

Transformational Leadership: Creating a Learning Culture in an Age of Accountability

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Abstract

This article explores the notion that the shifting responsibilities of school principals have required the incorporation of new and different leadership styles that will require advanced skillsets in organizational management and performance and instructional leadership. Further, how teachers perceive their school leader's ability to effectively demonstrate these capacities can have a tremendous impact on student learning and organizational effectiveness. This study seeks to explore how incorporating a blended leadership model using a professional development model can have positive effects on schools and focus school leadership on creating and articulating a clear school vision, promoting a climate of high expectations, effectively distributing leadership responsibilities, and improving teaching and learning, while designing and implementing effective staff development initiatives (Hallinger, 2005; Printy et al., 2003).

Key Words

transformational leadership, instructional leadership, blended leadership, teaching and learning, school climate, educational leadership

Introduction

Leadership Frameworks in Context

Two conceptual models in the field of educational leadership are instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 1992, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership, narrowly defined, focuses the principal's efforts on student outcomes, teaching, and learning. However, transformational leadership focuses the principal on organizational capacity and is derived from the business community (Hattie, 2012). Marks and Printy (2003) found principals overemphasized transformational leadership.

While transformational leadership is necessary to improve schools, this model by itself is inadequate to achieve high-quality teaching and learning and raise student achievement. They argue that this imbalance will lead to lower student learning outcomes (Marks and Printy, 2003; Hattie, 2015). The shifting responsibilities of principals have required that they incorporate new and different leadership styles that will focus on the members of the organization, their performance and instruction. How teachers perceive their school leader has a great impact on student achievement and organizational capacity. This study sought to explore how incorporating a blended leadership model using a professional development model can have positive effects on schools and focus school leadership on creating a purpose, promoting a climate of high expectations, distributing leadership, improving teaching and learning, and planning staff development (Hallinger, 2005; Printy et al., 2003).

Project objectives

The objectives of the study were to examine the perceptions principals and staff members have regarding the principal leadership practices to

determine (a) which transformational leadership practices principals have determined to be the most effective transformational leadership traits; (b) the frequency with which principals are implementing those transformational leadership practices; and (c) if a relationship exists between the principal's self-perceptions and the perceptions of the teachers they lead. Also, because few have been formally trained by the Hawaii Department of Education in transformational practices, (d) is there a difference between the perception of the teachers and staff whose principals have participated in the training provided by the state, which includes transformational practices, compared to those staff members of principals who have not received formal training and a focus on instructional leadership practices?

Purpose of the Study

Schools are under pressure to improve. Therefore, principals need to reflect upon the key competencies associated with being a transformational leader, while focusing on their perceptions as well as the perceptions of the various stakeholders. Transformational leadership theory is used in various schools and supported by research (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 451), which shows that transformational leadership can assist with making fundamental changes in schools.

The purpose of the study was to explore the transformational leadership practices believed of principals in Hawaii in underperforming schools to be the most effective. Principals' self-perceptions and the perceptions others have of them while implementing those practices will be examined. The results of the study can provide ideas for creating a leadership model that can support principals in the development of effective practices.

Context of study

The setting for the study was a professional development conference held by an educational company that focuses on providing leadership support to schools recognized by the state as a focus or priority.

All schools attending the conference receive consulting support from this educational company. There were 15 schools that attended the conference. Each school registered one principal and a minimum of four teachers and/or staff members to attend the conference. One school registered five teachers and/or staff members to attend.

A total of 76 participants registered for the conference. The staff members who were registrants for the conference attended based upon their role as school leaders (e.g., lead teacher, curriculum coordinator, grade-level chair, department chair).

Population and sample

The composition of the elementary and middle schools' grades was eight participants from K–5 institutions, one from a K–6 school, one from K–8, three from 6–8, and two from a school with grades 7 and 8. Five principals of the six schools fell in the 41- to 50-year-old age range, and one was over 50.

According to the respondents, the ethnicities they identified with included White, Asian, mixed, Japanese, Hawaiian, and Hawaiian/Chinese. Four principals were male, and two were female. All principals had obtained a master's degree in education. Two of the six principals participated in the New Principals' Academy, and the four remaining principals did not.

