

Four School Leadership Teams Define Their Roles Within Organizational and Political Structures to Improve Student Learning¹

Janet H. Chrispeels¹ and Kathleen J. Martin²

¹University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA, and ²University of California, Davis, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

A shift in educational policy and practice is to involve teachers in school reform. Many reform programs require school leadership teams for involving teachers, yet few studies have examined how teachers take up such new roles and responsibilities. Using the dual conceptual lenses of open-systems and micropolitics, we investigate how four middle school teams engaged with their colleagues to construct an identity, assume leadership roles, and situate themselves in their schools. We argue that the influence of training enabled teams to assume four roles: communicators, staff developers, problem-solvers, and leaders of change. The findings suggest that teams and educational leaders need to recognize the influence that existing organizational structures have on teams and the actions they are able to take. The results also indicate that knowledge of the organizational structure as well as micropolitical dynamics can serve as leverage points for constructing their roles and initiating change.

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INTRODUCTION

“School restructuring is everywhere and nowhere” Elmore (1995, p. 25) notes, as school districts struggle to find ways to enhance student learning. A recently published US Government directory of Comprehensive School Reform (CRS) Models reflects the diversity of the restructuring initiatives that are now approved for adoption by Title I schools. Although these programs vary in scope, curriculum focus, and pedagogical approach, a common feature of most programs is a provision for teacher participation in decisions that affect the school. The nature and extent of the involvement of teachers (and sometimes parents and students) can range from extensive shared leadership to token school improvement councils dominated by the principal (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). A challenge confronting leadership teams is that the reform initiatives establishing them do not start with schools as blank slates, but rather the new team must define and negotiate their role and responsibilities within existing school structures. How a team functions may depend on a combination of micropolitical and social factors such as how team members relate to each other, to the principal, to other staff and school groups, and to district goals (Mawhinney, 1999; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994). It is also the result of organizational factors such as structure, organizational strategies, and type of leadership the school uses to manage the environment. Therefore, it is important to understand how teams, whether mandated or self-determined, define their roles and responsibilities and establish their authority and power, and to identify factors that contribute to their success.

Previous research has identified a variety of variables such as conflicts, lack of time, poorly clarified roles and inadequate training that frequently undermine a team’s ability to focus on instruction (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Clune & White, 1988; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Johnson & Pajares, 1996; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Ogawa, 1994; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; Wallace & Hall, 1994; Wohlstetter et al., 1994). These problems often prevent the teams from affecting student learning outcomes, and acquiring “the knowledge and skills necessary for creating a high performance organization” (Wohlstetter et al., 1994, p. 282). Studies of site-based management (SBM) also indicate that teams frequently become bogged down in divisive procedural issues and fail to focus on student learning (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996; Taylor & Bogotch, 1992; Weiss & Cambone, 1994).

Although previous studies have identified the problems faced by teams, few have explored how the existing school structures facilitate and constrain roles teams can play, the influence they can wield, and the actions they can take to improve student learning and enhance the profession. Furthermore, many of these studies suggest that training is needed for teams to establish effective shared leadership, yet how school leadership teams develop, negotiate leadership roles and resolve conflicts in their schools when they are provided with training has not been investigated. In this article, we explore how four middle school teams, participating in training through the California School Leadership Team Professional Development Program, began to understand their role as part of the larger organizational structure and culture of their schools. We examine the roles and responsibilities of the school leadership teams and explore how perceptions of their place in the organization influenced their roles. We also examine the types of actions the teams could take in support of student achievement and in the overall organizational structure of the school. To explore the work of the teams in the context of a social system during a period of change, we were guided by four research questions:

1. How did the teams situate themselves in the overall organizational structure of the schools?
2. What actions did the four middle school teams take to enhance instruction and build professional community?
3. What cultural and political factors supported or constrained the roles teams were able to negotiate and construct?
4. How did the leadership teams use the expert knowledge they acquired at the training as a source of power and influence to achieve their goals?

These questions are important to investigate because leadership teams, which function well and stay focused on student learning, can have a positive effect on student outcomes (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; Smylie et al., 1996). Often, district efforts to empower teachers within the hierarchical organizational structure of the “old order” (Chion-Kenny & Hymes, 1994) is not enough to enable schools and teachers to assume new leadership roles and capitalize on professional training. Helping teams describe and comprehend the “old order” may better speed their developmental path and enable them to function more quickly and effectively. As Mawhinney (1999) has argued, we must better understand the political

dynamics of school reform. Particularly important is the need to explore the interactional relationships among systemic reform initiatives, organizational structure, strategies and culture, and micropolitics, which enable a school leadership team to guide the school in improving instruction.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Explaining the complex social phenomena of schools often is attempted through the use of a distinct theory, which may limit the ability of research to provide a conceptual framework to understand the complexity of school reform. For example, school reform has been examined through concepts of policy implementation (Elmore, 1995; McDonnell, 1991), system coherence (Fuhrman, 1993) and micropolitical aspects of social culture (Ball, 1987; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Mawhinney, 1999; Wallace, 2000). While useful for illuminating information regarding processes as they affect individual schools and some aspects of the system, single perspectives provide only a partial understanding of the problems of implementing and achieving the goals of school reform. To guide our data analysis, we pose an integrative framework as a way of looking at the social phenomena of schools using a “systemic-structural perspective” (Altrichter & Elliott, 2000), not as “orthodoxy,” but in combination with micropolitical analysis (Mawhinney, 1999; Wallace, 2000). We draw on concepts from systems theory and a structural perspective of organizations (Clegg & Hardy, 1996; Hanna, 1997; Scott, 1992; Senge, 1990) and micropolitics (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1990; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Mawhinney, 1999; Wallace, 2000). We agree with Wallace’s (2000) advice to “seek ways of reducing constraints imposed by the narrowing of focus that a single perspective dictates” (p. 609).

Core concepts from these theories allow us to view the four teams’ work from the macro-organizational level of school structures that shape and define the actions of actors often without explicit understanding of the process as it functions within the organization. The microperspective, which encompasses micropolitics, helps us to understand the implicit cultural prescriptive that guides participants’ actions. Integrating these perspectives may offer an opportunity to gain insights into ways that school leadership teams lead their schools in the reform process since reforms tend to politicize schools and threaten existing roles, relationships, power and resources.

Systemic-Structural Perspectives and the Study of Leadership Teams

Schools have been characterized as open systems that must interact with the environment to preserve their inherent organizational structure (Hanna, 1997; Scott, 1992). This structure defines relationships among multiple constituents (e.g., administrators, teachers, parents, students, support staff). These constituents have established patterns of interaction (i.e., structure) that impact student learning through factors such as “school climate, the community or network of persons connected to the school, and the larger society in which the school is located” (Hallinan, 1987, p. 8). They also affect what content is taught, how it is taken up by teachers and students, as well as the roles school leadership teams or site-based management (SBM) committees can assume. We see these structures as both dynamic and coherent frameworks for daily action.

Open systems theory helps to take account of the multilayered reality of schools and identify the individual components. It brings to the surface existing relationships and provides insights into the nature of interaction between them (Hanna, 1997). For this study, a systemic-structural perspective provides the macrolens needed to explore how school leadership teams are influenced by multiple environments, such as external training, state and district contexts, and the school culture in which they are embedded. The structure of certain organizations like schools, are sites of “situated social action more or less open both to explicitly organized and formal disciplinary knowledge . . . and to conversational practices embedded in the broad social fabric” (Clegg & Hardy, 1996, p. 4). In schools, structure can be thought of as “the pattern of relationships among the many individual components of school change: administrative leadership, teacher effectiveness, curriculum improvement, and community involvement” (Joyce, Hersh, & McKibbin, 1983, p. 5). By examining tensions between organizational factors (such as structure and strategy) and political/relational factors, it may be possible to gain insights into how school leadership teams become accepted structures within the existing system.

Organizational research supports the proposition that “the fit between strategy and structure affects performance . . . [and] lends support to the causal inference that fit affects performance” (Donaldson, 1996, p. 65). This concept is significant since individuals or teams within organizations interpret, act or react to existing structures in ways that influence their ability to achieve a fit between structure and strategy. Emphasizing the systemic structure of

an organization should illuminate the patterns of relationships between individuals without focusing on the innate characteristics of any one individual (Scott, 1992, p. 18). Furthermore, the structural design of an organization influences the strategy employed for managing conflict, addressing organizational complexity, and achieving a set goal of performance (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). Every organization's strategic response to the same environmental influences varies (Zucker, 1996, p. 105). We found these factors of structure and strategy proved useful for examining the teams' patterns of interaction, relationships, and their degree of influence at their school. A critical issue is understanding what supports and constrains the accomplishments of school leadership teams as they try to define their place in the organization, influence or alter established relationships, and use power to influence decisions. We explore how knowledge or lack of knowledge of the structure facilitated or constrained the team members' opportunities to generate new initiatives to influence teaching and learning at their schools.

