

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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# A Research-Based Approach to the President-Principal Model: Problems, Dynamics, and High Performance through Administrative Alignment

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*Many Catholic high schools have transitioned to a president-principal administrative structure. This article discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the model, revealing pertinent issues that must be addressed while operationalizing the model. Recent research supports some aspects of the model, but it is no panacea. Clear job descriptions, role expectations, and administrative alignment can help the model succeed.*

The popularity of the president-principal model heralds a paradigmatic change that deploys full-time administrative attention to the dual concerns of long-term institutional advancement and the daily demands of leading a Catholic school marked by academic excellence (James, 2007). This model has become a widespread administrative structure of Catholic secondary schools in the twenty-first century (Urbancic, 2004). This article will focus on the problematic aspects of the model, explore the dynamics that might lie behind these problematic areas, recommend constructive action that can be taken by presidents and principals to improve their performance through administrative alignment, and provide some insight for those considering moving into the model and those currently using the model.

### The Rise of the President-Principal Model

The president-principal model became a dominant administrative model for Catholic secondary education as an evolutionary adaptation to environmental change that has gradually won widespread acceptance (see Table 1). In the period after 1965, termed “a generation of crises” (Walch, 1996, p. 169), Catholic secondary schools responded to the rapid drop in enrollment, the rise in lay faculty and requisite higher salaries and benefits, and the increased competition for market-savvy students by creating lay boards, increasing tuition, and by adopting recruitment, development, and business operation

Table 1

*The Use of the Principal, President-Principal, and "Other" Administrative Models in Catholic High Schools (1992-2004)*

	1992	1998	2004
President-Principal	10%	21%	47%
Other	10%	12%	6%
Autonomous principal	80%	67%	47%

*Note.* Sources (Guerra, 1993, 1998; Urbancic, 2004)

models used in higher education (James, 2004). This newly expansive role for Catholic school administration made it increasingly difficult for an autonomous principal to provide adequate leadership in all these areas. Dygert (2000) reports that "the majority of presidents and principals agreed that the most important reasons for the model are development and fundraising along with the related activities of public relations, marketing, and strategic planning" (p. 18).

Several studies point to the success of the model from the self-reported perceptions of the practitioners (Dygert, 1998; Jesuit Secondary Educational Association [JSEA], 1991; Mullen 1998; Pasi, 1995). The studies also note that the success of the model is highly relationship dependent (Dygert, 1998; JSEA, 1991; Mullen 1998; Pasi, 1995). Pasi (1995) states, "virtually all indicated that the key to the success of the structure is the personalities of the president and the principal" (p. 50). Administrator satisfaction is also correlated with the administrator's assessment of the model's success (Mullen, 1998). However, logic dictates that a necessary condition may not be a sufficient one; personally compatible and satisfied administrators may not necessitate the success of the model.

### **An Unworkable Model?**

Bennis (1989), commenting on the CEO-COO model (the corporate analog of the president-principal model), remarks, "Ironically...even when the CEO and COO function happily together, they can run into big trouble, as mutual admiration is not necessarily relevant, much less productive" (p. 78). Some evidence from the field supports this conclusion. A recent study by Brown (2004) of personality within the president-principal model found that the president's emotional intelligence empathy score is negatively correlated with the principal's emotional intelligence motivation score. The generalization of this

finding is that the more empathetic the president, the less goal oriented the principal. Dygert (1998) in surveying presidents and principals found that 3% “*strongly agree*” and 23% “*somewhat agree*” that constituents perceive the model as unnecessarily bureaucratic. Dygert, citing the presentation of Nick and Doyle (1994), contends that this negative perception likely will prevail if constituents do not see any visible benefits to the school as a result of the implementation of the model. One president went so far as to say that “fund-raising and institutional development efforts must increase or implementing the model is pointless” (Dygert, 1998, p. 184).

Bennis (1989) argues that that the CEO-COO structure is “a jerry-built rig, which emerged out of perceived need and chance rather than choice, and like every fragile, sensitive machine, it’s only as good as its parts” (p. 77). Bennis states that it “is so susceptible to problems because, at bottom, it’s unworkable” (p. 79). Bennis contends it is unworkable because the two roles are “inextricably interwoven” (p. 79) and the potential for envy, interference, isolation, competition, and conflict are too great. Is this assessment also true of the president-principal model?

In order to address this question adequately, the problems cited by practitioners must be taken seriously and thoroughly examined in light of scholarly work on organizational theory, paradigms and paradigm change theory, and research on effective teamwork. This deep understanding of the problems will provide practitioners with the opportunity to understand properly the dynamics at work behind the problems cited in the literature, adequately diagnose the true nature of these problems, and proscribe a corrective action (e.g., discontinue the model, continue in the model with different personnel, continue in the model with a new understanding and plan of action, etc). If the president-principal model is indeed a workable model, then the corrective action utilized in addressing these problems may also provide insight into the high-performance functioning of the model. This deep analysis will provide ample grist for self-reflection for those currently using the model and those considering moving into the model.

### **Problems with the Model**

In three different studies, practitioners were asked about problem areas with the president-principal model. The JSEA (1991) study asked, “What would you identify as detracting from a successful and satisfying working relationship?” (p. 15). Pasi (1995) asked, “What do you believe are the major characteristics that detract from a successful and satisfying relationship?” (p. 47). Dygert (1998) asked most directly, “Which of the following factors

are problem areas with the model in your school?" (p. 258). The JSEA study utilized the open-ended question in a survey, the Pasi study utilized it in interviews, and the Dygert study utilized a Likert-scale response with an opportunity for comments within a survey. The results can be found in Table 2.