Concept operationalized

Transformational leadership must be operationally defined. McClesky (2014) cites

Burns (1978) in defining a transformational leader as somebody who raises the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes. This person "can convince his followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization, while elevating the followers' level of need on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy from lower level concerns for safety and security to higher level needs for achievement and self-actualization" (p. 117).

Leithwood (1992) defines transformational leadership as "leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of the system for goal accomplishment" (p. 9). Transformational leadership invests in ways to promote and develop the capacity of the organization (Baylor, 2012; Bickmore & Sulentic–Dowel, 2014; Fullan, 2012; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Ross & Gray, 2006). Transformational leadership practices are the focus of the four research questions.

Variables

The survey instrument operationalizes leadership practices with the following variables associated with the research questions and the needs assessment:

1. Years of experience is the number of years the principal has served as a sitting principal, as this indicates the leadership training received from the state, with 0–2 years indicating that the principal has participated in the New Principals Academy and/or the Hawaii Certification Institute for School Leaders.
2. Principals' beliefs refer to an opinion regarding transformational practices

that are most effective, causing great organizational change, and least effective, that if implemented will not likely cause change if implemented.

3. Perception: According to McDonald (2012), perception can be defined as the way one sees the world.

Research questions

Informed by the historical perspective, the theoretical framework, and the current literature, the research questions guiding the needs assessment are as follows:

RQ 1. What are the most effective transformational practices that principals believe are crucial for leading in a culture of change?

RQ 2. How frequently do principals implement transformational leadership practices?

RQ 3. What is the relationship between the principals' self-perceptions of the frequency with which they implement these practices and of perceptions of the staff they lead?

RQ 4. Is there a difference between the perceptions of the staff whose principals have participated in the recently adopted leadership training provided by the state and those staff members of principals who have not received that formal training?

Methodology

Data collection

Surveys were used to gather data on respondents' demographics, the frequency with which principals implemented transformational leadership practices, the beliefs on transformational practices that principals

thought were most and least effective, and perceptions teachers and/or staff members had of their principals implementing transformational practices.

Instrumentation

The survey method was used to gather data on respondents' demographics, as well as quantitative data on the frequency with which principals implemented transformational leadership practices, beliefs concerning transformational practices that principals thought were most and least effective, and perceptions that teachers and/or staff members had of their principals implementing transformational practices.

The survey questions were similar to those of Provost, Boscardin, and Wells (2010), who set out to study the beliefs of principals (Appendix A). The survey questions of Provost et. al asked principal participants to perform a Q-sort method and to sort and prioritize from high to low priority knowledge and skill statements generated from the literature review of 21 descriptors of principal leadership known to impact student achievement.

Another quantitative measurement that the researcher considered was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) used by Provost et al. to rank levels of transformational practices, including idealized influence (developing rapport, holding students accountable), individualized consideration (collaborative decision making), inspirational motivation (being encouraging and supportive), and intellectual stimulation (challenging the status quo and encouraging risk taking).

Additionally, Louis, Dretzle, and Wahlstrom (2010) survey was considered; however, it was not chosen for this study. Louis et al. (2010) conducted a survey using a Likert scale that was presented to teachers in

elementary and secondary settings. The survey focused on three attributes of leadership: instructional leadership, shared leadership, and organizational trust. Teachers were asked to identify which of the three attributes were positively related to student achievement. Their use of the Likert scale helped conceptualize the survey that the researcher provided for this needs assessment.

Procedure

Using Louis et al.'s (2010) survey and the MLQ as guides, the researchers created a paper-pencil questionnaire (see Appendix B) to focus on transformational practices in the areas of creating goals using a collaborative decision-making process; communicating vision, mission, and school goals; focusing on instruction; and creating a culture of high expectations and risk taking. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, and 5 = almost always) was used to ascertain the frequency with which principals implemented transformational leadership practices, and teachers and/or staff members were asked to rate the degree to which they believed their principal implemented those practices.

