

Influence of Personal and District Characteristics on Superintendents' Freedom to Implement Change, Staff Readiness for Change, and Leadership Styles

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As schools continue to battle with calls for reform and restructuring, understanding important aspects of change leadership is needed in explaining factors that facilitate successful implementation of planned changes in schools. Certain personal and school district characteristics have been reported in the literature as having impact or influence on school leaders' ability to successfully initiate, lead and/or manage the implementation of change. This study examined the influence of certain personal and district characteristics of Ohio school superintendents' (N = 200) on their perceived freedom to implement change, perceived readiness of staff to implement change, and situational leadership styles. Results of Pearson product-moment correlation, stepwise multiple regression, and ANOVA are presented and discussed.

Keywords: change, characteristics, district, freedom, implement influence, leadership, readiness, school, staff, style, superintendent

Many school reform initiatives that set out to raise standards, increase accountability, lengthen school days, or enhance the rigor of the existing public education system have resulted in changes to only the routine functions and operations of schools (Fullan, 2007; Hawkes et al., 1997; Knaak & Knaak, 2013). Such "first-order" (Cuban, 1988, p. 342) changes—attempts that do not result in significant changes to existing goals and structures—simply made what existed more efficient, without substantially altering the performance and role relationships of staff and students, and without altering the organizational features of the system (Ertmer, 1999; Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2007). According to Cuban (1988), those who propose first-order change "believe that the existing structures of schooling are adequate, desirable and only in need of adjustment" (p. 342).

The challenge to education and school leaders is to avoid maintaining existing conditions and structures, and to initiate "second-order" (Cuban, 1988, p. 343) change—fundamental structural changes that address major dissatisfaction with existing arrangements, structures, programs, and services from within, rather than wait for it to be introduced by an external force (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 2007; Friedman & Berkovich, 2021; Marzano et al., 2005; Paultz & Sadera, 2017; Taylor & La Cava, 2011). Second-order changes bring about new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems (Cuban, 1990, 2013; Taylor & La Cava, 2011). The realization of the aims of second-order change in schools, to a great extent, depends upon the willingness of school leaders, especially superintendents, to embrace the proposition and to support it with leadership behaviors that facilitate the readiness of staff to implement such planned change (Cuban, 1990, 2013; Fullan et al., 2005; Tomlinson, 2019). School leaders should be prime movers, take the impetus for change, and articulate the best mandates for staff support and participation in planned change programs (Brown et al., 2012; Cuban, 1990, 2013; Delaney, 1997; Kanter, 1983; Tomlinson, 2019).

As schools continue to battle with calls for reform and restructuring, understanding important aspects of change leadership such as the leadership styles of school superintendents (Cuban, 2013; Devine & Alger, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988a, 1988b; Owens, 2014; Walker, 1994), their perceived freedom to implement change (Chauvin, 1992; Crawford, 1991; Haro, 1991), readiness of staff for change (Brezicha et al., 2015; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988a, 1988b), and the influence, if any, of district and personal characteristics (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988a, 1988b; Howard et al., 2010; Jenlink et al., 1996; Lederer et al., 2015; Sheppard, 1996; Tomlinson, 2019) on their ability to implement change is needed in explaining factors that facilitate successful implementation of planned changes in schools as well as in explaining school organization response to planned change.

Certain personal and school district characteristics have been reported in the literature as having impact or influence on school leaders' ability to successfully lead and/or manage the implementation of change. They include chronological age, district per pupil expenditure, district per pupil income, highest educational degree of superintendent, number of teachers in the school district, percentage of board members with at least a master's degree, percentage of teachers with at least a master's degree, recruitment status (whether recruited from outside or within the school system), student enrollment, total years as superintendent, type of school district (whether city/urban or local/rural school

district), years of experience as an administrator, years of experience as an educator, years on the current job as superintendent, and perceived readiness of staff for change (this variable was omitted in analysis of data for research question two) (Cuban, 2013; Haro, 1991; Howard et al., 2010; Kerekes, 1993; Lederer et al., 2015; Vail, 1991; Walker, 1994).