Implications of Micropolitics for the Study of Leadership Teams

According to Blase (1990),

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations... Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover macro- and micropolitical factors frequently interact. (p. 11)

Micropolitical perspectives of organizations, thus, offer the potential for insights into the relational and power issues faced by school leadership teams as they assume new roles and responsibilities and negotiate their place in the system. "The micropolitical perspective reminds us that school reform is rarely a politically neutral event; ... teachers often have one overriding concern – the preservation of a stable sense of personal and professional identities ..." (Datnow, 1998, p. 21). Ball (1987) furthers our understanding of why it is important to investigate how existing organizational structures may facilitate or constrain the influence of teams when he asserts, "Micropolitics is the nexus where the formal structure of roles interpenetrates with the informal pattern of influence. It is a skill of judgment and coalition building rather than position" (p. 246). This perspective also may help to further "our understanding of social structures as systems

of roles organized to meet defined and negotiated goals” (Lopata, 1995, p. 8).

Micropolitics turns attention to the sources and use of power “to determine which issues and questions are seen as relevant and critical and which will be viewed as irrelevant and illogical” (Mawhinney, 1999, p. 164). Two sources of power are particularly significant to this study: (1) power derived from legitimate authority to make decisions as teams secured a place in their organization; and (2) power acquired through expert knowledge gained through the training the teams were receiving. The role of team members in school leadership encompasses the actions of the team, as well as the actions and interactions of the team with the hierarchical role of the principal and the norm of equitable relationship among colleagues. For schools instituting leadership teams or SBM, new roles for individuals are defined and their actions redefined, “altering as it does the balance of power in schools” (Weiss & Cambone, 1994, p. 287). Not only are the roles of administrators affected, but also “the critical behaviors that identify teachers as a general group [are] in flux and major issues surround their roles” as leaders (Hart, 1994, p. 482). “Role cannot be limited to one person’s behavior, but must include the behaviors of others which provides the rights enabling those actions” (Lopata, 1995, p. 1). Thus a micropolitical perspective can help to investigate how power is used by teams in conflictual situations, as well as how power is used to “build support to achieve their ends” (Mawhinney, 1999, p. 168).

To explore this organizing conceptual framework and interpretation of the School Leadership Teams’ work in the context of a social system during a period of change, we examine the organizational charts from four middle schools and the team members’ perceptions of their roles within the larger school structure. By examining and acknowledging the differences within schools and among teams’ responses to their environment, we highlight in this study each team’s strategic responses, patterns of relationships and the roles teams assume. Using the macrosystemic-structural organizational lens and a micropolitical lens will illuminate some of the difficulties of school restructuring and instituting new leadership relationships. By combining these two perspectives we hope to appropriately emphasize the internal political dynamics, identify the role of structural features in organizing everyday life, and show the relationship of external influences in the school environment as they impact internal actions of the actors (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1993; Datnow, 1998; Mawhinney, 1999).

METHOD

Context of the Study: The School Leadership Team Program

A unique aspect of this study is the examination of school leadership teams (SLTs) that have been participating in ongoing training over a 3-year period with 15 total days of full-time training. The California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) established the School Leadership Team (SLT) Program in 1993. The program is administered through 12 regional CSLA centers, which have provided over 300 elementary, middle and high school teams with training. Since its inception, the SLT Program has been addressing a common critique that leadership teams have not been provided with training. The SLT training seminars address both the process of team building and the content of school reform and restructuring. In this study, the training is seen as an external environmental factor influencing the teams' work.

The goal of the SLT training program is "to develop the capacity of School Leadership Teams to facilitate actions within their schools that lead to powerful learning for all members of the organization" (CSLA, 1995). Unlike other restructuring initiatives, the SLT program does not prescribe a model, but encourages each team to engage in a process of inquiry and investigation of its own conditions and establish outcomes within its school and district context. The program is predicated on a social constructionist perspective of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Duffy, Lowyck, & Jonassen, 1993). Materials such as "Building a Vision of Powerful Learning" (CSLA, 1995) urge teams to create classroom environments that actively engage students in learning (CSLA, 1995). The training program models these theories of learning (e.g., essential, but minimum time spent in direct instruction and maximum time devoted to engaging, hands-on learning around themes such as powerful learning, standards-based education, systems thinking, team leadership, and the collection of data to inform decision-making).

Sample and Data

For this study, we purposefully selected the school leadership teams (SLTs) from four middle schools, which were representative of middle school teams participating in the SLT program and were perceived by the CSLA directors to be moving forward in implementing the program outcomes. The four school teams represent three geographical areas of California and three school districts. One team is from Northern California, one is from Central California, and two are from Southern California in the same school district.

Three of the schools, Heights, Peak, and Pinnacle, are located in urban areas, are large (approximately 1,000 students) and ethnically diverse. Paramount, although not as large (650 students), was impacted by increasing enrollment that exceeded its building capacity. It is located in a small suburban community with enrollment that is equally divided between Hispanic and White students. We have used pseudonyms for each school to preserve confidentiality. Over the period of this study (1995–1998), we collected from these teams quantitative (survey data) and qualitative data (interviews, observations and video data from two of the teams’ training sessions). In this article, we present qualitative data regarding the roles of the teams at their schools and the activities they undertook to fulfill those roles.

Description of Schools

Table 1 presents the size and composition of the four middle school teams. The teams were formed at the schools and members generally volunteered or were recruited by the principal. Paramount and Peak volunteered to participate and were supported in this decision by the district administration. For Pinnacle and Heights, both from the same district, the decision to participate in the SLT program was made by the superintendent.

As indicated in Table 1, the team structure varied for each school; however, all four teams were primarily composed of teacher members and the principal. Peak and Pinnacle were the only teams with a parent member; Peak was the

Table 1. The Composition of School Leadership Teams (SLT) at the Four Middle Schools (Membership varied over the years of training; These totals represent the first year for each team).

	Paramount	Peak		Heights	Pinnacle
		Team 1	Team 2		
Teachers	4	4	4	7	5
Principal	1	1	0	1	1
Asst. Prin.	0	0	1	0	0
Counselor	0	0	0	1	1
Suprt Staff	0	0	0	2	2
Dist. Admin.	0	1	0	0	0
Parents	0	1	0	0	1
Students	0	2	2	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total #	5	9	7	11	10

only leadership team with student members. During the course of the CSLA program, Peak was also the only school that sent two teams to the training. The principal was a member of the first Peak SLT; the vice-principal was a member of the second team. The first team began in 1994 and continued for 3 years. The second team began the training in 1996 and began its 3rd year of training in 1998. Heights and Pinnacle began in 1995 and completed their 3rd year of training in 1998. Paramount began in 1994 and completed 3 years of training in 1997. All teams received a minimum of 3 years of training.

Interviews and Video Data

When contacted and asked to participate in this study all four schools agreed. The principal or the school's SLT Site Liaison was asked to arrange interview schedules. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted at each site as follows: Paramount, 9 and 4; Peak, 12 and 5; Heights, 8 and 8; and Pinnacle 15. No follow-up interviews were conducted at Pinnacle since all of the initial interviews took place at approximately the same time as follow-up interviews with the other three teams. Interviews were conducted with SLT members and a small sample of non-SLT members by a team of 2–3 researchers over a period of 1 to 3 days.

Interviews were conducted in the fall of 1996, spring of 1997, and winter of 1998. Most interviews were conducted one-on-one and lasted between 30 to 60 min; all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Semistructured, open-ended questions were used for each interview. The questions explored the roles each team assumed at the school, activities and actions of the team, and challenges the team faced.

In addition to interview data, an organizational chart was requested from each team. The charts (Figs. 1–4) indicate the position or placement of the SLT in relation to the school structure and will be discussed in the findings. The principal completed the chart for Paramount's SLT (Fig. 1). Peak's chart (Fig. 2) was completed by the staff prior to the SLT training as part of previous restructuring initiative, and during an interview the principal added the two SLTs to the chart. Heights (Fig. 3) and Pinnacle (Fig. 4) completed this task as part of an SLT training session during their 3rd year of training. Video data were collected during some of the SLT training sessions for Paramount and Heights SLTs. These data were used to gain an understanding of the range of training topics covered, as well as overall insights into team functioning and relationships between the principals and their teams.

