

FOCUS:

A STUDY OF PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL

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The study was initiated by some concerns about principal appraisal. These concerns were expressed in a series of questions designed to facilitate discussion with other interested principals . A reciprocal principal appraisal was undertaken to contextualise the discussions. The questions were as follows .

What are the criteria for the effectiveness of appraisals.

Do appraisals meet the needs of principals.

Do appraisals meet the needs of the employers.

How are appraisers chosen.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of external and internal appraisals.

To what extent is information on student achievement used in appraisal

STUDY OUTLINE

- 1** The first step was to talk to other principals and introduce the focus of the study and the questions suggested to guide the investigation. A study group was established and first met on 2 September 2005. There were 2 more meetings up to 29 march 2006.
- 2** Reciprocal principal appraisals were undertaken during 2005 with a member of the study group. The components of these appraisals were identified and discussion followed about the emphasis to be placed on each component to fulfill obligations to the Boards of Trustees and the principals concerned. This will continue in 2006.
- 3** Information on principal appraisal was collected from a variety of sources including the Ministry of Education, The school Trustees Association, the Education Review Office, the New Zealand Educational Institute and other commentators.

1 THE STUDY GROUP.

At the first meeting the study questions were considered and formed the basis of some discussion. It was considered that appraisal was for moving on and more than just a checklist of tasks completed. References were made to the work of David Stewart and the importance of principal reflection as a starting point for the process. Colleague appraisals were considered to be useful and it was noted that the NZSTA did not recommend this in their handbook on appraisal. The Quality Learning Circle approach was considered an effective model and one particularly responsive to the individual. It exemplified trust in the appraiser to help and guide the individual to a valid outcome. However the QLC may not suit all components of the appraisal and it was considered possible to have the Board of Trustees requirements and the Principals interests undertaken in different ways.

Reference was made to the work of Eileen Piggot- Irvine and the importance of establishing credibility at the beginning of the appraisal process. This involves knowing who will be involved, who will read the report and who will choose the appraiser.

The issue of defining good leadership was discussed and it was suggested that business models may not be the most useful. The perceptions of staff were considered to be useful though some precautions were advisable. Rating systems were discussed such as that advocated by Interlead Consultancy in which 10 people rate the appraisee on such categories as “vision, service, reality and courage”. Statistics chart the strengths and weaknesses in a very readable format and although the appraisee may have chosen the ten people it is essentially a one way process which is quickly over. The group felt that the aim should still be mostly a formative rather than a summative approach. It was felt that a snapshot on one day would not be as effective as a term or year long process designed to cover all the aspects of the work. However it is possible to have a variety of processes to suit specific requirements.

The importance of ongoing data was exemplified by the First Time Principals group who are taught to collect evidence as they go so that a comprehensive picture is built up. Ongoing data is a developing trend and the group considered ways of collecting and managing such data. The group looked closely at the Professional Learning Online Tool [PLOT] which enables data to be collected and presented in a variety of ways and in support of principal appraisal when required. Other online sources of support were discussed such as Interlead 360 which is more suitable for baseline data for the leadership team rather than appraisal. The digital portfolio designed by David Stewart was considered a good model of data collection with the focus on principal initiating the appraisal process.

The merits of a survey of principals were discussed. Although the questions presented were useful to start discussion there could be better ways of finding out what principals are concerned about. Approaches through Principals Associations, APPA, the Principals Federation and PEN to comment on or contribute to the study might be more effective.

Of interest is the work being done on distributed leadership. Heather attended the seminar run by Viviane Robinson. There may be some implications for principal appraisal and the development of a coherent theory of management that is suited to schools.

2 RECIPROCAL PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL

The reciprocal principal appraisal was undertaken partly to look closely at appraisal issues identified in the study questions and partly to address some of the problems identified in anecdotal accounts of appraisal. One such problem was the perception the BOT might have about principal colleagues appraising each other. The STA handbook , Guidelines for Boards of Trustees: Managing Principals Appraisal has some words of caution about colleagues appraising each other . This appears to be a lack of confidence in principals and their ability to effectively self review. The Education Review Office suggests that there is much to be gained from the interaction and support of colleagues in the appraisal process. This is the opinion of the participants in the appraisal which is outlined as follows.