Table 2  
*The Percentage of Respondents Identifying Problem Areas in the President-Principal Model*

	Dygert (1998) <i>n</i> = 202	Pasi (1995) <i>n</i> = 9	JSEA (1991) <i>n</i> = 86
Lack of clear understanding by faculty and staff	47%		
Ambiguity about functions	44%	33%*	20%
Interference of one in other's area	43%	78%	24%
Ambiguity about lines of authority	36%		
Poor communication	31%	56%	28%
Faculty/staff play president/principal off one another	31%		
Attitude of autonomy rather than collaboration	29%	22%	20%
Inflexibility	20%	11%*	
Disagreement about philosophy, goals, policies	20%	33%	15%
Personality conflicts	19%	22%	14%
Isolation: Failure to meet regularly	19%		
Competition between the two	14%		
Lack of mutual support	13%		
Lack of mutual trust	13%	100%	19%
Faculty/staff lack motivation	13%		
Faculty/staff lack direction	12%		
Jealousy between the two	12%	22%*	13%
Lack of confidence in others' ability/incompetence		11%	
Faculty/staff caught in power play	8%		

*Note.*\*This item was mentioned in the study, but the number of respondents was not given. The percentage shown is derived from reading the context of the narrative of the study and is therefore approximate.

While the Dygert study asked specifically about problem areas “in your school,” and while the percentage of respondents citing problems appears high, it must be noted that fewer than 6% of the respondents listed any problem as a “major problem area,” and fewer than 10% listed any as a “problem

area” (p. 161). Therefore, it must be assumed that the bulk of the responses are referencing what they consider to be “minor problems” (p. 161).

Mullen (1998) found that “generally speaking, for the dual responding schools, the larger the school, the greater the level of satisfaction with the model” (p. 44). If satisfaction results in part from a lack of conflict, conflict may be inversely related to the size of the school. It is certainly a logical inference that smaller schools might be more susceptible to the problem areas cited above, such as lack of clear understanding, ambiguity about functions, interference, etc. However, large schools may have their own problems with the model. Brown (2004) found that the president’s goal orientation is negatively correlated with the size of the school. The generalization of this finding is that the larger the school (and presumably the less pressing the concerns of long-term viability, growth, etc.), the less goal oriented the president. Could it be that larger schools, though less susceptible to administrative conflict, nevertheless are more susceptible to presidential advancement lethargy?

The dichotomous division of principal as “inside person” and president as “outside person” first suggested in the JSEA (1991) study is not so simple a divide. There are many roles that are shared (Dygert, 1998; JSEA, 1991; Mullen, 1998; Salvatore, 2000), yet the particulars about how these roles are shared is not always clear (Dygert, 1998; Heft, 2005). The JSEA study identifies student recruitment as the responsibility of the principal, as did 34.9% of the presidents in Mullen’s study. However, 32.5% of presidents viewed student recruitment as a shared responsibility, and 27.2% saw it as the responsibility of the president (Mullen, 1998). Furthermore, presidents as “outside persons” can alienate themselves physically and emotionally from the populations that they serve. Dygert (1998) observes that presidents “can find themselves isolated from the populations with which their position would have them most involved” (pp. 140-141). One might surmise the difficulty of a president in abandoning an “inside” role, especially for one who had experienced success and drew personal satisfaction from relating to students formerly in the roles of teacher and principal. Rowe (2003) relates a presidential candidate who withdrew his candidacy when the board chair stated “the whole job is about fundraising, not school administration” (p. 58). While there may be an organizational need for the president to be the “outside person,” is there a functional and personal need for the president to be “inside?” Might this be the source of envy, interference, isolation, competition, and conflict?

Longtime president Rowe (2003) rejects the notion of president as “Mr./Ms. Outside,” writing:

Do not let anyone try to sell you on the idea that the principal is “Mr./Ms. Inside” and the president is “Mr./Ms. Outside.” As president of the school, you cannot honestly be talking to the “outside” if you are not sure what the “inside” is doing. And the “inside” is the essence of the mission that the president is called to lead and monitor: the offering of educational opportunity, personal encouragement, and effective direction to students. (p. 27)

Rowe also contends that the authority of the “second tier” administration (principal, director of business operations, director of development) is “not autonomous, but is rather derived” from the president; “each person’s individual job is to creatively implement the responsibilities that have been delegated to him/her, according to the goals and policies set by the trustees and articulated by the head” (p. 62). Does this understanding validate any and all “interference” in the role of “second tier” administration, thereby rendering the question of interference moot?

A cursory reading of the research on the president-principal model might lead one to believe that the model is workable and effective so long as the major problem areas identified in Table 2 above are addressed. If all constituents are educated about the model, if job descriptions are clarified (eliminating ambiguity about functions and the interference in each other’s area), if lines of authority are specified, if structures for ongoing communication are created, if compatible personalities are found to fill the roles, then the model will work and produce measurable benefits. A deeper analysis reveals that the problems cited extend beyond administrator role clarity and conflict to issues of productivity, focus, and the alignment of their disparate functions. These problems comprise the core of Bennis’s (1989) critique that the two roles are “inextricably interwoven” (p. 79) and cannot be separated.

### **Interim Conclusions**

The president-principal model came about as a result of increased needs of secondary schools in the areas of development, fundraising, public relations, marketing, and strategic planning. Self-reported perceptions of practitioners reveal that the success of the model is very relationship dependent and that self-reported success is correlated with satisfaction with the model.