Analysis

Data were analyzed independently by three researchers associated with this study. The transcripts were read and reread to identify major themes. Thematic units identified by each researcher were compared, discussed and refined until there was agreement (Merriam, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Yin, 1989). In addition, the following major concepts were also used as an interpretive framework:

1. Organizational theory such as structure, policies and procedures, purposes and goals, and requirements of position (Bertrand, 1972; Clegg & Hardy, 1996; Clune & White, 1988; Elmore, 1995; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek with Rosenthal, 1964; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Senge, 1990; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981);
2. Relationships among external and internal environmental factors as presented in systems theory (Hanna, 1997; Scott, 1992); and
3. Micropolitical concepts such as power, influence and resource allocation (Blase, 1993; Datnow, 1998; Mawhinney, 1999).

Based on these concepts, we examined the existing organizational structures for supports and constraints of the teams' work, and the roles then adopted by team members within their school. We coded and tabulated the interview data and made charts to identify specific categories of team interaction, roles, relationships, team functioning, and power and influence on school decisions. These included categories such as: how members joined the team; meetings and team member roles; organizational structure and roles of the team and other groups at the school; statements of school vision or mission; district support; problem-solving and decision-making; differences the team has made at the school; and the team's use of data to inform their actions. At issue in the analysis was the SLT's placement within the organizational chart, particularly as it pertained to the team's ability to influence others. The organizational charts were examined and analyzed based on types of committees or groups, relational and placement factors and communication patterns and thus potential influence in the decision-making process. Conclusions were drawn based on the charts and then checked for corroborating and verifying data in the interviews.

FINDINGS

Based on organizational charts (Figs. 1–4), it was clear that all schools had a multicommittee structure at the time the SLT program was initiated. The

charts indicated the place of the SLT in the school organization, as well as its relationships with others.² Members of all four teams reported they also served on other committees, which they indicated demanded a large time commitment but was one way in which committees' work was coordinated. The data are organized to present a brief history of the teams as they worked to situate themselves in the schools' organizational structure and define their roles and responsibilities.

How the Teams Situated Themselves in Their Schools and Assumed Various Roles

Data indicate that preparing an organizational chart helped teams to elucidate patterns of power, communication flow, and social relationships existing at their schools. From our coding and analysis of the interview data, we also identified four roles, which the teams took up at various times and to varying degrees over a 3-year period (Table 2). These roles were those of communicators, staff developers, problem-solvers and leaders/decision-makers. By communicators we mean the activities the team undertook to share with colleagues in an informal and sometimes more formal way their work and actions, and what they were learning at the SLT seminars. The role of staff developers was defined as a more formal effort to lead faculty professional growth in ways that they had experienced at the SLT seminars. Actions, which we classified as problem-solving, included the teams' work to identify needs and action plans to address these needs. We also classified action research undertaken by the team as a problem-solving function. We defined the leadership role of the team as encompassing initiating actions that led to whole school change.

Paramount Middle School

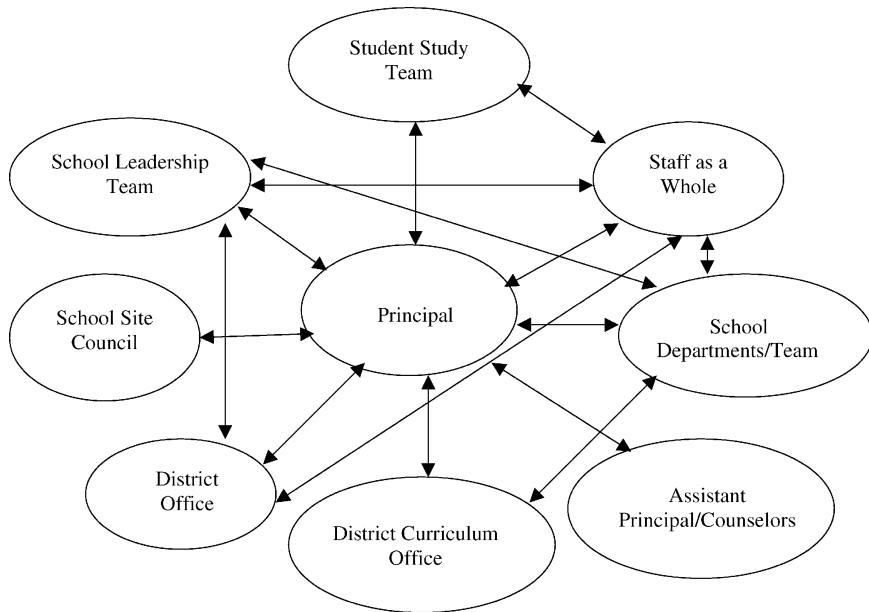
In 1994, the Paramount district superintendent advocated site-based management and negotiated with the teachers' union to establish leadership teams at

²Although parents and students who were members of two teams were interviewed and parent committees were represented on every organizational chart, their roles are not fully addressed in this article. None of the data revealed that parents or students were central players in schools organization, especially as it related to the SLT. In all of these schools, parents seem to play typical token roles on required committees such as the School Site Council or expected fundraising and support roles in the Parent-Teacher Associations. There was no evidence that they were exerting pressure on the schools to change, nor were they actively involved in critical decision-making processes that indicated a significant influence relationship. Therefore, we chose to focus our attention on the teacher leadership roles.

Table 2. Primary Roles Assumed by the Four School Leadership Teams.

Roles	Paramount	Peak (Teams 1 and 2)	Heights	Pinnacle
Communicators	Limited to larger school-based SLT	Limited presentations and informal sharing	Initially limited	Extensive sharing at FAC, department and castle meetings
Staff developers (replicating SLT training)	No activities	No activities	Formalized, led benchmark development	Formalized, extensive, led benchmark development and PQR
Problem-solvers	Focus on underachievement and school start time	Focus on portfolio, student's perception of learning, and safe school	Focus on resolving conflict with principal, and poor literacy	Focus on PQR, perceptions of graduates, and principal change
Leaders/ decision-makers	SLT part of formal decision-making group	No formal role	No formal role	Facilitated entire staff and appropriate subcommittees

each school. Through the initiation of the principal and with support from the team, Paramount chose to participate in the School Leadership Team Program. The new SBM team expected that the training would help them fulfill their new decision-making power to personnel, budget and curriculum issues. In 1995, before the team could begin to fully function, however, a new superintendent was hired, who renegotiated with the union a definition of the teams' role as primarily advisory. Changing superintendents also affected the principal, who indicated that she had shifted her perspective from being one among the team members to being the final arbiter of decisions. She believed "she has to take the front in decisions" and explained that the teachers are not always familiar with the district's perspective on issues. She frequently found herself in the middle of teachers and the district. When asked to submit a chart of Paramount's organizational structure, the SLT reported they had not formally constructed one. The principal instead sketched an organizational chart as shown in Figure 1.



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Fig. 1. Paramount Middle School's organizational chart developed by the principal from her understanding of the SLT.

Figure 1 indicates that the SLT is one among several groups that interact with and through the principal, who is in the center of the organizational model. Predominantly input and output flow through her as the central authority figure and power broker within the school. The organizational chart indicates the possibility that the principal may serve as a “director of activity” and boundary spanner (Chrispeels, Martin, Harari, Strait, & Rodarte, 1999). The placement of the SLT suggests the team is an equal with several other groups and communicates directly and primarily with the principal and occasionally with the staff as a whole and with departments (since team members are representative of the various departments).

The interview data indicate that Paramount's SLT assumed two primary roles of problem-solver and leader/decision-makers. The SLT training had equipped them with knowledge and skills to address critical issues facing the school, especially poor student achievement. During the team's 1st year of training, the team collected data from students about problems with

homework and examined the relationship of homework return and low grades. The team led the staff in a decision to implement a seven-period day for students with failing grades (Chrispeels, Martin et al., 1999). The team reported they were thwarted in this initial problem-solving and decision-making effort because of their failure to understand that they could not legally make this decision. When the principal reported the plan's rejection to the team, she stated, "There were teachers who just kind of threw up their hands and said is the district listening to us . . . Why are we doing this work if they are not listening to us?" However, the team persisted and developed alternative strategies, such as volunteering to tutor after school.

A second major problem-solving and decision-making cycle focused on changing the school start time to better meet adolescent needs. Although the district eventually implemented the team's recommendation for a later start time, their initial efforts to affect change were unsuccessful. Team members reported frustration and anger at their inability to implement decisions they thought best for their school. One team member notes, "We came back and we thought we had some things in place, and then some of them were changed on us and . . . some of it is still frustrating." The principal indicated that she felt caught in the middle in these two decision-making challenges. Although she supported the team's initiatives, in the first instance she did not have sufficient information to alert the team that their solution was illegal. In the second instance, she continued to work on the team's behalf but did not adequately communicate her actions to the team, which left them out of the final decision-making loop.