This study examined the influence of these personal and school district characteristics on superintendents' perceived freedom to implement change, perceived readiness of staff to implement change, and leadership styles. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) to what extent do personal and district characteristics, singularly and in concert with each other, influence superintendents' perceptions of the freedom they have to implement planned changes, (2) to what extent do personal and district characteristics, singularly and in concert with each other, influence superintendents' perceptions of subordinates' (other administrators, teachers, and support staff) readiness (as measured by the Readiness Scale: Manager Rating Scale) for planned change, and (3) to what extent do personal and district characteristics relate to superintendents' leadership styles (i.e., their scores as measured by the LEAD-Self instrument) (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988a)?

In the context of this study, superintendents' perceived freedom to implement planned change refers to their composite scores on five items on the questionnaire regarding the degree to which they perceived they had freedom to implement planned changes. Perceived readiness of staff for planned change, as measured by the Readiness Scale instrument (Hambleton et al., 1988), refers to superintendents' perceptions of the ability and willingness of school personnel to self-direct their behavior while engaged in planned change implementation. Leadership style (as measured by the LEAD-Self instrument) is defined as the behavior pattern that school superintendents, as leaders, exhibit when attempting to influence the activities of employees towards the accomplishment of common organizational goals. Two dimensions of situational leadership style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988b): (a) relationship behavior-the extent to which superintendents are likely to maintain or facilitate productive human relationships within the school organization, and (b) task behavior-the extent to which school superintendents are more likely to organize, define and control the roles and responsibilities of school employees by establishing well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and ways of getting jobs accomplished-are central to the concept of leadership style used in this study.

Review of Related Literature

Leadership and Leadership Styles

Gardner (1990) noted that because leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers, leaders should be thought of in the context in which they exist, in their functional setting, and based on the system over which they preside. Although there are many other different definitions and/or conceptions of leadership, two common denominators seem to exist among them: (a) leadership cannot occur in a vacuum--there must be followers--and (b) leadership is related to the accomplishment of objectives. While some views on leadership emphasize a link between

the prevailing situation and the probability of becoming an effective leader (Beyer, 2012; Bolman & Deal, 2013; Gardner, 1990; Owens, 2014), others espouse that it is a combination of abilities and characteristics as well as the situation that impacted the individual's leadership aptitude (Fiedler & Chemers, 1984; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988b; O'riely & Matt, 2014).

Hersey and Blanchard's (1988b) Situational Leadership theory and its accompanying Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description (LEAD-Self) served as the theoretical framework and instrument upon which school superintendents' leadership styles were examined. According to Hersey & Blanchard, one's leadership style involves some combination of task behavior and relationship behavior. They defined task behavior as the extent to which leaders are likely to organize and define the roles of the members of their group (followers) by explaining what activities each is to do and when, where, and how tasks are to be accomplished. It is characterized by endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and ways of getting jobs accomplished. Relationship behavior as the extent to which leaders are likely to maintain personal relationships between themselves and members of their group (followers) by opening up channels of communication, providing socioemotional support, psychological strokes, and facilitating behaviors.

These two dimensions of leadership behavior, task behavior and relationship behavior, are cross partitioned to form four styles a leader can use depending on the situation and the maturity level of followers. High task/low relationship leader behavior (S1) is referred to as Telling because this style is characterized by one-way communication in which the leader defines the roles of followers and tells them what, how, when, and where to do various tasks. High task/high relationship behavior (S2) is referred to as Selling because with this style most of the direction is still provided by the leader. He or she also attempts, through two-way communication and socio-emotional support, to get the follower(s) psychologically to buy into decisions that must be made. High relationship/low task behavior (S3) is called Participating because with this style the leader and follower(s) now share in decision making through two-way communication and much facilitating behavior from the leader since the follower(s) have the ability and knowledge to do the task. Low relationship/Low task behavior (S4) is labeled Delegating because the style involves letting follower(s) "run their own show" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988b, p.117) through delegation and general supervision since the follower(s) are high in both task and psychological maturity. Each of these styles can be effective depending on the situation.