However, is satisfaction with the model really a marker of its success? Might not satisfaction be a necessary but not sufficient requirement? The model is sometimes viewed as unnecessarily bureaucratic (Dygart, 2000), and ultimately success ought to be measured in increased performance in those areas that necessitated its creation, namely development, fundraising,

public relations, marketing, and strategic planning. Furthermore, questions have been raised as to whether a division of the chief administrative position can be effectively done (Bennis, 1989).

The limited research on the model indicates that its strengths include the deployment of an additional administrative person whose focus is the critically important areas of development: fundraising, public relations, marketing, and strategic planning (Dygert, 2000; JSEA, 1991). This person presumably frees up the principal to focus on the day-to-day issues of running the school and providing instructional leadership. The structure has also recorded high levels of administrator satisfaction (Dygert, 2000; JSEA, 1991; Mullen, 1998). Satisfaction generally increases with the size of the school (Mullen, 1998), but an anecdotal finding from Brown (2004) suggests that larger schools with greater satisfaction may have presidents with less goal orientation (i.e., presidential advancement lethargy). The weaknesses of the model include the cost of an additional administrator (Dygert, 1998), the dependence of the success of the model on the personalities of the respective administrators holding the positions (Dygert, 1998; JSEA, 1991; Mullen, 1998; Pasi, 1995), and a host of problem areas that are not viewed as major problems by a significant number of the respondents (Dygert, 1998).

The larger looming question is whether the chief administrative position can be effectively split up into the roles of president-principal, and if it can, are there lessons from the problematic areas of the model that might provide insight into its high-performance functioning?

### **Deeper Analysis Using Three Lenses**

The problems associated with the model will be analyzed through the lenses of scholarly work on organizational theory, paradigms and paradigm change theory, and research on effective teamwork. The concept of alignment, and its use by the administrative team, will be introduced as a mechanism to move toward high performance. The assumption that lies behind this analysis is that if critiques from the business management research literature predict and help explain the problems identified by practitioners of the president-principal model, then it follows that these problems may not be unique to the president-principal model, but are manifestations of deeper organizational issues.

The operative questions are: What are these deeper organizational issues that predict and explain the phenomena cited by practitioners as problematic? What, if anything, can be done to address these problematic issues? Each section that follows first articulates the general principles appropriated from the particular lens (organizational theory, paradigms and paradigm change theory,

and research on effective teamwork), an application of the theory to the president-principal model, and finally implications derived from the application of the theory to the president-principal model. The larger question as to whether the chief administrative position can be effectively split into the roles of president-principal will be answered and the lessons learned from this analysis will provide insight into the high-performance functioning of the model.

### **Organizational Theory**

*Reframing Organizations*, a work by Bolman and Deal (2003), synthesizes the major intellectual stances of organizational theory and research, and provides four perspectives (or frames) for viewing the operation of an organization. While all four frames are helpful in understanding the president-principal model, the structural frame is of particular importance. Two of the structural frame assumptions are that “organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and a clear division of labor” and that “appropriate forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh” (p. 45). The two assumptions prefigure a central and enduring tension within the president-principal model and in organizations in general: how to allocate work that is too much for one person to do (differentiation) and how to coordinate roles and units once responsibilities have been divided (integration). Vertical coordination is accomplished through authority, rules and policies, planning, and control systems. Lateral coordination is achieved through meetings, task forces, coordinating roles, matrix structures, and networks.

### **Applications of Organizational Theory**

It has been suggested that these inherent tensions lie at the heart of many of the president-principal conflicts cited in the literature (James, 2005). The lack of coordination mechanisms to provide integration of the differentiated roles of president and principal and loose role design may explain the problems identified by practitioners of “poor communication,” “lack of mutual trust,” “lack of mutual support,” and “isolation: failure to meet regularly.” Pasi (1995) observed that “virtually all of the principals stressed the importance of both administrators understanding their roles clearly. They stressed the importance of regular, scheduled, and candid interchanges” (p. 50).

Similarly, job overlap and the underuse of the president/overuse of the principal may be at least partially responsible for the problems of “interference of one in another’s area.” One principal interviewed by Pasi (1995) felt that the president “wants to choose certain of my responsibilities and some



of his, depending upon the whim of the moment and his own personal preference. The result is that he meddles when I least expect it” (p. 51). Pasi, quoting a principal, put it this way: “If the president does not know what to do with his or her time, does not like doing what he or she has to do, or does not trust that the principal is performing well, the temptation can be for the president to interfere” (p. 53). Ironically, development work, cited most often as the purpose for the president-principal model (98%), is the function cited most often by respondents (24%) as not getting enough of the president’s time (Dygert, 1998). Indeed, 11% of presidents specifically stated that “donor cultivation and personal solicitation are often neglected by presidents” (p. 141).

Lack of job clarity may be responsible for “lack of clear understanding by faculty and staff,” “ambiguity about functions,” “ambiguity about lines of authority,” “faculty/staff play president/principal off one another,” as well as “interference of one in another’s area.” Dygert (1998) aptly states, “The challenge for chief executives is to do the right work, not just the things they are familiar with and like to do” (p. 89). This is complicated by the fact that most presidents are former principals (60% served formerly as principals of the schools where they are now president) and are quite familiar and comfortable doing the work of the principal. Dygert summarized findings in observing that

individuals who fill the positions of president and principal have to be willing to share leadership, have to know how to and want to function in their particular position, and have to allow the other party to fulfill his or her job without interference. (p. 160)

The excessive autonomy of both roles may explain the “attitude of autonomy rather than collaboration” and “isolation: failure to meet regularly.” Goal-less orientation and irresponsible abdication of responsibilities may be responsible for “disagreements about philosophy, goals, policies,” “faculty/staff lack motivation,” and “faculty/staff lack direction.” One principal interviewed by Pasi (1995) who did not believe in the model stated, “Perhaps we have run our own shows for so long, neither of us wants to give into the other on any matter of substance” (p. 50).

