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## The 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader

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The average correlation of .25 produced in our meta-analysis was based on principal leadership defined in very general terms. However, researchers and theorists in school leadership have cautioned that such generality doesn't tell us much in a practical sense. For example, Wimpleberg, Teddlie, and Stringfield (1989) have exhorted that research on principal leadership not only must attend to general characteristics of behavior such as "has a vision," but also must identify specific actions that affect student achievement. Consequently, we examined the 69 studies in our meta-analysis looking for specific behaviors related to principal leadership. We identified 21 categories of behaviors that we refer to as "responsibilities." They are listed in Figure 4.1 on p. 42 along with their correlations with student achievement.

Our review in Chapter 2 of various theories and theorists should make clear that these 21 responsibilities are not new findings within the literature on leadership, though others may have given them different names. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Cotton (2003) identified 25 responsibilities quite similar to ours. (See Appendix B for a comparison of our responsibilities and Cotton's.) To a great extent, our findings validate the opinions expressed by leadership theorists for decades. However, our 21 responsibilities provide some new insights into the nature of school leadership. Here we briefly consider each of the 21 responsibilities.

### 1. Affirmation

*Affirmation* is the extent to which the leader recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments—and acknowledges failures. It is related to some of the behaviors described in Chapter 2 in the discussion of transactional leadership and many

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FIGURE 4.1</b>  <b>The 21 Responsibilities and Their Correlations (r) with Student Academic Achievement</b></p>					
Responsibility	The Extent to Which the Principal...	Average $r$	95% CI	No. of Studies	No. of Schools
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures	.19	.08 to .29	6	332
2. Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo	.25	.16 to .34	6	466
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments	.24	.15 to .32	9	465
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students	.23	.12 to .33	11	299
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	.25	.18 to .31	15	819
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.27	.18 to .35	12	437
7. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent	.28	.16 to .39	6	277
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24	.19 to .29	44	1,619
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	.22	.14 to .30	7	513
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies	.25	.18 to .32	16	669
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.24	.13 to .34	4	302
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.20	.14 to .27	23	826

**FIGURE 4.1 (continued)**  
**The 21 Responsibilities and Their Correlations (r) with Student Academic Achievement**

Responsibility	The Extent to Which the Principal...	Average <i>r</i>	95% CI	No. of Studies	No. of Schools
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.25	.15 to .34	10	368
14. Monitoring/Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	.27	.22 to .32	31	1,129
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations	.20	.13 to .27	17	724
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines	.25	.16 to .33	17	456
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.27	.18 to .35	14	478
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	.18	.09 to .26	11	505
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.25	.17 to .32	17	571
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	.33	.11 to .51	5	91
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	.20	.11 to .28	13	477

Note: 95% CI stands for the interval of correlations within which one can be 95% sure the true correlation falls (see Technical Note 9, p. 153). No. of Studies stands for the number of studies that addressed a responsibility. No. of schools stands for the number of schools involved in computing the average correlation.

of the leadership behaviors identified by Collins (2001) in his research on businesses that have gone from “good to great.”

At its core this responsibility involves a balanced and honest accounting of a school's successes and failures. Cottrell (2002) explains that one of the biggest challenges facing school-level administrators is directly addressing performance

issues—both positive and negative. Although it is somewhat easy to recognize and acknowledge the positive, it is rather difficult to recognize the negative. He notes that a typical school includes staff members who might be classified as 30 percent superstars, 50 percent middle stars, and 20 percent falling stars. He further explains that it is natural to recognize exceptional performance from the superstars as well as to ignore inferior performance from the falling stars. Yet both must be addressed explicitly. He states, “You simply cannot ignore performance issues and expect your superstars to stick around very long” (p. 40). In a summary of research on leadership accountability, Lashway (2001) frames the issue in terms of accountability: “For many, ‘accountability’ just means delivering results” (p. 2). He adds that in this era of standards, accountability should encompass consequences, both positive and negative, that are based on results.

The specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as found in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Systematically and fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of students
- Systematically and fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of teachers
- Systematically and fairly recognizing the failures of the school as a whole

To illustrate, the principal executes the responsibility of Affirmation when she acknowledges that a certain group of students or the school as a whole has raised scores on the state test by 5 percentile points. Affirmation is exhibited when the principal announces at a faculty meeting that members of the social studies faculty have just had an article accepted for publication in a professional journal. The principal demonstrates the responsibility of Affirmation when he announces to the faculty that they have not met the goal they set of decreasing student referrals during the third quarter.