Basic to Situational Leadership theory is an interplay among (a) the amount of direction (task behavior) a leader gives, (b) the amount of socio-emotional support (relationship behavior) a leader provides, and (c) the maturity level that followers exhibit on a specific task (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988b). The maturity level of subordinates is the ability and willingness of people to take responsibility for directing their own behavior-the extent to which a subordinate is willing and able to successfully accomplish a specific task. Hersey and Blanchard (1988b) defined ability as "the knowledge, experience and skill that an individual or a group brings to a particular task or activity" and willingness as "the extent to which an individual or group has the confidence, commitment and motivation to accomplish a specific task" (p. 175). They emphasized that maturity should be considered only in relation

to a specific task to be performed-"an individual or group is not matured or immature in any total sense" (p. 151). Because there is no one best style of leadership for all situations, the maturity level of followers determines the appropriateness of a leadership style. Thus, the maturity level of followers must be determined in order to determine the appropriate style to be used with a group or an individual.

Superintendents as Change Leaders

The 1980s era of school reform, dominated by state and federal initiatives, created a backseat role for superintendents, thereby dampening successful results (Domenech, 2010; Glass, 1992). Also, the emergence of choice movements across America, as well as advocacy for more control at the local level by parents, building administrators, teachers, students, and other interest groups have challenged superintendents' authority and policymaking leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Garcia, 2007; Glass, 1992; Hawkes et al, 1997; The Wallace Foundation, 2010). The authority and freedom of school superintendents to effectively implement organizational changes in school systems seem to be hampered by factors such as (a) encroachment by a more involved citizenry, (b) a wide array of regulatory and legislative mandates, (c) unionization, (d) changing relationships between boards and superintendents, and (e) assumption of greater leadership in formulating policy by boards (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; Glass, 1992; Walker, 1994). As Glass (1992) noted, often the result is the creation of a "superintendency where leaders often find themselves in continuous defensive posture, both personally and on behalf of their district" (p. 3).

School leaders have the primary responsibility for initiating and managing change abound (Chauvin, 1992; Fullan, 2007; Garcia, 2007; Hall & Hord, 1987; Kerekes, 1993; The Wallace Foundation, 2010). Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991) conducted an analysis of school employee resistance to change and concluded that "the school district leader should be the one to initiate change and provide the ingredients and processes for constructive change" (p. 412). Carlson (1965) elaborated on the significance of the school leader (the school superintendent) in the change process, stating that:

though it is true that a school system as a whole accepts or rejects innovation, the school superintendent is at the focal point in the decision process regarding innovation. Whether he [or she] convinces his [or her] staff or is convinced by them, the superintendent is in a position to make the final decision. (p. 11)

School superintendents have the opportunity to take the impetus for change (internal and external mandates), prioritize them, internalize the concepts, and articulate the best mandates for staff support and participation in planned school change programs (Ash, 2014; Garcia, 2007). The nature of planned changes and how employees, especially teachers, perceive them as fitting into or challenging established beliefs and patterns of behavior influence the degree and manner in which they are rejected, resisted, or accepted (Al-Furaih et al., 2020; Kondakci et al., 2017; Oppi et al., 2022).

In today's schools, planned change is pervasive and necessary, and the attitude and practices of school leaders determine whether change is productive (Al-Furaih et al., 2020; Ash, 2014). Leadership for change requires that the change effort begin at the top with the leader and his or her administrative team making an introspective analysis of their skills,

leadership style, and beliefs about personnel, students, and standards of excellence (Jenlink et al., 1996; Sheppard, 1996; Thurston et al., 1993). Superintendents should have the freedom, as well as every opportunity to implement appropriate planned changes that will make their school districts responsive and educationally outstanding, especially in response to legal mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), etc. They should be aware of the interrelationships of their leadership styles and adaptability, freedom to implement planned changes, school structure, and how all these interact to influence the readiness of school personnel to implement planned change programs (US Department of Education, 2015).