Principals were asked to provide demographic information (see Appendix D). In addition, the instrumentation provided to principals consisted of 26 statements that principals used a 5-point Likert scale to rate and determine the frequency with which transformational leadership practices were being implemented. Teachers were given the same 26 statements (see Appendix D) related to transformational practices and were asked to rate the frequency with which the principal displayed these leadership attributes. MLQ scores for each respondent were calculated by taking the mean across the 26 items, (Cronbach's $\alpha = .980$). Additional data were collected on demographic items related to years

of experience, to determine frequency, average, and correlation between teacher perceptions and principal perceptions along with years of experience and gender.

Findings

Initial summary of results

The research questions guided the study and this section provided an initial summary of the findings for the questions. Tables and charts that are referenced are located in the appendix section of the needs assessment.

Research question 1

What are the most effective transformational practices that principals believe are crucial for leading in a culture of change?

Each principal ranked the attributes they felt were necessary for transformational leaders to demonstrate from most important to least important. Of the 25 attributes, those that were most commonly associated with creating goals using a collaborative decision-making process and communicating the vision were ranked as most effective. Overwhelmingly, protecting teachers from outside influences was ranked 23 or 24 on a scale of 1–25 by over 80 percent of the principals. This indicated that protecting teachers was not perceived as an effective transformational practice (see Appendix E, Figure 1).

Research question 2

How frequently do principals implement transformational leadership practices?

When principals self-reported the frequency of demonstrating exemplary practices, the principals generally perceived themselves as frequently demonstrating exemplary practices. (see Appendix E, Figure 2). Mean responses to the 26 questions in the questionnaire instrument ranged from a high of 4.69 to a low of 3.54. With three representing a

response of “sometimes” implementing the associated item, and four representing “frequently”, the results show that principals positively self-assess their use of transformational techniques. Interestingly, although principals tended to rank culture items as most important (see Appendix E, Figure 1), they tend to self-assess as scoring implementing this least often (see Appendix E, Table 1). The mean response to the culture items was 3.98, compared to 4.43 for school goals, 4.33 for instruction, and 4.08 for communication.

Research question 3

What is the relationship between the principals’ self-perceptions of the frequency with which they implement these practices and of perceptions of the staff they lead?

Fewer teachers regarded their principals as implementing transformational leadership practices. Not one of the school’s staff members viewed their principal better in regard to implementing transformational practices compared to the principal’s self-assessment (see Appendix F, Figure 3). An independent samples t-test found that the difference in assessments was statistically significant in a two-tailed test with alpha set at .10 due to the small sample size, $t(22) = -1.764$, $p = .092$. The average staff score on the questionnaire scale was .702 lower compared to the average principal.

Research question 4

Is there a difference between the perceptions of the staff whose principals have participated in the recently adopted leadership training provided by the state and those staff members of principals who have not received that formal training?

Principals who participated in New Leadership academy and had recent training

were perceived by their staff as implementing transformational leadership practices more frequently. Although the small sample size prohibits mean difference testing, (see Appendix E, Figure 4) shows that the average reported frequency for those receiving recent training ($M = 3.97$) was higher than those who have not received recent training ($M = 3.29$).

Limitations

The researcher does recognize that the sample size is small, so the generalizability of the findings and conclusions is limited. Another limitation of this study was the number of participants who did not complete the survey in its entirety. While principals and staff members were provided the same time to complete the instrumentation, staff members had a higher completion rate. Principals were likely to complete the survey section, with most not completing the rank ordering of the most effective and least effective practices. This may be indicative of the activity, which caused principal participants to lose interest. Alternatively, this component of the survey was not the best approach for the researcher to collect evidence on the practices principals found to be the most effective and least effective in the area of transforming schools.

There may have been a variety of reasons that there was lower respondent participation than expected and that the lack of responses was significantly lower than what was expected. However, this did not hinder the researcher from collecting data and drawing some type of conclusions from the data.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the transformational practices needed by principals in order to serve as change agents in schools that most need school reform—low achieving and high minority schools. Moreover, it is those practices of transformational leaders that get

people to want to change, improve, be led, and transform schools. Using the historical context, theoretical perspective, and research questions as a guide, the needs assessment sought to gather information regarding the transformational practices principals thought were most effective and least effective for changing the culture and leading an organization. It also examined the perceptions principals have of themselves in the role of transformational leader and if those perceptions were different when comparing the formal leadership training received, and the perceptions of their staff.

