

Principals as Human Capital Managers: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This review focuses on the school system's evolution and the principal's role as an administrator. Principalship refers to the professional standards to which a school's leadership aims to meet the needs of staff, students, and parents. The roles include student management, enforcing curriculum, assisting teachers, and allocating material and financial resources to ensure high academic performance. The review identifies that most principals fulfill a minimum requirement of undergraduate and postgraduate education with vast experience as regular teachers, school counselors, or educational professionals.

The review identifies several academic preparation programs for state credentialing to become a school administrator. The study reveals that applicants for school leadership roles achieve higher learning goals such as master's or doctoral in education, psychology, and business administration. Most states require a minimum of three years of field experience with diverse communities. Scholars emphasize the need for continued learning programs for effective principalship and managing diverse school communities. Furthermore, each state has a local credentialing agency open to various professionals, thus creating varied leadership experiences for different schools.

The review seeks to establish the functions of a principal as a human capital manager. Scholars differentiate human resource management and human capital management by emphasizing the role of principals as business managers whose goal is to steer a school toward the best student, staff, and institutional output. The study uses human capital theory to maximize staff potential and achieve better institutional results. Therefore, the roles of a principal as a human capital manager include recruitment of qualified personnel, provision of professional growth opportunities for various staff, capacity building, and retention of qualified staff.

Keywords: principalship, academic preparation, human capital management

1. Introduction

The principal is one of the most critical education roles. Principals are responsible for implementing the curriculum, promoting school safety, creating a positive and inclusive school culture, serving as community role models, and maintaining a highly qualified staff capable of administering a rigorous course study for all students. This literature review examines the role of principals, specifically regarding their position's human capital management functions. Understanding the role of principals as human capital managers is an area of principalship for which little current research is available. Previous studies have highlighted the principal's role as an instructional leader, but limited studies have evaluated principals' human capital management functions. This review examined literature focusing on the principalship itself, the academic preparation provided to principals, human capital management, and the role of the principal as a human capital manager. These areas represent the dynamic interaction between management, instruction, and leadership, which capture the primary responsibilities of the school principal.

The scope of this review is limited to peer-reviewed research published within the most recent five-year period, except for seminal research providing a historical perspective. A keyword search was conducted using available educational databases, including JSTOR, EBSCOHost, LexisNexis Academic, Educational Research Complete, SpringerLink, and ERIC. Searches were conducted utilizing keywords and phrases that pertained directly to the topic, including education, principalship, human capital, principal + manager, academic preparation, school leadership, and principal professional learning. The results of those searches returned more than 250 peer-reviewed articles, from which the most relevant twenty-six works were selected. Subsequently, the literature was reviewed and synthesized into the information presented below.

2. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

A fundamental understanding of the standards set for the profession is necessary to understand the principal position and the expectations for those who fill such critical roles in schools. In 2015, in response to several calls for standardization in education and educator preparation, the National Policy Board for Education Administration published its standards for academic administration. Known as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, these standards build upon earlier standards promulgated in 1996 which addressed a very different environment for educators and the students they serve.

The Professional Standards for Education Leaders set expectations for the "nature and quality of work of persons who practice the profession of principal" (Nelson, 2015, p. 2). The standards, created by others in the profession of teaching and administration of education, are intended to guide professional practice and set out minimum requirements for how practitioners are prepared. The standards are designed to inform government policymaking and regulations that oversee the profession of education administration, articulating the scope of work expected from an administrator and the outcomes that can be expected from those individuals. Recognizing the link between exemplary educational administration and student achievement, the standards include ten elements ranging from ethics and professional norms through school improvement responsibilities that fall at the feet of school principals everywhere (Nelson, 2015). Principals who seek to be outstanding in their work adhere to the standards and conduct themselves accordingly.

3. The Principalship

The discussion of principals as human capital managers must begin with a review of the principalship and a history of its evolution. As Gunnelfson et al. (2021) noted, the role of the school leader, now mostly referred to as the principal, has evolved over recent years in which school leadership has become highly politicized. Indeed, finding a history of the principalship is a complex undertaking. Early literature on education and the creation of successful schools needs to give more notice to the individuals selected to lead those institutions.

The role of the principal has sometimes been clearly defined and referred to in terms allowing for comparison between different eras and school systems. When referenced in history, whether under the name of Dean, Head Teacher, or Preceptor, the role of the principal has often been one that focuses on bringing together teachers in support of students (Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Because early American schools were largely independent endeavors conducted by singular teachers in one-room schoolhouses, there was no need for an administrator to oversee day-to-day activities. Early principalships only emerged once schools grew in population and physical size, and staffing required oversight by an educator experienced in navigating the needs of staff, students, and parents (Rousemaniere, 2013). Out of this need emerged the school administrator, later referred to as the principal teacher and later the principal.