The data did not reveal significant evidence that the Paramount team assumed the other two roles of communicator and staff developer. Although team members informally shared what they were learning, there is little evidence that the team made a systematic effort to communicate to the entire faculty or broader school community. One team member indicated, "We shared some things at lunch time; that didn't work out real well. We have [shared] informally."

Peak Middle School

As part of a district-wide school restructuring program negotiated between the local teachers' union and the district in 1990–1991, Peak Middle School, similar to Paramount, began to organize the school for site-based management. The principal reported that, as part of this restructuring, Peak worked with a consultant to develop an organizational framework that would promote

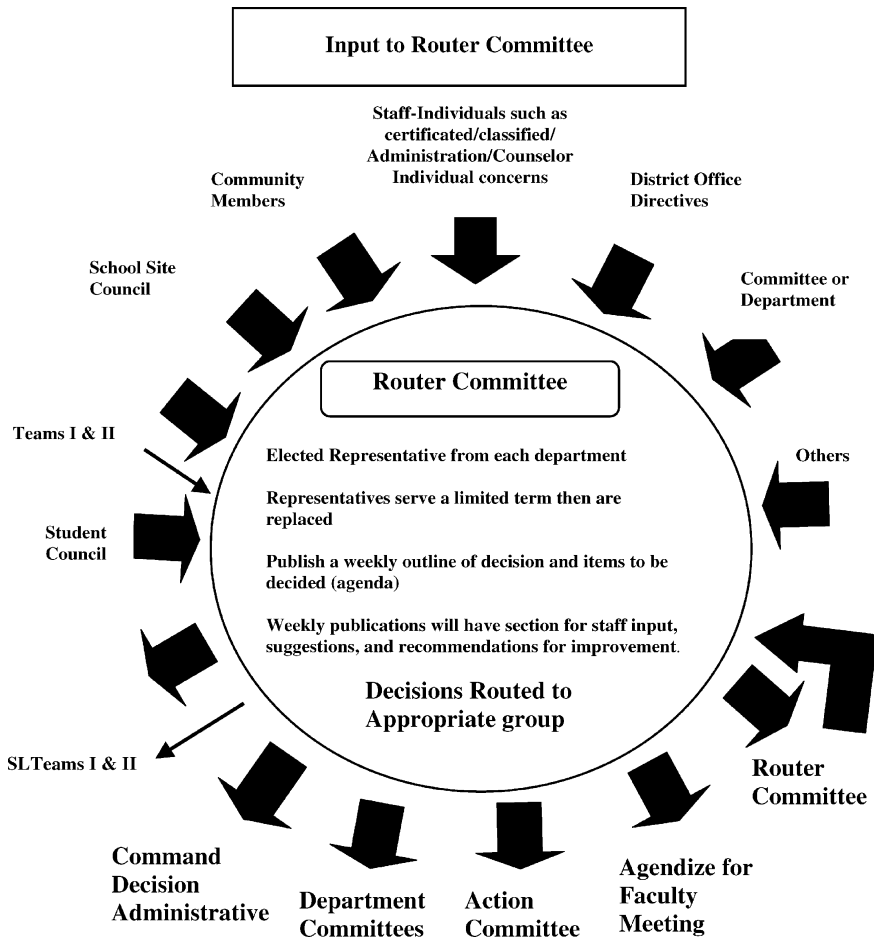


Fig. 2. Peak's organizational chart as developed by the staff prior to the SLT formation.

extensive involvement through subcommittees and at the same time ensure communication among groups. Similar to the other organizational charts, Peak's reveals a multicommittee structure. Peak, however, has a central coordinating committee, the Router Committee, composed of elected representatives from each department who serve a limited term and act as a clearinghouse for issues routing them to the appropriate subcommittee or making the decision themselves. As can be seen in Figure 2, arrows leading into the Router Committee represent key stakeholders and school committees

that provide input. Any school committee can send agenda items to the Router Committee. The arrows leaving the bottom half of the circle reflect committees that receive output from the Router Committee, which publishes minutes to keep all informed.

Three years after this organizational chart was created, Peak began participating in the SLT training. In 1994, Peak sent its first team to the SLT seminars. In 1996, a second team began the SLT program, while the first team continued for a 3rd year. Team 1 included teachers, the principal, two students and one parent. Team 2 included teachers, the vice-principal, and two students. When the organizational chart (Fig. 2) was requested, the principal added the two SLT teams to the chart, which had not been updated to reflect the schools involvement with the SLT program. He indicated that the SLT, like other committees, gave input to and received information and directions from the Router Committee. Team members, however, reported a key difference: Other committees met on a rotating basis during a weekly Professional Hour. Neither SLT teams were given time to meet during this hour. As noted by one member, "We never get a chance to really share or talk with the team . . . at one point we were really frustrated." According to team members, failing to meet outside the training meant they did not see themselves as a committee or group with a defined purpose.

The principal's expectation of the training was "primarily a teaching process" and the opportunity to

soak up the stuff and then understand it until . . . they put it to use. It is quite clearly a sounding board . . . and it has helped take the staff and show them what those directions are and bend them in that way.

Furthermore, it was the teams' perception that the principal wanted a "more informed and intelligent staff, for understanding site-based decision-making and how to make those decisions." The data suggest that the principal co-opted the purpose of the SLT program and training seminars to meet his needs. The organizational chart and team member perceptions seem to confirm that the team was struggling to find a place within the organization as a defined entity with power to influence decisions.

Both teams at Peak assumed the role of communicators and problem-solvers, but they did not describe themselves as leaders/decision-makers or staff developers. As one team member said, "We go through extensive training but it's different when we try to bring it back to the staff. Everything takes longer than we would want." Another member commented, "the role of

one who trains others is taken away . . . so it's hard." Members generally perceived their primary role as the chance to "disseminate information and learn . . . and grow as a person." The role has been "more of a subtle permeation into the different areas of the school and [members] becoming leaders in their own way." This permeation was accomplished through membership on multiple committees. Some team members believed they "did not have a real active or clearly identified role." Because they did not meet as a team, they did not see themselves as a "team" in the sense of being the "leadership team." Even the parent member of Team 1 seemed frustrated: the principal "didn't tell me I would not be bringing the stuff back and using it more than what I can get out of it."

Similar to Paramount and Heights, both of the Peak teams reported they learned ideas from the SLT seminars, which then led them to engage in action research regarding student achievement and school safety. During the 2nd year of Team 1's training, a subgroup of teachers became a Pilot Committee engaged in initiating assessment strategies to see if they were worth implementing in the school. Two teachers reported that they investigated the use of portfolios by gathering information from other schools, experimenting with them in their classrooms, and then introducing them to the staff. This work eventually influenced the whole school to move toward implementing portfolios, but neither these teachers nor the staff perceived this as leadership work by the SLT.

Team 2 brainstormed about individual students who were struggling at the school. Similar to Paramount, the team collected data from students on school culture and safety and used the results to apply for a grant. They also videotaped interviews of students in the Leadership class describing any experiences of powerful learning. The tapes were shared with the whole staff, which resulted in "soul searching" about instructional practices. According to the interviews, this action by Team 2 was perceived as a team initiated event. Although the interview data indicate Team 2 was pleased with this sharing with the staff, they too were frustrated by the existing cultural norms and entrenched structure which excluded them from serving as a team at the decision-making table of the Router Committee.

A Districtwide SLT Initiative: Heights and Pinnacle Middle Schools

Heights and Pinnacle Middle Schools are part of a large secondary school district, serving similar student populations. The district negotiated with the CSLA to provide training for all its schools. Through the district's union

contract, each school already had an elected Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) that played a role in shared management at the districts 20 middle and high schools. With the agreement to participate in the School Leadership Team Program, each school also established an SLT whose members were selected through volunteers and principal encouragement. The district and the CSLA agreed that the primary role and function of the SLTs would be leaders for school reform and improvement rather than managers. The team training would help the teams learn to lead the staff in the development of benchmarks aligned to state curriculum standards and to prepare the middle school teams for conducting Program Quality Reviews (PQR) and high school teams with their accreditation studies. However, interviews with team members, the union president and SLT directors during the 1st year revealed there was considerable tension over the specific roles and responsibilities of the SLTs and how they were to be situated within each school's organizational structure. One outcome from this tension at Heights Middle School was the reluctance of SLT members to call themselves leaders whereas Pinnacle's team was more comfortable with its leadership role (Chrispeels, Brown, & Castillo, 2000).

