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Principal Competencies That Make a Difference

Identifying a Model for Leaders of School Turnaround

ABSTRACT: Literature in the field of school leadership substantiates principals' influence on student achievement. Less clarity is available concerning principals' influence on school turnaround or the competencies needed for principals to effectively engage in and sustain the turnaround of low-performing schools. This study seeks to illuminate principal competencies that support an individual's ability to influence turnaround as evidenced by increased student achievement. We analyzed behavioral event interviews conducted with 19 principals whose schools experienced a rapid increase in student achievement. This sample is the successful 10% of a population of 200 principals who each attempted to lead a turnaround. From the interview data, we derived seven competencies that capture the specific characteristics and actions of principals leading turnaround. Our research provides an initial framework for the actions, behaviors, and dispositions of successful turnaround principals. Results of this study suggest ways to improve the selection and development of turnaround principals.

Leadership in schools matters for students (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Suppovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2009), second only to teacher quality in terms of influence on student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010) and potentially accounting for as much as one quarter of the in-school variation in student achievement (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner,

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2012). Leadership may be even more important for students in chronically low-performing schools (Murphy & Meyers, 2008), where successful leadership appears to have considerably greater effects (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Growing attention has been given to what principals in such schools need to be able to do to lead turnaround, although the articulation of those expectations seldom differs much from already established bodies of school leadership literature, primarily that of school effectiveness. Surprisingly little attention so far has been made to determine—even conject—what attributes and qualities a turnaround principal needs to possess (or be able to access) in demanding turnaround school leadership roles (Meyers & Hitt, 2017).

Collectively, these attributes and qualities can be termed competencies, or ways of thinking and behaving that influence the success an individual has in a particular role or professional position (McClelland, 1973). In response to the turnaround challenge (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007), urban school districts are increasingly ascertaining principal candidates' leadership competencies and then using these competency scores to make hiring decisions about which candidates are best suited to turn around their lowest-performing schools (Steiner & Barrett, 2012). Some districts are also using the competency score, or generating additional scores, once the candidate is installed as a practicing principal to inform principal development (e.g., Hillsborough County Public Schools, 2016). In theory, determining levels of competencies should enable districts to better understand principals' "personal resources" that affect their practice as leaders (Leithwood, 2012, p. 44), resulting in better informed hiring decisions and aligned professional growth opportunities. In his seminal Ontario Leadership Framework study, Leithwood (2012) submits that of all talents principals possess, personal resources is one of the most important yet most difficult to alter, which also suggests that research does support district use of a competency-based approach. In this article, we extend initial school principal competency thought leadership founded in research literature from other fields by initiating a process to identify principal competencies potentially key to leading low-performing schools in urban contexts by analyzing interview data of principals who led documented turnarounds.

BACKGROUND

TURNAROUND AND EFFECTIVE LEADER PRACTICE

An existing body of research substantiates principals' influence on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Suppovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2009).

We know that when principals utilize certain practices, student achievement is positively influenced (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012). Knowing what effective leaders do is important for those concerned with turnaround leadership because effective leader practice is mostly relevant regardless of context. However, lessons from effective schools and leadership literature can be an insufficient set of practices for turnaround school context (Abe et al., 2015; Meyers & Smylie, 2017), mainly because turnaround principals are charged with "lifting an organization out of collective depression" (Payne, 2008, p. 14) so that the school may become what its students need. A key contention of ours is that the initiation of change for the better and rehabilitation of the entire organization requires a much different principal than does a decently performing school.

However, little conclusive empirical research exists to define exactly what turnaround principals do or must be able to do, likely in part because actual turnarounds are extremely rare (Stuit, 2012), making investigation of the phenomena difficult. In their review of the scant research literature on turnaround principals, Authors (in press) identify a few differences in what turnaround principals do, including (1) centralizing decision-making initially before making informed decisions to distribute leadership; (2) expertly wielding support and accountability simultaneously to catalyze change; and (3) capitalizing on quick wins to initiate change in school culture. The researchers also highlight a number of qualities, characteristics, or attributes such as belief that positive change can happen, competitiveness, and responsiveness that might be important distinguishers of turnaround principals. These constructs have not yet been studied in any systematic way, again likely due to limited data sources that have been identified when rigorous criteria are applied.

Personal resources for leadership. The specific personal resources, actions, behaviors, or characteristics effective leaders rely upon to enact effective leader practice has been understudied, but not nearly to the inconsequential degree that turnaround leader resources have been examined, as a counterpart framework for turnaround leaders does not exist. In terms of the limited effective leader work, Leithwood (2012) provides a framework for the personal resources of effective leaders and categorizes them as cognitive, social, and sociological. Within the broad categories, further refinement and specificity is provided. Cognitive resources include problem solving expertise and knowledge about classrooms and schools. Problem solving is further decomposed to include problem interpretation, goals, principles and values, constraints, solution processes, and mood. Knowledge about schools and classrooms comprise technical or rational, emotional, organizational, and family conditions. Social resources are perceiving and managing emotions of self and others and acting in emotionally appropriate ways. Psychological resources are defined as a leader's

initiative, creativity and responsible risk taking behaviors, and these capacities are unleashed through optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. Looking broadly by domain, Leithwood (2012) observes