Early duties assumed by a school's principal included day-to-day student management, creating curriculum, and assisting teachers in addressing unexpected circumstances. Because the public education system was in its infancy, there was little focus on students' performance in those early days; instead, teaching and administration focused on preparing students for life rather than academic achievement (Rousemaniere, 2013). However, as schools evolved and grew from one-room structures serving all levels of students to complex systems, changes in expectations also occurred. Schools became accountable for the academic performance of students who were prepared for a world beyond local agrarian concerns. A political element became attached to the job that required principals to be experienced educators and adept at addressing various demands on school resources. They were tasked with educating students in ways that prepared them for success in an ever-expanding global economy yet may not directly reflect the social values held by their immediate families and communities.

In the 21st century, the position of the principal has continued to evolve. Principals at all levels, from primary through secondary schools, are the instructional leaders of their schools. One recent study on the modern school leader, conducted through observations of teachers participating in the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP), found that "...the work of school leaders is described as engaging within the school context to influence student and school outcomes through interventions in teaching and learning, school capacity building, and the wider context" (Gurr, 2017, p. 15). This indicates that the role of the principal is highly diverse, requiring those individuals holding the positions to have deep knowledge of their student's needs and how the curriculum implemented at their school addresses those specific needs. It also requires that the principal understand the context and community in which their schools are situated to provide perspective and guidance to various stakeholders with varying needs and expectations. Additionally, principals need to have the interpersonal skills to interact with individuals in their buildings in ways that support the creation of relationships built on trust and respect. This extends, too, to the creation of relationships with other stakeholders in the educational environment.

The modern school principal is nearly always an individual with extensive experience as a classroom teacher and postgraduate education that, in other industries, provides an expectation of a higher level of compensation

(Ganon-Shilon & Chen, 2019). In most instances, such experience is required to obtain the credentials necessary to conduct school leadership duties. While principals make more than teachers and support staff at their schools, their wages are insufficient to contribute significantly to increased job satisfaction (Spiegelman, 2018). Ganon-Shilon and Chen (2019) concluded that while principals make higher wages than most other school-based personnel, they often need to be compensated in ways that recognize the complexities of their schools or the needs of their student populations. This leads to frustration among principals who often leave the profession due to high job dissatisfaction (De Matthews et al., 2021). Principal burnout is a phenomenon common to the work much as it is common to the teaching profession, with a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals finding that four out of every ten respondents indicated they intended to leave their position within the next three years (Zalaznick, 2021).

A second factor influencing the high levels of job dissatisfaction experienced by principals is the lack of upward mobility from school positions. Pendola and Fuller (2021) found little in the way of a systematic approach to advancement beyond the principalship, with inconsistency in the years of experience that qualified a principal to advance to additional leadership opportunities within their districts. This work suggests that, for the principal, the indicators of success leading to increased salary and promotion are difficult to identify and are most often subjective to the school systems involved, leading to frustration and eventual disassociation with the role.

An element of school leadership unique to the 21st century that may never have been imagined in the early days of school systems is that of the school principal as a community leader. Roudela and Bertrand (2018), working with schools located in marginalized communities, conducted a study to determine not only what the role of the school principal was but also who gets to be a school leader and which leaders are those who are responsible for social justice. Their work, reviewing several articles published by experts in school leadership and social justice, found that principals in these communities are often involuntarily placed in the role of community leader and required to bridge the gaps between their school communities and the neighborhoods surrounding their schools.

Similarly, Ogden (2017), in her case study of one American principal working in the south, set out to understand the pressures placed on school principals to become community leaders. She found that the principal in her study was constantly pressured to become a leader for social justice and implement social justice reforms in her school that were visible to the external community. The principal was focused not only on the internal workings of her school but also keenly aware of the need to respond appropriately to injustices impacting her students and to work diligently to rectify them (Ogden, 2017). This placed the principal in a political position unrelated to the delivery of instruction yet highly important to the position and the school's success. This is important to the concept of human capital management and the principalship as it indicates the necessity of the principal to recognize the worth of individuals and seek justice, not only for students but for the staff members they lead.

While every school and principal are different, some common duties fall to all principals and their schools. Lambert and Bouchamma (2019), in their study of competency standards for principals in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, found several core competencies necessary for all successful principals. These include making decisions, continued professional learning, empathy toward staff, students, and the community, instructional leadership, and the ability to manage material and financial resources (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019, p. 59). Interestingly, the study was as remarkable for the omitted principles as the necessary ones, noting that cultural diversity, technology, and the ability to balance their personal and professional lives were not competencies that denoted successful school principals. This suggests that the role of the principal is exceptionally complex, requiring successful individuals to put the needs of their schools above those of their own. Principals must be empathetic toward their staff while understanding the complex needs of students served by those staff and be able to relate to the diverse and often conflicting needs of various stakeholders (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019). Principals must navigate increasing demands on stretched resources to ensure they are distributed in ways that serve the maximum number of stakeholders, even when some underserved groups have legitimate concerns over their levels of need. Principals are often those individuals who make difficult decisions and navigate waters filled with conflict.