The president-principal model represents a shift from a Mintzberg simple structure to a professional bureaucracy (James, 2005). As such, Bolman and Deal (2003) observe that “control relies heavily on professional training and indoctrination” (p. 77) and that “though producing many benefits, this arrangement leads to problems of coordination and quality control” (p. 77). Bolman and Deal also observe that “a professional bureaucracy

responds slowly to external change” (p. 77). These issues will surface again in the paradigm section that follows.

The implications drawn from the application of Bolman and Deal’s (2003) analysis to the problems cited by practitioners of the president-principal model are: (a) tensions between the president and principal roles are an inherent element of structural design that cannot be eliminated, only managed either poorly or well; (b) appropriate forms of role clarity, coordination, and control are necessary to ensure effective functioning; (c) the shift to a “professional bureaucracy” represents a paradigm shift that adds complexity to the issue.

### Paradigms and Paradigm Change Theory

Kuhn (1962) laid out in the landmark work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* the nature of paradigms as a controlling mental construct in scientific advancement. Kuhn’s notions of paradigms were quickly appropriated to other disciplines and provide a powerful framework for examining the move of Catholic secondary schools to the president-principal model.

Kuhn (1962) argues that certain beliefs form the foundation of the “educational initiation that prepares and licenses the student for professional practice,” and that the nature of this “rigorous and rigid” preparation helps ensure that these beliefs have a “deep hold” on the student’s mind (p. 5). But sometimes a problem “resists the reiterated onslaught of the ablest members of the group within whose competence it falls” (p. 5). Kuhn observes that this failure “lead[s] the profession at last to a new set of commitments...known in this essay as scientific revolutions” (p. 6). Scientific revolutions produce new paradigms for dealing with the new problems. “Paradigms gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute” (p. 23). However, more successful does not mean completely successful.

Kuhn (1962) notes that the appropriation of the new paradigm is not uniform because “they do not all learn the same application of these laws, and they are not therefore all affected in the same ways by changes in...practice. It follows that...it is not the same paradigm for them all” (p. 50). Furthermore, a new discovery “involves an extended, though not necessarily long, process of conceptual assimilation” (p. 56) that may indeed lead to a new paradigm. Complicating matters further, “since the new paradigms are born from old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary...that the traditional paradigm had previously employed” (p. 148).

The power of traditional paradigms to control thought and behavior is wryly captured in a quote from Planck’s *Scientific Autobiography*: “a new scientific

truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it” (as cited in Kuhn, 1962, p. 150). Kuhn contends that the quote is an overstatement and that most can be converted. “Individual scientists embrace a new paradigm for all sorts of reasons and usually for several at once” including those “outside the sphere of science entirely,” and “the idiosyncrasies of autobiography and personality” (pp. 151-152). Arguments for the new paradigm are most successful when “they can solve the problems that have led the old one to a crisis,” when they “display a quantitative precision strikingly better than its older competitor,” and when they “appeal to the individual’s sense of the appropriate or the aesthetic” (pp. 153-154).

### **Applications of Paradigms and Paradigm Change Theory**

Kuhn’s (1962) analysis of scientific paradigms provides a powerful framework for understanding the dynamics at work in the shift to the president-principal model. The principalship and principal preparation programs deeply ingrain in students what it means to be a principal or head of school. Heads of school in the period following the “generation of crises” (Walch, 1996, p. 169) were confronting enrollment, marketing, and financial issues that challenged the ablest members and led to new commitments to recruitment, marketing, and advancement efforts.

The president-principal model gained ascendancy because it was more successful than the autonomous principal model in solving these new problems that practitioners had come to recognize as acute. The president-principal model, though possibly uniform in theory, is not uniform in practice, because not everyone has learned or appropriated the full utility of the paradigm. Consequently, the model is a multivariiegated phenomenon that represents a significant change in some schools and a negligible change in others. Indeed, Dygert (1998) observes that “despite the fact that the model is becoming increasingly popular, the model means very different things in various situations” (p. 7). Dygert also notes that “in two instances, respondents indicated that the model as used in their schools is not really a dual model, but that there are multiple officers serving below the president” (p. 128).

The discovery of the impact of advancement work, marketing and recruitment efforts, etc. for the school involves an extended, though not necessarily long, process of conceptual assimilation for the autonomous principal that may indeed lead to a new paradigm. Complicating matters further, the new paradigm, born of the old, uses terms and titles from the old model, such as principal or head of school, that leads to misunderstandings regarding the

relationships among and between the various constituents. Dygert (1998) relates the observations of respondents that “the model demands a readjustment of expectations of all involved, that there is a tendency for parents and the public to try to go right to the president and bypass the principal” (p. 163).

A cynical view would hold that autonomous principals, and the faculty that work for them, must all die before the full appropriation of the paradigm shift can be realized. However, conversions are possible, and converts are won over by a variety of reasons, including the idiosyncrasies of personality and autobiography. Dygert (1998) relates the comment of a principal who stated “a school needs a president who does not want to also be a principal, and a principal who has no desire to be a president” (p. 160).