> Of the three sets of Personal Leadership Resources, cognitive resources are the most responsive to direct and short-term intervention. While considerable effort has also been made to develop interventions for improving leaders' social resources, this is a more complex and less certain undertaking. And we know much less about how to successfully build the psychological resources included in the Ontario Leadership Framework. For these reasons, the possession of many of these resources ought to be among the most important criteria used for the initial recruitment and selection of school leaders. (p. 52)

Leithwood (2012) astutely points out that if cognitive resources can be learned, and even perhaps social resources can be also, yet psychological resources are static or less alterable, or at least current research does not illuminate pathways toward growing optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. Thus, perhaps an appropriate strategic approach for districts interested in hiring effective school leaders would be to prioritize candidates with high levels of these psychological characteristics and then rely upon professional development to address any shortcomings in cognitive and social resources since they may be more malleable characteristics.

Having established that no work exists to frame the personal resources of turnaround leaders, and having described the insight we have into effective leader practice, we turn our attention toward considering what we do know about turnaround leadership as a way to frame further study to support development of a conceptual model for the personal resources, also known as "competencies" of turnaround leaders.

Turnaround leaders. Currently, there is little to frame our understanding of the leaders needed to carry out turnaround work. We assert that several factors contribute to the effectiveness of a principal, and these same factors can be used as a way to scaffold to what contributes to the effectiveness of a principal in a turnaround school: The school and district context as well as the larger accountability environment (Bruggencate, Luyten, Sheerens, & Sleegers, 2012), the principal's prior experience (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009), the principal's preparation program (Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996), and the principal's disposition (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Preparing principals to be successful across these areas is a challenge. There does not appear to be enough experienced principals who have the necessary dispositions to take on the challenging work of turning around low-performing schools. Although we do not know the order of importance of these factors, it is apparent that disposition is the least understood (Hitt & Player, 2018), and ripe for

examination because efficacious turnaround prep programs and "building ready" turnaround principals are each rarities. As such, the specific principals who enacted the work entailed in turnaround leadership are an important source of insight. Just as there are parallel lines of inquiry in terms of specific principals in effective leadership, we assert that this type of inquiry is needed as the consequential nature of school turnaround implicates a better understanding of how these principals differentiate from other principals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TURNAROUND LEADER COMPETENCIES

If turnaround leadership is distinct in nature, as a growing number of scholars and their work suggests (Duke, 2015; Payne, 2008), and because of the near crisis situation students in failing schools endure (Murphy & Meyers, 2008), districts and schools will greatly benefit from a principal who can catalyze dramatic improvement. Accurate identification of the right person to lead, and then developing and supporting that person based on the competencies that matter, is important for any school, but seems even more critical and complex for a school engaging in turnaround (Hitt, 2016; Clifford et al., 2012). Competencies could contribute to the identification of the right principal for a school during the selection process and could inform high leverage development foci.

Competencies refer to an underlying, enduring characteristic of a person (demonstrated by certain defined types of behavior) that relates to effective or outstanding performance in a specific job or role (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competencies resemble the construct of "personal resources" discussed above in that they are the internal characteristics from which leaders draw upon to lead effectively. These internal characteristics are revealed, or "manifested" by related behaviors, or dimensions of the competency.

While business widely uses the competency concept for selection and development of leaders (Hermann, Komm, McPherson, Lambsdorff, & Kelner, 2011), competencies and even personal resources have been considered sparingly in education. However, School Improvement Grant requirements entailed replacement of building level leaders, implicating a focus shift to the level of thoughtfulness and reference to multiple data sources involved in candidate selection. The Every Student Succeeds Act only seems to extend responsibility and pressure to the district level to secure accurate principal hiring and development decisions. Thus, the competency process would likely benefit education as well. In that vein, principal competencies is increasingly an area of practical and scholarly consideration, especially for urban districts and/or low-performing school settings. Districts

report a need to shift from traditional hiring practices that often relied on experience and relationships to one dependent upon accomplishment and potential (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Some of the largest districts in the nation approach principal hiring and placement practices by relying on competency scores, at least in part, to drive their selection and development of principals to lead school turnaround (e.g., Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2016; Hillsborough County Public Schools, 2016). But there is little evidence, if any, that districts can demonstrate a relationship between principal competencies and student achievement (Hitt & Meyers, 2017).

OUR PURPOSE: DEVELOPING AN EMPIRICAL MODEL OF PRINCIPAL COMPETENCIES

We assume that internal states of principals, as well as how they go about influencing the internal states of stakeholders, is a key to turning schools around. Thus, we begin to identify the competencies, or the actions, behaviors, and dispositions that manifest unobservable latent constructs specific to turnaround principals. To do so, we conducted intensive thematic coding of self-report data of 19 "turnaround" principals of various school types (elementary, middle, and high) in multiple states to establish what we believe to be the first effort to develop an empirical model of principal competencies.