As Lambert and Bouchamma (2019) noted, principals are responsible for their schools' material and financial resources. They must ensure that the school building and its ancillary components are safe and secure environments supporting student engagement and learning. They are also responsible for maintaining a highly qualified teaching faculty and a support staff capable of aiding the faculty and the school community. In connection with these duties, the principal must exercise keen judgment in recruiting, selecting, and developing a diverse teaching faculty representative of the student population it serves.

Chan et al. (2019) found that school principals are often described as "business managers" (p. 80). Their study of principals in Poland and the United States found that 60% of the participants spent between 30% and 54% of their day

attending to administrative duties such as facilities and personnel management. These statistics raise concerns over the actual distribution of a principal's time instead of the public perception of the principal as an instructional leader active in classrooms, curriculum decisions, and the administration of actual instruction. Chan et al. (2019) found that American principals experience "more frenetic" days than their Polish counterparts, which is a direct result of the increased pressure and expectations placed on them to be visible on school campuses and communicate about the genuine concerns their teachers face with students. The findings of this study suggest that American school principals spend a significant amount of time managing the human dynamics of their buildings. As such, it seems logical that principals need and want training to conduct this aspect of their job best.

Eacott (2015) theorized that educational leadership was a complex interplay of professional expertise, administrative insight, and the ability of the individual principal to shift their approach to employ empathy and discretion in the execution of their duties. His work suggests that no standard theory or model is appropriate to describe the modern American principal. However, if the position is approached with an understanding of its unique attributes, experienced educators can fulfill the job's demands (Eacott, 2015).

In understanding the position of the principal, it is also critical to understand that the principalship may represent one of many different roles a school leader may take on. Principalships at elementary schools differ from those in secondary schools. Elementary school leaders are more often than secondary principals to be present in classrooms and viewed in a more instructional role. Kovač and Pažur (2021) found that elementary school principals most frequently interacted with their staff and students in an instructional capacity, guiding lesson planning and discussing data to inform instruction. They were considered a source of instructional excellence in their schools and expected to drive professional learning, address instructional difficulties, and be the individual to set the tone for teaching and learning (Kovač & Pažur, 2021, p. 45). The ability to successfully guide others in professional learning would necessitate the ability to have productive interactions with the teachers in a building. This is a skill that principals would need to develop to reach their overarching instructional goals.

Conversely, a phenomenological study of secondary school leaders by Mulvaney (2018) found their roles less instructional and generally more holistic. Secondary school leaders were far more involved with budgeting, human resource issues, district-level initiatives, sports programs, and fundraising than their elementary school counterparts (Mulvaney, 2018). They saw their roles as akin to "running a small city," where hundreds of employees and often thousands of students gather for teaching, learning, socialization, and academic success. High school principals reported spending less time in the classroom than their elementary school peers, demonstrating the gap between the two types of administration duties.

Kovač and Pažur (2021) also found elementary school principals relatively isolated from politics and community issues. Their study, conducted as a phenomenological study of a group of elementary school principals, found that the participants interacted less frequently with external stakeholders and that, when such interactions happened, they were most frequently with specific representatives of the communities in which their schools were located (Kovač & Pažur, 2021, p. 46). High school principals were also found to be significantly involved with external stakeholders, both those at the district level and community representatives (Mulvaney, 2018). Their positions are much more visible to community and district leaders due to the nature of running schools that educate students and prepare them for college and careers. Extracurricular activities requiring fundraising and garnering the attention of local media and community members are often a source of stress for high school principals that do not similarly impact their elementary school peers (Mulvaney, 2018). This is important because the extra stress incurred because of managing multiple, often competing demands on the principal's time impacts how the principal can address the needs of their staff and adequately recognize the efforts of those for whom they have responsibility. The job of the secondary school principal is more dynamic, and issues with human capital management are more visible as a result.

4. Principal's Role in Creating and Advancing School Culture and Environment

School principals are said to be the instructional leaders for their schools, looked to as the individual responsible for setting the tone for teaching and learning (Vogel, 2018). In addition to the many other duties, principals are responsible for ensuring that district-adopted curriculum is being implemented with fidelity in classrooms and that the level of instructional rigor is sufficient to provide success for all learners (Hayes & Irby, 2020). This is, however, only one facet of the principal's role in creating and advancing school culture and environment.

Teachers, students, families, and external stakeholders see the principal as the face of the school community (Vogel, 2018). The mission and vision developed by the principal will be translated into the school's goals and strategic plans toward which internal and external stakeholders strive. This means that school principals who establish cultures of inclusion and value diversity will be those whose schools are recognized for their safe and supportive environments where all students can learn (Hayes & Irby, 2020). School principals who demonstrate value for faculty will likely

establish a climate and culture in which teachers understand that their voices are essential to the school.

