrator may share that he or she has felt and acted in the same way in similar situations. When mistakes are made, or changes are suggested, there is no judgement of the person. Instead of acting as the expert and telling the teacher what to do, the administrator indicates that he or she believes that all behaviour is an individual's best choice in the moment, given the information that is possessed at the time.

The second step in the Restitution process is to validate the individual's needs (Gossen, 2004). The belief behind this step is that all behaviour is purposeful and that there is always a reason for the way that people behave. When talking to staff members about making changes to an approach or trying something new, needs can be validated by asking questions to understand the teachers' point of view, and acknowledging that their viewpoint is legitimate. Instead of behaviour being labelled as inadequate, bad, or a mistake, behaviour is seen as an attempt to meet a need. The needs that could be addressed through the implementation of a new approach or initiative can then be identified. The conversation changes from one about personal inadequacies to one that is focused on the search for more effective options.

For example, a teacher may appear resistant to trying a new literacy program. If the principal confronts the teacher about having a bad attitude, the relationship between teacher and administrator could easily be damaged, and the teacher may become even less likely to embrace the new program. If, however, the administrator seeks to find out the need behind the teacher's hesitancy, he or she may find that the teacher feels unable to implement the program effectively without training. Instead of the problem being identified as a personality flaw, a valid need is uncovered, and the teacher and administrator can create a plan to address the teacher's concern.

The third step in the Restitution process is to encourage people to think about the values and beliefs they hold, and what kind of people they desire to be (Gossen, 2004). This step can be applied both at an individual level as well as at a system level. At an individual level, people are encouraged to consider what is really important to them. When a person has a clear picture of what he or she desires, punishments or rewards are no longer required in order to elicit behaviour. Instead, behaviour is chosen because it is seen as the right thing to do. Allowing people an opportunity to examine their values and beliefs is key in developing self-motivation.

At a system level, discussion of values and beliefs builds relationships and a sense of community between people (Gossen, 2004). When people have conversations about beliefs, they develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives, which promotes greater understanding between staff members. When common convictions are found, staff members are able to set clear goals for their work together. A shared vision is necessary for schools to work effectively (Piggot-Irvine, 2010; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). When a common mission is identified, it ensures that individuals within a team are not working at cross-purposes, and that efforts are all focused toward the same end.

To illustrate this step, one may consider a situation in which a teacher is engaging in yelling and threatening in order to manage the challenging behaviour of a student. Instead of the

administrator taking on the role of expert, and telling the teacher that this behaviour is not appropriate, he or she could instead inquire about what the teacher's vision is of an ideal classroom. In this writer's experience, most teachers identify that they desire a classroom that is safe and respectful. Once these values are identified, the teacher can be encouraged to consider whether yelling and threatening have been effective in creating this kind of a classroom. Given time to reflect, the teacher may recognize that he or she is not modelling respect for the students, and that the child's behaviour is escalating instead of improving. The teacher now becomes internally motivated to try a new approach because of the recognition that the current strategies are not effective. Facilitating a similar discussion with all staff members can create a common agreement with regards to behavioural interventions and a sense of purpose as a staff team.

While it may seem obvious that it is important to discuss the concerns of staff and take time to consider options, the reality in many schools is that there is little time available for this process to occur (Kaniuka, 2012; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Without time for reflection being purposefully provided, the daily work of staff often remains focused on managing situations in a reactive manner instead of considering the overall vision of what is desired and planning for how to achieve it. While some people feel that conversations about beliefs take too much time or are superfluous, they are necessary in order for cooperative, collaborative, and proactive work to be accomplished.

Helping staff to constantly learn and improve is a goal shared by most administrators. Ironically, the traditional approaches that are frequently used, including the use of external motivators and outside evaluation, may decrease the likelihood of change occurring. The Restitution process, due to its focus on working with people to understand and validate their needs and encourage self-evaluation, provides a useful framework for administrators to utilize in their work with staff, which aligns with the characteristics that have been identified in the most effective leaders. The use of Restitution can create a caring and respectful environment, wherein making mistakes and learning are encouraged, and staff members are given the opportunity to reflect on what they want for themselves and their work, thereby creating the ideal conditions for people to develop to their fullest potential.

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