Turnarounds are a rarity. Resultantly, researchers are hesitant to undertake turnaround research because they are unable to identify criteria-referenced, legitimate turnaround schools, or they have concern about devoting time to studies with extremely limited sample sizes. Perhaps more troubling is that this continual lack of research may be contributing to the rarity of turnaround schools because opportunities to learn important lessons about the arduous work are missed. It is for this reason that we suggest that any initial, empirical research with at least clear criteria for informant inclusion, regardless of sample size limitations, is preferable to no study at all or the use of a larger sample that does not meet rigorous criteria.

In order to undertake incremental, foundational research, our study intends to begin to answer the following two questions:

1. What competencies do principals successfully leading turnaround demonstrate at the time of their hire?
2. What are the facets of these competencies?

We acknowledge that leadership, or the act of exercising influence, is largely dependent upon context. This is the basis for our competency approach. Moreover, competency work is also grounded on the assumption

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that in every job or role, some people perform better than others, and that superior performers in any role or job often use different approaches and different behaviors than the typical performers in the same role or job (McClelland, 1998).

SAMPLE AND METHODS

In an initial model, and one we consider to be preliminary, of turnaround principal competencies (see Table 1), Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) suggest uncovering the behavioral characteristics of successful leaders as

Table 1. Clusters, Competencies, and Descriptors in the Preliminary Model by Public Impact

Cluster/Competency	Descriptor
Driving for Results	Competencies capturing the leader's intent to achieve outstanding results and the task-oriented actions needed for success
Achievement	The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers
Initiative and Persistence	The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers
Monitoring and Directiveness	The ability to set clear expectations and to hold others accountable for performance
Planning Ahead	A bias toward planning in order to derive future benefits or to avoid problems
Influencing for Results	**Competencies capturing the leader's intent to work through and with others**
Impact and Influence	Acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking and actions of others
Team Leadership	Assuming authoritative leadership of a group for the benefit of the organization
Developing Others	Influence with the specific intent to increase the short and long-term effectiveness of another person
Problem Solving	**Competencies capturing the leader's intent to work through and with others**
Analytical Thinking	The ability to break things down in a logical way and recognize cause and effect
Conceptual Thinking	The ability to see patterns and links among seemingly unrelated things.
Showing Confidence to Lead	**Competency capturing the leader's intent to stay focused, committed, and self-assured**
Self-Confidence	A personal belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks and the actions that reflect that belief

Note. Summarized from Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel (2008). *School turnaround leaders: Competencies for success.* Chicago, IL: The Chicago Public Education Fund.

a way to better understand effective turnaround leaders. One strength of their work lies in the assumption that when developing a model for school turnaround leaders, the intersection of the fields of effective school leader practice and organizational turnaround is a logical place to start the building of a theoretical model. In isolation, these fields do not provide the level of nuance needed to understand the special, perhaps radical, work needed to improve schools. Because robust data about school turnaround leaders did not (and does not) exist for the reasons discussed above, their preliminary model draws upon empirical work and theory outside of the field of school turnaround to include the broader field of organizational turnaround. Their preliminary model also partially relates to some of the domains within effective leader practice. For example, their model calls for turnaround leaders to utilize competencies directed externally, like setting goals and performance expectations, developing others, and working collaboratively. They also assert that turnaround leaders rely on competencies with a self or internal orientation. These include driving for results, emphasizing achievement, and maintaining persistence. Although we know that these competencies theoretically make sense for turnaround principals and that references to related fields are in keeping with the scaffolded approach to developing and validating a model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), their preliminary model remains inadequate for turnaround leadership specific to schools as it has not been tested empirically with actual school principals who successfully orchestrated a turnaround. In response, we developed a process to leverage interview data from principal hires who then oversaw schools that had substantial increases in student proficiency scores.

OPERATIONALIZING TURNAROUND BY SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT PERFORMANCE

Most definitions of turnaround call for rapid improvement (e.g., Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Herman et al., 2008), so we required that schools show improvement within two years, even though we anticipated this would render an extremely limited sample given that there are few schools that successfully turn around (e.g., Meyers, Lindsay, Condon & Wan, 2012; Stuit, 2012). We used the following criteria for sample selection: (a) principals were placed in schools in need of turnaround (to address methodological concerns that some turnaround schools were not actually among the lowest performing in the nation), (b) principals remained principal of that school for at least two full school years (so as to be able to connect school performance with one isolated principal), and (c) the principal's school demonstrated improved student performance results that were above their

same-state peers (to prevent inclusion of schools whose scores increased due to inflation when a whole state showed improvement in given year). To operationalize the last two criteria, we looked at the state average of percent proficient scores and changes from year to year, and compared the performance of the principals' schools to their state's norm. We acknowledge that these scores are a blunt measure. Ho (2008) has discussed many of these limitations in detail. Yet, this measurement method widely prevails in state and federal accountability systems and is the simplest way to compare schools across states. This also addressed state-specific issues, such as school grading systems and measures that are widely different from state to state.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE SAMPLE

In order to investigate the competencies of legitimate turnaround principals, we applied these criteria and rendered a sample of 19 school leaders from over 200 who engaged in the behavioral event interviews (BEIs) (discussed below) and were hired as a turnaround school principal. That is, less than 10% of principals from our population actually ended up leading schools to performance gains meeting the threshold of turnaround. This is in keeping with the rarity of turnarounds as measured by rigorous, established criteria. These 19 principals met all three of the criteria set forth above in a, b, and c. While the sample is small, we proceeded with the study given that it was drawn from a population of 200 principals installed as turnaround principals. The distinct purpose of this study was to develop an initial empirical model despite data source limitations as prior work examines turnaround leadership often without formally defining or operationalizing the terms, and we contend that a small but qualified sample is preferable.