The most successful arguments for the president-principal model are those that show that it solves the problems that have led the autonomous principal model to a crisis, that display a quantitative precision showing that the model is strikingly better than its older competitor, and finally arguments that appeal to the individual’s sense of the appropriate or the aesthetic.

The implications drawn from the application of Kuhn’s (1962) analysis to the problems cited by practitioners of the president-principal model are that (a) while many might be using the president-principal model and may even agree on the differentiated roles, the practitioners of the model may not be operating within the model in the same way (in fact, Kuhn’s analysis predicts that they do not) due to the persistence of conceptual assimilation, a principal in the autonomous principal model might be acting more like a president (taking on much of the role of president without the title), or conversely, a president in a president-principal model might be acting more like an autonomous principal (taking on the title of president, but not the role); (b) since the vocabulary and apparatus of the old paradigm persist, misunderstandings are bound to happen since the president-principal model reconceptualizes the relationships between and among all constituents; (c) the conversion of a president into the role of president will not happen simply and automatically because the new president-principal model is better at addressing the challenges of institutional advancement, marketing, and recruitment, but because the president decides to perform this role.

### **Research on Effective Teamwork and Administrative Alignment**

Larson and LaFasto (1989) identified eight characteristics of highly successful teams through their 3-year grounded theory research of 75 highly successful teams: a clear elevating goal, a results-driven structure, competent members, unified commitment, collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external

support and recognition, and principled leadership. While each characteristic is applicable to the president-principal model because all are necessary for highly successful teams, this article will focus narrowly on the collaborative climate element. The collaborative climate element was selected since collaboration and the related concept of trust were cited in the research on the president-principal model as both very important to the success of the model and whose absences were noted as problematic (Dygert, 1998; JSEA, 1991; Pasi, 1995).

Larson and LaFasto (1989) found in their interviews that “working well together” was characterized in one of two ways:

First, it was sometimes attributed to structural features of teams, such as clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities, or clear lines of communication, record keeping, and documentation. Second, it was often characterized as a feeling or climate that described relationships among members of the team or between the team and its leader. It was usually a climate that fostered collaboration, and interviewees, when pushed, almost always explained this climate by referring, in one way or another, to “trust.” (p. 85)

Larson and LaFasto’s content analysis found that trust is produced in a climate that includes four elements: (a) honesty—integrity, no lies, no exaggerations; (b) openness—a willingness to share, and a receptivity to information, perceptions, ideas; (c) consistency—predictable behavior and responses; and (d) respect—treating people with dignity and fairness.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) found that trust promotes communication, which makes collaboration and teamwork possible. Four themes emerged from their research to explain why trust fosters teamwork: (a) trust allows team members to stay problem focused; (b) trust promotes more efficient communication and coordination; (c) trust improves the quality of collaborative outcomes; (d) trust leads to compensating behaviors. However, they found that trust is so fragile, that a single transgression can severely compromise the relationship.

Trust and collaboration are ultimately created as an outgrowth of involvement and autonomy. Larson and LaFasto (1989) cite as an exemplar the technique used by a team leader to achieve involvement and autonomy simultaneously:

First, he makes sure that the goal is crystal clear and that everyone on the team is absolutely committed to the achievement of that goal. The team must be, he says, ready to walk through brick walls in order to succeed. Then team members

sit down together and wrestle with the question, “Now how in the hell are we going to do it?” Trust and collaboration come from being involved in planning the attack, working out the strategy for accomplishing the goal, and knowing what the team’s approach is going to be and how it all fits together—recognizing that achieving the goal is going to depend on how well the team works together in developing and implementing its strategy. (p. 93)

Involvement and autonomy are mechanisms used in the process of administrative alignment. Senge (1990) refers to alignment as “when a group of people function as a whole” (p. 234). Senge notes that “in most teams, the energies of individual members work at cross purposes....The fundamental characteristic of the relatively unaligned team is wasted energy. Individuals may work extraordinarily hard, but their efforts do not efficiently translate to team effort” (p. 234). In contrast, Larson and Lafasto (1989) refer to unified commitment as the primary characteristic of an aligned team:

Certainly, it is “team spirit.” It is a sense of loyalty and dedication to the team. It is an unrestrained sense of excitement and enthusiasm about the team. It is a willingness to do anything that has to be done to help the team succeed. It is an intense identification with a group of people. It is a loss of self. “Unified commitment” is very difficult to understand unless you’ve experienced it. And even if you have experienced it, it is difficult to put into words. (p. 73)

The process of administrative alignment utilizes autonomy and involvement to produce trust, collaboration, and a unified commitment. However, Senge (1990) notes that in alignment there is a “commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another’s efforts. Individuals do not sacrifice their personal interests to the larger team vision; rather, the shared vision becomes an extension of their personal visions” (p. 235). Senge emphatically observes “alignment is the *necessary condition* before empowering the individual will empower the whole team” (p. 235). The lesson here is that empowered individuals do not create team alignment. It is a shared vision built upon shared knowledge and a shared understanding of the discrepancy between the ideal situation and the current situation along with a concrete plan of action to which individual members are committed that creates alignment.

## **Applications of Teamwork Research**

The teamwork analysis performed by Larson and LaFasto (1989) provides a framework for understanding how environmental factors either contribute to trust, which in turn promotes collaboration or makes it impossible. All 9 principals interviewed by Pasi (1995) cited trust and respect as significant characteristics that help ensure a successful working relationship.