## 2. Change Agent

It is not uncommon for a school (or any other complex organization) to keep certain practices in place and unchallenged for years and even decades simply because of their historical status. In contrast, the responsibility of *Change Agent* refers to the leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo. Many of the characteristics of this responsibility fit well within the discussion in Chapter 2 on transformational leadership. It is one of the defining features of total quality management (TQM). Underpinning the responsibility of acting as a Change Agent is the leader’s willingness to temporarily upset a school’s equilibrium. Fullan (2001) explains that an

effective leader has the ability “to disturb them [staff] in a manner that approximates the desired outcome” (pp. 45–46). He further comments that change agents don’t “live more peacefully, but . . . they can handle more uncertainty—and conflict—and are better at working through complex issues in ways that energize rather than deplete the commitment of the organizational members” (p. 15).

Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002) provide a different perspective on the responsibility of Change Agent. They note that effective change agents are leaders who “protect those who take risks” (p. 618). They further explain that effective leadership involves “the extent to which staff feel empowered to make decisions and feel free to experiment and take risks” (p. 619). Finally, Clarke (2000) notes:

Seeing successful school improvement as the ability to live with contested and problematic issues is a more realistic and developmentally helpful way of preparing for sustained reform. This way of operating implies an acceptance that conflict is a necessary dynamic of good reform and healthy learning environment. (p. 350)

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Consciously challenging the status quo
- Being willing to lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes
- Systematically considering new and better ways of doing things
- Consistently attempting to operate at the edge versus the center of the school’s competence

To illustrate, the responsibility of Change Agent is practiced when the school leader poses a question such as this: Is our homework policy really helping students learn, or is it indirectly punishing those students who don’t have much help at home? The school leader demonstrates the responsibility of Change Agent when he makes a commitment to implement a new reading program for at least two years to give it adequate time to work. The school leader exhibits the responsibility of Change Agent when he says to the faculty, “Perhaps we are becoming too comfortable with ourselves. What could we be doing that we are not?”

### 3. Contingent Rewards

*Contingent Rewards* refers to the extent to which the school leader recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments. In Chapter 2 we identified this behavior as one of the defining features of transactional leadership. One might expect that recognizing individual accomplishments is standard operating procedure in schools. However, singling out individual teachers for recognition and reward appears to be rare in K–12 education. Specifically, some believe that the “egalitarian” culture of

K–12 education, in which everyone must be considered equal regardless of competence, works against the implementation of this responsibility (see Friedkin & Slater, 1994).

This tendency notwithstanding, a great deal of discussion has addressed the importance of contingent rewards in schools. Nunnolley, Whaley, Mull, and Hott (2003) explain that “the administrative leader must be proactive in recognizing the varying abilities of staff members” (p. 56). Buckingham and Clifton (2001) note that “many different kinds of prestige should be made available to reflect the many different perfect performances the organization wants to encourage” (p. 241). Kouzes and Posner (1999) emphasize the fact that contingent rewards send messages to teachers and administrators alike:

In recognizing individuals, we sometimes get lost in the ceremonial aspects. We think about form, but we forget substance. Recognitions are reminders; quite literally, the word *recognize* comes from the Latin to “know again.” Recognitions are opportunities to say to everyone, “I’d like to remind you one more time what’s important around here. Here’s what we value.” (p. 19)

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Using hard work and results as the basis for rewards and recognition
- Using performance versus seniority as a primary criterion for rewards and recognition

To illustrate, the principal demonstrates the responsibility of Contingent Rewards when he singles out and praises a teacher who has put in extra time for the last month working with students whose reading comprehension scores are below grade level. The principal executes the responsibility of Contingent Rewards when she rewards teachers whose students have made exceptional progress with a trip to a local conference on best practices.

#### **4. Communication**

*Communication* refers to the extent to which the school leader establishes strong lines of communication with and between teachers and students. This responsibility seems self-evident—good communication is a critical feature of any endeavor in which people work in close proximity for a common purpose. In Chapter 2, we mentioned it in conjunction with instructional leadership, total quality management (TQM), and theories of leadership promoted by virtually every theorist reviewed in that chapter. Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, and Valentine (1999) explain that effective communication might be considered the glue that

holds together all the other responsibilities of leadership. One might say that effective communication is an implicit or explicit feature of most aspects of leadership. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Elmore (2000), Fullan (2001), and Leithwood and Riehl (2003).

The specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as defined in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Developing effective means for teachers to communicate with one another
- Being easily accessible to teachers
- Maintaining open and effective lines of communication with staff

To illustrate, the school leader displays the responsibility of Communication when he sets up and presides over informal, biweekly, after-school discussion sessions at which teachers can discuss their concerns. The school leader demonstrates the responsibility of Communication when she initiates a monthly newsletter distributed to all faculty members describing significant decisions she has made or is considering.