Specifically, the gains we required for study inclusion were operationalized as a positive change in the standardized value (i.e., increased z-score) of mathematics and/or English language arts test scores after one year of these principal's installation. The 19 principals identified seem to have contributed to a positive change in the standardized scores of their school's mathematics and/or ELA test results, ranging from 0.21 to 1.41 standard deviations.

DATA SOURCE: BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEW

In some districts, BEIs are conducted with school principal candidates prior to the district's decision to hire, retain, or assign individuals as principal of a turnaround school. The BEI is a specific form of the critical

incident interview technique (Flanagan, 1954), which has been shown to be a useful, reliable, and valid method for obtaining accurate descriptions of work behavior (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974). Leadership development in the corporate sector has utilized the BEI since the early 1960s (McClelland, 1973), capitalizing on its strengths-based and story-driven approaches (Oliphant, Hansen, & Oliphant, 2008).

Administrators of the BEI ask interviewees to identify work-related incidents or events and explain in detail times when they felt effective and others when they ineffective. The BEI process calls for the interviewer to obtain detailed accounts while also avoiding leading the interviewees. Interviewers limit probing questions to the following: "What led up to the event?" "Who did and said what to whom?" "What happened next?" "What were you thinking or feeling at that moment?" and, "What was the outcome?" Because the interviewer probes for thought processes and feelings that occurred while interviewees engaged in specific behaviors, the BEI uncovers information beyond directly observable behavior.

Despite the retrospective nature of interviewee accounts of events, the validity and reliability levels of these interviews are strong (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974). Researchers suggest this utility of the BEI because a very high level of specificity and precision is sought in the interview as interviewers require interviewees to discuss only substantial events occurring within the prior 18 months. This addresses potential memory loss associated with older events.

The data included in this study are based on BEIs that lasted two hours each. On average, interviewees discussed two to three events per interview. Each interviewer utilized the same protocol and process. All of the interviewers had a minimum of two years of experience utilizing this interview technique. Each interview was recorded for later professional transcription.

CODING BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEWS

Coding renders only those behaviors and thoughts explicitly described as having occurred during the recent events described in the transcripts. We do not code behaviors and thoughts that are not fully and explicitly described, whether they be provided in general or vague terms or without a set of "actionable" steps (McClelland, 1998). We did not limit our coding to the theoretical competencies identified by the preliminary model but labeled other steps or behaviors not reflected in the preliminary model as "unique."

Each coder has over ten years of experience applying this method of coding, including extensive ongoing peer feedback from other professional

coders. Coders were blind to the grouping of the particular interviews dur-
ing analysis of the transcripts. Coders scored behavior described as (a) hav-
ing been explicitly enacted by the interviewee (i.e., they may not code a
statement that uses the term "we" did something or where the action itself
is general: "I influenced him."); (b) as having taken place in the course of
this specific recent event (i.e., nothing that the person plans to do or "usu-
ally does" or thinks they should do or might do or did in previous cases);
and (c) with adequate detail as to how it was accomplished. According
to McClelland (1998), these parameters focus participant responses such
that researchers may look for evidence of specific behaviors. Any coding
discrepancies were noted and brought to resolution through discussion
among the research team.

    Approximately two thirds of the coded data aligned with the prelimi-
nary model. Additional data were coded as "unique." This process rendered
two important sets of data from the interview transcriptions: (a) instances
of alignment with competencies set forth by the preliminary model, and
(b) unique behaviors of principals not expressed by the preliminary model.
Both competency data that aligned to the preliminary model as well as
unique material were included in subsequent empirical model development.

DATA ANALYSIS: DEVELOPING THE COMPETENCY MODEL

Coding BEI transcripts yielded evidence of behaviors, thoughts, and feel-
ings displayed by principals. We now describe how we synthesized these
data in a structured way to develop the competency model (McClelland,
1998; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). We followed these steps:

1. Identify emerging themes that are not expressed by the preliminary
    model;
2. Group coded material according to existing and emerging themes; and
3. Draft new competency definitions and dimensions.

    We refer to this process as concept formation, as this is where we iden-
tify, discuss, and refine the key concepts revealed from coding the inter-
views. The guiding question was "what is the data telling us in terms of
the competencies that make the difference for leading school turnaround?"
This question allowed us to reference the preliminary model but also refine
existing work and create an improved set of competencies rooted in the
behaviors and actions of this specific type of school leader.