Principals who employ leadership styles that encourage collaboration, communication, and transparency are those whose school cultures will reflect positivity and opportunity for students and staff alike. A study by Kalkan et al. (2020) found that principals who employ transformational leadership styles are those whose faculties recognize their schools as having a strong culture and a positive school image. Teachers who worked for such principals reported higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more valued at their school, and felt that the school leadership prioritized their interests (Kalkan et al., 2020).

Atasoy (2020) study examined the role of principal leadership style and school culture. Reinforcing the work of Kalkan et al. (2020), the study found that transformational leadership styles were associated with positive school climates and cultures and that teachers who worked in such environments were less likely to demonstrate negative behaviors counterproductive to effective teaching and learning (Atasoy, 2020). The study concluded that, in an era in which change was ever-present in the educational organization, a positive school culture influenced by a principal exercising a transformational leadership style was essential for creating sustainable change (Atasoy, 2020).

5. Academic Preparation of Principals

As with nearly all professional positions, the role of the principal requires formal education, including, at a minimum, the attainment of a bachelor's degree and additional postsecondary preparation. Additionally, candidates selected to be principals will typically have extensive on-the-job experience, ostensibly preparing one to lead a school. To succeed in the role of principal, whether elementary or secondary school level, a variety of preparation occurs through formal educational and professional development opportunities. Principals have advanced education, often at the masters or doctoral level, and years of experience providing direct instruction to diverse groups of students. The most successful principals are those who continue as lifelong learners, understanding that the duties they will assume in their principalship will constantly change as educational reform, political sentiments, and the general demographic composition of the students and families they serve continues to shift.

As Mosher (2021) points out, good principals are a product of their preparation and understanding of their roles. Their "ability to lead school activities...will be judged by their communities" (Mosher, 2021, p. 48). Teachers are prepared with, at minimum, a bachelor's degree, providing a foundation for teaching a specific subject or multiple subjects in the case of the elementary school teacher. Meeting the minimum education requirements set by the respective state entitles the individual to sit for an examination that leads to a provisional teaching credential, from which point there are multiple avenues toward classroom teaching. For some, the provision for testing is waived based on coursework taken during the bachelor's program (Mosher, 2021). However, in most states, advancing from teacher to administrative positions at the school or district level requires advanced academic preparation beyond the bachelor's degree and an additional credential.

Preparation programs for principals vary from state to state, and some standard exceptions exist in how individuals may earn their credentials and become school principals. The most common is a three-year requirement of educational experience that provides direct contact with students and completion of a one to two-year program of graduate school-level learning. These administrator preparation programs are offered by universities and local education authorities (LEA) and are provided in formats allowing educational leaders to complete them while remaining employed. Once complete, the state agency confers a preliminary credential by which an aspiring leader may seek employment as a school administrator, understanding that additional professional learning will be necessary to "clear" their certificate for permanent work as a school principal or administrator.

Principals most often come from the ranks of teachers, but some are former school counselors, school psychologists, and education specialists serving the needs of specific segments of the school population. These professional positions are necessary to provide the types of exposure to student needs that prepare individuals for success in administrative roles. Often, those pursuing administrative roles take additional coursework, and, according to Göksoy (2017), more than 20% of school leaders possess a master's degree, and .3% have earned a doctorate. These statistics indicate the importance of continuing education and the perception that school leaders should be educated above the level of their teaching staff to attain the type of expertise necessary to address the various issues facing school leaders.

What should be clear from the discussion of principal preparation is that there is no one size fits all approach to becoming a school principal (Gurr, 2017). Requirements vary from location to location and the amount of formal education required to earn an administrative credential varies. Just as standards for graduation and student achievement are primarily up to the areas in which instruction is provided, so are the certification requirements to become a school leader. This, unfortunately, also means that the quality of the school leader may vary from area to area (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2017; Ogden, 2017). Standardization of principal preparation programs has largely been deemed unnecessary due to the variations leading rural vs. urban schools.

No matter how a principal arrives at their position, there is a need for continued professional learning that accompanies each position, whether formally instituted or informally enforced by the changing landscape of education in the United States (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2017). Most states do not have a required number of hours for principals to demonstrate commitment to professional learning despite the same requirements instituted for teaching staff through district policy or union initiatives (Ogden, 2017). School leaders are largely autonomous in the type, amount, and frequency of continuing professional learning in which they engage.

In his work on the development of the principal, Stephen Gordon (2020) identifies ten phases of what he terms the "principal development pipeline" (p. 62). This "pipeline" extends from the initial phases of becoming a principal through the types of professional learning necessary to find success, in a general sense, in the role of school leader. Gordon (2020) believes that principals move through ten phases of learning, many of which are inadequately addressed – including the need for continuing professional learning. When principals are ill-prepared in any of these roles, Gordon (2020) believes that students, faculty, the school community, and even the principal suffer due to an inability to understand the nuances of school leadership in a rapidly changing environment. One gap in Gordon's (2020) work is in human capital management, which is not expressly addressed in his ten phases of the principal development pipeline.