## 5. Culture

By definition, every school has a culture. As Hanson (2001) explains:

Schools also have their own unique cultures that are shaped around a particular combination of values, beliefs, and feelings. These school cultures emphasize what is of paramount importance to them as they strive to develop their knowledge base in a particular direction, such as producing outstanding football teams, high SAT scores, disciplined classrooms and skilled auto mechanics, or sending kids to college who come from inner-city urban schools. Although the culture of a school is not visible to the human eye, its artifacts and symbols reflect specific cultural priorities. (p. 641)

Like the responsibility of Communication, *Culture* is implicit or explicit in virtually every theory and in the principles espoused by every theorist discussed in Chapter 2. Although a culture is a natural by-product of people working in close proximity, it can be a positive or negative influence on a school's effectiveness. An effective leader builds a culture that positively influences teachers, who, in turn, positively influence students. As Leithwood and Riehl (2003) explain:

Leaders act through and with other people. Leaders sometimes do things, through words or actions, that have a direct effect on the primary goals of the collective, but more often their agency consists of influencing the thoughts and actions of other persons and establishing policies that enable others to be effective. (p. 8)

Fostering a school culture that indirectly affects student achievement is a strong theme within the literature on principal leadership. For example, Scribner,

Cockrell, Cockrell, and Valentine (1999) assert that building principals can do little to directly affect student achievement. Consequently, an effective culture is the primary tool with which a leader fosters change.

In keeping with these various sentiments, our study defined the responsibility of Culture as the extent to which the leader fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation among staff. We found the following behaviors associated with this responsibility as a result of our meta-analysis:

- Promoting cohesion among staff
- Promoting a sense of well-being among staff
- Developing an understanding of purpose among staff
- Developing a shared vision of what the school could be like

To illustrate, a principal deploys the responsibility of Culture when she takes time at faculty meetings to point out and praise examples of teachers working together. The principal practices the responsibility of Culture when he has an extended discussion with faculty regarding the underlying purpose and mission of the school.

## 6. Discipline

One important task of the school principal is to protect teachers from undue distractions. It is an acknowledged aspect of instructional leadership, and many theorists address it directly or indirectly. Elmore (2000) explains that “school leaders are hired and retained based largely on their capacity to buffer teachers from outside interference.” (p. 7). He goes on to say, “Buffering consists of creating structures and procedures around the technical core of teaching.” (p. 6). The structures and procedures Elmore speaks of are those that protect instructional time. Specifically, he notes that “there is a role for leaders in moving non-instructional issues out of the way to prevent them from creating confusion and distraction in school systems, schools, and classrooms” (p. 24). Youngs and King (2002) have also highlighted the importance of protecting or shielding teachers. In describing the behaviors of one highly successful principal, they explain that “she buffered the school from the potentially negative effects of the new district initiatives.” (p. 662).

The acts of “buffering” and “protection” converge to form our responsibility of *Discipline*. Specifically, Discipline refers to protecting teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time or focus. We prefer the term *discipline* to *buffering* or *protection* because it conveys the message that this responsibility is perhaps a natural consequence of attending to the primary work of schools—teaching.



Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Protecting instructional time from interruptions
- Protecting teachers from internal and external distractions

To illustrate, the school leader uses the responsibility of Discipline when she establishes and enforces a policy that no announcements are to be made during instructional time. The school leader executes the responsibility of Discipline when he handles an issue with the local media in a way that does not involve individual teachers.

## 7. Flexibility

*Flexibility* refers to the extent to which leaders adapt their leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and are comfortable with dissent. It is associated with transformational leadership as well as the theories of Bennis (2003), Collins (2001), and Spillane (Spillane & Sherer, 2004). Fullan (2001) explains flexibility in the following way:

To recommend employing different leadership strategies that simultaneously and sequentially combine different elements seems like complicated advice, but developing this deeper feel for the change process by accumulating insights and wisdom across situations and time may turn out to be the most practical thing we can do. . . . (p. 48)

Deering, Dilts, and Russell (2003) describe this responsibility in terms of “mental agility.” Lashway (2001) emphasizes the acceptance of diverse opinions. He notes that effective leaders “encourage and nurture individual initiative . . . leaders must protect and encourage the voices of participants who offer differing points of view” (p. 8).

Specific behaviors associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Adapting leadership style to the needs of specific situations
- Being directive or nondirective as the situation warrants
- Encouraging people to express diverse and contrary opinions
- Being comfortable with making major changes in how things are done

To illustrate, the responsibility of Flexibility is demonstrated when the principal determines that he must directly intervene in a decision being made by members of the mathematics department because it will have negative consequences for other faculty members. The principal executes the responsibility of Flexibility

when she decides to refrain from giving her opinion regarding the adoption of a new textbook to ensure that teachers feel ownership over the decision.

