

MODELS of
SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT

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Method:

Conducted a literature review of best practice models in the educational and business management literatures. Areas of review included: network, virtual organization, complexity, chaos theory, intellectual capital, post modern, post industrial, total quality management, Baldrige criteria , benchmarking, business process change, performance based management, continuous improvement process, decentralization, school based budgeting. These models were then clustered into three general typologies 1) models involving chaos theory 2) quality management models, and 3) decentralization models. These three groupings were analyzed along thirteen key measures identified as best practice arenas in the literature. These measures are: communication, leadership, client orientation, empowerment, team development, data research, continuous improvement, flexibility, technology, resource management, organizational culture, budgeting approach and use of performance standards. Finally, a summary of caveats and critiques from the literature was developed based on the three model clusters.

Relevance to School District Organization and Management:

The literature with direct reference to school district organization and management is scarce. Literature that encompasses case studies of school district best practices is even sparser. Nonetheless, there is an important literature on managing organizational growth and complexity that has considerable relevance for school district restructuring and re-invention. Of the three model arenas investigated in this review, the literature on decentralization has the only directly significant history of analysis and evaluation of experiments in educational organization and management. In and of itself, however, it lacks an inherent theory or approach to management and organizational change. The other two model areas of chaos theory and quality management contain important information about best practices in structural reorganization and reinventing management with a specific drive towards quality and innovation. It is in the comparison and combination of all three literatures, that material directly relevant to best practices in school district organization and management become possibilities. Contiguous with these

possibilities, however, are also concerns and questions unique to school district structure that can only be solved through innovation by those directly involved in the administration of these systems.

Analysis:

Dominant themes relevant to school district organization and management center around the concept of decentralization and the development of mechanisms for developing ongoing quality service. Within these combined arenas, best practices include:

- informal communication that crosses traditional vertical and horizontal organizational boundaries
- clarity of communication that promotes trust and mutuality
- a strong commitment to the change process by all parties involved
- a client led change process [client's for the district include-school board, state legislature, local community, teachers, parents and students, federal government, the press, employers, universities and colleges]
- facilitative leadership that leads by example; sets parameters and purposes but delegates significant decisional power to networks or teams operating at the school level; and assists change advocates in analyzing and strategizing institutional resistance.
- a heavy emphasis on experimentation and innovation at all levels
- autonomous disciplinary teams that cross disciplinary boundaries and create networks among units, unions and departments
- central office staff has specific non-decisional, facilitative functions in defining and limiting their own role; building consensus; providing conflict management; refereeing inter-school disparities; assessing resource management; promoting inventory sharing; developing integrated data bases on dollars, positions and; clarifying equity issues.
- Extensive training of staff and involved stakeholders particularly in budget areas
- Fewer teachers with higher qualifications; extensive use of paraprofessionals and community resources; inter-district cooperation in outsourcing.
- Strong use of ongoing and reflective research data to drive change process

These best practices point to a school district central office whose primary role is one of providing services to a network of quasi-independent local schools. While this, in and of itself, would be quite challenging, the transition to such a system would be extremely complex and time intensive. Nonetheless, the system of commodity based ownership and centralized control is giving way at all levels of the business community to network systems of outsourcing and service maintenance of networks of providers. It is important to note that there are significant differences between the for-profit business sector and the school district both in mission and function. It is also, however, potentially useful to draw upon the management and organizational experience of business in devising solution pertinent to education without losing site of the uniqueness of the enterprise.

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CAVEATS & CRITIQUES
FROM THE LITERATURE**

Chaos Theory Based Models

- requires highly sophisticated staff
- strong interest in theoretical orientation
- willingness to dismantle hierarchical power structures
- tolerance of ambiguity and chaos
- high tolerance for experimental error

Quality Management Models

- requires perseverance, clear set of goals, long term perspective
- must be understood and supported at all levels
- desire for change must exceed drag of resistance
- requires the identification of facilitators and inhibitors to major change
- should not be promoted by groups with parochial interest
- requires comprehensive analysis of entire system
- has underlying assumption that there will be a CEO and board structure-not so for school district. District structure includes state legislature, regulations, shifting board composition etc. this requires dealing with these political realities in implementation of significant change.
- Innovation highly resisted unless mandated by educational authority and accompanied by funding
- Requires extensive knowledge of customers
- Requires high commitment by all employees
- Requires extensive training
- Reasons for failed TQM include:
 - Fear of exposing weaknesses
 - No commitment from senior management
 - Little recognition of achievements
 - Compartmentalization
 - Comfort in doing what has been done
 - Poor training
 - Seeing it a someone else's problem