According to Larson and LaFasto (1989), involvement and autonomy must be exercised within a context of honesty, openness, consistency, and respect. This understanding is captured by Pasi (1995) in summarizing the findings from interviews with principals. Pasi observed that

virtually all of the principals stressed the importance of both administrators understanding their roles clearly. They stressed the importance of regular, scheduled, and candid interchanges. If mutual respect does not exist, there seemed to be universal agreement that the president-principal model would not work. (p. 52)

The implications drawn from the application of the research on teamwork to the problems cited by practitioners of the president-principal model are: (a) working well together requires clearly defined roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, or clear lines of communication, record keeping, and documentation; (b) trust promotes communication, which makes collaboration and teamwork possible; (c) trust and collaboration are an outgrowth of involvement and autonomy; (d) alignment must precede empowerment of individuals, otherwise the result is misaligned action by individuals doing their jobs or coordinated action without an understanding of the higher purpose of their work.

## **Interim Conclusions**

The purpose of the foregoing analysis was to answer the question of whether or not the president-principal model is workable, and if so, are there lessons from the problematic areas of the model that might provide insight into its high-performance functioning? This question was prefaced by two others: What are the deeper organizational issues that predict and explain the phenomena cited by practitioners as problematic? What, if anything, can be done to address these problematic issues? The research on organizational theory, paradigms and paradigm change theory, and research on effective teamwork were appropriated in order to understand the dynamics at work behind the problems cited in the research on the president-principal model. Several conclusions were drawn from the application of this research to the president-principal model. These conclusions represent an understanding of the deeper

organizational issues that predict and explain the phenomena cited by practitioners as problematic.

1. Tensions between the president and principal roles are an inherent element of structural design that cannot be eliminated, only managed.
2. Appropriate forms of role clarity, coordination, and control are necessary to ensure effective functioning.
3. The shift to a professional bureaucracy represents a paradigm shift that adds complexity to the issue.
4. While many might be using the president-principal model and may even agree on the differentiated roles, the practitioners of the model may not be operating within the model in the same way.
5. Since the vocabulary and apparatus of the old paradigm persist, misunderstandings are bound to happen since the president-principal model reconceptualizes the relationships between and among all constituents.
6. The conversion of a president into the role of president will not happen simply and automatically because the new president-principal model is better at addressing the challenges of institutional advancement, marketing, and recruitment, but because the president decides to perform this role.
7. Working well together requires clearly defined roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, or clear lines of communication, record keeping, and documentation.
8. Trust promotes communication, which makes collaboration and teamwork possible.
9. Trust and collaboration are an outgrowth of involvement and autonomy.
10. Alignment must precede empowerment of individuals, otherwise the result is misaligned action by individuals doing their jobs or coordinated action without an understanding of the higher purpose of their work.

Taken as a whole, these findings indicate that a move to the president-principal model is not a simple change or reorientation of administrative duties, nor a panacea to all that ails secondary schools. It is a fundamental paradigmatic change that has implications for everyone in the organization. The division of labor, no matter how clean and clear on paper, will still necessarily involve tension and misunderstandings between those who occupy the positions of president and principal. The operation of the roles will not be uniform, nor will the change happen simply and automatically with a change in title or job description, but is dependent upon the individuals to do their work effectively. Involvement and autonomy are means of creating trust, collaboration, and unified commitment that take into account the strengths and



needs of the individuals together with the larger needs of the school. The work of the individuals occupying these positions will need to be aligned and this alignment must precede their individual empowerment.

### **Administrative Alignment & High Performance**

Administrative alignment is a systematic, continuous, collaborative process characterized by an identification of clear elevating goals emanating from a shared vision built upon shared knowledge and a shared understanding of the discrepancy between the ideal situation and the current situation, culminating in a deliberative process of determining how goals are to be achieved with a concrete plan of action to which individual members are committed.

Administrative alignment is not merely a fancy term for team planning. Team planning does not necessarily imply the extension of personal visions for the organization into a unified commitment to accomplish these goals with an enthusiasm exemplified by “an unrestrained sense of excitement about the team...a willingness to do anything that has to be done to help the team succeed...a loss of self” (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, p. 73), and “a group of people functioning as a whole” (Senge, 1990, p. 234). Unified commitment, as Larson and LaFasto (1989) put it, “is very difficult to understand unless you’ve experienced it. And even if you have experienced it, it is difficult to put into words” (p. 73).

Administrative alignment is both a product and a process that differs from team planning in both areas (though the documents produced may be identical in appearance). Alignment is a team skill, just as team learning and team discipline are team skills. Senge (1990) argues that skills require practice, and teams must also learn how to practice together.

Such a process could be made manifest in an administrative strategic plan and accompanying project management documents whose production involves team members in identifying the goals, working out the strategy for accomplishing the goals, and specifying what will be accomplished by whom and by when (Lewis, 2002). Such an approach clarifies roles—not in the abstract as is done in a job description—but in actual practice through record keeping and documentation (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). The approach also fosters candid, honest, and open communication in the identification of clear, elevating goals that are aligned with the most pressing needs of the school. The administrative strategic plan and project management documents specify strategy and concretely commits individuals (who are also involved in the development of the document) to specific actions. Such clearly articulated documents also provide a basis for job performance evaluation and feedback.

The development of an administrative strategic plan and accompanying project management documents not only holds forth the potential for higher performance of presidents and principals, it also has the potential of generating greater satisfaction for principals. The project management documents specify autonomous action for principals and provide a specific reference point for job feedback. Pasi (1995) found that both autonomy and job feedback contributed to the level of job satisfaction of principals, the latter representing the greatest opportunity for improvement.