    During the concept formation meetings, we reviewed the preliminary
model and accompanying text examples supporting each competency. We
then revised the preliminary competency model to more accurately, and

empirically, reflect the qualitative data found in the text examples within the sample.

RESOLVING UNIQUE MATERIALS

In analyzing the unique text examples, we employed a grounded theory approach to conduct thematic content analysis of the unique data (Smith, 1992). We first grouped text examples illustrating similar themes into competencies. Next, we sorted the groups into dimensions to better express the facets of the competency. Dimensions were created through organizing specific actions, thoughts, and dispositions that comprised the broader competency. Not all principals displayed all facets or dimensions, but rather the dimensions encompassed the spectrum of actions, thoughts and dispositions demonstrated by the interview data. Finally, we came to consensus on representative language.

RESULTS

We developed a revised principal competencies model asserting the following seven competencies: (a) initiates and perseveres, (b) elicits intended

Table 2. New Model: Competencies and Their Descriptions

Competency	Description
Initiates and persists	The principal focuses on sustainable results through persevering and addressing challenges in the school, and developing appropriate strategies to address problems of practice.
Inspires and motivates others	The principal utilizes works with a group of adults to leverage their input, to develop actionable goals, and to ultimately realize change in the school.
Elicits intended response	The principal takes actions for the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking, and actions of others.
Builds capacity through accountability and support	The principal is mindful of school performance needs and holds others accountable for high standards.
Commits to Students	The principal demonstrates a commitment to students as evidenced by a belief in their own capability, and the courage to take a stand on behalf of students.
Crystalizes problems and creates solutions	The principal demonstrates the ability to see meaningful patterns among seemingly unrelated issues or ideas, leading to new ideas or fresh perspectives.
Uses inquiry to frame and solve problems	The principal demonstrates the ability to analyze issues and opportunities in a logical way, and to recognize cause and effect.

responses, (c) builds capacity with accountability and support, (d) inspires and motivates others: engages the team, (e) commits to student learning, (f) crystalizes problems and creates solutions, and (g) uses inquiry to frame and solve problems (see Table 2). Each competency represents a group of thoughts, actions, and dispositions of a principal who led school turnaround. Here, we present the competencies and provide insight into the descriptors and indicators that comprise each level.

INITIATES AND PERSISTS

This competency encompasses the actions and behaviors utilized by principals taking responsibility for improving school outcomes that link to sustainable results. Principals focus on sustainable results through persisting in face of challenges in the school, and developing appropriate strategies to address problems of practice (see Table 3).

Identifies problems and accepts responsibility for taking initiative. Principals with this competency take steps to address problems through developing a quick course of action. They demonstrate a sense of urgency and energy to support their movement toward meeting a challenge or solving a problem. The solution is typically rapidly devised and addresses concrete issues (school fundraising, student fluency in reading, tracking data on scholarship applications, scheduling, grade level progress, and coaching teachers). Principals with this competency take initiative to create change and to deliver results in relation to problems. This is accomplished through taking thoughtful risks. For example, the principal may try different approaches, modify previous plans, shift faculty and staff into optimal roles and assignments, and re-allocate resources including people and budget. Also, the school leader accepts responsibility for occasionally making difficult or unpopular decisions related to above issues.

Sustains measurable progress toward addressing problems and achieving results. Principals with this competency sustain the pursuit of measurable progress toward addressing problems and achieving results.

Table 3. Dimensions Within Competency of Initiates and Persists

Identifies root cause of problem. Determines source of challenge or issue to guide high leverage efforts

Demonstrates sense of urgency. Develops plans with rapid-response timelines that include achievable increments to spur forward momentum

Takes calculated risks and adjustments. Takes actions that are creative, out-of-the box, inventive, or even experimental

Demonstrates resilience in adverse conditions. Sustains focus and dedication to the work of the organization despite setbacks or enormity of challenge

Table 4. Dimensions Within Competency of Inspires and Motivates Others

Provides convincing rationale. Uses data or logical argument to back decisions and plans.

Anticipates reactions. Uses empathy to determine how decisions, plans, and other communications will be received by individuals or groups.

Customizes responses. Tailors actions and reactions to the needs of individuals or groups

Identifies areas of mutual interest. Pinpoints overlapping objectives that exist between the overall school organization and individuals and/or groups

Negotiates. Works toward positive outcome for multiple parties or sides through use of shrewd brokering

Distributes power to encourage commitment. Encourages individuals and groups to take on responsibility for working toward goals implicated by decisions and plans

Table 5. Dimensions Within the Competency of Elicits Intended Responses

Provides convincing rationale. Uses data or logical argument to back decisions and plans.

Anticipates reactions. Uses empathy to determine how decisions, plans, and other communications will be received by individuals or groups.