The first task undertaken by the principals was to look at their previous appraisals and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the systems used and the usefulness of the outcomes. One such problem had been time spent on the appraisal .Being seen by an appraiser only once a year for a few hours may not be enough to produce quality information, even though the same appraiser is used for several years. If the appraiser is unfamiliar with the school or other similar schools, the most useful aspects of the appraisal may be missed..It is expected that the appraiser will be fully informed about current best practice in educational leadership and able to apply the information to the particular school situation. It is considered desirable that the appraisal process is dialogic in nature and this has implications for the nature of the final report or reports..

The principals then approached the Board Chairpersons to outline the process and obtain permission to undertake the appraisal. An understanding was reached that all the Board requirements would be met in the usual way. The appraisal would inform the performance management documentation negotiated by the Boards and the Principals. A time line was agreed.

It was felt that shared understandings about the professional standards would be a good place to start. Each professional standard was analysed looking at previous expectations and other possible interpretations. Each principal undertook a self review which identified the way in which each professional standard could be applied to the specific job description and school situation. The criteria for assessment of the professional

standards were established at this time. This task resulted in a lot more detailed information because both principals were fully aware of the complexities of the job and the challenges to be met. The schools involved were from a similar community. The appraisers had credibility with each other and were able to discuss different ways of achieving the expected outcomes. This was far more helpful than a purely compliance model of appraisal which produces a checklist.

As outlined above the scope of the appraisals was greater than previous appraisals had been. This was also the case for the school visits which were undertaken throughout the year.. Evidence of the professional standards was looked at and ideas for improvement developed. Most of the classrooms in the schools were visited . These were directed observations and notes were taken. However there were also informal observations which led to useful discussions which were not part of the official appraisal. Senior management staff were interviewed and other the staff were met informally in the staff room.

Leave arrangements led to a delay in writing the final reports but they were completed within the timeline suggested. Each principal received suggested developments for the following year and strengths were identified. Each principal was involved in a learning process the focus of which was to make the appraisal as useful as possible to all concerned.

The principals have decided to build on the experience in the following year and will again look at ways of achieving the best outcome in terms of individual growth, professional development and the confidence of the Board of Trustees.

The above is a brief summary of the procedure. The details are part of the individual appraisals and remain confidential. However it is likely that with more reciprocal appraisals being done some general points will emerge.

3 VIEWPOINTS

A] Official

The Primary Principals collective Agreement 1October 2004 – 30 June 2007 a booklet produced by NZEI does not offer suggestions for appraisal but gives specific details of performance review [paragraph 4.1 to 4.1.4]. The review is to be done annually with specific reference to the professional standards. It is clearly stated that where there is disagreement the views of the employer shall prevail and that additional comments from the principal shall only be included if the employer considers them to be appropriate. The principal is required to co-operate at all stages.

This statement is about compliance and the responsibilities of the Board. In most cases the performance management part of the process is informed by the appraisal . However the focus of the appraisal is usually claimed to be the development of the principal. Although the Board pay for the appraisal and the appraiser reports to the Board many

appraisers would consider the principal to be the client. This appears to be an area of tension and one which has the potential to undermine the usefulness of the appraisal.

NZSTA Guidelines for Boards of Trustees, Managing Principal Appraisal sets out the process in more detail. It gives a sample policy which describes the appraisers as the Board Chairperson or delegate or an independent consultant. There is no suggestion that the principal would choose an appraiser and in fact the employment of a neighbouring principal is specifically discouraged by NZSTA. It is stated that such an appraiser would not be objective. However there are guidelines for choosing a consultant who may be a practising principal. These are provided for Boards who have acknowledged an inability to assess the skills and professional standards of principals. NZSTA suggests that teachers appraisals should be formative but principals appraisals should be formative and summative. Some caution is expressed about leaving the appraisal entirely to a consultant.