During the 3rd year of training, the SLT director in this region asked each team to create a school organizational chart. From their charts (Figs. 3 and 4), it is possible to see how the varying cultural and political dynamics of two schools within the same district affected the place and role that the teams assumed in their schools.

Heights Middle School

According to Heights' team members, the process of trying to craft an organizational chart (Fig. 3) clarified many issues for the team and helped them to regain focus and direction as they tried to figure out where they fit in the school structure. The organizational structure revealed a multicommittee structure and a complex web of interactions among groups all connected somehow through the staff as a whole.

Figure 3 indicates five groups are in closest proximity to the administration: the School Site Council (SSC), which controls the school improvement budget and is comprised of an equal number of parents (and students) and staff; the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA); the SLT; the FAC; and Classified Advisory Committee (CAC). The SLT sees itself in direct relationship and communication with the FAC, the district office (DO), and the administration, but not with other school groups except through the faculty as a whole. The SLT members emphasized in the interviews that although "the model looks

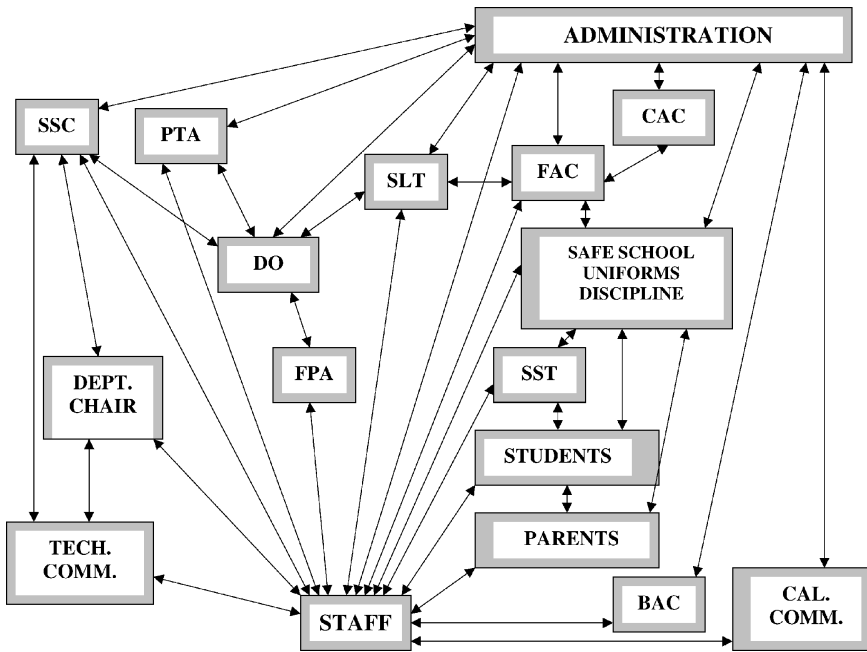


Fig. 3. Heights' organizational chart as developed by the SLT during the 3rd year of training.

hierarchical with the staff on the bottom and administration at the top, the structure is not to be viewed this way.” Rather, according to team members, the arrows indicate the flow of communication from the staff to and from all entities. Compared to Paramount, the staff plays a more central role in guiding the work of its various committees.

The data indicate that the roles assumed by the Heights SLT evolved as they continued in the training. The initial role undertaken by the SLT, at the request of the principal, was that of staff developer – helping the staff to develop benchmarks. The interview data suggest, however, that once the benchmarks were completed the team lost its focus and stopped meeting outside the training sessions. One team member expressed the frustration of no apparent role for the team by saying, “I would just like to clarify the definition of what we are doing, and I think [we] have as much role as I see the parents and students: Zero.” The lack of direction and task clarity stymied the team in their efforts to understand their role as leaders and to feel as if they were able to carry out change. As noted by several team members, “Information from the seminars is not getting back to the faculty.” “There is no real definition

and we certainly do not play any role other than when we are directed to present something.”

Two factors may help to explain why the SLT struggled to define and sustain a role after its initial activity. First, team members reported that they were reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership. One teacher member explained, “We changed our name to Site Liaison Team rather than leadership because we wanted only to be the go-between so that we could be inclusive of all staff members.” This reluctance to see themselves as leaders meant that the team did not act unless given direction by the principal. A second factor leading to team inactivity and failure to assume a role during its 2nd year was that the principal did not designate the SLT to lead the school’s Program Quality Review as was the case in most of the other district schools. In the latter half of the 2nd year, the frustrations of the SLT came to a head. The SLT asked an outside consultant to facilitate a staff discussion to clarify roles and responsibilities. These efforts contributed to a reactivation of the SLT. The year ended with the SLT planning and leading another staff development day, which was well received by the faculty (Field notes 05/97).

In the winter of 1998, team members were re-interviewed and indicated they had found a new purpose. They took the lead in bringing reform to the school, especially by using the action research skills they were learning at the SLT training seminars to concentrate on improving student literacy. They collected and shared student achievement data with the staff, which led to the implementation of a new reading initiative and improved reading scores. They continued their role of staff developers by making presentations on strategies for teaching reading across the curriculum and test preparation (field notes from SLT training session 05/98). A team report to the staff was now a regularly scheduled part of faculty meetings.

Team members also began to see themselves as leaders. Instead of calling themselves “liaisons,” as they had in the first 2 years, they now described themselves as “movers and shakers.” One member reported that SLT members now see themselves as leaders who recognize that “leaders are not dictators, rather they are servants” (a concept of leadership they had learned at the SLT training). By the end of its 3rd year, the team assumed all four roles: communicator, staff developer, problem-solver and leaders/decision-makers.

Pinnacle Middle School

Pinnacle, in the same school district as Heights, presents a different story of how the team worked to find its place in the organization. The team developed

its organizational chart during the SLT training and as part of the Program Quality Review process as a way to help the school formalize its communication and involvement structures in the interest of shared decision-making. Compared to Heights, the chart reflects a more conscious organizational design as opposed to a graphic of current organizational realities.

As indicated in Figure 4 and confirmed by team members, Pinnacle's primary goal is student achievement. This conceptualization of a goal-driven organizational structure was not shown in any of the other charts. Pinnacle's chart also uniquely incorporates funding sources and resources. Similar to the other charts, Pinnacle's shows widespread involvement across grade levels, departments, houses, and committees. Team members indicated they all had a role in working toward improved student achievement. Similar to Heights, both the FAC and the SLT are shown to be in close relationship to each other.

Unlike Heights, Pinnacle's site liaison played an active role from the beginning, which seemed to help the team in its work. She planned meetings, set the agenda, and prepared the other team members for upcoming training programs. Team members believed the training could be an important avenue to student achievement, and "that was the thrust of why the team was formed." The team met regularly to discuss "different ideas that can be implemented to improve the school," and they reported back to the faculty to actively involve them in whatever idea they are addressing.

Interviews of the team revealed that the SLT at Pinnacle, placed so centrally in the school's organizational structure, was able to assume all four roles: communicators, staff developers, problem-solvers, and leaders. They most frequently thought of their role as communication facilitators designed to "clarify goals at the school." One team member reported, "I would say overall the actual role would be to keep a cohesive group and keep everybody informed of what's going on." Another team member stated, "I truly believe our charge is attitude . . . I think that if we can create excitement, if we can create what is over the next educational hill . . . then we have done our job." As part of the training, the charge included establishing and clarifying a guiding direction, a "vision" for the school, which was then incorporated into the school's organizational chart.

Similar to Heights' SLT, the team led a staff development day to develop benchmarks. This work led to the creation of three school action committees: the Technology Committee, the Discipline Committee, and the Uniform Committee (as indicated on their organization chart). These committees addressed specific tasks identified during the meetings. Similar to the other