A dynamic complicating the preparation of principals for school leadership lies in the increasingly political nature of education and, specifically, the principal position (Verger et al., 2019). Decades past saw the principal as responsible for ensuring teaching staff provided a rigorous course of education in a safe and secure learning environment. Most classrooms were largely homogenous, with lessons and materials provided to address most students. This meant that some students, including those with learning differences, language barriers, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, were largely left out (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). However, recent shifts have resulted in the use of "...test data to closely supervise teachers and schools, to decide on teachers' salaries and promotion, to encourage school competition via the publication of test results, or to intervene the autonomy of underperforming schools" (Verger et al., 2019, p. 13).

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the 1970s highlighted the inequitable funding of education to American students, allowing politicians to take up the gauntlet and leverage education for political purposes. Standardized testing, concurrent with the passage of laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), placed pressure not on communities but on schools to provide educational opportunities for all students while failing to meet those requirements with increased funding (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). In their qualitative study involving interviews with school-based principals, Gannon-Shilon and Schchter (2019) found that principals perceive their roles as bearing the brunt of the initiatives as they struggled to do more and produce results without additional support.

The politicization of the principalship from one focused on teaching and learning to one focused on interpreting the myriad of social issues becomes an issue for those in and aspiring to the role. Principals are now required to understand the needs of their school communities and respond to data with movements that would produce what the public – and politicians – recognize as results (Verger et al., 2019). Schools are termed successful or failing based on testing data principals are often not privy to until after the public has dissected and analyzed that data, creating a maelstrom of public ire and frustration for which principals are and continue to be largely unprepared (Landolt & Goldring, 2021).

A second and recently emerging trend in the principalship is adequate staffing and professional development of school employees, particularly credentialed teaching staff (Dee and Goldhaber, 2017). Before the global COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were disheartened with the profession due largely to public disdain for their work and salaries that failed to reflect the formal education and training necessary to become certified teachers. Social media, mass media, and even district-level administration often disparaged teaching staff as unprepared or underprepared for the required work to teach increasingly diverse groups of students.

This has not improved in a post-pandemic world where students returned from more than a year of distance learning and reacclimated to the classroom environments. Teachers have left the profession in droves, with one study conducted by the Brookings Institute (2021) finding that a staggering 42% of teachers have contemplated leaving the profession after returning to the classroom post-pandemic. Zamarro et al. (2022) found that post-pandemic, teachers of retirement age (age 55 and older) are more likely to consider leaving the teaching profession or retiring than other teacher age groups. Similarly, Maloney et al. (2021) noted an increasingly concerning substitute teaching shortage related to the burgeoning labor market and the ability of those who formerly substituted to earn higher salaries in the private sector. This places principals in the eye of a staffing storm for which they have few resources or solutions.

Keeping a school fully staffed with highly qualified teachers is a task that has previously been a relatively small part of the role of the principal. However, as the labor pool for teachers shrinks and the industry looks forward to increasing vacancies due to retirement and simple attrition, principals are tasked with finding novel ways to fill positions and

provide instruction to students (Maloney et al., 2021). In a study of teacher vacancies and analysis of educational staffing issues, Dee and Goldhaber (2017) found that the situation has been degrading for over a decade. Some roles, such as special education and STEM-related teaching positions, have had ongoing vacancies for multiple academic years (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017, p. 8). While the ultimate responsibility for staffing lies at the district level, principals are the public faces of their schools. They ultimately answer to their stakeholders when high-quality instruction is interrupted due to a lack of regular teaching staff or substitutes. The pressure, coupled with little support and guidance, complicates the role of the principalship and detracts from the business of teaching and learning.

6. Human Capital Management

Shifts in attitudes toward staffing and human resources have led to an understanding that simply filling vacancies with qualified individuals is insufficient to ensure long-term success in any organization. As Lin et al. (2017) found, "...effective human capital management, which includes attraction, development, deployment, and inimitability, is crucial to increase organizational performance" (p. 81). This is as true in educational settings as in any other industry; the need for school-based leaders to address capacity building, job satisfaction, and other intangible attributes of people management in ways that inspire dedication and longevity on the part of their teaching staff (Farkas, 2017).

To begin a discussion about human capital management, it is important to first distinguish the practice from that of human resource management. While both are essential to staffing and operations, each has distinct elements that set them apart. Human resource management is concerned with identifying the need, recruitment, selection, and onboarding of individuals to fill specific positions (Subramony et al., 2018). This function is primarily concerned with ensuring jobs are filled and that employees of organizations are treated by state and federal law and the policies and procedures of the organizations themselves. Human resource management may include elements of professional development and employee health and well-being but is, at its core, a functional approach to staffing (Yousaf, 2018). Little investment has been made in the process of identifying needs, assessing goals, and building capacity when management is the goal.

