

Leadership Analysis In K-12 Case Study: Superintendent's Hiring Dilemma

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Abstract

This paper will seek to analyze of the case “*Superintendent’s Hiring Dilemma*” by Hoy and Tarter (2004) using multiple leadership perspectives. The last section of this analysis of the case study will provide the most effective leadership recommendations for the key players.

Keywords: Leadership, Superintendent’s Hiring Dilemma, Principal, and performance of students

1. Overview of Case

This section presents the setting, key players, and situation at hand.

1.1 Setting

The occurrences in this case study transpire and occur in the community of Kingston, a city in a large Midwestern state. The community is big enough that it has several high schools as well as a number of prestigious private universities. This case study, however, focuses mainly on a situation at Kingston High School, one of the high schools in the community that needs a new principal following the death of the last principal.

1.2 Key Players

The case reveals various key people, most of whom are stakeholders at Kingston High School. The first main player is superintendent *Dr. Mary Beth Kerner*, who is presently faced with the dilemma of hiring a new principal for Kingston High School. She has to recommend one candidate for the position from all the candidates in the applicant pool. Dr. Kerner is under pressure from the school’s board and the community to select a candidate who meets their interests. The second significant person in this situation is *Dr. William Levine*, the vice-principal for Kingston High School for about six years. He is the current acting principal following the death of the former principal Jimmy Johnson, who died in a road accident.

Both Jimmy Johnson and Dr. Kerner had hired Dr. Levine to potentially become the principal once Johnson retires. However, this changed when Dr. Kerner decided instead after the accident to open a search process for the new principal. Nonetheless, Dr. Levine applied as a candidate and managed to make it to the final stage of hiring. The third key player, *Dr. Sarah Washington*, is also a candidate who, like Dr. Levine, made it to the final hiring stage. Before applying for the position of principal at Kingston High, Dr. Washington was a principal for six years in one of the schools in a large urban city. During her time as the principal in her previous station, she managed to build a reputation as a very effective administrator, as she had managed to improve the performance as well as discipline in the school.

The fourth and last key stakeholder is the *board of education* at Kingston. The board has often placed a high demand on the school system by insisting that the high school should offer primarily an elite college preparatory program. The board, therefore, is involved directly in matters concerning the reputation and running of the school by a principal who can maintain this desired educational standard.

1.3 Situation at Hand

The situation concerns the hiring of a new principal for Kingston High School following the sudden death of the principal, Jimmy Johnson, in an auto accident. The superintendent is under intense pressure from both from

internal and external stakeholders, the school's board as well as from the community to hire a candidate capable of meeting the different requirements set by these two parties. The board wants a new principal to be chosen from the candidates who all capable of managing a school that primarily offers elite college preparatory programs. Conversely, the community wants a candidate capable of offering programs that satisfy the needs of all students at the school. The Superintendent, Dr. Kerner, therefore, faces a tough challenge of recommending the best principal. This decision is further complicated by having another qualified and attractive principal candidate in addition to the acting assistant principal who also wants and was previously promised the job.

2. Analysis from Multiple Perspectives

From the overview presented above, Dr. Kerner has a challenge to select a successor to principal Jimmy Johnson as the next principal of Kingston High School. Several issues weigh in her decision, creating internal conflict and external conflicts of interest for her as a leader. She has previously promised an internal candidate the principal position, yet also created an external opportunity for new candidates to apply, one of which is highly favored by the board of education. Additional pressure from community members' interests to address the needs of many student academic levels conflicts with the board's desires to concentrate on high achieving students and its choice for new principal, adding another layer in an assemblage of considerations influencing Dr. Kerner's complicated hiring decision. This section will provide views that analyze the situation at hand from various leadership perspectives involving: human resource perspective, structural perspective, and political perspective.

2.1 Perspective #1: Human Resource Perspective

The human resource frame is a leadership perspective that emphasizes on the individual rather than organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and in this case the superintendent has the burden of making this hiring decision. This perspective views leadership as a framework for motivating and supporting individuals and helping them in constructing meanings with a purpose to synchronize their targets and the organization or community (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bush, 2011). Given the individual dilemma for this superintendent, this frame addresses her decision-making conflicts mainly through the supportive actions of her colleagues, while still granting her respect and freedom to maintain her decision-making authority (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Based on the analysis of the case, the human resource department could be vital and play an important role in facilitating the resolution of the conflict for the superintendent in her emerging hiring dilemma at Kingston High School (Maxwell, 2013). According to Bolman and Deal (2013), the tenet that comprises the human resource perspective highlights the importance of individual needs and motives. In the context of education institutions, the model can operate on the assumptions that schools, as other social systems, work best when needs are satisfied in a trusting and caring work environment (Cloud, 2013). In short, in her attempt to recommend the most effective candidate, Dr. Kerner should consider recommending the candidate capable of satisfying the needs of all the students as well as the parents and teachers at the school.