Method

Population and Sampling

The target population was superintendents of 614 Ohio school districts (Ohio Department of Education, 2022). School districts were classified as either city/urban or local/rural. City School Districts are those encompassing the territory within the corporate limits of a city, but excluding territory detached for school purposes; while Local School Districts are those that legally depend on a county board of education for service and supervision (Buchter et al., 1991). Superintendents of 191 city school districts and 423 of the local school districts comprised 31% and 69%, respectively, of the target population. To ensure that each school district was represented in the sample in proportion to its numbers in the target population, a proportional, stratified sampling procedure was employed (Frankel et al., 2014). Using a table of random numbers, an initial sampling point for each proportion was selected, and from that point every third city school superintendent in the Ohio Educational Directory (Ohio Department of Education, 2018), and every third local school district superintendent in the directory was included in the sample. This procedure yielded a total of 200 school superintendents: 63 (31%) from city school districts and 137 (69%) from local school districts.

The criterion for being part of the sample was that a respondent (superintendent) must have been on the job as superintendent in the school district for at least two years. This reduced the likelihood of selecting those who had not been in the school system enough to have involved staff in planning and implementing change program(s). The Ohio Educational Directory was used to ensure that each respondent who was randomly selected had been in the school district for at least two years as the superintendent. Superintendents who did not meet this criterion in the initial sampling process were replaced. This process further minimized the chances of rejecting many returned research instruments, though some respondents (two) who met the criteria did not implement planned change in their school districts.

Research Instrument

A three-part questionnaire comprised (a) personal and school district characteristics data section, (b) the Leadership Effectiveness Adaptability Description (LEAD-Self) developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1988a), and (c) the Readiness Scale: Manager Rating Scale developed

by Hambleton, Blanchard, and Hersey (1988). The first part of the survey instrument was designed to (a) collect data about school district and personal characteristics of superintendents, (b) ascertain whether the superintendent had implemented at least one major planned change program in which all or a majority of school district staff were involved (respondents were asked to describe at least one planned change program which they implemented or that was being implemented in the school district), and (c) determine superintendents' rating of their perceived freedom to implement planned change programs.

For purposes of clarity, planned change was defined on the instrument as the altering of behavior, structures, procedures, purposes, or output of some or all units within the school district. Two examples of planned change were provided in the research instrument to guide respondents. Determining whether a superintendent had implemented a planned change program involving most school employees made it possible to exclude any superintendent who had not implemented a planned change program from the study. This exclusion was necessary because the Readiness Scale instrument required that respondents (superintendents) base their perceptions of staff readiness on the involvement of such employees on a major task, in this case, the implementation of a planned change program in the school district. To determine perceived freedom to implement planned change, superintendents were asked to rate, on an eight-point scale, five questions on the degree to which they perceive they had freedom to implement planned change programs. A composite score was determined for each respondent by adding scores on the five questions. The computed composite interval scores represented respondents' degree of perceived freedom to implement planned change scores.

The second part of the instrument measured the leadership styles of school superintendents using the Leadership Effectiveness Adaptability Description (LEAD-Self and other) (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988b). The LEAD-Self is a 12-item leadership-style assessment questionnaire consisting of 12 leader-followers task situations followed by four alternative leader behavior actions. Each of the four alternative actions that follow a situation correspond to one of the four leadership styles (Telling ([S1], Selling [S2], Participating [S3], and Delegating [S4]) identified in Hersey and Blanchard's (1988a, 1988b) situational leadership theory. The minimum and maximum score for each style is 4 and 12, respectively. Respondents' dominant leadership styles were determined by counting and summing the number of times each style was selected. This produced an interval score on each style for every respondent. Summing the responses for each style/column (i.e., Selling, Telling, Participating, and Delegating columns) determined a respondent's dominant style (either Telling, Selling, Participating, or Delegating). In situations where respondents' scores on the four dimensions of the instrument indicated more than one predominant leadership style (e.g., scores of 4 for Selling, 4 for Telling, 3 for Participating, and 1 for Delegating), one style was randomly chosen for each of those respondents using a random number table. In this example, either Selling or Telling would be randomly selected as the respondent's primary leadership style and would be used as his or her dominant leadership style score for data analysis. According to Baker and Campbell (1994), this process prevents bias in the results of the analysis. Only two respondents had equal scores for two styles—Participating and Delegating.