Customizes responses. Tailors actions and reactions to the needs of individuals or groups

Identifies areas of mutual interest. Pinpoints overlapping objectives that exist between the overall school organization and individuals and/or groups

Distributes power to encourage commitment. Encourages individuals and groups to take on responsibility for working toward goals implicated by decisions and plans

Table 6. Dimensions Within the Competency of Builds Capacity with Accountability and Support

Centers efforts on vision. Takes only actions aligned with vision attainment

Communicates state of vision attainment. Provides updates to remind individuals and groups of work that has been accomplished and work left to be done

Reminds others of their role in vision attainment. Utilizes parameters and standards implicated by vision to draw attention to the quality of individual's and group's contributions

Resolves non-performance. Provides aligned support for those with the will to improve and removes those who do not

Differentiates professional learning. Identifies key strengths and limitations of individuals to foster growth

Develops other leaders. Cultivates leadership in others

Aligns individual strengths with work. Ascertains how certain talent can support organizational goals

Table 7.   Dimensions Within the Competency of Commits to Student Learning

Possesses self-confidence. Acts with self-assuredness that efforts to serve students will prevail
Aware of self-limiting behavior. Transparently owns areas for improvement
Believes in potential of every student. Actions and word reflect confidence in each student's capacity to grow and learn
Leverages existing policy for benefit of students. Navigates and confronts limiting procedures while maximizing enabling procedures

Table 8.   Dimensions Within the Competency of Crystalizes Problems and Creates Solutions

Applies past lessons learned. Embraces mistakes as learning opportunities
Identifies salient issues. Analyzes situations to render key challenges
Focuses efforts of others. Helps individuals or groups concentrate efforts on what matters
Behaves entrepreneurially. Innovates to meet a need
Adjusts iteratively. Maintains flexibility to meet emerging needs

Table 9.   Dimensions Within the Competency Uses Inquiry to Systematically Frame Problems and Solutions

Articulates inter-relatedness of situations. Checks for and explains connections
Articulates logical thinking. Uses logic to connect ideas
Employs sets of logical steps. Uses rationale actions
Creates coherent plans of action. Considers how to align actions to support and reinforce other actions
Anticipates barriers. Analyzes plans for potential sources of challenge
Assumes various perspectives. Uses empathy to understand positions of others to improve potential solutions

This is accomplished through employing innovation, to include taking a course of action that maybe considered insurmountable or untraditional. Although cutting edge in nature, this course of action is well thought out, and supported by gathering and considering data from diverse sources. Principals with this competency rely upon deep levels of resilience, and persevere over many months and obstacles or complications that threaten accomplishment of the goal.

INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES OTHERS

This competency comprises the actions and behaviors the principal utilizes when working with a group of adults to leverage their input, to develop actionable goals, and to ultimately realize change in the school (see Table 4).

Communicates with the group. Principals with this competency share information with the school and its partners. This communication entails information about agendas, accomplishments, and time constraints. These principals update people affected by decisions or events, and think critically about what information particular people need and then work to ensure that those people have the benefit of that insight. In general, these principals see communication as a way of bringing groups together and uniting them for a common purpose.

Works with the group. Principals with this competency emphasize the importance of joint effort and intentionally work to raise team morale. They express confidence in the team's ability to make change, facilitate the sharing of information and relationship building among the team, and foster collaboration. The principal deliberately models desired behavior through demonstrating desired norms of behavior in the presence of stakeholders.

Aligns team efforts toward clear goals. Principals with this competency organize collective efforts that lead teams to accomplish clear results in complex settings. These principals also harness input from individuals so that they may foster support for school improvement and dramatic change.

Empowers the team. Principals with this competency assess the situation and identify the issues and key members needed to compose a high-functioning team. They involve the team in organizational decision-making and other processes to include collaborative co-construction of the vision. Principals in this level incorporate strengths of individuals through identifying particular talents of members, and then integrate their relative strengths to overcome obstacles and/or accomplish goals. Finally, these principals engage people to contribute through inspiring them to work collectively to carry out a well-defined vision.

ELICITS INTENDED RESPONSES

These are the actions and behaviors principals employ for the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking, and actions of others. Through exercising positive influence over others, these principals are able to guide the organization toward achieving results for students and adults (see Table 5).

Acts to influence thinking and mindsets of others. Principals with this competency anticipate perceptions. These principals think ahead about the likely reaction of audiences and take a thoughtful action to obtain a specific desired reaction from others. Principals with this competency also influence perceptions through presenting data, making arguments, and highlighting alternative ideas with the intent to change people's opinions or perception.

Adapts approach to affect actions of others. Principals with this competency elicit desired responses through identifying the likely reaction of others, and then taking steps, or a single dramatic and persuasive action, to obtain an improved reaction. These principals also customize communication through considering how to construct a message that will resonate with the audience to move them in a particular direction through careful consideration of method and substance of the message. Examples could include clearly stating a compelling rationale adapted to the needs of the audience, negotiating toward finding common ground among stakeholders with disparate opinions or concerns, or providing a concrete path toward a desired state.

Leverages multiple stakeholders to change ingrained behaviors. The principals with this competency utilize an emotionally intelligent approach. Based on interpersonal understanding of varied stakeholders' views, these principals engage in an interrelated and sophisticated set of maneuvers with many people to communicate a compelling rationale to obtain the desired outcome. These leaders also distribute leadership to those ready for it such that they share power and build coalitions as well as encourage others to craft their own contributions toward organizational improvement. Principals with this competency identify and leverage key change agents to initiate a domino effect for influence.