Administrative alignment culminating in the production of an administrative strategic plan and accompanying project management documents is a mechanism that could be used to involve administrators in concrete, autonomous, coordinated action that additionally builds trust.

### **Is It Unworkable?**

This analysis now returns to the original question raised by Bennis (1989) and echoed in the problems cited in the research on the model: Is the president-principal model unworkable? Bennis's central critique is that the model is unworkable because the two roles are "inextricably interwoven" (p. 79) and the potential for envy, interference, isolation, competition, and conflict are too great. Bennis's analysis rests upon the assumption that the CEO-COO segregation of duties is a segregation of managerial and leadership roles.

Thus, the CEO wears both leadership and managerial hats and is bound to tread on the COO's turf at least occasionally. At the same time, the COO can't resist flexing those leader's muscles occasionally and assuming some of the CEO's prerogatives. (pp. 79-80)

This assumption implicitly denies the possibility of alternative forms of segregation of duties and backhandedly denies the ability of structural design to divide labor and provide effective coordination techniques.

Bennis (1989) recommends that

the key responsibilities of both the CEO and COO should be combined and assigned to a CEO in chief, who would reside at the center of a kind of constellation of executives. This CEO in chief would be a leader and the manager of managers, each of whom would superintend a portion of the company's operations. (p. 81)

In point of fact, the president-principal model with subsidiary positions of principal, advancement director, and director of business operations actually matches closely the professional bureaucracy advocated by Bennis.

It must be noted that Bennis's critique may hold true if the president's role is relegated exclusively to the "outside" and the principal is relegated exclusively to the "inside" (another dysfunctional segregation of duties); organizational theory predicts that those who hold job roles that are too clear or too tight will choose to violate the parameters of the role in search of "creativity" and "looseness," or engage in "bureaupathic" behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 70-71). A corollary is that the president cannot be successful "outside" if he or she does not have a position of significance "inside." This "inside" role must be separate and distinct from the principal, the director of development, and the director of business operations.

The "inside" role of the president is to lead the leaders of the "inside" processes, to monitor their performance, to monitor the status of the "inside" systems (academic, advancement, and business operations), and to provide the nucleus of the shared vision that lies at the core of the school's purpose and the administrative alignment, but not to direct or do these "inside" processes. The president needs to align the actions of the disparate systems with the overall mission of the school, to know what is going on, what is going well (and what is not), and what is being done to improve the state of affairs without actually directing these processes. While the president ought to spend at least 50% of his or her time on advancement work with benefactors (Rowe, 2003), the remainder ought to be spent on "inside" processes of developing a learning organization, "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (Senge, 1990, p. 14).

It follows that the role of principal must not be derived from the authority of the president, but must be understood to exist in its own right. This understanding mitigates the subordination of academic issues to the immediacy of financial or coercive pressures and places the principal in a position of primacy behind the president. Since the principalship has authority of its own right, the principal and president must align themselves and their work with the overall mission of the school.

While a well-planned process of administrative alignment appears to hold the most promise for ensuring a high-performance team, it raises deeper questions. What type of governance and accountability systems must be in place to support the development of this high-performance team? Could governance and accountability be an overlooked *sine qua non*? Is it possible that presidential advancement lethargy, micromanagement of the principal from time to time based upon personal whims, or acting each day in response to the urgency of the moment rather than on the long-term well-being of the school (by both presidents and principals) is a natural consequence of the absence of appropriate governance and accountability structures to the contrary? These

are significant questions for the appropriate juridic persons (archdiocese or religious order) that require thoughtful consideration.

Finally, if a president and/or principal fail(s) to recognize the inherent tensions within the model that nevertheless enable the organization to achieve its purpose, but rather chooses to exploit these tensions for whatever reason, then the model may be unworkable. If a president and/or principal fail(s) to understand or act upon the potential for the organization of this paradigm shift that calls upon both individuals to play fundamentally different roles, then the model may be unworkable. If a president and/or principal choose(s) not to work collaboratively—typified by a working relationship built upon a foundation of trust that has been secured through involvement and autonomous action in a context of honesty, openness, consistency, and respect—then the model may be unworkable. These elements are impediments that can be overcome through a deeper understanding of the issues that lie behind the problems, targeted intervention by a knowledgeable consultant, and ultimately by a decision on the part of the president and/or principal to act in accordance with the needs of the organization.

### **Recommendations for Those Considering Moving Into the Model and Those Currently Using the Model**

Those considering moving into the model ought to consider the foregoing research very carefully before making such a decision. While the general consensus is that the model is advantageous, some serious questions ought to be addressed in a period of study. The period of study will enable the governing body to address these questions but will also provide a vehicle for informing all constituents on the paradigmatic change should it be adopted. These questions ought to include: What is the president-principal model? What are its advantages/disadvantages? Given the potential advantages and disadvantages, how might the president-principal model be structured in our situation? How will we measure the success or failure of the model or of the persons occupying the positions? Are appropriate governance, accountability, and support structures in place to help ensure the successful implementation of the model? Are appropriate governance, accountability, and support structures in place to ensure the alignment of the work of the persons occupying the positions of president and principal, such as job descriptions, role expectations, accountabilities, evaluation procedures, reasonable expectations of job performance, training, and the support of a coach or consultant?