In the third part of the survey instrument, the Readiness Scale: Manager Rating Scale was used to measure superintendents' perceived readiness of their subordinates (staff) to accept and/or implement planned change programs. There are two subscales in the Readiness Scale: (a) Job Readiness and (b) Psychological Readiness. Each subscale contained five questions rated by superintendents on an 8-point response scale. Scores on the two subscales were added together to produce a composite interval score for a respondent's perceived readiness of staff to implement a planned change program. Possible scores for each subscale range from 5 to 40, while possible composite scores for perceived readiness of staff for planned change range from 10 to 80.

Validity and reliability of instruments. The LEAD-Self has been extensively used in leadership behavior studies and for training (Greene, 1980; Hambleton et al., 1988; Pascarella & Lunenburg, 1988; Ramos, 1986; Walter et al., 1980). Walter et al (1980) asked 126 elementary school principals to respond to the LEAD-Self in order to test for validity and reliability. Two measures of internal consistency yielded reliability coefficients of .81 and .61, respectively. In a research study by Greene (1980), the LEAD-Self was standardized on the responses of 264 managers/leaders who ranged in age from 21 to 64. Validity scores for the 12 items ranged from .11 to .52, and 10 of the 12 coefficients (83%) were .25 or higher. Each response option met the operationally defined criterion of less than 80% with respect to selection frequency. According to Greene, the stability of the LEAD-Self was moderately strong. In two administrations across a six-week interval, 75% of the managers maintained their dominant style and 71% maintained their alternate style. The contingency coefficients were both .71 and each was significant ($p \leq .01$). The correlation for the adaptability scores was .69 ($p \leq .01$).

Greene maintained that logical validity of the LEAD-Self was clearly established, that scores remained relatively stable across time, that "the user may rely upon the results as consistent measures, [and that the] LEAD-Self is deemed to be an empirically sound instrument" (p. 1). Several empirical validity studies (Blank et al., 1990; Greene, 1980; Norris & Vecchio, 1992; Pascarella & Lunenburg, 1988) which were conducted showed satisfactory results supporting the four style dimensions of the scale.

According to Baker and Campbell (1994), the Readiness Scale: Manager Rating Scale used in conjunction with the LEAD-Self instrument was found to have validity and test-retest reliability coefficients of .62 and .71, respectively. Face validity for the Readiness Scale was based upon a review of the items, and content validity emanated from the procedures employed to create the original set of items (Baker & Campbell, 1994).

Data Collection

Copies of the research instrument were mailed to the 200 randomly selected sample. The return rate after the first mailing of the instrument was 49% (98 responses). A second mailing of the instrument was completed three- and one-half weeks after the first mailing, and the return rate increased to 86% (172 responses out of 200). Of the 172 responses, 162 were usable, bringing the actual return rate to 81%. Of the 10 questionnaires that were not usable, six were completed by respondents who, based on the criterion established (must have been on the job as superintendent for at least two years) earlier for being part of the sample, were

considered unqualified. Two contained incomplete and/or confusing responses, and two were returned uncompleted because the school superintendent vacated his or her job.

Data Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation and stepwise multiple regression (forward selection) (Keith, 2006; Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), with research emphasis upon the coefficients of multiple correlation, were used to analyze the data collected. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine (at the alpha level of .05) the singular influence of the predictor variables on the criterion variable in the research question, while a stepwise multiple regression (stepwise selection) and the accompanying coefficient of multiple correlation were performed (at alpha level of .10) to determine their collective influence.