Decentralization Models

- may lead to school inequities and variation in student achievement
- need significant time for implementation
- need considerable technical support particularly in the area of budget management
- requires an actual decentralization of power with large discretionary authority to sites
- requires possibly significant shifts in district culture in area of information sharing
- requires substantial staff training and development
- needs ongoing substantive rewards structures
- only a weak link between school based budgeting, school based management and student achievement
- significant legal implications in the areas of:
 - due process, civil rights
 - oversight on public tax dollars
 - preservation of fiscal accountability
 - economies of scale and district efficiency
 - personal liability
- requires adequate strategies for handling cash flow
- risk management
- accommodation of varied school organizational characteristics
- school based budgeting provided little incentive for schools to do business differently:
 - monies used in traditional ways
 - principals retained considerable power over expenditures
 - limited access to budgeting information
 - sanctions for poor performance exacerbates difficulties

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	<i>Models Involving Chaos Theory*</i>	<i>Quality Management Models**</i>	<i>Decentralization Models***</i>
<i>Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal • Stories & metaphors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process must be understood and supported at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish clear lines of communication with administrators
<i>Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By example/role model • Reinvent org control • Leadership capable of understanding grip of the past and nature of the possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets with teams • Establishes parameters/purposes • Collaborative leadership • Senior management support • Visionary leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous management by parent group • School community partnership • Establish decision making parameters • Facilitative leadership style • Network not hierarchical model • Restraint of power • mutuality • Control & decision making close to school & classroom
<i>Client orientation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet or exceed customer expectation • Client led: client is school board, state legislature, local community, teachers, researchers, federal government, the press, students and parents, employers, universities and colleges 	
<i>Empowerment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radical delegation & empowerment • Innovations & experiments • Assist change advocates in analyzing and strategizing institutional resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower employees • Innovations & experiments • Assist change advocates in analyzing and strategizing institutional resistance • Every employee shares vision • District models facilitate development of models at school level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovations & experiments • Decentralize power and knowledge • Assist change advocates in analyzing and strategizing institutional resistance
<i>Team</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish commitment • Empower teams to develop autonomous teamwork • Teams are multidisciplinary • Create networks among school units, unions, departments • Partnerships within and without 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use process improvement teams • Establish commitment • Choose benchmark partners • Share responsibility for strategies broadly • Teams are aware of client needs and preferences; sets benchmarks and is led by benchmarks • Teams are multidisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office staff defines and limits roles; builds consensus • functionally specialized units tied together in exchange relationship • role integrity • conflict management • establish commitment • Teams are multidisciplinary

	<i>Models Involving Chaos Theory*</i>	<i>Quality Management Models**</i>	<i>Decentralization Models***</i>
<i>Data research</i>	Sense making main vehicle for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data utilization • Choose metrics and collect data • Analyze data • Do not follow latest fad • Need for innovation should follow from research • Solutions come from research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralize information • Sites evaluate programs • Sites make decisions about effectiveness
<i>Continuous Improvement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan carefully: expect resistance • Develop org with high capacities for learning • Strong future orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce error • Continuous and incremental improvement • Prevention • Staff development • Plan carefully: expect resistance • ID processes to be benchmarked/establish baselines • Implement improvements following data analysis • Monitor results • Long term perspective; process is ongoing cycle of performance/evaluation • Link projects to agency goals and objectives • Develop performance measures • Strong future orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive training of all stakeholders • Train staff in budget process • Plan carefully: expect resistance • Guided by mission/goal achievement strategies • Central office provides training • Strong future orientation
<i>Flexibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High flexibility • adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dynamic not structured or formal • rethink strategies as needed • explicit focus on and measurement of response time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high flexibility
<i>Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • max use of technology • transform physical processes to virtual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of technology implied but not noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of technology implied but not noted
<i>Resource Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer teachers with higher qualifications • extensive use of paraprofessionals • extensive use of comm. Resources • inter-district cooperation in outsourcing 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office referees to manage disparities; • promotes inventory sharing; • assesses resource management; develops integrated data base on dollars, positions outcomes; clarifies equity issues and funding mechanisms • outsource non-core activities

	<i>Models Involving Chaos Theory*</i>	<i>Quality Management Models**</i>	<i>Decentralization Models***</i>
<i>Budgeting Approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific approach noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school based accountability • decentralized fiscal decisions • sites decide about continued funding • eliminate all pre-approval process • decentralize access control • standards not invented from bottom up • must be real • single set focuses issues
<i>Use of performance standards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none noted 	

* includes: network, virtual organization, complexity, chaos theory, intellectual capital, post modern, and post industrial models.

Sources: Bergquist, 1997; Donlon, 1997; McMaster, 1996; Swanson 1983;

** includes: Total quality management, Baldrige criteria , benchmarking, business process change, performance based management, and continuous improvement process.

Sources: Agocs, 1997; Baldrige 2000; Birrell, 1997; Chakravarthy, 1997; Drucker, 1995; Ferne, 1993; Gohlke, 1997; Grover& Kettinger, 1997; Llanes, 1996;

*** includes: decentralization, school based budgeting, site based management, and community empowerment.

Sources: Archrol, 1997; Emmanuel & Sawada, 1998; Ferguson & Nochelski, 1996; Goertz & Steifel, 1998; Goertz & Duffy, 1999; Hall, 1997; Harel & Partipilo, 1996; Ilg & Raisch, 1999; Odden et al. 1995; Picus, 1999.

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