Human capital management, conversely, is an area concerned with ensuring the maximization of employees as resources to the organization that can promote innovation and success over the long term (Yousaf, 2018). Leaders focus on understanding not only the current state of their employees but also the desired future they envision for themselves. They also understand how those future fits with (or fails to fit with) the goals and objectives of the organization. Successful human capital managers find the nexus of these areas and create opportunities for staff to benefit, providing value to their organizations (Yousaf, 2018). Successful human capital managers are those viewed as transformational and inspirational by employees who feel valued, heard, and respected. Successful human capital managers understand their role to be more than simply performing duties that any similarly prepared individual could address and genuinely feel a sense of dedication to their organization.

7. Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory originated in the 1960s when economists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz posited that education and training were functions that added to the productivity of employees and could result in greater returns for organizations than simply retaining employees at the levels of expertise they possessed upon entry to their positions (Becker, 2009). They theorized that, as more humans were available to provide physical capital, the value of intellectual capital would begin to outstrip that of the actual physical labor force and that organizations could develop loyalty and competitive advantage by recognizing the shift. By differentiating labor forces through advanced education and training, the economists felt they could ensure a sustained competitive advantage over those who simply invested in capital resources such as buildings and equipment. However, critics of the theory note that human capital is portable, which could result in an employee leaving an organization, although an investment is made (Becker, 2009). Critics of human capital theory feel this indicates that investing too heavily in employee development is detrimental to long-term organizational success. The investments seem logical and vital in the long run for schools and school systems, which rely heavily on human capital.

Human capital managers are those individuals responsible for developing employees who are competent and have the potential to exercise their skills and expertise to increase productivity in the workplace (Bartz et al., 2017). Human capital managers recognize the inherent potential in their workforce and strive to understand those elements of employment that will inspire creativity, dedication, perseverance, and longevity. They understand the costs associated with hiring and preparing individuals for work are higher than those incurred when workforce development is a central component of organizational culture. They constantly strive to maximize their human capital. Human capital managers extend their areas of responsibility beyond simply managing the labor force to achieve specific metrics and genuinely work toward paradigm shifts in employee and organizational well-being through attunement to the needs of their teams and a deep understanding of the labor market (Becker, 2009).

In school settings, human capital management is a function falling squarely on the shoulders of the school principal.

This involves understanding the needs of the staff on a personal level and identifying the professional learning needs of the school community and the desires of the individual professionals themselves. As a study by Yousaf (2018) found, the nexus of these areas is where successful principals will leverage staff to promote the success of student achievement and support staff who are more deeply engaged in their work, exhibiting higher levels of job satisfaction as a result. Principals who exercise human capital management techniques regarding professional learning indicate to staff that there will be recognition, the opportunity for personal and professional growth, and a sense of purpose to their work.

As Huggins et al. (2017) found, human capital is also enhanced at schools when principals exercise distributed leadership practices that provide teachers and other staff members with opportunities to lead and retain decision-making responsibilities for some of the areas in which they work. Their multi-school survey of teachers and principals found that shared responsibility was a primary driver of job satisfaction and retention at several schools across the educational spectrum. By empowering employees to retain ownership of their responsibilities, principals exercise human capital theory and leverage their staff's expertise, increasing job satisfaction (Huggins et al., 2017).

8. Principals as Human Capital Managers

Principals who are successful leaders of their school communities understand the need to be human capital managers and fulfill the required school functions of the role. They perceive their responsibilities as exceeding simple human resource management and operationalizing human capital theory. This means working to demonstrate the value of all employees in a school community, including teachers and non-instructional staff, who contribute to students' educational experience in different yet no less meaningful ways.

One of the most critical human capital functions a principal will assume is recruitment. As Saks (2017) noted, the recruiting function is an essential first step in human capital management. Beyond posting job openings and filling them with qualified personnel, the human capital management portion of recruitment involves identifying those individuals who will bring value to an organization and benefit from career development and education throughout their employment. Human capital managers recruit individuals who have the potential to promote within an organization, assuming additional responsibility and propelling themselves and their teams to success (Saks, 2017). In the principal role, identifying teaching staff who are certified in their respective subject area and capable of building the capacity to assume teacher leadership roles is critical for a principal because it ensures the presence of a highly motivated and often creative teaching staff. Neglecting the function of recruiting in human capital management is to create a deficit in staffing that may be difficult to overcome.

The selection of teachers is, for many principals, a challenging endeavor. Staffing at the district level, union agreements, and tenure or seniority rules may complicate the selection process to hire teachers from other schools or with more seniority than other highly qualified candidates. This forced selection may further complicate the notion of a successful school in that those brought to schools from other locations may not share the same values and cultural expectations as the principal. In these instances, principals adept at human capital management understand their work involves shifting the perceptions of qualified staff new to the school to ensure the school culture is embraced. Through working collaboratively with staff to communicate expectations and ensuring that norms are followed, it is often possible for principals to manage reluctant staff and create space in the school community where they can be successful and build their capacity to become valued members of the faculty. This ability to nurture all faculty to embrace the school culture is a skill that may or may not be taught in a principal's administrative credentialing program.