## 8. Focus

One common opinion expressed by researchers and theorists alike is that schools are quite willing to try new things—perhaps too much so. As Elmore (2002) explains, “The pathology of American schools is that they know how to change. They know how to change promiscuously and at the drop of a hat. What schools do not know how to do is to improve, to engage in sustained and continuous progress toward a performance goal” (p. 1). Fullan (1993) echoes these comments, noting, “It is probably closer to the truth to say that the main problem in public education is not resistance to change but the presence of too many innovations mandated or adopted uncritically and superficially on an ad hoc fragmented basis” (p. 23). An effective school leader ensures that change efforts are aimed at clear, concrete goals.

In keeping with comments like these, the responsibility of *Focus* refers to the extent to which the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention. Effective execution of this responsibility provides a safeguard against expending vast amounts of energy and resources on school improvement initiatives that go nowhere. As described by Leithwood and Riehl (2003), “Leadership involves purposes and direction. Leaders know the ends toward which they are striving. They pursue goals with clarity and tenacity, and are accountable for their accomplishments” (p. 7).

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Establishing concrete goals for curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices within the school
- Establishing concrete goals for the general functioning of the school
- Establishing high, concrete goals, and expectations that all students will meet them
- Continually keeping attention on established goals

To illustrate, the school leader executes the responsibility of *Focus* when she and the staff set a goal that by the end of the year the curriculum will be aligned with the state standards and the state test in all subject areas. The responsibility of *Focus* is demonstrated when the school leader and the faculty set a goal that by the end of the year 65 percent of the students will be at standard or above in mathematics.

The school leader displays the responsibility of Focus when she reminds faculty members of the school goals at faculty meetings.

## 9. Ideals/Beliefs

It might be said that human beings are at their best when they operate from a set of strong ideals and beliefs. De Pree (1989) explains:

Beliefs are connected to intimacy. Beliefs come from policies or standards or practices. Practice without belief is a forlorn existence. Managers who have no beliefs but only understand methodology and quantification are modern-day eunuchs. They can never engender competence or confidence. (p. 55)

Bennis (2003) places well-articulated ideals and beliefs at the core of effective leadership. Youngs and King (2002) view beliefs as a subtle but powerful force used by a principal to effect change. They explain that “one prominent way in which principals shape school conditions and teaching practices is through their beliefs.” (pp. 643–644). Cottrell (2002) echoes Bennis’s (2003) position by offering the following advice to leaders: “Guard your integrity like it’s your most precious management possession” (p. 52).

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Possessing well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning
- Sharing beliefs about school, teaching, and learning with the staff
- Demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs

To illustrate, the principal exhibits the responsibility of Ideals/Beliefs when she begins the school year by writing and distributing to faculty members a description of her belief that a school must pay particular attention to students who come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The responsibility of Ideals/Beliefs is demonstrated when the principal explains a decision he has made in terms of his belief that academic achievement is not the only measure of success in a school.

## 10. Input

*Input* refers to the extent to which the school leader involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies. It is associated with transformational leadership, TQM, and instructional leadership. Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002) attest to the importance of this responsibility by noting that a school’s effectiveness is proportional to “the extent to which teachers participate

in all aspects of the school's functioning—including school policy decisions and review—share a coherent sense of direction, and acknowledge the wider school community" (p. 618). They further explain that effective leadership is a function of "the extent to which the principal works toward whole-staff consensus in establishing school priorities and communicates these priorities and goals to students and staff, giving a sense of overall purpose" (p. 620). De Pree (1989) refers to this responsibility as "participative management":

Everyone has the right and the duty to influence decision making and to understand the results. Participative management guarantees that decisions will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning. Participative management is not democratic. Having a say differs from having a vote. (pp. 24–25)

Finally, Cottrell (2002) warns of the consequences of not attending to this responsibility:

They [principals] forget to take the time to listen to their people. Soon they become insensitive to the needs and desires of the individuals on the team. Arrogance, out-of-control egos, and insensitivity are part of the management land trap. Don't allow yourself to fall into that trap—listen to your people! (p. 87)

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Providing opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies
- Providing opportunities for staff input on all important decisions
- Using leadership teams in decision making

To illustrate, the school leader demonstrates the responsibility of Input when he institutes the use of an "honest reaction box" outside his office. Faculty members may place signed or unsigned comments in the box. The principal reads all comments and offers the topics for discussion at faculty meetings. The school leader employs the responsibility of Input when she shares information about an important topic with the faculty and asks for their guidance on the decision.