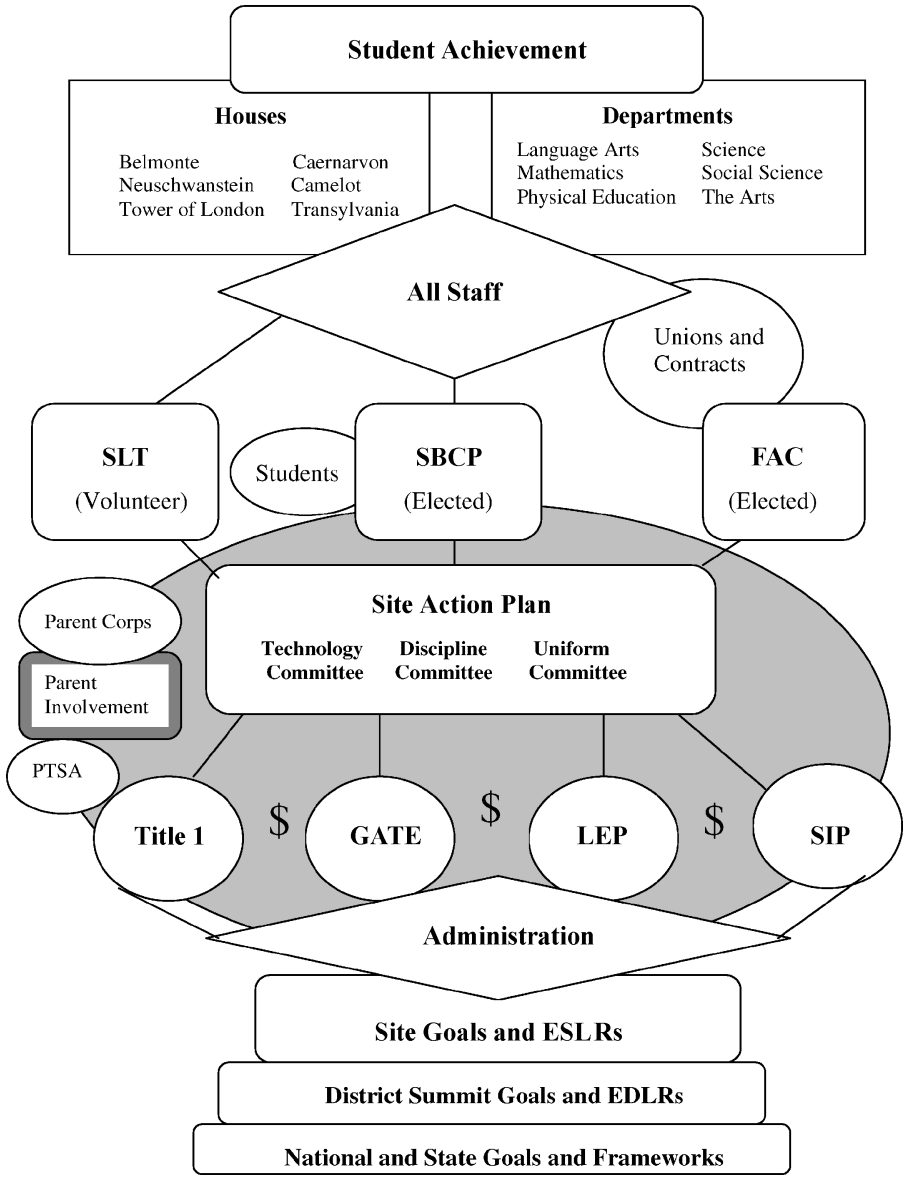


Fig. 4. Pinnacle's organizational chart as developed by the SLT in the 3rd year of training.

three schools, Pinnacle's SLT also engaged in action research and problem solving. It conducted a survey of 100 high school students about the students' experiences at Pinnacle Middle School (best and worst experience, and advice for what students should do to be ready for high school).

In its 2nd year of training, the Pinnacle's team (unlike Heights) became leaders in the district mandated Program Quality Review (PQR) process. One team member reported, "This was nice because [we were] a group that had already worked together. We had the rapport going, and it gave us a task to do [something] we could lead the group in." The PQR process meant that the team became actively involved in data collection and examining student work, which then equipped the team with expertise to share with others.

Similar to Heights, the SLT also found itself addressing a challenging issue with the principal. The team, with district assistance, used the problem-solving and facilitation skills learned at the SLT training, to lead a staff discussion, "vent frustrations" and resolve conflicts with the principal. One possible explanation for both Pinnacle and Heights' leadership teams being able to play a facilitative role in resolving issues with their principals, was the full commitment of the district to the development of strong teacher leadership teams. This culture shift by the district enabled these teams to take up significant leadership and problem-solving roles that were not possible in the case of Paramount, where the hierarchical relationship between the superintendent and the principal was continually reaffirmed by the superintendent.

Through each of these four organizational charts, it is possible to see that the structures varied from school to school, even within the same district. The charts indicate that all teams were able to situate themselves within the organization, but not necessarily in the same relationship to other established groups. This placement affected information flow, the relationship to other committees, and the power of the team to influence decisions. The next section explores how this placement affected the work of the SLT.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we more fully address the research questions by examining the relationship among existing organizational structures, the roles the teams assume and the work they accomplish, and the political dynamics which seemed to constrain and facilitate their work. We explore how the SLT training served as an environmental force, as suggested by systems theory, which

provided a form of expert power and stimulus to the teams to undertake new roles, establish new relationships, and exert influence in their schools. We also examine how the political and cultural dynamics, shaped by existing organizational structures, influenced what roles the teams could assume and the influence they could have. The findings suggest that although teams wanted to take up new roles and use their expert power, they often faced considerable challenges when they re-entered their schools to face pre-existing structures and relational factors. We discuss the implications of training for the leadership teams and the knowledge and skills gained by the teams. Then, we summarize the roles that the training equipped them to take up. Finally, we outline how existing organizational structures, relationships, and political dynamics affect the teams' work and the factors that constrained and supported them.

School Leadership Team Training

The SLT seminars taught team members skills in how to work together, strategies for problem-identification, data collection, analysis, and problem solving. They provided teams new models of teaching and learning and concepts of shared leadership. The training seemed to create a professional development environment that offered "meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas, with materials, and with colleagues" (Little, 1993, p. 138). This study illuminates some of the benefits and challenges of providing training for teachers, who are to assume new roles in their schools. Our data indicate that the SLT seminars provided significant opportunities for teacher/principal collaboration and sharing of ideas, which laid the groundwork for teachers to become capable leaders of reform. The training lessened the typical isolation of teachers and brought them together as an energized focused learning community (Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994). It engendered goals and a sense of personal and collective responsibility to assume the role of leaders in their schools (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). The training also brought to the surface important structural and political dynamics, which challenged team members as they worked to negotiate and find a place for the teams in the school.

As the teams re-entered their organizations after each training session, they found they had to adjust their expectations and alter what they had learned to fit their school. They explored ways to influence school culture and relationships by changing the name of the team, posing solutions to identified problems, negotiating with the principal about roles and responsibilities,

making recommendations and taking actions. We see these as strategies designed to exert influence and improve performance. In addition, the adoption of different roles by each team became strategies the teams used both to fit and influence the organization and situate within current school structures (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). The degree of fit affected the performance of each team and the actions they could take (Donaldson, 1996); however in all four cases, the challenge of finding a fit did not preclude the teams from taking some action or exerting influence on colleagues and school decisions, many of which were designed to impact teaching and learning.

Comparison of Roles Assumed by the Teams

As highlighted in the findings, the teams assumed the roles of communicators, staff developers, problem-solvers, and leaders/decision-makers, but the intensity and performance of the roles varied across the sites. The roles assumed were influenced by the interaction among pre-existing organizational structures and political and cultural norms and expectations of relationships between the principal and the team, the team and other committees, and the team and other teachers.

Communicators

One of the first roles described by teams was that of communicator of what the team was learning. Initially teams saw themselves as “channels of information” or as “liaisons” taking back information to their schools. In each case, we see that the structure of the school influenced the team’s ability to communicate. For Paramount, the organizational chart revealed that information sharing was often indirect. All committees were largely connected through the principal who placed herself in a hierarchical relationship between the team and the district (Chrispeels, Martin, et al., 1999). The principal’s position of power and centrality over all aspects of the school’s culture constrained the flow of communication, and thus the team’s influence on others in the school. This finding confirms Blase’s (1990, 1993) research that principal’s control and protectionist strategies can have negative consequences for schoolwide performance.

Heights’ organization chart revealed a diffuse organizational structure and flow of information. This seemed to contribute to truncated communication patterns, and it limited the team’s ability initially to mobilize and use its new knowledge. As the team gained insights into the school’s organization, it found ways to communicate more effectively within this existing structure by

developing its expertise as a source of influence and power. This expert power began to give team members a different basis in which to negotiate with other groups, structure daily interactions, and form links with internal and external communities (e.g., the neighboring high school; Lindle, 2000).

In contrast, Peak had a centralized clearinghouse for information, but the SLT messages were lost or diluted as they were filtered through the Router Committee. The principal at Peak was a key force in defining the SLT as a non-team. There was no evidence that his decision was based on a desire to limit or control the SLT's influence, but derived from a perspective that the SLT seminars should serve as professional development for teachers who were already serving on committees. The team's ability to communicate in an organized and consistent way was inadvertently undermined by the failure of the team and principal to clarify roles and expectations or even renegotiate expectations as the team members' knowledge and expertise grew with the ongoing training. This need for negotiation, re-negotiation and persuasion in regard to the work of the leadership team and its place in the school was an issue that faced all four principals and which many were ill-equipped to handle (Chrispeels, Strait, & Brown, 1999; Lindle, 2000).