It seems clear that NZSTA want the Boards to be demonstrating authority and control in the appraisal process. The quotation they give from 'Human Resources and Management in New Zealand' identifies performance appraisal as follows: "The process of identifying, evaluating and developing the work performance of employees in the organisation, so that the organisational goals and objectives are more effectively achieved, while at the same time benefiting employees in terms of recognition, receiving feedback, catering for individual needs and offering career advice." The organisational goals and objectives appear to be the rationale for the process and it is assumed that these will cater also for the appraisal of individual personnel. However the appraisal of a principal, while not in conflict with organisational goals is more extensive and includes personal goals that would be difficult to appraise in terms only of performance as described above.. The "vision" so often lauded in leadership is hard to measure against set criteria. Little mention is made of the needs of the principal or the quality of the appraisal undertaken. Only contractual obligations are mentioned. The booklet is designed to support Boards and provides reassurance that in the event of disagreement with the principal the Board view will prevail and any comments from the principal will only be attached if the employer considers them to be appropriate.

The Education Review Office: Good Practices in Principal's Appraisal 2002

The introductory passage has a list of six conditions that are common in good practice schools. The last of these is as follows; "It goes beyond compliance and accountability and encourages reflection, innovation, risk taking, creative leadership and professional growth." Also included is the statement that; "It is based on things that the principal believes in and can work towards achieving." In the guidelines for Boards it is suggested that more than one persons point of view should be sought and that the final written assessment should be useful to both parties. Acknowledgement is made of the lack of confidence that a Board may feel in it's ability to appraise the principal. "As a consequence they focus on simple, verifiable, measurable, short term behaviours that can be easily checked off to comply with requirements." The question of who should do the appraisal is addressed and the following are mentioned; chairpersons, subcommittees,

another principal, a teaching colleague and expert consultants. There are advantages and disadvantages for all these appraisers however the use of another principal is well supported. : “An experienced principal understands the context and the professional and practice demands of the job, yet can also provide some distance, rigour and objectivity.” Various ways of using another principal include a reciprocal arrangement between two schools, as part of a local cluster or a panel of three or four principals augmented by the Board chair. A pilot of this latter procedure was undertaken using the format of the principal portfolio developed by David Stewart and was considered to give pleasing results. A case study is outlined in which a principal is working with a neighbouring principal and both are highly motivated to do a first rate job. Although the principals differ in strengths and style the outcome was described as follows: “ It’s meaningful, enjoyable, rigorous, exciting. We learn from each other and I get a real buzz out of measuring myself against the professional standards.....the first time I’ve felt the appraisal has been of real value to me and the school.” Several reality checks are described such as visits to the schools and staff surveys or interviews. Four examples are given of the use of another principal assisting with appraisal. Some support is also given to the use of a consultant with the caution that getting the right person is critical. All the different procedures for appraisal rely on quality information and these are likely to include self appraisal by the principal, staff views, students views, other sources of evidence such as analysis of student achievement and community views. There may be variation from year to year.

B Other commentators.

A common theme in discussions about learning at any level is the value of the Quality Learning Circle. Although originally developed in industry it can work well when adapted to education as outlined by Stewart and Prebble in 1993 and developed by many others since then. The essentials of the QLC are very suited to the appraisal needs of principals and schools: “ Schools should be learning communities where all members- teachers, parents and pupils-wish to participate in the learning process as part of their own development .Schools should be collaborative enterprises where knowledge and expertise are shared and problems are solved cooperatively.”. The QLC for the principal appraisal could include people from outside the school community but the group would still provide the group dynamics that lead to learning through shared experience and informed discussion to develop ideas and set new goals. Principal self review is an accepted starting point of the appraisal process and this is of limited value if done in isolation. Inherent in the self review process is decision making about what can be achieved and the change agents involved. The QLC provides a structured rather than an anecdotal discussion about the principals learning journey. The QLC works through the commitment and involvement of all the participants. It has a focus of learning rather than compliance and an appraisal undertaken in this way would not be considered an imposition. An appraisal which is imposed can result in limited information being offered within narrow parameters.

David Stewart developed the QLC model further in 2000 as a principal cluster or focus group. Principals would meet during the year to work on a number of areas. The results would be part of the appraisal process and would be principal centred.

