
MEMO FROM MARIA



DATE: March 24, 1996

TO: Keystone Council Members

RE: Attached article

The attached article, Organization Development: Using Data for Decision Making, appears in the Winter, 1996 **Journal of Staff Development**. Written by Dianne Ashby and two co-authors, it discusses in some depth the collaborative process undertaken at U-High. I am interested in your comments and reactions. I found the piece interesting and, as a new member of the U-High community, informative. There are some assertions and conclusions with which I do not agree, however, and assume you also will identify themes with which you both agree and disagree. I suggest we take some time at a Council meeting to discuss the article. Please share this article with other faculty and staff who might be interested.

Organization Development: Using Data for Decision Making

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Staff developers employ data-gathering tools to help a high school community deal with improving program, organizational climate, and student learning.

early every school faces pressure to improve student achievement, even those whose students are, by most standards, performing well. In response to local, state, and national initiatives to better serve their students, some schools adopt new instructional models, while others engage in massive reorganization of school governance. Too frequently, innovations become answers to ill-defined problems, rather than new ways of doing business based on empirical study. Organizations that initiate change without a clear sense of where they are going and how they are going to get there will get lost.

To avoid constant adoption and abandonment of innovations, many schools have used some form of collaborative planning. The goal is to involve a wide variety of stakeholders in developing and implementing the organization's preferred future. Typically, a fact-finding or research phase is included. Some data are obvious and easily attainable, such as student attendance, racial and socio-economic demographics, and achievement. Other data, such as faculty work load and use of faculty time, are frequently overlooked but may be more pre-

dictive of the likelihood that planning will successfully culminate in implementation and institutionalization. What can staff developers do to help provide data that remove barriers and promote changes essential for student success?

This article describes one school's journey to change. Charged with the responsibility for charting its own future in a site-based system, the school struggled to find its course and put its resources solidly behind its mission. Only by finding its rudder and discovering ways to "put its money where its mouth is" could this school develop into an organization truly dedicated to student success.

Before significant change could occur through a collaborative approach to future planning, the staff had to wrestle with issues which, if left unresolved, threatened to sabotage the organization development efforts. For the school to be successful with its students, it first had to create for teachers the same conditions it sought to create for students (Sarason, 1990).

An Uncertain Future

University High School (U-High) is one of two buildings in a pre-K through 12th grade laboratory school system for Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. As a

system, the laboratory schools are charged by the university with a four part-mission: providing an instructional program for students, teacher preparation, research, and service. The underlying function of laboratory schools is experimentation with innovative curricula, instructional practices, organization, and community relations. Studies of these innovations by university and laboratory school faculty are disseminated through presentations, articles, and teacher education graduates.

U-High operates as a public school of choice, admitting a varied student population from 19 area schools. Forty-seven teachers and 15 support staff serve approximately 600 ninth- through twelfth-grade students. U-High programs include typical academic classes for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and interdisciplinary teaming at the freshman level. U-High also includes several low-incidence special education students (students in wheel chairs, student with sight and hearing challenges, students with diseases affecting their muscles and coordination). Approximately 80% of the students participate in co-curricular activities.

Over the years, U-High had drifted from its intention to constantly seek more effective ways to address the needs of students. While parents and students seemed generally content with the school's operation as a successful but traditional high school, the school had lost its focus on innovative instruction and educational research. The College of Education agreed in the fall of 1993 to provide U-High with staff development resources so the school could replace business as usual with a model learning organization critically invested in anticipating and creating a successful future for the organization and its students.

A new emphasis on the site-based management of the laboratory schools put the responsibility for organization development on the shoulders of the faculty, staff, and principal. In accordance with Roland Barth's (1990) approach to site-based management, upper-level administration put its faith in the ability of the staff and principal, aided by parents and students, to get the school house in order. For this faith to be justified, the principal and staff members had to develop new skills in using data for decision making.

Getting the school in order required not only new relationships among the people in the school, but a new relationship between the people and data. Teachers and administrators learned in their preparation programs to assess student learning, evaluate textbooks, and align curriculum. If they were to create a learning organization focused on the needs of students, the staff also needed to identify problem areas and use data to define and solve those problems.