## 11. Intellectual Stimulation

*Intellectual Stimulation* refers to the extent to which the school leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school's culture. Supovitz (2002) refers to this characteristic as the extent to which the leader engages staff in meaningful dialogue regarding research and theory. As a result of his review of the research on leadership accountability,

Lashway (2001) links this responsibility to the change process. He explains that “deep changes require deep learning, and leaders must build teacher learning into the everyday fabric of school life” (p. 7). Fullan (2001) describes this responsibility in terms of the need for “knowledge building, knowledge sharing, knowledge creation, knowledge management” (p. 77). Finally, Kaagan and Markle (1993) explain:

Discussing educational issues is something that the diverse actors in the education drama rarely get to do. Merely providing the time and resources to support team development around these issues seems to have a marked pay-off. By making overtly collective and open reflections that up to now have remained singular and closed, there emerges a strong will and capacity to innovate. (p. 11)

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Continually exposing staff to cutting-edge research and theory on effective schooling
- Keeping informed about current research and theory on effective schooling
- Fostering systematic discussion regarding current research and theory on effective schooling

To illustrate, the principal executes the responsibility of Intellectual Stimulation when he institutes a book group to study the differing philosophies underlying the whole-language and phonics-based approaches to reading because the school is considering the adoption of a new reading program that combines the two. The responsibility of Intellectual Stimulation is demonstrated when the principal hires a speaker to talk about economic trends and how they are affecting the job market, and then uses the presentation as a springboard for a discussion of how well the school is preparing students for the future.

## **12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

This responsibility addresses the extent to which the principal is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities at the classroom level. This type of hands-on support has been a staple of discussions regarding school leadership for decades. Like the responsibility of Visibility (discussed later), *Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment* is considered critical to the concept of instructional leadership.

Stein and D’Amico (2000) attest to the importance of this responsibility by noting that knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy should be as important to administrators as it is to teachers. As a result of their synthesis of the research on leadership, researchers at the National Institute on Educational Governance,

Finance, Policymaking, and Management (1999) noted that an administrator's ability and willingness to provide input regarding classroom practices was one of the most highly valued characteristics reported by teachers. In that same brief, the authors reported that in one large school district in the Northwest, both the superintendent and the principals regularly visited classrooms with the goal of learning to recognize and describe good teaching and to provide better instructional feedback to teachers. Relative to this responsibility, Reeves (2004) emphasizes the principal's involvement in assessment practices. He explains that in an effective school

the principal personally evaluates student work and participates in collaborative scoring sessions in which the percentage agreement by the faculty is measured and posted. The principal personally reviews faculty-created assessments as part of each teacher evaluation and coaching meeting. (p. 50)

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as defined by our meta-analysis are the following:

- Being directly involved in helping teachers design curricular activities
- Being directly involved in helping teachers address assessment issues
- Being directly involved in helping teachers address instructional issues

To illustrate, the school leader demonstrates the responsibility of Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment when she regularly meets with teachers to review the use of end-of-quarter tests that have been developed to determine if they can be improved. The school leader also executes this responsibility when she meets with members of the science department to discuss how they will ensure that the required science courses address the content of the science section on the state test.

### **13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

Whereas Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment deals with a hands-on approach to classroom practices, *Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment* addresses the extent to which the leader is aware of best practices in these domains. The focus here is on the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge, whereas the responsibility of Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment is action oriented. Fullan (2001) attests to the importance of this responsibility by explaining that a principal's knowledge of effective practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment is necessary to provide guidance for teachers on the day-to-day tasks of teaching and learning. Elmore (2000) adds that "leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement" (p. 13). To accomplish this, principals must be students of best practices. Reeves (2004)

echoes that an extensive knowledge base regarding best practices is necessary to mentor teachers. To develop an extensive knowledge base, Fullan (2001) recommends that principals meet monthly with other administrators to stay abreast of current advances in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

As straightforward and obvious as this responsibility might appear, some believe that it receives little attention in practice. To illustrate, in a 1999 policy brief, researchers at the National Institute of Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management noted that “instructional knowledge has traditionally received little emphasis in the hiring process for principals’ jobs” (paragraph 4). When describing the results of a study of interview protocols used with principals, the researchers noted that “people who did well in other stages of interviewing could not accurately describe the lessons they had seen” (paragraph 4).

Specific behaviors and characteristics identified in our meta-analysis and associated with this responsibility are the following:

- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective instructional practices
- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective curricular practices
- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective assessment practices
- Providing conceptual guidance regarding effective classroom practices

To illustrate, the principal demonstrates the responsibility of Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment when she attends a conference featuring new research on instructional practices. This responsibility is also evident when the principal reads a book on the research supporting a comprehensive school reform program the school is considering adopting.

## **14. Monitoring/Evaluating**

As a result of a review of almost 8,000 studies, Hattie (1992) concluded that “the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback.” According to Hattie, “the simplest prescription for improving education must be ‘dollops of feedback’ ” (p. 9). However, feedback does not occur automatically. It is a function of design. Creating a system that provides feedback is at the core of the responsibility of *Monitoring/Evaluating*. More specifically, within our meta-analysis this responsibility refers to the extent to which the leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement.