BUILDS CAPACITY WITH SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

These are the actions and behaviors principals employ to maintain mindfulness of school performance needs and to hold adults accountable for high standards while also supporting them in reaching for these ambitious goals (see Table 6). Principals with this competency insist upon performance through publicly monitoring and posting performance against standards and also foster growth above and beyond meeting a standard. These principals insist upon compliance, confront people with performance problems, and stipulate a change of course when the individual is falling behind. Principals with this competency prioritize learning for all and recognize that all members of the school benefit from continuous learning. As such, the principal customizes suggestions for growth and improvement for low performers, average performers, and/or high performers. Principals with this competency insist upon high performance for all. They conceive of the school as an integrated organization, and take a systematic approach to enhance school performance. This systems level approach is marked by concern for school morale and faculty sense of efficacy, to include: ridding the organization of low performers; and, following all legal procedures and appropriate efforts to improve performance. These principals create a

culture of high performance through aligning individual growth and goal-setting to the school's vision, and developing the school leadership team by coaching and mentoring them to gain skills for the school vision attainment. Finally, these principals interpret context. They accomplish this through tending to the school's unique needs for performance, and through taking a contextual approach to matching strengths of individual teachers to the school's performance-driven initiatives.

COMMITS TO STUDENT LEARNING

These are the actions and behaviors principals utilize to demonstrate a commitment to students as evidenced by a belief in their capability as principal, as well as the courage to take a stand on behalf of students (see Table 7). Principals in this competency not only display an understanding of the link between leadership and student outcomes, they also take ownership for student learning. As such, they believe in their own capability, while simultaneously maintaining awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as principal. Finally, principals in this level exhibit self-efficacy as evidenced by expression of a "can-do" attitude regarding leading a school or making changes or improvements on students' learning. Principals with this competency believe in all students' ability to learn. They convey to students confidence in their ability even when students are difficult or do not believe in themselves. These principals also believe in their capability to help all students learn. They embrace opportunities and challenges to exercise their influence on the school so that they might advocate for opportunities for students. Finally, these principals assume responsibility for students' learning. They publicly express personal accountability for all aspects of school leadership (leading teachers, working with students, working with key community stakeholders, liaising with central office).

Principals with this competency believe in the potential of all students. They advocate for decisions and policies that are for the express benefit of students to improve the school's practice of instruction, and advance learning for all students, regardless of ethnicity or background. These principals put students first. They determine courses of action based on thoughtful analysis of the learning needs of students, and operate from the position of advocating for students in the debate of decisions/policies. To accomplish this work for students, these principals leverage existing policies for transformation of their schools. These principals relentlessly defend work that benefits students. Despite powerful opposition, principals in this level advocate for students. As such, they justify use of authority to advocate for improved outcomes for students.

CRYSTALIZES PROBLEMS AND CREATES SOLUTIONS

These are the actions and behaviors, as well as cognitive processes, principals utilize that demonstrate their ability to see meaningful patterns among seemingly unrelated issues or ideas which lead to new ideas or fresh perspectives. Principals with this competency compare and contrast ideas, plans, and other expressions of meaning to note similarities, differences, gaps, or trends. These principals make connections to past experiences through comparing a current situation to a specific past experience (see Table 8).

Utilizes insight to help prioritize. Principals with this competency categorize complex data which allows them to select what is most important or how concepts are related. These principals not only acknowledge past experiences, but also apply lessons learned from past experiences. These principals generalize similarities, differences, gaps, and trends to categorize new data or situations. Finally, these principals identify the most salient issues in a complicated situation.

Reframes situations for clarity. Principals with this competency demonstrate an ability to render key considerations within a situation. This process crystallizes the meaning and importance of complex data into a few, simple findings, thereby creating focus, and vision or priorities for others. Finally, principals in this level distinguish key considerations through identifying and articulating the underlying issue that may have been "hidden" previously.

Generates new ideas and approaches. Principals with this competency create new solutions. This is accomplished through developing innovative solutions not previously identified by others that address issues or problems. Often, creation of the new solution brings about a new idea that results in a new approach.

USES INQUIRY TO SYSTEMATICALLY FRAME
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

This competency includes the practices, behaviors, and cognitive processes that demonstrate the school leader's ability to analyze issues and opportunities in a logical way, and to recognize cause and effect (see Table 9).

Sees the facets of a situation. Principals with this competency recognize needed actions, and are able to coherently list tasks or items. These principals recognize components of situations, which allows them to outlines the basic parts comprising in a situation.

Identifies cause and effect among several items. These principals can explain the relationship among several items, which permits them

to organize a complex activity into a set of logical steps (based on time, importance, or other factors). These principals also generate several possible causes of events or results of events. Finally, principals in this level anticipate multiple next steps and likely barriers.