Considering the expansive role of the principal over the last 40 years (James, 2004) and the caveat that at least 50% of the president's time ought

to be spent on advancement work (Rowe, 2003), it could be argued that even small high schools could benefit from the model in terms of additional revenue and the opportunity for the principal to spend more time on academic leadership. Under these conditions, the question of whether or not a school should move to the president-principal model might well be reconfigured to ask, can a school afford not to move to the president-principal model?

If the model produces significant additional revenue to cover the added cost of an administrative salary, provides the principal with more time to spend on academic leadership, and if the president also brings additional administrative attention to the intangible benefits of board development, strategic planning, and works to align the actions of disparate systems with the overall mission of the school, then the answer is yes. If the president is merely a super-principal who micromanages the work of others and in typical bureaucratic fashion fails to exploit the advantages of the model for the benefit of the school, but instead exploits the model for reasons of self-interest or self-aggrandizement, then the answer is no.

Those currently in the model ought to consider whether the work of the president and principal are understood and are aligned with the overall mission of the school. As Senge (1990) observes, misalignment results in individuals working extraordinarily hard, but these efforts are not translated into efficient team effort because they are often at cross-purposes. There might also be a misalignment between the skills, talents, and dispositions of the person holding the position and the demands of the position (in general) or the particular demands on the position by the school at this point in time. Awareness of such misalignments might be an opportunity for a president-principal team to grow, or it might afford a particular president or principal the opportunity to discern the need for a change. In either event, the school and the individuals filling the roles of president and principal ultimately gain from the process of pursuing alignment.

### **High-Performance Functioning in the President-Principal Model**

High-performance functioning in the president-principal model is predicated upon several caveats beginning with a solid understanding of the model, its strengths, its potential problems, and the issues that lie behind these problems. A fundamental understanding of the model can be gained from reading Dygert's (1998) in-depth study, or at a minimum, the abridged version of this study (Dygert, 2000).

Consistent with the research on highly successful teams (Larson & LaFasto, 1989), the president and principal must commit to a program of

administrative alignment. Alignment of the organization is rooted in the work of Senge (1990) and is predicated upon alignment of the administration; if the administration is not clear about what it is doing, the lack of clarity will be amplified for subordinates, who in the absence of clarity will both create some clarity and simultaneously explore the full boundaries of acceptable behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Consistent with the research on paradigms (Kuhn, 1962), alignment requires a knowledge base of the model, an assessment of personal strengths (Myers-Briggs, LIFO, Firo-B), and an invitation for the individual to make a deeper commitment to the president-principal model. This commitment is concretized in the development of the administrative strategic plan based upon the pressing needs of the school and the accompanying project management documents. The completion of these documents is the culmination of the administrative alignment process, which is a collaborative process moderated by a consultant who guides the president and principal in articulating and successfully navigating in advance their autonomous and collective action.

The administrative strategic plan identifies for the administration a statement of the ideal for the school, a candid statement of the current reality, and an identification of the steps the administration will take over the next 3 to 5 years to leverage social and financial capital to raise the current status to the ideal. The project management documents break down administrative goals into smaller tasks that can be managed. These tasks in turn may be goals for other units that must in turn develop goals, objectives, and a work-breakdown structure for accomplishing their goals. In this way the administration will align the actions of all those within the school with the pressing needs of the school as identified by the administration. In doing so, the members of the administration align and commit themselves to a course of action based upon the pressing needs of the school rather than on personal whims or the urgency of the moment. The administrative strategic plan is aligned with the school's strategic plan, or in its absence, forms the seed for its eventual development.

The whole process of administrative alignment is critical to the efficacy of the model. It is important that presidents and principals are guided through this important process by someone knowledgeable of how the president-principal model operates within Catholic schools and equally knowledgeable of the requisite elements of the administrative alignment process. Rowe (2003) suggests consulting "an organizational psychologist, who works with presidents in business as well as in education. That person's job is to help clarify your thinking and/or to offer new approaches to problems and working with people" (p. 86). Certainly if using a consultant for the transition is recommended for moving

into the model (Dygert, 1998), the use of a consultant is even more important for achieving high-performance functioning within the model.

The most immediate results of the alignment process will be more time on task as determined by the administrative team, and less attention given to administrative trivia and that which is immediate, but ultimately unimportant. This liberates the president to spend more time on advancement issues, global strategic issues, board development, and the monitoring of “inside” processes. Likewise the principal is liberated to spend more time on high-leverage issues related to academic leadership. The accompanying project management documents and the successful completion of their objectives provides ample evidence of “visible benefits to the school as a result of the implementation of the model” (Dygert, 1998, p. 166) and represent “planning and control systems” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 52-53) that provide vertical coordination, and address the twin “problems of coordination and quality control” (p. 77) endemic to professional bureaucracies. Administrative alignment directly addresses the issues of focus, productivity, and the very nature of the president-principal divide, and goes much farther.

Administrative alignment is most successful when it captures the elements of “the council” (Collins, 2001, p. 115) that identifies key metrics representing a “balanced scorecard” approach (Kaplan & Norton, 2007, p. 150). Such action will produce an entire advancement team that is working feverishly to maximize the dollars per event, persons per event, people-contacts per week, or advancement yield; a recruitment team that is working to maximize prospects per event, prospect-contacts per week, or incoming students per outgoing students; the faculty working feverishly to maximize student proficiency in particular content areas or SAT score over PSAT score; or whatever key metrics are chosen in each of these areas. The result is a school of self-monitoring and self-correcting high-performance teams whose work is strategically aligned with the school’s most pressing needs.

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