As a result of his study of successful schools, Elmore (2000) concluded that “superintendents and system-level staff were active in monitoring curriculum and instruction in classrooms and schools.” (p. 26). Others have related this

responsibility to the act of evaluation. For example, De Pree (1989) explains that performance reviews, when done well, represent a strong leverage point in the management of a school. Kaagan and Markle (1993) note that in the most effective schools “constant evaluation” is a norm.

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Continually monitoring the effectiveness of the school’s curricular, instructional, and assessment practices
- Being continually aware of the impact of the school’s practices on student achievement

To illustrate, the responsibility of Monitoring/Evaluating is enacted when the school leader implements standards-based report cards and uses the information from those report cards to determine the extent to which the school is meeting its goal to increase the number of students who are at or above standard in writing. The school leader also exhibits this responsibility by systematically observing the implementation of the new science program.

## 15. Optimizer

As a result of their study involving more than 1,200 K–12 teachers, Blase and Kirby (2000) identified optimism as a critical characteristic of an effective school leader. They note that the principal commonly sets the emotional tone in a school for better or for worse. Kelehear (2003) explains that at appropriate times an effective leader is willing to bolster a change initiative with his optimism and energy. For Kelehear, the creation of an optimistic emotional tone is a strategy that the principal should execute at appropriate times. Kaagan and Markle (1993) describe the benefit of a positive emotional tone as an environment where “new ideas and innovation abound” (p. 5).

Aligned with these sentiments, the responsibility of *Optimizer* refers to the extent to which the leader inspires others and is the driving force when implementing a challenging innovation. Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Inspiring teachers to accomplish things that might be beyond their grasp
- Being the driving force behind major initiatives
- Portraying a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish substantial things



To illustrate, the principal displays the responsibility of Optimizer when she distributes a summary of the research supporting the new standards-based report card the staff is considering implementing. The responsibility of Optimizer is evident when the principal announces to the faculty that she understands that implementing standards-based report cards will have difficult moments and will take time, but that she will provide support and the necessary resources until implementation is effectively completed.

## 16. Order

The fact that order, as opposed to chaos, is good for a school is self-evident. In terms of leadership behavior of principals, the relevant questions are, What are the defining characteristics of an orderly school and how is order established?

Order in any dynamic environment is created by structure. The explicit structures in an environment inhibit certain events and facilitate others. Fritz (1984) explains this dynamic in the following way: “Once a structure exists, energy moves through that structure by the path of least resistance. In other words, energy moves where it is easiest for it to go” (p. 4). Following this theme, we defined *Order* in our meta-analysis as the extent to which the leader establishes a set of standard operating principles and routines.

In the context of schools, Nunnelley, Whaley, Mull, and Hott (2003) define order as clear boundaries and rules for both students and faculty. In an analysis of successful schools in a large metropolitan area, Supovitz (2002) identified order as a necessary condition: “groups need structures that provide them with the leadership, time, resources, and incentives to engage in instructional work” (p. 1618). In the context of standards-based education, Lashway (2001) explains: “This means not only finding the time and money but reshaping routine policies and practices. Staffing, scheduling, and other seemingly mundane issues can have a major impact on the school’s capacity to meet new standards” (p. 1). He goes on to say: “Daily routines can hinder or help teacher learning, and they also send important signals about the organization’s priorities” (p. 4).

In our meta-analysis, the responsibility of *Order* involved the following specific behaviors:

- Establishing routines for the smooth running of the school that staff understand and follow
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for staff
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for students

To illustrate, the responsibility of Order is executed when the school leader establishes and implements a procedure for equitable access to the copy machine. He also demonstrates this responsibility when he establishes and implements an equitable system for monitoring the lunchroom.

## 17. Outreach

A school is not an island. Rather, it functions in a complex context that must be addressed if the school is to be highly effective. The responsibility of *Outreach* refers to the extent to which the leader is an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders. Cotton (2003) affirms the importance of this factor, explaining that the principal must have a willingness and an ability to communicate to individuals both inside and outside the school. Benecivenga and Elias (2003) add that partnerships are required to effectively run a school, and these partnerships necessarily extend beyond the boundaries of the school to the community at large. They note that Comer (2003) echoes this same sentiment when he says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” They further explain that “educational leaders must ensure that local police and fire departments, community newspapers, local private and public agencies and civic groups, and local government officials participate in the culture of the school community” (p. 70).

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility are the following:

- Ensuring that the school complies with all district and state mandates
- Being an advocate of the school with parents
- Being an advocate of the school with the central office
- Being an advocate of the school with the community at large

To illustrate, the principal demonstrates the responsibility of Outreach when she systematically reviews all district regulations to ensure that her school is in compliance. The responsibility of Outreach also is employed when she regularly sends a memo to the superintendent detailing the latest accomplishments of the school.