Results from the data revealed that principals perceive themselves frequently implementing the practices, and there was not much variability in self-assessments among the school leaders. The most significant finding revealed from the research was that the staff members had a much lower perception of their school administrators exhibiting transformational leadership attributes.

After analyzing the findings, it is clear that future research must include the reasons staff members may not view their principals as transformational leaders, what consistent practices or values staff members are looking for in transformational leaders, and whether the staff expectations align with the transformational leadership attributes defined in current research.

It is therefore evident that principals are over-confident in their abilities to provide transformation leadership. This may stem from a poor understanding of both what the components of transformational leadership actually entail as well as how those actions are interpreted by the people that matter, namely staff and students.

Improved leadership should therefore follow from an intervention that improves self-awareness of leadership weaknesses and what can be done to address those shortcomings.

Author Biographies

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Appendix A

Principal Survey

Please read each statement and identify the characteristics of an effective transformational principal. Use 1-25 to rank order the most effective practices, with 1 as the most effective and 25 as the least effective.

Statements	Rank
A. Develops school-wide goals	
B. Communicates school-wide goals	
C. Obtains stakeholders' input to create school-wide goals	
D. Use several data points to create the school-wide goals	
E. Utilizes the Plan-Do-Check-Act process for continuous improvement	
F. Stakeholders understand the role they play in meeting the school-wide goals	
G. Shares the mission and vision with all stakeholders	
H. Communicates instructional goals to the staff and to the students	
I. Posts academic goals	
J. Shares academic progress with all stakeholders	
K. Collaborates with all stakeholders to set academic goals	
L. Aligns classroom and instructional practices with the state and complex	
M. Makes frequent classroom observations both formal and informal	
N. Identifies instructional areas of growth and strengths of teachers	
O. Helps staff members improve instructional practices	
P. Use the data collected from classroom observations to create professional development	
Q. Seeks staff input regarding curricular and instructional programs	
R. Articulates who is responsible for instructional programs	
S. Protects instructional time	
T. Holds high expectations of the staff and of student performance	
U. Maintains high faculty morale	
V. Monitors student progress using a systematic process	
W. Creates an orderly learning environment	
X. Allows teachers to teach	
Y. Protects teaches from outside influence	

Appendix B

Principal Survey

Please use the scale to indicate the degree to which you implement the following practices. Please circle only one number per statement. Please try to answer every statement.

1= Almost Never	2= Seldom	3= Sometimes	4= Frequently	5= Almost Always
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School Goals					
1. I develop school-wide goals with the staff	1	2	3	4	5
2. I seek input from all stakeholders (staff, students and community) to create the school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
3. I ensure that all stakeholders (staff, students and community) understand the role they play in meeting the school's goals	1	2	3	4	5
4. I use several data points (student data, demographics, perceptual) are used to create the school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
5. I use the Plan-Do-Check-Act-Process to evaluate the implementation of the school-wide goals and course correct when needed	1	2	3	4	5

Communication					
6. I share school-wide goals, along with the mission and vision, with stakeholders (staff, students and community)	1	2	3	4	5
7. I communicate instructional goals to the staff and to students	1	2	3	4	5
8. Academic goals are posted throughout the school	1	2	3	4	5
9. Academic goals are highly visible (e.g. bulletin boards, classrooms, hallways)	1	2	3	4	5
10. I share academic progress with all stakeholders (staff, students and community)	1	2	3	4	5
11. The setting of academic goals is collaborated across stakeholder groups (staff, students and community)	1	2	3	4	5

Principal Survey (continued)