Findings

Of the 162 superintendents whose responses to the instrument of measure were determined to be usable, 108 (66.7%) were superintendents of local school districts and 54 (33.3%) were superintendents of city school districts; 107 (66%) had been recruited from outside their school district; and 55 (34%) had doctoral degrees. Four respondents (2%) used Telling (S1) as their predominant leadership style, 68 (42%) used Selling (S2), 90 (56%) used Participating, and none used Delegating (S4).

The first research question sought to determine the singular and collective influence of the independent variables (personal and district characteristics) on superintendents' perception of the freedom they had to implement district-wide planned change programs. Results of a Pearson product-moment correlation (acting singularly) indicate that of the predictor variables examined, four: (1) type of school district—whether city or local—($r = .32, p \leq .01$), (2) percentage of board members with at least a master's degree ($r = .29, p \leq .02$), (3) recruitment status—whether recruited from within or outside the school district—($r = .35, p \leq .05$), and (4) perceived readiness of teachers for planned change ($r = .26, p \leq .001$) are significantly, at the .05 alpha level, related to superintendents' perceptions of their freedom to implement planned change programs (effect sizes [Ellis, 2009] are .11, .08, .12, & .07 for type of school district, percentage of board members with at least a master's degree, recruitment status, and perceived readiness of teachers for planned change, respectively). Similarly, the results of a stepwise (forward selection) multiple regression (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005) show that acting in concert with each other (a) perceived readiness of staff for planned change ($\beta = .029, R^2 = .069, P < .001$), (b) type of school district ($\beta = 0-.691, R^2 = .103, P < .01$), and (c) recruitment status were significantly related to superintendents' perceptions of their freedom to implement change ($\beta = .283, R' = .12, p < .05$) (Table 1). The regression model, though statistically significant but considered not practically significant due to small effect size (Cohen, 1988; Ellis, 2009; Kotrlik et al., 2011; Kotrlik & Williams, 2003) of 12% is:

$$\Delta \quad YPFIPC = .032(PRTPC) - .455(DTYPE) + .300(RS) + 3.965$$

$$\Delta \quad R^2_{Y, 123} \text{ and } R^2_{\Delta Y, 123} = 12\%$$

Where:

PFIPC = Perceived Freedom to Implement Planned Change; PRTPC = Perceived Readiness of Staff for Planned Change; DTYPE = Type of School District (City or local); and

RS= Recruitment Status (Whether recruited from outside or from within the school district).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a significant, $F(1,162) = 5.84, p = .01$ mean difference between city ($M = 5.44$) and local/exempted village ($M = 5.92$) school district superintendents scores. There was also a significant $F(1,162) = 3.67, p = .05$ mean difference between superintendents ($N = 55$) recruited from within the school district ($M = 6.02$) and those ($N = 107$) recruited from outside the district ($M = 5.63$) in their perceptions of the freedom they had to implement planned change programs. Superintendents who were recruited from within the school district perceived themselves higher as having freedom to implement planned changes than those who were recruited from outside the school district.

Table 1

Summary of Stepwise (Forward Selection) Multiple Regression: Dependent Variable = Superintendents' Perceived Freedom to Implement Planned Change Programs; Independent Variables: Personal and School District Characteristics

PROCEDURE RESULTS						
Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standardized Coefficient (β)	R	R ²	F	P
INTERCEPT	3.965				51.51	.00
Perceived Readiness of Staff for Planned Change (Step 1)	.032	.029	.264	.069	11.82	.00***
Type of School District (Step 2)	-0.455	-0.691	.323	.103	5.91	.01**
Recruitment Status (Step 3)	.300	.283	.354	.12	2.38	.05*

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (one-tailed).

NOTE: Effect size = .12—small (Cohen, 1988; Ellis, 2009; Kotrlik et al., 2011).