## 18. Relationships

A case can be made that effective professional relationships are central to the effective execution of many of the other responsibilities. In the context of our meta-analysis, the responsibility of *Relationships* refers to the extent to which the school leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff. To foster this responsibility, Elmore (2000) recommends that principals should

“rely more heavily on face-to-face relationships than on bureaucratic routines” (p. 32). He further notes, “In the panoply of rewards and sanctions that attach to accountability systems, the most powerful incentives reside in the face-to-face relationships among people in the organization, not in external systems” (p. 31). Citing research and theory on emotional intelligence, Fullan (2001) describes the importance of the school leader’s forming emotional bonds with and among teachers that help staff and administrators stay aligned and focused during times of uncertainty.

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Being informed about significant personal issues within the lives of staff members
  - Being aware of personal needs of teachers
  - Acknowledging significant events in the lives of staff members
  - Maintaining personal relationships with teachers

To illustrate, the school leader executes the responsibility of Relationships when sending flowers in the name of the school to the family of a teacher who has lost a loved one. The school leader also exhibits this responsibility when he makes an effort to say hello to every teacher in the school at least once a day and to ask teachers how they are doing.

## 19. Resources

Resources are to a complex organization what food is to the body. In the context of school leadership, Deering, Dilts, and Russell (2003) explain that resources important to a school extend well beyond books and materials. They state:

To be successful, leaders need to create organizations fluid enough to respond quickly to new circumstances. This involves the alignment of several levels of resources necessary to analyze, plan, and take action in response to opportunities and threats that the future brings. (p. 34)

Fullan (2001) expands the concept even further:

Another component of school capacity concerns the extent to which schools garner technical resources. Instructional improvement requires additional resources in the form of materials, equipment, space, time, and access to new ideas and to expertise. (pp. 64–65)

One of the most frequently mentioned resources important to the effective functioning of a school is the professional development opportunities for teachers.

Elmore (2000) explains that “heavy investments in highly targeted professional development for teachers and principals in the fundamentals of strong classroom instruction” (p. 28) are critical to the success of a school. In their discussion of professional development, Nunnolley, Whaley, Mull, and Hott (2003) include professional growth plans. They explain that “. . . the principal is obligated to making sure strong professional growth plans are enacted” (p. 56).

In keeping with comments such as these, within our meta-analysis the responsibility of *Resources* refers to the extent to which the leader provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their duties. Specific behaviors associated with this responsibility found within our meta-analysis are the following:

- Ensuring that teachers have the necessary materials and equipment
- Ensuring that teachers have the necessary staff development opportunities to directly enhance their teaching

To illustrate, the principal demonstrates the responsibility of *Resources* when she meets with every teacher once a month to ask what materials they need. This responsibility is also deployed when the principal schedules a staff development session on a topic that teachers have explicitly requested.

## 20. Situational Awareness

*Situational Awareness* addresses leaders’ awareness of the details and the undercurrents regarding the functioning of the school and their use of this information to address current and potential problems. In a summary of the research on leadership accountability, Lashway (2001) describes this responsibility in the following way: “Deep change requires knowing what is happening, distancing the ego from daily events, and honestly appraising the state of the organization” (p. 8). Deering, Dilts, and Russell (2003) describe this responsibility as anticipatory leadership. They exhort principals to identify “clues of coming opportunities and hints about emerging threats. With the openness and mental agility of truly anticipatory leadership throughout the organization, the organization is well positioned to survive and prosper” (p. 33).

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Accurately predicting what could go wrong from day to day
- Being aware of informal groups and relationships among the staff
- Being aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord

To illustrate, the school leader demonstrates the responsibility of Situational Awareness when he studies the schedule in an attempt to identify hidden problems that it creates for teachers or students. He also executes this responsibility when he meets with a group of teachers who he has heard are disappointed in a decision he has recently made.

## 21. Visibility

The responsibility of *Visibility* addresses the extent to which the school leader has contact and interacts with teachers, students, and parents. As explained in Chapter 2, this responsibility is commonly associated with instructional leadership. Whitaker (1997) describes the importance of visibility in the following way:

The research has demonstrated the great need for strong instructional leadership in schools and has identified several common characteristics of effective leaders. One of those characteristics, extremely important in the life of a school and often neglected, is that of being a visible principal. (p. 155)

Fink and Resnick (2001) add that effective principals “are in teachers’ classrooms every day, and it is difficult to draw the line between observations that have an evaluative intent and those that are part of the professional support system” (p. 606). Blase and Blase (1999) echo these comments, explaining that highly effective principals are in classrooms on a routine basis. The proposed effect of Visibility is twofold: first, it communicates the message that the principal is interested and engaged in the daily operations of the school; second, it provides opportunities for the principal to interact with teachers and students regarding substantive issues.