Bolman and Deal (2013) argued that showing concern for others as well as providing opportunities for participation and shared decision-making all among the ways to increase ownership and involvement of shareholders. Based on the analysis of the case study, one important expectation of Dr. Washington would be for teachers to pay attention to all students equally in order to address their needs. Although she considers success with high achievers important, Dr. Washington has also expressed concern over the fact that school has neglected other students.

Therefore, she advocated and called for the equal transfer of resources to all the sectors of the school's student population. Contrarily, there is another important assumption of the situation in this case study that Dr. Levine does not advocate equal opportunities for both students because she believes, as the school board does, that the school should focus mainly on education programs for the elite students. To that degree, it is observable that Dr. Washington has the qualities of human resource leadership to guide all students learning at the high school; hence, she seems to be the most effective candidate for the position of principal. One of the primary limitations of the human resource frame in this case study, nonetheless, is it tends to overlook the hierarchy of the school system management and disregard the internal conflict of interests in order to manage with an approach that is the best possible for all concerned (Bush, 2011). This could minimize the frame's effective application here. For instance, if Dr. Kerner selects Dr. Washington as the principal, she would likely face opposition from the school board because the board is championing for a system that favors the "elite" students and expressed greater interest in the other candidate.

2.2 Perspective #2: Structural Perspective

The structural frame/perspective is a leadership frame of reference that emphasizes stability, efficiency, and order in meeting goals. Leadership with this perspective requires clarifying expectations through effective communications, understanding stakeholder interests, and building relationships, all important aspects of the process to set and reach goals effectively and strategically (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kline & Saunders, 1998; Sheninger, 2014; Tough, 2013). This frame could be explained using Argyris's theory of action (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fullan, 2014). Appropriately, in his model I of action theory, Argyris observed that leaders should be rational when making decisions as this helps ensure that all members of the organization are protected and provided with equal opportunities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame could also be used to analyze the situation at hand at Kingston High School. Supporters of the structural frame such as Kline and Saunders (1998) argued that leaders should rely primarily on power and authority granted to them through their organizational position to influence others during decision-making processes, to execute decisions, and to support those decisions longer term. In addition, leaders should focus on assuming the responsibilities defined by job description and the scope of their administrative roles while making decisions that meet goals of the organization (Tough, 2013). In line with structural perspective, Mintzberg's model of organization structure, developed by Henri Mintzberg in 1994 could be used to explain the situations at hand at Kingston High School.

Mintzberg's model shows that all members of the organization, regardless of their viewpoints and special interests, still adhere to the key strategic goals and mission of the organization (Mintzberg, 1994). For instance, the strategic apex of the model is charged with making sure that the organization serves its objectives in an effective way. In addition, the model serves to ensure that all the needs of those individuals who control or otherwise have power over the organization are met. In line with the model, decision-making at the school should reflect the underlying goals and objectives of the school, which here include hiring a new principle to lead the school and to further continue educating the students of Kingston High School (Stone & Heen, 2014; Sutton & Rao, 2014). For many years, the school has mainly focused concentrated on a system that favors the implementation of programs that only suit the elite college-bound students. The same board that favors a system preferring more school focus on advantaged students in the community hired Dr. Kerner six years ago to implement strategies that suit its needs.

As noted in the above, there is expectation that the board wants Dr. Kerner to hire Dr. Levine because his policies are in line with the view of the board of education. Indeed, for this reason, Dr. Levine has expressed that the school should continue focusing primarily on high-achieving students. Dr. Levine also argues that the school should continue devoting resources to lower- and middle-range students as a secondary focus. In short, from a structural leadership perspective, Dr. Kerner should recommend Dr. Levine because his policies reflect the ongoing administration system at the school. Tough (2013) noted that structural leaders must be sure that the design and structural forms in organizations are aligned with the environment, goals, and the current circumstances in the environment. The current environment that favors high-achieving students has been working well for the school; yet, the environment also contains others in its student population who do not fit the high-achieving focus. Therefore, it is justifiable to conclude that, based on this frame; Dr. Kerner should recommend Dr. Levine because his views are in line with the current circumstances as well as the goals of the school.

