

Managing and Leading Elementary Schools: Attending to the Formal and Informal Organization

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The Distributed Leadership Study
<http://www.distributedleadership.org>

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Theoretical & Empirical Anchors

Formal or Designed and Lived or Informal Organization

- Formal organization - organizational charts, formally designated leadership positions, formal organizational routines.
- Informal or lived organization - school as experienced by organizational members
- Informal not a mirror image of formal organization (Dalton 1959; Homans 1950; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Brown & Duguid, 1991)

A Distributed Perspective

- The Leader-Plus Aspect
- The Practice Aspect



A Distributed Perspective

- Conceptual framework for thinking about leadership and management.
- A diagnostic instrument that draws attention to particular dimensions of practice
- A design framework for guiding leadership and management development efforts.



Research Questions

- Who has a formally designated leadership position in elementary schools and what are their responsibilities?
- Who takes responsibility for leadership and management work?
- To what extent does the practice of leading and managing involve co-performance?
- Do patterns of distribution vary from one school to the next?
- What types of leading and managing work are distributed across people and involve co-performance?

Research Methods

Sample

- 23 of 30 Elementary Schools in one mid-sized urban school district.

Data Collection:

- Mixed methods design - survey, observation, interviews & logs.
- Current paper:
 - School Staff Questionnaire (SSQ)
 - School Principal Questionnaire (PQ)
 - ESM log

Social Network Instrument

Screen Screen Shot from SSSNQ Version 2 – Math Advice Questions Page

School Staff Survey



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During THIS SCHOOL YEAR, to whom have you turned for advice or information about teaching Mathematics? Please write full first and last names, and give a brief description of that person's role or position. You do not need to fill all the spaces.

- I have not sought advice from anyone.

Name	Role
Jim Spillane	principal
James Pustejovsky	6th grade teacher
Virginia Pitts	math coordinator
Cindy Sigal	roommate - also a teacher



Research Methods

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics for Elementary Schools.

	Elementary Schools in District ¹	Elementary Schools in analysis ²
Total number of students	16,776	13,162
Average number of students/school	559	572
Average student:teacher ratio	13	13
Percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch	65	60
Percentage minority enrollment	71	65

¹ All elementary schools in the district, including those with and without ESM data; N=30.

² Elementary schools in the district in which principal participated in ESM; N=23.

Research Methods

Response Rates

- SSQ – Overall response rate for 23 schools was 89%, ranging from 78% to 100%.
- ESM - Overall response rate for 23 principals was 64%, ranging from 25% to 93%.
- PQ – All 23 Principals completed the Principal Questionnaire.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive and correlational approaches by aggregating individual responses to school and sample levels.
- Non-parametric tests.

Overview: Findings/Assertions/ Hypotheses

- Multiple formally designated leaders have responsibility for leadership and management.
- Responsibilities of formally designated leaders often overlap suggesting co-performance or parallel performance.
- Formally designated leaders not always prominent in who actually takes responsibility for leading and managing.
- *Co-performance* (collaborated distribution) of leading and managing activities was relatively commonplace in the 23 elementary schools.
- *How* responsibility for leadership and management is distributed and stretched over leaders depends on the type of activity.
- There is considerable between-school variation in how responsibility for leadership and management is distributed.

Today's Focus

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Leading and Managing from the Perspective of the Lived or Informal Organization

- The mean number of leaders was 3.7 for languages arts and 3.1 for mathematics.
- Between school variation ranged from
 - one to 11 leaders for language arts
 - zero to 12 leaders for mathematics
- Of those identified in language arts, 44% had formal position, 48% did not.
- **Only 43% (13) of the 30** with formal language arts position were identified.
- Of those identified for mathematics, 45% had formal position, 49% did not.
- **Only 36% (10) of the 28** with formal math position were identified.

The Formal and Informal Compared

Table 2. Presence of formally designated leaders in Language Arts and Math Networks.