Managing human capital in a school setting also involves the provision of appropriate and timely professional development opportunities. DiPaola and Wagner (2018), in their work on principals as successful leaders, found that the principal who acts as a "learning leader" is more apt to grow a faculty of dedicated and innovative teachers. The actions associated with being a "learning leader" involve not only intimate familiarity with instruction but also with the needs of the teaching staff. The "learning leader" model professional curiosity and lifelong learning to their faculty and seeks every opportunity to provide professional development for those they want to build capacity (Klaeijnsen et al., 2018).

A central tenet of the human capital theory is the use of education to develop human assets and encourage them to be more productive (Lindvall et al., 2018). Instructional leaders carefully craft professional development opportunities, often through discussion with individual teachers to determine their wants and aspirations. These principals then construct courses or seek outside assistance in providing courses that speak to those needs. Teachers can see their value reflected in the professional learning plans created by such principals and are therefore motivated to participate because they understand the opportunities for growth their leaders provide (Lindvall et al., 2018). Again, principals may or may not have received academic training on identifying teacher professional development opportunities.

An often overlooked but critical component of human capital management is the administration of evaluative measures that create opportunities for reflection and professional growth (Tabak, 2020). In the context of the school community and specifically with teaching staff, the evaluative process is often a prescribed activity conducted annually or

semi-annually in conjunction with district policies and bargaining unit contracts (Lindvall et al., 2018). Principals are responsible for providing evaluations to teachers that meet stated minimum requirements. Yet, a successful human capital manager recognizes that the evaluation process can be leveraged to educate staff, build capacity, and truly create understanding between the individual and the principal as the site leader.

Recursive and reflective evaluation processes are valued by teachers who recognize how they can increase their performance and contribute to professional growth (Lenhoff et al., 2017). A recent study by Tabak (2020) sought to understand the impact of teacher evaluation on job satisfaction and perceptions of personal value in the school setting. Through multiple interviews conducted with five principals, five vice principals, five external stakeholders, and five teachers, the researcher found that teachers were excited about the evaluation process when principals were mindful and took opportunities to explain the process and collaborate with teachers to determine what elements the evaluation should cover and what outcomes teachers would like to achieve. This indicates that teachers see value in the evaluation process not only as it relates to their continued employment and compensation but also as a mechanism through which they can set goals, understand their progress toward those goals, and receive support via professional development opportunities that support advancement toward those goals (Tabak, 2020). This is the essential nature of human capital management and an indicator that the evaluation cycle should be a primary tool in the work of the principal as a human capital manager.

Finally, concerning teaching staff, the principal, as human capital manager, holds an essential role as the individual responsible for the retention of teaching staff. Studies have repeatedly shown that teacher attrition in the first five years of employment is exceptionally high (Billingsly & Bettini, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019). Each time a teacher chooses to leave the profession, schools and the educational system lose resources as the amounts invested in teacher training and development are lost. Opportunity costs associated with those losses mean that resources that could have been dedicated to other aspects of the learning process and thus invested for growth are now lost as teachers leave the profession. As a human capital manager, the principal recognizes the need to nurture existing staff and understands the elements of teachers' jobs that create stress and lead to a desire to leave the profession (Neumerski et al., 2018). By attuning themselves to their staff's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, these principals can intervene promptly and potentially change the intentions of staff who would otherwise have found new lines of work.

Human capital functions related to teachers are those that are most visibly the responsibility of the principal. External stakeholders often mistakenly assume that principals are responsible only for teaching staff. Yet, several different roles at a school must be appropriately staffed, cultivated, and supported. Without teachers, achieving excellence in any school community would be impossible.

Non-instructional staff can make up a significant percentage of the staff at any school. Schools may be staffed with office personnel, cafeteria employees, instructional aides, security, and janitorial staff. At the secondary school level, the number of non-instructional staff may also include counselors and other certificated staff, making the total number of non-instructional staff equal to or greater than the actual number of certificated staff providing services to students (Goldring et al., 2019). Consequently, principals must also exercise human capital management approaches to this diverse group of employees whose needs may differ significantly from those experienced by teachers. Should a principal fail to recognize the importance of managing the non-instructional staff on their campus, they risk alienating those individuals who keep the school running, and without whom the essential functions of supporting students would be nearly impossible.

In a recent study of school environments, Debnam et al. (2021) found that school personnel were more likely to respond favorably toward their jobs and the requirements placed on them in the school setting when their principals were actively involved in measures that made them feel seen and valued. The staff members participating in the semi-structured interviews conducted as part of this study reported that they felt validated when principals allowed them to not only participate in but see and discuss the results of the school climate surveys administered on an annual basis (Debnam et al., 2021). Support personnel such as custodial, secretarial, and security staff all reported feeling like they were part of the school community when the results of surveys were shared with them, recognizing the extraordinary impact their roles have on the perceptions stakeholders have of the school and its performance.