Similar to the human resource frame, this model has some limitations that could hinder its effectiveness in the analysis of the case, namely incorporating important variables for decision-making. In the case of Kingston High School, the frame may not accommodate the human variables, in particular those that involve the parents of the non-high-achieving students. In the case of Kingston High School, it is observable that the parents have objected to the current environment or system that favors only the elite-bound student. Consequently, if Dr. Kerner decides to choose Dr. Levine because his views are in line with the current system, she would likely face strong objection from the community; this may be temporary, but communication efforts would need to reach this stakeholder group so they understand the secondary focus of the Dr. Levine's educational goals for Kingston High.

2.3 Perspective #3: Political Perspective

The political perspective/frame views an organization as an arena of ongoing conflict or tension over the allocation of scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bush, 2011). Also, this perspective can view leadership as compromising, negotiation, bargaining, and exerting impact based on power (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Leaders utilizing a leadership frame such as Bush (2011), however, showed spend their time during a decision-making

process by interacting with other stakeholders to build collations, either to influence others or to gather any new or pertinent information available through people in the organization's network that may impact the decision. Leaders under this frame articulate clear organization goals, and may do less negotiating than listening or explaining a situation. Therefore, in light of this frame, Dr. Kerner should consider consulting with all the stakeholders at Kingston High School, including the parents and the school's board. Based on their educational qualifications, both Dr. Levine and Dr. Washington appear to be very qualified for the position. However, they have expressed different policies with respect to the management of the school. While Dr. Levine believes that the school should focus on the current strategy that focuses primarily on programs for high-advantaged pupils, Dr. Washington believes that the school should ensure that resources are distributed equally to all the students. Therefore, Dr. Kerner should consult extensively with all the shareholders to hear their concerns, as this would enable him/her to be sure that the candidate with the most relevant policies for the school is the one she hires. In tandem with this, she would have to involve all the shareholders by explaining to them the candidate she feels is best for the job. The political frame seems to be the best appropriate frame for decision making for this case. The subsequent section would recommend how this model could help facilitate decision-making at the school. However, similar to the first two frameworks, the political model also has some, but fewer, limitations that could minimize its effectiveness in the case. In summary, the model recognizes the ability of the leader to achieve organizational goals by expanding influence and utilizing leadership authority to minimize conflict through careful consensus building among stakeholders and constituents (Bush, 2011). It has some limitations, but it also has more potential to be applied to solve this particular hiring dilemma. As observed in the case, the community and the board members have conflicting interests with respect to how the school should be managed. As a result, these conflicting interests would influence the hiring decision significantly. Yet, this model also offers more opportunity to bring conflicting interests together, especially because stakeholders can participate in the decision-making process.

3. Leadership Recommendations for Key Players

Following the analysis of the case, *Superintendent's Hiring Dilemma*, from multiple perspectives, this study observed that the political frame is the most appropriate frame for decision making in respect to the arising issues in the case. The political framework/perspective observes that beliefs, interests, skills, values, and behaviors often provide the rich context for the effective allocation of power and resources in the organization (Burns, 2010). In light of this, Burns (2010) observe that people should be capable of setting an agenda, negotiating, bargaining, building collations, compromising and courting, and managing conflict. As noted in the case study, the conflict arises from the difference in views and opinions between the school board and other members of the community.

From one perspective, members of the community, particularly the new members comprising of Hispanic and African Americans have expressed concern over the current school system that pays little attention to the needs of disadvantaged students. These members of the community believe that the school should consider implementing a curriculum that addresses the needs of all students at the school. The current system focuses primarily on addressing the needs of only those who aspire to elite higher education institutions. However, as observed in the case, most people cannot afford these elite higher education institutions. In addition, members of the community especially African Americans and Hispanics have expressed that they want the new principal to be of Hispanic or African-American origin.

Based on their views, I can only guess that these members of the community want the superintendent, Dr. Kerner to hire Dr. Washington to the position of the principal. Apart from the fact that Dr. Washington is biracial, her policies seem to reflect that all the students at the schools should be provided with equal opportunities. In short, during the interview, even though Dr. Washington agreed that the success with high achievers is important; she also demonstrated that the school should focus on the students that need intensive education. So, based on the views and preferences of the community, this study assumes that Dr. Washington is the perfect candidate for the position of principal because her profile reflects the views of these members of the community.