	Language Arts Leaders			Math Leaders	
	N	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Principal	23	1	4	1	4
Assistant principal	39	5	13	5	13
Whole school reform program coach/ facilitator	64	10	16	10	16
Special program coordinator (e.g., Title I)	59	8	14	6	10
Reading, Literacy, or English program coordinator/ chair	30	13	43	2	7
Math program coordinator/ chair	28	3	11	10	36
Other subject area program coordinator/ chair	72	4	6	6	8
School improvement coordinator	59	8	14	8	14
Master/mentor teacher	133	25	19	20	15
Teacher consultant	81	9	11	10	12
Other	50	8	16	6	12

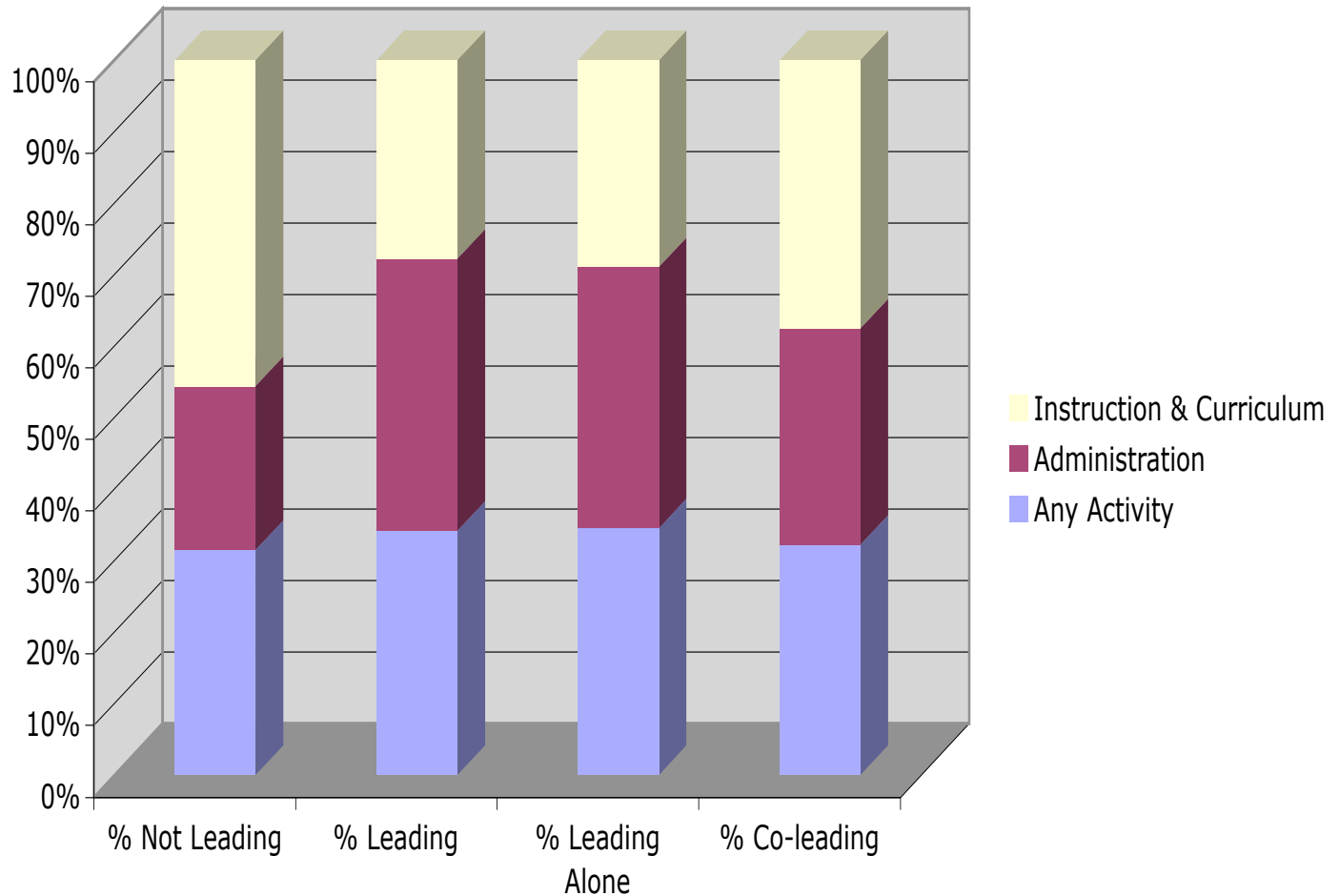
Formal and Informal Organizational Congruence: Between School Variance

- Across the 23 schools, formally designated leaders account for between 0% and 82% of language arts advice relations.
- Across the 23 schools, formally designated leaders account for between 0% and 77% of mathematics advice relations.
- While formally designated leaders were responsible for none of the advice giving interactions about language arts in one school, they were responsible for 82% of these interactions at another school.
- A measure of *how* leadership is distributed -- congruence of formal and informal arrangements.