Articulates complexity among multiple variables. Principals with this competency decompose a complex problem or process into categories and subcategories to arrive at basic steps or parts. They interpret a difficult problem from several different perspectives, and use different criteria before arriving at a detailed solution.

DISCUSSION

This study provides an important contribution to the fields of school turnaround and school leadership by innovatively framing and analyzing the challenge of identifying leaders for turnaround schools. Since empirical investigation of effective turnaround principal behaviors is extremely limited, findings from this study are unprecedented. We see the study offering insight in the following ways: (a) practical implications for the selection process of principals in schools where a strong leader is desperately needed, (b) implications for a model of actions, behaviors, and dispositions of principals, and (c) implications for future research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: SELECTION

The importance of leadership in organizational-level as well as student-level outcomes is substantiated. Although there is broad consensus regarding the importance of effective principals, research also suggests that traditional hiring practices do not consistently identify the most promising candidates. This is especially problematic as leader removal and replacement alone, as called for in the "transformational" and "turnaround" models within the School Improvement Grants and increasingly assumed in states as they transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act (Herman, Gates, Chavez-Herrerias, & Harris, 2016), does not necessarily mean that the installation of a new leader will bring about the desired improvement or change (Le Floch, Butler, & Barbour, 2017). Districts and schools must find ways to carefully select a replacement whose dispositions and strengths fit with the needs of the school. If districts can find ways to enhance the selection process so that they can become more confident in the type of leadership a candidate will bring to the school, resources utilized during the hiring and selection processes can be

protected and honed, and schools minimize the possibility of continual leader replacement resulting from poor fit. Given the particular dispositions and actions required of school turnaround leaders, it makes sense that the selection process would benefit from information that yields helpful insight into candidates' levels of these dispositions and actions (Hitt & Meyers, 2017).

Further, we recall Leithwood's (2012) observation that of each of the factors comprising a principal's disposition, psychological resources may be the least malleable. Psychological resources, defined as a leader's initiative, creativity, and responsible risk taking behaviors are unleashed through optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. We see these qualities as parallel to some of the competencies and specific levels within competencies identified in our model (*Initiates and persists*, *Elicits intended responses*, *and Commits to Student Learning*, respectively). Because of these similarities, and in keeping with the literature's warning about lower levels of psychological adaptiveness (Leithwood, 2012), we suggest that it be may be preferable to privilege these as selection criteria. That is, it raises question as to how likely development or other interventions will impart them without at least some level of these three "psychological" competencies being present in candidates.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MODEL

Our analysis of BEI data suggests that seven competencies capture the behaviors or practices of these principals. These competencies can be useful to policy makers, superintendents, and practitioners in terms of identifying (a) how these principals approach the improvement process (*Initiates and Persists*), (b) how they interact with teachers and other constituent groups (*Inspiring and Motivating Others*, *Building Capacity with Support and Accountability*, and *Eliciting Intended Responses*), (c) which cognitive processes they rely upon to inform their work (*Crystalizes Problems and Creates Solutions* and *Uses Inquiry to Systematically Frame Problems and Solutions*), and (d) their internal states and mindsets (*Relentless Commitment to Students*). While there are certainly other realms in which turnaround principals engage, we find these to be the ones particular to the unique work called for in school turnaround.

Distinguishing exemplary principals from typical principals becomes logically implicated if schools and districts are to use competencies with confidence during the selection process. Our findings suggest the substance of the unique behaviors, and as such, our work offers needed insight into dispositions of principals appearing to successfully lead turnaround.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
IN SCHOOL TURNAROUND

We would like to investigate the relationship between these competencies and school turnaround as measured by student achievement. Given the need for cutting edge work in turnaround leadership, we could see how developing a correlation study conducted with student achievement growth as the outcome variable would provide further insight into the strength of this model. In keeping with the current findings in measurement of principal effectiveness, we would also like to develop a more robust set of measures for school turnaround, to include formative assessments of organizational conditions linked to the distal outcome of improved student achievement.

Finally, we suggest conducting further research to include an even wider variety and larger number of principals, schools, and districts. In addition, as new national standards are implemented, testing to see which principal actions, behaviors, and dispositions link to meeting these new standards will be important to undertake to update the model in an iterative fashion.

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We know that leadership matters, and that perhaps its importance is amplified in schools in need of turnaround. We also know with some degree of certainty what constitutes effective leadership in most schools. Turnaround leaders must engage in these same realms plus others. Further distinguishing the work of turnaround leaders is the reality that these schools often need change that is fundamental, transformative, and extremely rapid in nature. Leading this type of effort may call for shifting paradigms of teachers and facilitating the development of new routines and practices within the broader organization. We assert that principals with a distinct set of actions, behaviors, and dispositions, also known as competencies, fare better in the engagement of this type of work than those who do not possess these attributes.

Incorporating measurement of competencies into the selection process could be a way to address these issues, and improve the match between a turnaround school and a new principal. Protecting the selection process from unnecessary error may bolster progress and then influence teachers' efficacy and commitment to the change process. Selecting the right leader links to an array of positive outcomes, and that choice may make all the difference in the effort to transform schools to become the type of organization our most underserved students need.

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