The second research question concerned influence of personal and district characteristics on superintendents' perceptions of subordinates' readiness for planned change. The results of a Pearson product-moment correlation at .05 alpha level showed that, acting singularly, only chronological age of superintendents significantly ($r = .20, p = .02$) (effect size = .04-small) influenced their perception of teachers' readiness for planned change implementation. Regarding the extent to which the predictor variables acted in concert with each other, the results of a stepwise (forward selection) multiple regression analysis, at .05 alpha level, indicate that chronological age ($r = .20, p \leq .05$) (effect size = .04-small) and total

years of experience as an educator ($r = .15, p \leq .03$) (effect size = 02-small) were statistically significant influences on superintendents' perceived readiness of staff for planned change implementation. The higher the chronological age and total years of experience as an educator of superintendents, the higher they rated their perceptions of staff readiness for change implementation.

The third research question sought to determine the extent to which the variables (personal and district characteristics) influence superintendents' leadership style scores (i.e., their degree of tendency to use a particular style of leadership as defined by the LEAD-Self instrument) on the dimensions of Telling (S1), Selling (S2), Participating (S3), and Delegating (S4). Results of both a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis and a stepwise (forward selection) multiple regression analysis indicate that none of the predictor variables was significantly related to superintendents' tendency to use either the Telling (S1) or Selling (S2) leadership style. Only years of experience as an administrator was significantly ($r = .28, p \leq .04$) (effect size = .08-small) related to the tendency to use the Participating (S3) style of leadership. Three variables (years as an administrator, $r = .23, p < .05$ [effect size = .05-small]; recruitment status, $r = .26, p < .05$ [effect size = .07-small]; and type of school district, $r = .32, p < .10$ [effect size = .12-small]) were significant in predicting the tendency of superintendents using Delegating (S4) as their predominant leadership style.

Based on the finding that majority of the superintendents used either Participating (S3) or Delegating (S4) leadership styles, an *ex post facto* ("after the fact") analysis was done to see if Participating and Delegating superintendents differed significantly in their scores on the personal and district characteristics. Both a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for continuous variables and a chi-square test for dichotomous variables (type of school district, highest educational degree, and recruitment status) indicated no significant difference between the two groups.

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

Superintendents' perceived readiness of staff to implement planned change, their type of school district (whether city or local), the percentage of board members having at least a master's degree, and their recruitment status (whether recruited from within or outside the school district) influenced their perceived freedom to implement planned change programs in their school district. The more Ohio superintendents perceived teachers to be ready for planned change, the more freedom they felt they had to implement planned change programs. Local/exempted village school district superintendents appear to perceive they have more freedom to implement planned changes than those of city school districts. Perhaps, because superintendents in local/exempted village school districts have fewer teachers to supervise, smaller student enrollment, more involvement of the community in school activities, and a more homogeneous student body to deal with, they see themselves as having greater freedom to implement planned changes than do superintendents of city school districts.

The findings also suggest that the higher the percentage of board members with at least a master's degree, the greater the superintendents perceived they had freedom to implement planned change programs. This finding, if generally substantiated, could have implications for the community, school boards, superintendents (as change leaders/agents),

and school leadership preparation programs. It may benefit communities to consider the minimum educational qualifications of those they elect to school boards, if superintendent-lead reform or change implementation is perceived to be desirable. Perhaps, superintendents who work with school boards in which most of the members have less than a master's degree should be aware of and examine the impact of such minimum educational qualification when planning change programs. They may also consider giving deserving attention to ways of improving such members' receptivity to planned change.

Superintendents hired from within the school district appear to see themselves as having greater freedom to implement planned change than those hired from outside the district. An explanation of this finding could be that they already had very good understanding of and more trust in employees in the school district prior to becoming its superintendent. Another explanation could be that as former administrators in the school district/system, they already had good knowledge of how to work the system.