Demonstrating value for and building capital in non-instructional staff must be approached in the same manner the principal utilizes to support and develop certificated teachers and other instructional staff (Hickey, 2018). Recruitment of these individuals is more complex due to the varying roles they may take and the myriad of skills and abilities extending beyond their immediate job duties that individuals must possess to be successful in a school community. For example, school office support staff must have office skills that prepare them for the technical aspects of the work and be able to engage with students of all ages and communicate with their families effectively (Hickey, 2018). Thus, the principal as a human capital manager must understand the complexities of the various positions, recruit individuals who

are immediately appropriate for the work to be done and ensure that those individuals recruited to their organizations possess a capacity for growth and development that may propel them to success beyond their immediate employment terms. While an aspiring principal's academic program may prepare them for hiring teachers, the program may not emphasize the critical role of hiring and maintaining productive relationships with school support staff.

Developing professional staff whose roles primarily exist outside the classroom can be challenging, even for the principal committed to human capital management. Because support staff is responsible for various roles at the school, and their employment terms often do not include funding for mandatory professional learning, this portion of the school community is often overlooked. However, principals who are adept human capital managers understand that support staff often seek opportunities to expand their skill sets and feel a sense of value and purpose when invited to participate in professional learning opportunities, either independently or alongside their certificated peers. As Anaby et al. (2020) learned in their study of non-certificated staff employed to support students with special needs, this population of employees should be given opportunities to extend their learning independently and to join the teaching staff in whole-group professional development that creates a sense of culture and value for the entire school community (Anaby et al., 2020). The support staff is empowered to feel more valuable and work innovatively when they are included in school learning opportunities and given the freedom to design development plans that address their unique independent needs.

As with teaching staff, the evaluation process is a key part of the employment cycle of non-instructional school employees. Principals who are effective human capital managers are those who engage their support staff in regular evaluation and reflection opportunities focused on progress toward specified goals and the creation of professional learning opportunities that build their skill sets and provide opportunities for cross-training and advancement (Tabak, 2020). An interesting component of managing human capital in support staff roles often arises in the differences in education and preparation these individuals have for their jobs and the perception that they are easily replaceable or somewhat homogenous. Then, evaluations of such staff and the creation of professional growth and development plans must discuss gaining additional skills and the funding for formal learning that may not otherwise be part of the individual's plan. Regardless of their future goals and aspirations, the main goal of the evaluation is to act as a tool for professional growth, dedication, and a sense of purpose in the school community. (Lenhoff et al., 2017).

Due to the nature of the work done by school support staff, which is often unskilled and requires little in the way of education or technical expertise, there is often a more significant turnover in the ranks of custodial staff, secretarial staff, instructional aides, and yard attendants in school communities. The dilemma of lower wages in school systems compared to similar work in the public sector also contributes to high turnover among these school employees. Thus, retention becomes an issue that can overwhelm a school administrator if no procedures are in place to encourage staff to remain employed (Metcalf & Perez, 2020). Engaging these staff in school climate surveys and professional learning opportunities to ensure they recognize their value to the school community are strategies utilized by successful principals to garner loyalty from their non-certificated staff and create continuity in their school communities (Lenhoff et al., 2017). While these may be recognized as successful strategies, the question remains whether academic institutions are training aspiring principals to employ these strategies.

9. Conclusion

Principals are school leaders responsible for various school matters, staff, and community issues. They juggle priorities that often compete with one another and, in a post-pandemic world, struggle with re-opening and staffing schools that remained largely dormant for more than an academic year. As they are looked to for guidance and inspiration in returning to a sense of normalcy, and as they seek to create cultures of inclusion and safety for their school communities, principals should be aware of the significant role they play in developing staff and instilling a sense of loyalty in those they lead. Despite the crucial nature of these aspects of the principalship, the preparation programs and education available for principals appears to hinge largely on curriculum and instruction, minimizing the importance of understanding the needs and goals of instructional and support staff comprising the human capital of a site.

Human capital management or focusing on developing staff and creating a sense of value and purpose, is a critical component of workplaces where employees feel valued, and organizations benefit from their continued dedication to their work. Unlike human resource management, human capital management recognizes the inherent future value of employees and the need to provide pathways toward that value. Human capital management theory posits that organizations will receive a greater benefit than the cost invested in those employees. School principals, however, have long been viewed solely as instructional leaders rather than human capital managers, and the value of such a role in school communities is little understood.

Focusing on how principals can use hiring, retention, professional development, and learning for certificated instructional staff and non-instructional support staff can and learning about how those efforts shift the perceptions of

job satisfaction and dedication of all school employees can provide essential information to inform school staffing. This is particularly critical during times such as when a volatile job market has left fewer candidates for teaching and support staff and has challenged principals to utilize novel approaches to providing highly qualified and competent staff at their schools. Through examination of programs and principal self-report, this study explores the extent to which principals are provided with adequate training to be successful human capital managers.

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