From the other perspective, the board of education, for many years, has expressed their desire for a curriculum that favors the more advantaged members of the community. In particular, the board has been insisting on a system that focuses primarily on elite college preparatory program. The board feels that this program would enable more students to join elite higher education institutions or local private universities. This program, however, is not suitable for all students because it only favors high achieving and more advantaged members of the society. Consequently, based on the views, this study would assume that the school board wants Dr. Barker to hire Dr. Levine to the position of the principle. Dr. Levine has worked at Kingston High for about six years as

the vice principal. In addition, Dr. Levine agrees that the school should continue focusing primarily on high-achieving students. He also believes that the school has been doing an excellent job by devoting fewer resources to the lower- and middle-range students. Dr. Levine's views are in line with the view and preferences of the school's board.

To this end, while making a decision, Dr. Kerner would have to incorporate these conflicting views in her decision-making process. Maxwell (2013) argued that leaders in political positions must exercise discretion in decision making by first assessing the distribution of power and interest. Political leaders should not let what they want cloud their judgment about what is possible (Maxwell, 2013; Schein, 2013). For that reason, owing to the conflicting interest of the two parties, it is justifiable to observe that Dr. Kerner should first negotiate with the two parties, the board of school and the community members, before hiring the new teacher. This would mean Dr. Kerner needs to analyze the two leaders to be sure that the candidate whom she feels would be most appropriate for the job is thoroughly considered. After careful analysis, she should then consult and negotiate with the two parties as well as explain the main reason for hiring a particular candidate. Contemporary supports of the political framework such as Burns (2010) noted that leaders operating out of the frame are capable of clarifying what they want and what they can get. In light of this, Dr. Kerner must first ensure that she clarify her decision before considering a negotiation with the two parties.

As noted in the case study, Dr. Kerner also seems to have a conflicting interest in the issue of hiring. Prior to arriving at the open search method of hiring, she had implied (several times) that Dr. Levine would be the next principal at Kingston High. In short, she had expressed an interest in hiring Dr. Levine as the next principal. This conflict could easily affect her decision-making ability while selecting one of the two final candidates. In this context, this study suggests that Dr. Kerner should engage in political frame leadership behavior by putting her interest aside and hiring leaders capable of ensuring success at the school. From a personal perspective, I would recommend that Dr. Kerner hire Dr. Washington for the position of the principal. In her last station as the principal, Dr. Washington was able to increase the overall school averages on standardized tests. She also worked closely with the local community as well as implemented very successful middle college programs. She also demonstrated that she is capable of addressing the needs of all students.

To that end, I believe that Dr. Washington would be able to address the needs of all students (including the high achieving students) at Kingston high school. Unlike, Dr. Levine who has proven that he is mainly concerned with focusing primarily on the needs of high-achieving students, Dr. Washing has proven that she would focus her attention on ensuring that all student achieve the performance that reflect their capabilities. Furthermore, Dr. Washington would be callable of working closely with the members of the community, including the minority members of the community. Obviously, the board members would not appreciate the decision of hiring Dr. Washington. However, I would assume that they would begin to appreciate Dr. Washington in the end, particularly as her policies resulted in both high achieving and less advantaged students performing to higher levels.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is observed that the aspects of both structure and political frame would play an important role during Dr. Kerner's facilitation of her decision- making as well as during the hiring process. However, it goes without mentioning that both models could be used to make recommendations for the parents and members of the board since the conflict of interest seems to be emerging between the two parties. The parents want the school to implement programs that focus on all students. Conversely, the board members want the school to implement programs that focus primarily on elite college-bound students. Schmoker (2011) noted that good political leaders are leaders capable of building the necessary relationships among constituents and stakeholders in addition to explaining and justifying for constituents' understanding and acceptance to ensure that an organization is heading in the right direction.

Based on Schmoker's (2011) view, this study recommends that the school board should consider including parents in their decision-making process. Occasionally, they should consult and negotiate with the parents to ensure that reasonable needs from the parents are included in the school's activities. Therefore, the study recommends that the parents and teachers should build a coalition and work together towards ensuring improved performance at the school. If possible, the parents should form a parent association that would represent mainly their views. This association would be capable of working closely with the principal as well as the board members. This study supposes that the school's board would be willing to encourage the parents to form an association that represents their view and ideologies towards matters concerning the school. In turn, this would help ensure that all stakeholders at the school work together through coalition as well as through team building

to help ensure that important issues and arising conflicts are addressed in time. Team building and coalitions are some of the important elements of the political frame of leadership. Ultimately, all stakeholders at the school including parents, teachers, school board, and other members of the community would be able to work together towards ensuring effective development and progress of the school.

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