There remain questions about the role of the Board of Trustees, the extent of their involvement and possibly a sense of loss of power in the appraisal process. Dr Wayne Edwards, in his paper entitled *Leadership: Enigma or Sense* explores the ideas of power and empowerment. Power is often thought of as the power of one person over another rather than the power to do things. : “Empowerment is the collective effect of leadership.....Empowerment is less to do with coercion and more about synergy which involves capitalising on abilities, exploding the power of the group and casting off quite a degree of accumulated power.” he also develops the concept of shared leadership which makes genuine use of everyone's abilities: “ leadership will be viewed as a dispersed concept that includes all adults, especially teachers.” While many principals would recognise the value of the above comments on power, it may not be the case for Boards of Trustees. Each Chairperson is likely to have their own experiences of power related to the workplace they have experienced. Such experiences may lead them to feel powerless in the position of appraising the principal and to seek ways of asserting a power relationship. However the leadership described above is inclusive. The QLC could include the Chairperson of the Board at any point of the process.

Two important aspects of appraisal identified by Eileen Piggot Irvine and Carol Cardno are supported by the collegial approach outlined above. The first is the : “ direct, trust based, two way feedback [called critical dialogue] ”. This requires confidence in the process and in the colleague. This would be most likely to occur when the principal is involved with establishing a collegial partnership or group. The second relates to some of the characteristics of effective principals identified by Eileen Piggot Irvine in a recent article. These are openness, being non-defensive, non controlling and seeking to work inclusively and collaboratively with staff. Their schools are described as professional learning communities.

Principal appraisal relies on an agreed definition of leadership. There are many definitions and even those most commonly used, or assumed, change over time. Distributed Leadership is a term currently being developed. It describes a team approach which recognises leadership capacity at all levels. At an APPA forum last year Viviane Robinson distinguished the “heroic” style of leadership in which all power is vested in one person, and distributed leadership which empowers others. Various tasks may require various leaders who have the skills for the job. It is not just delegation or sharing the load. It anticipates decision making from those involved. The role of the principal is to maintain the focus on the goals of the school. There are implications here for principal appraisal. Surveys of staff are frequently used in principal appraisal but in many cases these surveys try to gauge the staff opinion of the principal on a range of criteria. The surveys assume a shared understanding of the value of the criteria and some are less than specific. Where distributed leadership is in action the survey could focus more on what the staff are actually doing rather than their attitudes toward the principal. The appraiser could also look for the characteristics of the principal that engender distributed

leadership. This could be difficult where leadership is embedded and task specific. However a high degree of coordination and support is required for distributed leadership to thrive. Leadership can be varied but still heading in the same direction. Evidence for the success of distributed leadership will probably be found in the outcomes of decisionmaking, the common activities and goals that are evident in a range of operational situations.

SUMMARY

Not all the original questions have been answered, however the questions were a useful framework for discussion. The criteria for the effectiveness of appraisals depends very much on the views of leadership and management shared by the appraiser and the school. Least effective would be a mismatch between the appraiser, the governors and the principal. Theories about leadership vary and change over time. The needs of principal and employers ideally will coincide. However different viewpoints were evident in the published material of the School Trustees Association and the Education Review Office. Most schools employ some kind of external appraisal and it is the quality of the appraiser which is an issue for some. The experience of the writer in reciprocal principal appraisal was very positive mainly because of shared understandings about the job and the problems arising from similar school communities. There were learning opportunities for both principals and in both cases there was more depth to this appraisal than previous ones. Most importantly there was the opportunity to examine the nature and the process of appraisal.

Student achievement data was looked at incidentally as part of the examination of data collection and goal setting. Although this may be stated as a goal in a particular year for a particular principal, and targets are set each year for the reporting process it is not usual for a student achievement level to be set for principal appraisal criteria.

The following statement from David Stewart exemplifies the above: “ Successful school development is an educational rather than a managerial process.”

The study has indicated those appraisal procedures most likely to be effective for both the principal and the Board of Trustees. Collegial appraisal is the most likely to provide learning opportunities for all those involved. Where a collegial group is formed there would be a range of strengths available to respond to requests from appraisees. It would be possible to have several people who have different roles in the appraisal. This could include the Board chairperson who could select areas of interest to the Board.

The study indicates that there are areas suitable for research to provide evidence of best practice

Heather Hampton 2006

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