Instruction					
12. I ensure that classroom practices and instructional activities are consistent with the state and the complex	1	2	3	4	5
13. I make regular classroom observations, both informal (drop-in visits with or without verbal or written feedback) or formal (pre-conference and post-conference where observation data are recorded and discussed with the teacher)	1	2	3	4	5
14. I identify instructional areas of growth and strengths for teachers during formal post-conferences	1	2	3	4	5
15. I help staff members improve their instructional practices	1	2	3	4	5
16. I use the data collected from classroom observations to create professional development opportunities that are meaningful for the staff	1	2	3	4	5
17. I seek staff input regarding curricular and instructional decisions	1	2	3	4	5
18. I articulate clearly who is responsible for the instructional programs among the grade levels (e.g. principal, curriculum coordinator, vice-principal, grade-level chairs, department heads, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
19. I protect instructional time	1	2	3	4	5

Culture					
20. I hold high expectations of the staff and of student performance	1	2	3	4	5
21. I celebrate student and teacher accomplishments	1	2	3	4	5
22. I maintain high faculty morale	1	2	3	4	5
23. I monitor student progress using a systematic process	1	2	3	4	5
24. I create an orderly learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
25. I allow teachers to teach	1	2	3	4	5
26. I protect teachers from outside influences	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C

Principals' Demographics

Demographic Information		Answers
1.	What is your school setting (elementary K-5, elementary K-6, middle school 6-8, middle school 7-8, high school)	
2.	What is the current enrollment at your school?	
3.	Is your school a Title I school?	
4.	What is your gender?	
5.	What is your ethnicity?	
6.	How many years have you been a principal?	
7.	How many years were you an assistant administrator before becoming a principal?	
8.	How many years have you been at your current school?	
9.	What is your age range? Less than 30, 31-40, 41-50, 51 +	
10.	What is your highest level of education attained?	
11.	Does your district provide leadership training and mentoring?	
12.	Do you participate in leadership training and mentoring?	
13.	How frequently within the school year do you meet with the complex area superintendent to formally discuss the school's performance and your performance?	

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

Please use the scale below to indicate the degree that your principal implements the following practices. Please circle only one number per statement. Please try to answer every statement.

1= Almost Never	2= Seldom	3= Sometimes	4= Frequently	5= Almost Always
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School Goals					
1. Develops with the staff school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
2. Stakeholder input has been provided to create the school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
3. Stakeholders understand the role they play in meeting the school's goals	1	2	3	4	5
4. Several data points (student data, demographics, perceptual) are used to create the school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
5. Plan-Do-Check-Act-Process is used to evaluate the implementation of the school-wide goals and course correct when needed	1	2	3	4	5

Communication					
6. Shares school-wide goals, along with the mission and vision, with stakeholders (staff, students and community)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Communicates instructional goals to the staff and to students	1	2	3	4	5
8. Posts academic goals throughout the school	1	2	3	4	5
9. Posts academic goals that are highly visible (e.g. bulletin boards, classrooms, hallways)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Shares academic progress with all stakeholders (staff, students and community)	1	2	3	4	5
11. Collaborates across stakeholder groups (staff, students and community) to set school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5

Teacher Survey (continued)

Instruction					
12. Ensures that classroom practices and instructional activities are consistent with the state and the complex	1	2	3	4	5
13. Makes regular classroom observations in classrooms, both informal (drop-in visits with or without verbal or written feedback) or formal (pre-conference and post-conference where observation data are recorded and discussed with the teacher)	1	2	3	4	5
14. Identifies instructional areas of growth and strengths for teachers during formal post-conferences	1	2	3	4	5
15. Helps staff members improve their instructional practices	1	2	3	4	5
16. Uses the data collected from classroom observations to create professional development opportunities that are meaningful for the staff	1	2	3	4	5
17. Seeks staff input regarding curricular and instructional decisions	1	2	3	4	5
18. Articulates clearly who is responsible for the instructional programs among the grade levels (e.g. principal, curriculum coordinator, vice-principal, grade-level chairs, department heads, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
19. Protects instructional time	1	2	3	4	5

Culture					
20. Holds high expectations of the staff and of student performance	1	2	3	4	5
21. Celebrates student and teacher accomplishments	1	2	3	4	5
22. Maintains high faculty morale	1	2	3	4	5
23. Monitors student progress using a systematic process	1	2	3	4	5
24. Creates an orderly learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
25. Allows teachers to teach	1	2	3	4	5
26. Protects teachers from outside influences	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix E