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as found in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Making systematic and frequent visits to classrooms
- Having frequent contact with students
- Being highly visible to students, teachers, and parents

To illustrate, the principal exemplifies the responsibility of Visibility when she attends school football, basketball, and baseball games as frequently as possible. This responsibility is also demonstrated when the principal makes daily visits to classrooms simply to ask teachers and students how things are going.

## Examining the Relative Effect of the Responsibilities

Again, we must point out that the 21 responsibilities identified in our meta-analysis are not new to the literature on leadership. Each one has been mentioned

explicitly or implicitly by a host of researchers and theorists. Indeed, we refer to these behaviors as responsibilities because they are, or at least should be, standard operating procedures for effective principals. Perhaps this wide array of behaviors explains why it is so difficult to be an effective school leader. The variety of skills a leader must master is daunting indeed.

What is new to the leadership literature is the quantification of the relationship each responsibility has with student academic achievement. The quantified relationship for each responsibility is reported as the correlation in the third column of Figure 4.1, pp. 42–43. These correlations are interesting. However, probably the most important information depicted in Figure 4.1 is the 95 percent confidence interval reported in the fourth column. Technical Note 9 (p. 153) discusses confidence intervals in some detail. Here we should simply note that a confidence interval that does not include the value .00 indicates that a correlation is significant at the .05 level. Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1 that when a researcher says her findings are significant at the .05 level, she is stating that the reported results could happen by chance 5 times in 100 or less if there is no real relationship between the variables under investigation (in this case the variables under investigation are student academic achievement and the 21 leadership responsibilities). Figure 4.1 illustrates that all 21 of the responsibilities we identified have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement.

This is perhaps the first time in the history of leadership research in the United States that we can point to a set of competencies (responsibilities) that are research based. We believe this to be a significant addition to the knowledge base regarding school leadership.

We would like to emphasize that in the preceding discussion, we listed the 21 responsibilities in alphabetic order. We did so to communicate the message that they are all important. Indeed, as demonstrated in the next chapter, their rank order changes when they are viewed from a different perspective. When we list the 21 responsibilities in order of their strength of relationship with student achievement, some interesting patterns emerge. To illustrate, consider Figure 4.2. Again, we caution that interpreting the rank order depicted in Figure 4.2 in a rigid fashion would be a mistake. For example, it would be ill-advised to conclude that Situational Awareness is the most important responsibility and Relationships is the least important based on their relative positions in Figure 4.2.

Probably what is most striking about Figure 4.2 is how close the correlations are in size. Twenty of 21 correlations, or 95 percent, are between the values of .18 and .28. Specifically, the responsibility of Relationships has a correlation of .18 and the

**FIGURE 4.2**  
**21 Responsibilities Listed in Order**  
**of Correlation with Student**  
**Academic Achievement**

Correlation with Achievement	Responsibility
.33	Situational Awareness
.32	
.31	
.30	
.29	
.28	Flexibility
.27	Discipline Outreach Monitoring/Evaluating
.26	
.25	Culture Order Resources Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Input Change Agent
.24	Focus Contingent Rewards Intellectual Stimulation
.23	Communication
.22	Ideals/Beliefs
.21	
.20	Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Visibility Optimizer
.19	Affirmation
.18	Relationships

responsibility of Flexibility has a correlation of .28. Contrasting these extremes using the interpretation of correlations introduced in Chapter 1 provides a useful perspective. A correlation of .18 implies that an increase in a principal's effectiveness in Relationships from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile is associated with an increase in a school's achievement from the 50th percentile to the 57th percentile. An increase in a principal's effectiveness in terms of Flexibility from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile is associated with an increase in a school's achievement from the 50th percentile to the 61st percentile. Although their relative effects differ somewhat, clearly the responsibilities of Relationships and Flexibility can have a substantial influence on student achievement.

Because the responsibility of Situational Awareness has the largest correlation, .33, we should at least comment on it. Recall that this responsibility addresses the extent to which the principal is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and

future problems. According to Figure 4.1, the correlation for this responsibility involves the fewest number of schools (91) and the second-fewest number of studies (5). Had a few more studies involving a few more schools been found, the correlation of .33 might have shrunk considerably. However, it makes intuitive sense that a school leader must understand the innermost workings of the school at the

nuts-and-bolts level to be effective. The more one knows about the inner workings of an organization, the more one is able to lead and manage that organization.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Our meta-analysis defined 21 leadership responsibilities. Although each has been addressed in the theoretical literature for decades, the fact that they have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement, as indicated by our meta-analysis, is an important new addition to the research and theoretical literature. Our findings indicate that all are important to the effective execution of leadership in schools.