Unlike the other three schools, Pinnacle's team seemed to have an organizational structure that allowed the team multiple opportunities for communicating what it was learning at the training with other committees and the staff as a whole. Because the team assumed the task of conducting the Program Quality Review during its 1st year, it cemented a central place in the organization and gained valued information that other staff members needed. In spite of its central place in the school, the team also struggled with communication issues with the principal.

Staff Developers

A second role assumed by two of the teams (Heights and Pinnacle) was that of staff developer. In day-long professional development sessions, teams replicated activities they learned at the training. Both a micropolitical and systemic perspective help to explain why these two teams were able to play this role. As previously noted, the SLT program was being implemented as part of a system-wide school reform initiative and all teams led their school in developing schoolwide benchmarks. This sense of working with the whole staff and the team's connection to the district is reflected in both of teams' organizational charts. In contrast, neither Paramount nor Peak perceived staff development as their role. Similarly, their organizational charts do not reflect a connection

between the SLT and the whole school, which would provide both teams with the mechanism and formal recognition or negotiation of this role. Furthermore, neither chart reflects an embeddedness of the team in the larger context of the district. The staff development role highlights the interactive nature among variables such as role definition and expectations by self and others, pre-existing organizational relationships, and micropolitical dynamics among key leaders such as principal, team and district administrators (Wallace, 2000).

Problem-Solvers

A third role that all teams took up was that of problem-solvers. This role flowed directly from the training where teams learned action research, data collection, problem identification and problem-solving skills. Through data collection and analysis, teams became aware of issues about student learning that needed to be addressed, and thus gained an “expert” power base. We found strong evidence that all teams eventually used their expert power to influence decisions at their schools. Initially teams could assume the role of problem-solver because it did not affect power relationships within the school or other existing groups (Datnow, 1998; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). As problem-solvers, the teams could work together toward a goal, which increased team cohesiveness and gave members a sense of power that often sustained the team through the frustration of being unable to communicate effectively to the staff what they were learning. Achieving a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction through problem-solving gave the teams a purpose, energy, and an identity, and it eventually ensured their place within the organization, even at Peak where they were not formally represented on the organizational chart. In some instances, assuming the role of problem-solver required interaction and negotiation between the team, the principal and the larger school organization as the teams were pushed by colleagues to address relevant and critical issues (Mawhinney, 1999). This was particularly true in the case of Heights and Pinnacle when these teams confronted the personnel and leadership issues surrounding their principals’ roles and responsibilities.

Leaders/Decision-Makers

The fourth role, which emerged from the data, is that of leaders and decision-makers. The four SLTs engaged in various actions in an attempt to carry out their SLT charge to serve as school leaders. Devising actions and strategies to improve student learning was a logical outcome. Leadership by the Pinnacle team appeared to be the most direct and forceful of the four teams studied. They led the

school in completing the Program Quality Review. By taking on this task they acquired critical expert knowledge, which provided a base of power and influence in setting future school directions. Because of their cohesiveness as an expert team, they were then able to facilitate a change in principals.

The Paramount team led their school in implementing after-school tutoring and altering the start time to meet the needs of adolescents. Paramount's team activity was most intense in the early stages when the principal clearly defined her position as being one of the team. By the 3rd year, the team's ability to function as leaders and decision-makers waned as the superintendent pressed for a more hierarchical chain of command and pushed the principal to redefine her role *vis a vis* the team (Chrispeels et al., 1999). As the principal's control functions took precedence over collaborative and shared decision-making approaches, the team's leadership potential was undermined (Blase, 2000; Greenfield, 1991).

In contrast, team leadership at Heights was sporadic. In the 1st year, the team assumed leadership in developing curriculum benchmarks when this responsibility was clearly defined by the principal; then, faltered once the task was completed. It regained leadership momentum in the 3rd year when roles and relationships were clarified, and it assumed the task of action researchers focusing on improving reading achievement. The problem-solving role provided the Heights team with needed data and expert power to reassert its leadership role. The leadership by Peak's SLTs was more indirect and diffuse since individual members exercised leadership on other committees. However, each of the two teams from Peak found ways to lead through their action research projects, which impacted both assessment and instructional practices. In other words, all teams took actions based on their organizational structure and what could be negotiated within the existing political framework. In schools where the notion of leader threatened relationships, teams adopted new appellations for themselves and fulfilled alternative functions within the organization. In schools where the SLT was conceptualized as a major part of the organizational structure, the teams had more opportunity to act as leaders, exercising power and influence to implement instructional changes and shape a vision for the school.

The Influence of Organizational Structures and Political Factors on Teams' Work

In this section, we outline how the existing organizational structures and political factors constrained and supported the teams' work. In each of the four

schools, we see evidence of how the organizational structure fostered collaboration and coordination of tasks (Fidler, 1997). The SLT training introduced an external factor that challenged patterned and established means of operation (Chrispeels et al., 1999, 2000). The variations among the four teams, particularly reporting relationships, flow of information, committee structures, and environmental and relational factors, required that each team use organizational learning to understand what supports and constrains their school.

Opportunities to communicate with colleagues can be seen as a support for the Pinnacle and Heights teams, and as a constraint for the Paramount and Peak teams. The Pinnacle team, with its FAC, department and house meetings, had an organizational structure that allowed the team to present on a regular basis. The school's organizational and political decisions facilitated this by providing release time to meet, and, by designating the site liaison to initiate agendas, set regular meetings, and distribute minutes of the meetings. We view this as an organizational factor that influences the actions of participants based on the requirements of the position. Initially communication by the Heights team was both controlled and facilitated by the principal. As the team gained expertise and developed a sense of internal power, it began to assert its own authority to communicate with the faculty, establishing a formal time on every staff agenda to communicate, and to redefine cultural norms and expectations in terms of its role and responsibilities. For the Paramount team, opportunities to share were limited based on a lack of an organized and direct relationship between the SLT and the entire faculty. For the Peak teams, the elaborate Router Committee structure demanded SLT members participate in many committee meetings, but as SLTs they still remained largely on the outside of the circle of influence.³

For all four teams, organizational learning became an important criterion for establishing their roles. A fundamental purpose of organizational learning is "self-organization that entails organizational members working together to restructure, reculture, and otherwise reorient themselves in response to new challenges" (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 1998, p. 271). According to Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998), teachers involved in school

³One could assume that the teams at Peak maybe fulfilling only a symbolic role, especially based on the Team 1's lack of cohesion as a team; however, we found no evidence among any of the interview data that the team members perceived their role as mostly symbolic. There was frustration that they were not able to do all that they envisioned based on expectations from the SLT seminars, but they were active and found informal ways to bring issues to the attention of the faculty through their action research.

restructuring efforts felt that increased knowledge of the district and the schools enhanced their work. Often, teams or committees who are sanctioned to gain new knowledge and then share or use that knowledge for the benefit of the school, are more readily accepted by their peers as emergent leaders (Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, & Mohrman, 1997). Knowledge and awareness of the organizational history, authority relationships, and structure, including reporting and communication patterns, became a crucial step in the SLTs organizational learning, a condition identified by Wohlstetter et al. (1994) as significant in successful SBM schools. For the four teams, finding a way to look at their schools, asking questions such as “What does our organization look like?”, “How are we doing?”, “What could we do differently?” were significant ways of beginning this task. With this knowledge, the teams were better equipped to handle the feelings that surfaced and the constraints under which they operated. Furthermore, the training provided the opportunity for mutual collaboration and sharing of ideas and enabled the teams to become capable leaders of reform (Chrispeels, 1997; Martin, Chrispeels, & D’Emidio-Caston, 1998).

As a result of their increased knowledge and skills gained through training, teams were able to enhance the professional culture of their school when personnel issues surfaced; thus more widely dispersing power among the stakeholders. Pinnacle and Heights served as process facilitators at staff meetings regarding personnel issues at their schools. When tensions arose regarding principal/staff relationships, having received training in raising and dealing with “undiscussable” issues, the SLTs were able to facilitate a schoolwide discussion. Although the degree of power and authority invested in the teams varied across schools, all of the teams over time were entrusted and sanctioned by their colleagues with leadership and authority contributing to the dispersal of power among others at the schools. Wohlstetter et al. (1997) note that actively restructuring schools typically disperse power broadly throughout the school organization and coordinate that power through the use of councils. The evidence suggests the school leadership teams were in a continual process of defining themselves throughout the 3 years of training.