Identifying the Issues

The principal and the elected faculty advisory committee joined forces to form a core group dedicated to convincing the school to take responsibility for its own future. Doing so required identification and serious study of unspoken issues. The first challenge was to find an acceptable approach to bringing issues to the forefront. The core group began the process by taking two courageous steps. First, they opened "the books," sharing all available data regarding budget, salaries, curriculum, extra-curricular offerings, student demographics, student achievement, teacher to student load, and university relations.

Second, they asked all school personnel, both teachers and noncertified staff, to begin the school year in fall of 1993 by completing a research-based climate questionnaire available from a local psychological testing company. Three issues surfaced that contributed to competitive, rather than collaborative, relationships among faculty: (a) staff unhappiness with the working processes of the organization; (b) dissatisfaction with faculty work load; and (c) frustration with inequities in paid and unpaid extra-duty assignments.

Using Data for Decision Making

The core team wanted to make sure the school owned its destiny, but core team members found that they lacked both the skills and objectivity to gather data about organizational processes, faculty work load, and extra-duty assignments. Because of the proximity of the university and the absence of a district staff-developer, the core team engaged university faculty and graduate students experienced in staff development to work with faculty to gather, analyze, and report relevant data. Data were organized in the following two categories.

1. Data about how the organization works. The first issue—staff perceptions of

the working processes of the organization—was an emotionally charged and subjective issue, so staff were individually scheduled for confidential interviews. Interview questions were developed based on Weisbord's Six Box Model, which provides a framework for diagnosing an organization's formal and informal systems through lenses of leadership, purpose, helpful mechanisms, structures, rewards, and relationships (Weisbord, 1976). Teachers, noncertified staff members, and administrators were interviewed by university graduate students in early fall 1993. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes. An identi-

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fication number was assigned to each interviewee, protecting each staff member's anonymity.

Results of the analysis, shared with the entire staff, revealed keen awareness of some district problems to be solved. Staff members saw the school as lacking in a shared purpose, which, in turn, resulted in other problems, such as a lack of staff unity. A majority of the staff complained that the merit pay system (used in the university to promote individual research and publication, but applied as well to laboratory school faculty) encouraged competition rather than collaboration. Interviews confirmed the conclusion of the initial climate study regarding dissatisfaction with work assignments and related rewards. Tangible rewards, such as salary for regular and extra duties, were viewed as inadequate and unequal.

2. Data about how people work in the organization. Faculty work load, another emotionally charged issue, was studied using a combination of interviews and task analysis. The study began with developing labels and definitions for various types of faculty work. Faculty work became de-

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defined as a combination of direct instruction (classroom instruction), indirect instruction (nonclassroom activities related to academic courses, library, media), student services (counseling and student advisement), institutional support (committees not related to instruction), public service (presentations and consultations to other groups), and research.

Each faculty member was expected to contribute at least 40 hours each week through a unique combination of these work categories. Direct instruction and some aspects of indirect instruction could be calculated based on records of teaching assignments and supervision of college students studying to be teachers. Other data were gathered from faculty interviews, administrative reporting, and records of committee assignments and extra-curricular contracts.

Data collection and analysis were straightforward. Data for each faculty member were recorded on an activity form listing the work categories. Data were then reported in a spreadsheet format, allowing analysis by individual, faculty as a whole, work categories, paid and unpaid assignments, and gender. Data were further analyzed relative to the U-High mission and beliefs; faculty assignments were sorted according to the school beliefs each activity put into action. The central questions were, "Did actions support the words? Did the mission have life?"

Data confirmed that faculty had every right to feel overworked. Eighty-two percent of faculty worked more than 40 hours per week due to the nature of regular and extra duty assignments.

Fifty-six percent worked more than 60 hours per week. Interestingly, only 54% of faculty time was spent on direct instruction. This was followed by 24% of time on student services, 13% on indirect instruction, 4% on research, and 2% each on public service and institutional support.

The majority of extra pay assignments was for athletics, not for additional academic or organizational responsibilities. Significantly more men than women received extra pay. Women held 86% of the unpaid extra-duty assignments, primarily academic and organizational committee responsibilities, while men held 62% of the paid extra-duty assignments, primarily coaching athletics.

Using Data to Change the Organization

Data about U-High's operations and faculty load generated two categories of issues. The first category could be dealt with only at the district level because it involved both schools in the system. The second category of issues could be solved at the building level.