Co-Performance of Leading and Managing: The Subject Matters

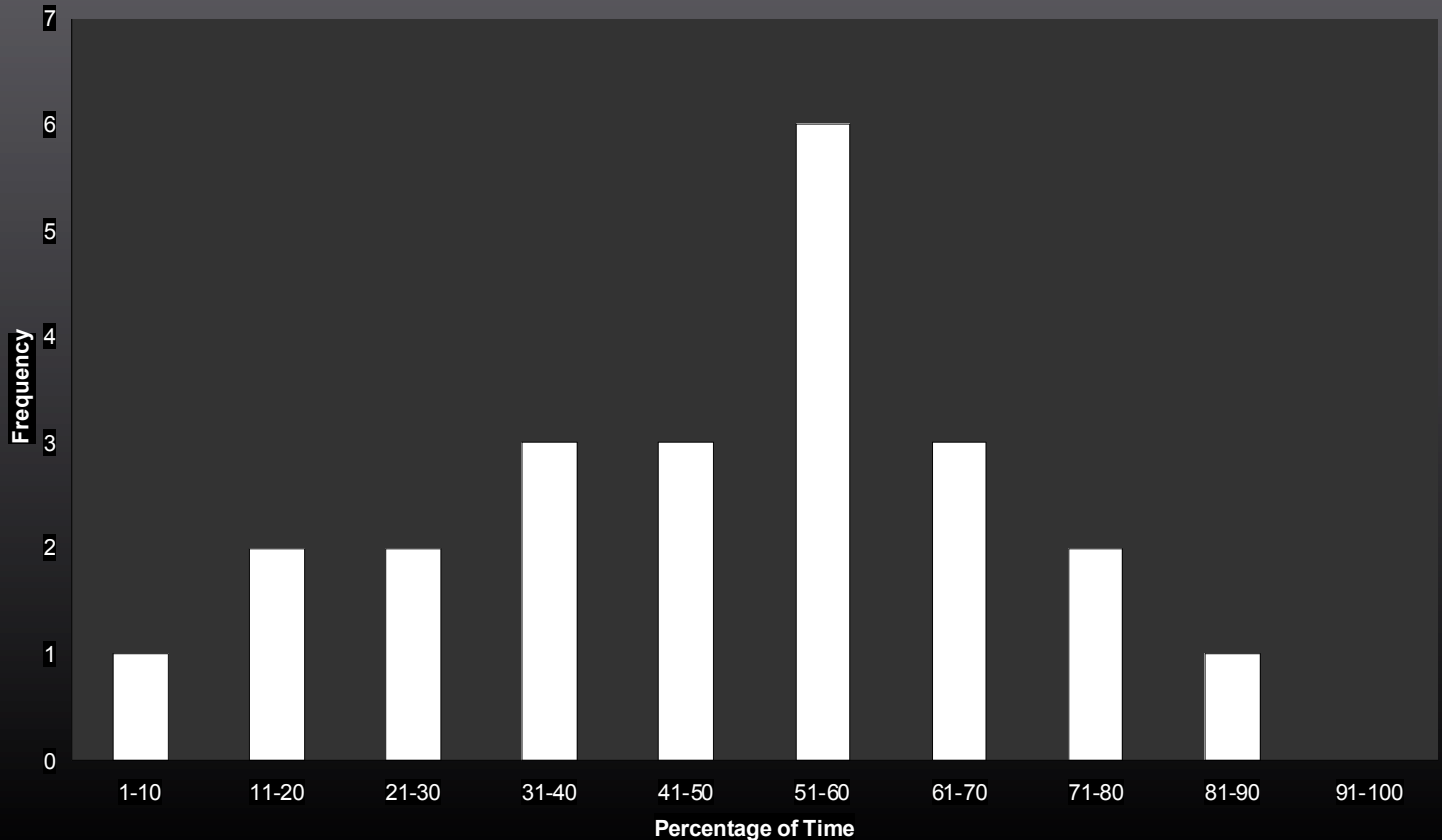
- Principals reported co-performing 48% of activities.
- Principals co-performed significantly more instruction and curriculum-related activities (56%) than administration-related activities (45%) ($p < 0.05$)
- Principals most frequently reported co-performing with regular classroom teachers (32%) and teacher leaders (25%).
- For over 50% of co-performance situations, principals identified at least one individual with no formal leadership designation.

The Activity Type Matters



Co-Performance: Between School Variance

Figure 2(b). Frequency Distribution of Percentage of Principals' Activities Co-lead with Someone Else (N=23).



Conclusion

- Attending to both the formal and informal organization and relations among the two.
- Schools differ in how leading and managing is stretched over people
- The activity type matters.
- Ongoing work ...