CONCLUSION

In this article we address fundamental questions about school organizations, the coordination of activities undertaken by School Leadership Teams, and the

control processes the SLTs face at their schools. We have highlighted the interactive process of how components of a system – the embedded nature of the school in a larger system, the leadership team, the organizational structure, and the micropolitical dynamics – mutually influence and shape each other. Similar to Altrichter and Salzgeber (2000), we see organizational structures as both a means and a result of actions. “On the one hand, actors necessarily refer to the enabling and limiting structures in their action. On the other hand, structures only exist in action” (p. 106). Through the dual lens of organizations as open systems and micropolitical analyses, we explored how the initiation of a school leadership team influences the organization and how the roles the teams assume are shaped by the existing web of cultural and power relationships. By drawing on both conceptual perspectives we are able to spotlight some of the conflictual negotiation processes and the inner life of the organization while, at the same time, not ignoring “the boundaries between the organization and the environment” (Altrichter & Salzgeber, 2000, p. 101). The findings from this study suggest it is essential to understand the complex interaction between the macro-organizational system and the micropolitical interrelationship of the team to the system. It foregrounds some of the differences that emerge when teachers receive professional development and then return to their schools to apply what they have learned. It also clarifies the dynamics of the relational issues encountered by team members and their colleagues when new knowledge is introduced into the system. These four cases illustrate the need for knowledge of organizational structures and strategies that staffs can use for dealing with internal politics and external environmental pressures and constraints. Gaining knowledge about the organization gave teams sources of expert power and potential influence to shape decisions. This study also illuminates that the opportunity to use expert power is influenced by position power. Teams that gained a more authoritative position in the school organizational structure were able to maximize their expert power.

The evidence collected through the interviews and observations of the teams during training, suggests that the teams learned important ideas about how to improve student learning at their schools and how to function as a leadership team. We also present evidence that indicates that the roles the teams could assume varied across sites because of existing organizational structures and the cultural norms they represent, as well as existing micropolitical dynamics among the stakeholders, especially the teams’ relation to the principal. We suggest several important implications for policymakers and

educational leaders regarding the implementation and development of school leadership teams from this research.

First, establishing a new structural entity such as an SLT can be a catalyst for changing power and authority relations; however, the degree of shift that occurs from such a policy initiative will depend upon the local structural, cultural and political conditions. Initiating an SLT lays the groundwork and provides the potential for the shift by presenting the opportunity to move from a hierarchical structure, typically described as administrative where relations among people are designated, to a heterarchical form in which power and authority are more disperse and fluid. Teams begin to develop “common practices” that are linked through interdependent activities (e.g., program review or developing benchmarks) and to assume joint responsibility for the completion of such activities (Gilmore, 1990, p. 152). We saw in these four case studies emergence of common practices and shifts in membership and relationships among members, which leads to a rethinking of the roles and responsibilities of membership for all participants. Often, these shifts are an incremental process that requires the adjustment and coordination of activities by participants, thus this study confirms the importance of following such changes over time to understand their true effect on the organization and on student learning.

A second implication indicates that to maximize the authority and potential for impact, a new SLT needs knowledge of the existing organizational structures, rules and relationships and an understanding of how to negotiate a place within the system. Structural knowledge is an essential starting point for initiating organizational change for reform. Without this understanding, participants have limited knowledge of lines of communication, power and authority, where they fit, and what they can accomplish. We suggest that this knowledge must be made explicit so that a team has a better understanding of the role they can play within the organization and the team’s relationship to others. Significant differences among the organizational structures at each school reflected different power and relationship networks that affected the teams’ ability to carry out their leadership work and, in some cases, contributed to frustration about their work. In other words, context matters and essential components of the context are organizational structures and political dynamics (Mawhinney, 1999).

Third, this study suggests for policymakers and educational leaders that training gives teams the authority to act as school leaders and the knowledge and skills of how to affect their schools. Once given the authority, we found that team participants take their responsibilities seriously. They find ways to

penetrate the organization and play roles such as communicators of new ideas, problem-solvers, action researchers, staff developers and leaders able to initiate and facilitate change. The training helped each team to become a new “box” on the organizational chart (Elmore, 1995), to define new roles within the organization, and to solidify their objectives. When the Pinnacle and Heights SLTs created their organization charts as part of the training, the teams gained new insights about their role and responsibilities. The initial total school involvement in creating Peak’s Router organization chart launched the school’s restructuring initiative and was an important catalyst for changing power relationships among the teachers and principal. When the SLT was formed, however, neither the school nor the team consciously revisited the chart to explore how the SLT should relate to the rest of the school. These findings suggest that if training begins with giving teams greater knowledge of existing organizational structures, they may be able to maximize their influence within the organization earlier in the development cycle. Furthermore, teams need time to explore lines of communication and power relations among groups and to identify relationships and norms that may facilitate or constrain their assumption of leadership roles and accomplishment of work.

A significant insight of this third implication is the importance of the relationship between structure, roles and relationships, and values and beliefs. Beck and Murphy (1998) argue that setting up a new structure such as SBM or a school leadership team will not automatically lead to school reform and improved student learning. They argue that “we must focus on inspiring and equipping persons at schools. They must feel an urgency about learning, community, capacity building, and leadership and garner the knowledge and skills to enable them to respond to these imperatives” (p. 383). This conclusion fails to recognize that bringing about organizational change includes an appreciation that organizational structures have the ability to influence and “optimize the capacity of actors” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 11). Actors’ abilities to make adjustments in behavior and expectations are influenced by organizational structures, and existing structures reflect and shape organizational culture and power relations in ways that cannot be ignored. Similar to Blase (1993), we found that the introduction of new shared decision-making structures “related directly to increases in the degree of teachers’ involvement in actually making decision” (p. 154). These structures also created opportunities to question operating beliefs and values that are at the heart of existing structures, rules and norms. This change in structure then

affects the relationships and roles of actors and can enable the accomplishment of the imperatives set out by Beck and Murphy (1998).

A fourth implication of this study is that there can be no set formula for understanding how a new structure such as a school leadership team will be situated within the school. In part, this is because schools are complex open systems, and in part because each school's social environment, organizational structure and micropolitics are unique. As a social organization, schools are communities "following some substantive interest... that has a shared meaning for participants... [that] guides the joint interests and activities of participants, and also provides collective identities" (Gilmore, 1990, p. 150). Examining the relationships and interactions among the stakeholders in these four schools as an explanatory mechanism at both the organizational and individual level, proved useful for understanding their complex systems. Furthermore, team members' knowledge of the organizational structure and the development of strategies to support student learning were essential components of teams' development. As team members gained knowledge of the system, they were able to identify areas of work, possibilities of influence, and opportunities to access or affect the system particularly to initiate programs to improve student learning.

Fifth, this study suggests that teams must also learn how to read the micropolitical dynamics of their organization and engage in organizational learning if they are to be able to assume leadership and develop the necessary qualities to renew, restructure, and enhance existing structures. As Leithwood and Seashore Louis remind us, "the task is not to just create a school organization capable of implementing the current set of reform initiatives ... [but] to design an organization capable of productively responding" to the subsequent initiatives that inevitably will follow (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 1998, p. 6). Team development through training becomes a way for teams and the rest of the staff to develop a common understanding of their school, establish and define shared memories, and most importantly begin unlearning the past of what "is" at their school. In essence, this type of "learning leads to a change in how people behave toward their work, their organization, and one another" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 177). As complex open systems, school organizations are not easily defined or redefined; it takes time to institute changes in relations and behavior patterns, as well as changes in organizational structures.

Finally, the study points to the difficulty of organizational learning and SLT development. The training was essential, but even with sustained SLT training,

the process of preparing teacher leadership teams is slow and requires active direction and support. This study confirms Hart's (1994) finding that "during periods of change, roles and social systems may exert a powerful influence, particularly as coalitions are being formed and a new interpretation of reality is emerging" (p. 494). As schools develop new role configurations for decision-making and design new organizational structures, adjustments in behavior and expectations can significantly affect organizational functioning. Rules for interaction, access to meetings, opportunities to share or learn may be limited or enhanced based on the existing roles, social and political norms and organizational structure (Blase, 1993; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Wallace, 2000). As teams engage in leadership training, new perceptions and interpretations of their role may emerge contributing to frustration or even conflict. Thus, when an organization attempts to make structural changes, such as implementing a new SLT, organizational reconfiguration and shifting role relationships are viewed as significant undertakings. In this study all four teams engaged in these undertakings and struggled to find their place within the organization. All teams experienced some degree of success in implementing their improvement initiatives and impacting opportunities for student learning. Much remains to be learned, however, about how SLTs sustain themselves in the organizational and political landscape, and how they consistently sharpen their ability to improve student learning. Part of the difficulty of this process is that each system is unique and there is no set formula to follow.

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