1. Change at the district level. Several system change efforts were initiated at the school district level. Staff compensation, evaluation, and load will undergo significant revision over the next two years through the work of collaborative committees of faculty from the laboratory schools and the university. The merit pay system for the laboratory school is being studied to find ways of encouraging collaborations among K-12 faculty members and university faculty. A related concern is the design of a staffing plan for retaining and rewarding a strong teaching staff within the confines of a static budget, while also finding ways to develop the skills of young teachers who may teach in the laboratory schools for a short time.

2. Change at the building level. The laboratory schools function within the university as if they are a department of the university's College of Education. Consequently, the U-High principal, faculty, students, and parents have the latitude necessary to take control of the ways in which they meet their mission of educational innovation, research, and teacher education. In fact, failure to assertively address this mission and distinguish the ways in which the laboratory school can best serve both its students and the university could lead to the school's closing.

The laboratory school must provide a unique and constantly challenging environment for its students and for students of the university. Climate and organizational data

made it clear that U-High needed to decide what it stands for and where it is going. Only then will the school know how to best ensure its students success.

The collaborative process, guided by an expanded core team of university and community representatives, enabled the staff to identify a U-High mission which could be embraced by all members of the school community. The draft mission and 11 accompanying belief statements were shared with every family, staff member, administrator, and university faculty member who functioned at the school.

Acting as a committee of the whole, the faculty and parent representatives identified specific steps U-High must take to realize its mission and beliefs to the fullest. Action planning teams concentrated on issues affecting both how the organization works and how people work in the organization. A blue print was developed for improving school administration through teacher empowerment, university-school collaborations, school-community partnerships, facilities improvement, curriculum development, and continuous review and planning. This blue print will serve as the basis for future decisions at U-High.

The Role of Staff Development

Too many professional educators fear the words "research" and "data." Limited knowledge of design, anxiety about statistics, and memories of high pressure research courses all may lead to educator's resistance in limited-scope research so that problem solutions can be based on data about the problems themselves. Site-based management holds the staff of each building accountable for important decisions regarding the daily operations of the school and also the future viability of the school as a subsystem of a larger organization. Each site must develop the capacity for self-scrutiny and self-renewal that extends beyond observation of the obvious.

Staff developers are in a position to see that a school's change efforts are not thwarted by unacknowledged issues. Techniques for identifying these issues are worth the time and effort they require if they allow the organization to engage in productive planning. Staff developers, because of their background in adult learning, school organization, administrative theory, organization development, and data gathering and analysis, are in a unique position to facilitate a school's efforts to undertake

important steps in (a) identifying the unspoken issues, (b) gathering relevant data, (c) analyzing data, (d) reporting data to the entire staff, and (e) basing a plan for the future on continuing identification of issues, use of data, and collaboration.

Each of the data gathering and analysis processes used by University High School is within the capacity of other schools, provided their staff developers are well prepared. In the case of U-High, staff developers from the university's College of Education assisted with each step. Staff developers facilitated planning by the core group and demonstrated effective group decision-making techniques. Staff developers, in consultation with the core team, designed the work load study, examined work-load documents, and interviewed faculty. Staff developers administered, scored, and reported results of the climate survey. Most important, staff developers worked with faculty, parents, and others to see that data were critically examined and used to guide decisions.

Staff developers could serve in these roles for any school. They could work collaboratively to assist principals and teachers in selecting climate survey instruments and techniques appropriate for their situations. Staff developers could prepare key staff to design and administer simple and appropriate data gathering tools. Staff developers need knowledge of com-

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mon data-management software and should teach others to use it. They also need to remind participants to examine all data in light of their missions and beliefs so that their work is clearly focused. Further, staff developers can build the capacity of faculty to use effective shared decision-making processes.

Site-based decision making requires school professionals and their communities to be engaged in the serious planning of the futures of their schools. Barth (1990) urges

educators to achieve success for students by fostering profound learning by the adults in the school, particularly learning which acknowledges our inadequacies, poses our own problems, involves risk, requires collaboration, and models learning for students.

Sarason (1990) warns that over time the structure and culture of schools undercut the motivation, creativity, and intellectual growth of educators. To change structure and culture so that schools meet the needs of students, educators need to make decisions that are driven by data as well as by personal and professional judgments.

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