Years of experience as a superintendent was not found to be statistically significant in influencing the perceived freedom Ohio superintendents have to implement planned change programs. However, Walker (1994), who studied the autonomy of Tennessee superintendents in directing effective change, found that it was significantly related to the superintendents' freedom to implement planned change—less experienced superintendents reported less freedom to implement change than more experienced ones. Walker's study also led him to conclude, contrary to the findings of this study, that higher educational qualification (above master's degree) was related to the freedom superintendents reported having to implement planned change programs. Like the findings of this study, Walker found that school district setting (urban, suburban, and rural) was related to the extent of freedom superintendents reported having to implement planned change programs. In this study, local school district superintendents perceive themselves to be freer to implement planned change programs than city-school district superintendents.

Superintendents' chronological age and years of experience as an educator were significant influences on their perceptions of school employees' readiness for implementation of planned change programs. The older the superintendent, the greater he or she perceived school employees to be ready for planned change, and the greater the number of years as an educator, the greater the superintendents' likelihood of perceiving staff to be ready for planned change. In contrast, Freitas (1992), who examined the relationship between principals' leadership styles and teacher readiness to change in elementary schools, found that principals' age was negatively related to the reported readiness of teachers to implement change by principals. According to Freitas' findings, principals who were in the younger age group (40-49) seemed to rate their teachers' readiness for planned change higher than those who were older (50-59) and also were males. The contradiction between these two findings could be due to differences between superintendents and principals in their responsibilities, their relationships with teachers, professional training, and experiences. Another explanation could be that because superintendents usually are older and have more professional experience than principals, they had developed more understanding and appreciation of the abilities of school staff to self-direct their behavior while working on a particular responsibility such as implementing a planned change program.

Although findings from this study about influence of certain school district characteristics on Ohio school superintendents' perceived freedom to implement change programs, perceived readiness of staff for change, and leadership styles did not offer very strong statistical relationships between the criterion and the independent variables, there appear to be a need to continue to study systematically the relationships among variables related to leadership and planned change in schools. Such studies will contribute to the explanation of relationships between personal and professional characteristics of school leaders and important school district variables as they interact to influence the implementation of planned change programs. It is recommended that a case study should be conducted to determine why local school district superintendents perceive themselves to have more freedom to implement planned change programs than city school superintendents.

Also, a causal-comparative study may be conducted to investigate further the findings that (a) the higher the percentage of board members with at least a bachelor's degree in the district, the higher the superintendents rated their freedom to implement planned change programs in the district; and (b) superintendents hired from within the school district reported greater freedom to implement planned changes than those hired from outside the district. Further examination of these issues could inform school boards, superintendents, administrator preparatory programs, and the community in ensuring that schools are better able to respond to calls for change or reform. Most important, a study of superintendents who have successfully implemented multiple planned change programs in their school districts should be conducted to determine the degree to which board members' highest educational qualification was a significant factor when implementing change programs.

As society, the curriculum, students' needs, the workforce, technology, the economy, and other factors change school leaders become aware of the constant pressure to bring about change in schools (in curricula, in personnel performance, and in standards). School superintendents, as school organization leaders, must find new ways of meeting the need for change in order to maintain the relevance and responsiveness of schools. Change in schools is inevitable and often desirable and depending on whether it is planned or merely a reaction to internal or external pressures, its effect can be drastically different. Effective planned change requires deliberate decision making and implementation strategies rather than haphazard acceptance of faddish projects and ideas. Because schools are complex and modeled by increasingly fluid and disorderly environmental forces that constantly threaten their rationally ordered structures and goals, the success in implementing planned changes lies in having a particularly effective person who can mobilize people to overcome the resistance that the system reflexively generates.

As schools brace for reform and change, leaders and scholars of school administration and leadership need to understand the interaction or relationship, if any, between school superintendents' ability and readiness to implement change and variables such as leadership style, perceived freedom to implement planned change, readiness of school staff for change, etc. Such understanding is needed in explaining factors that facilitate successful implementation of planned changes in schools as well as in explaining school organization response to planned change.

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