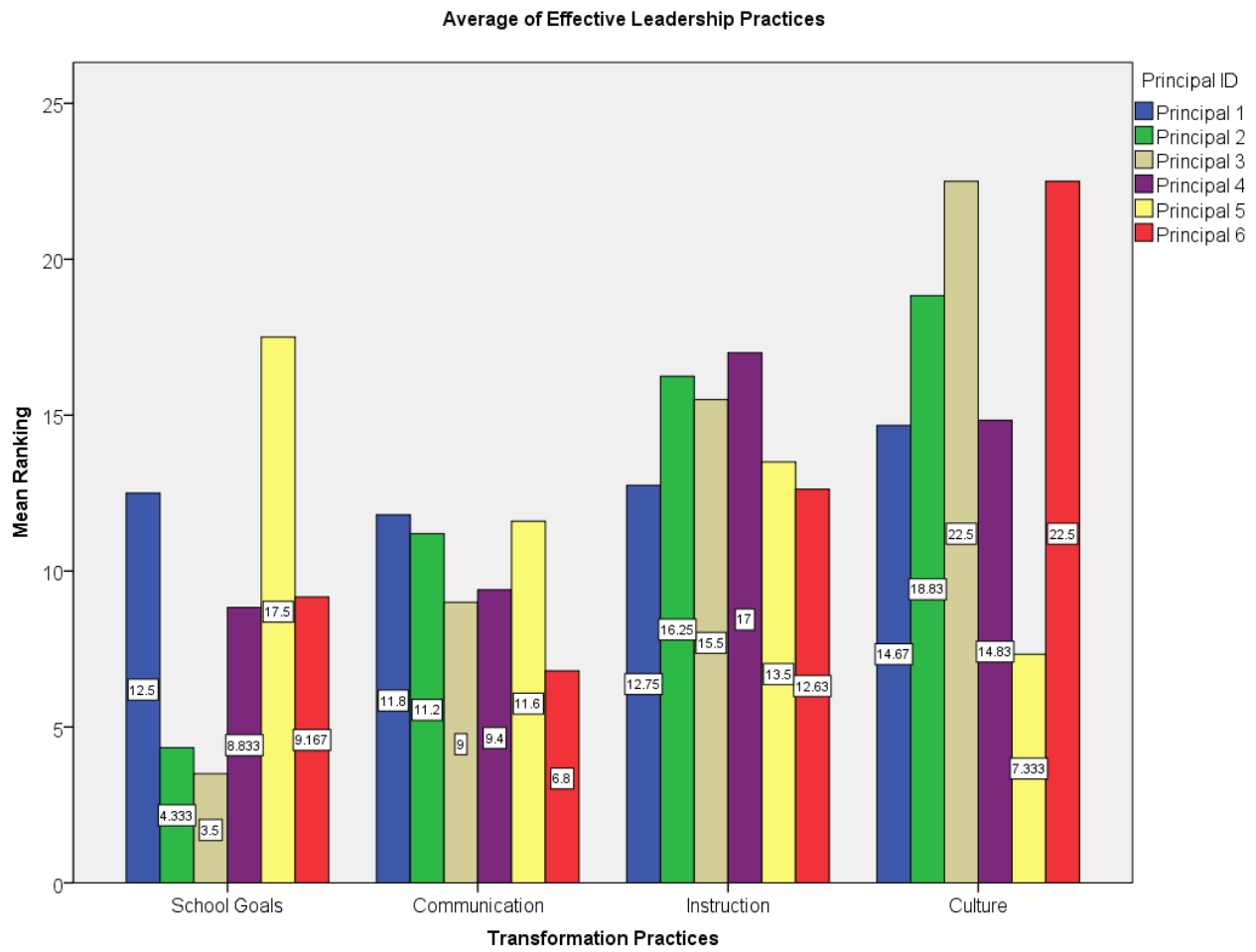


Figure 1. Principals ranking most effective leadership practices to least effective practices.

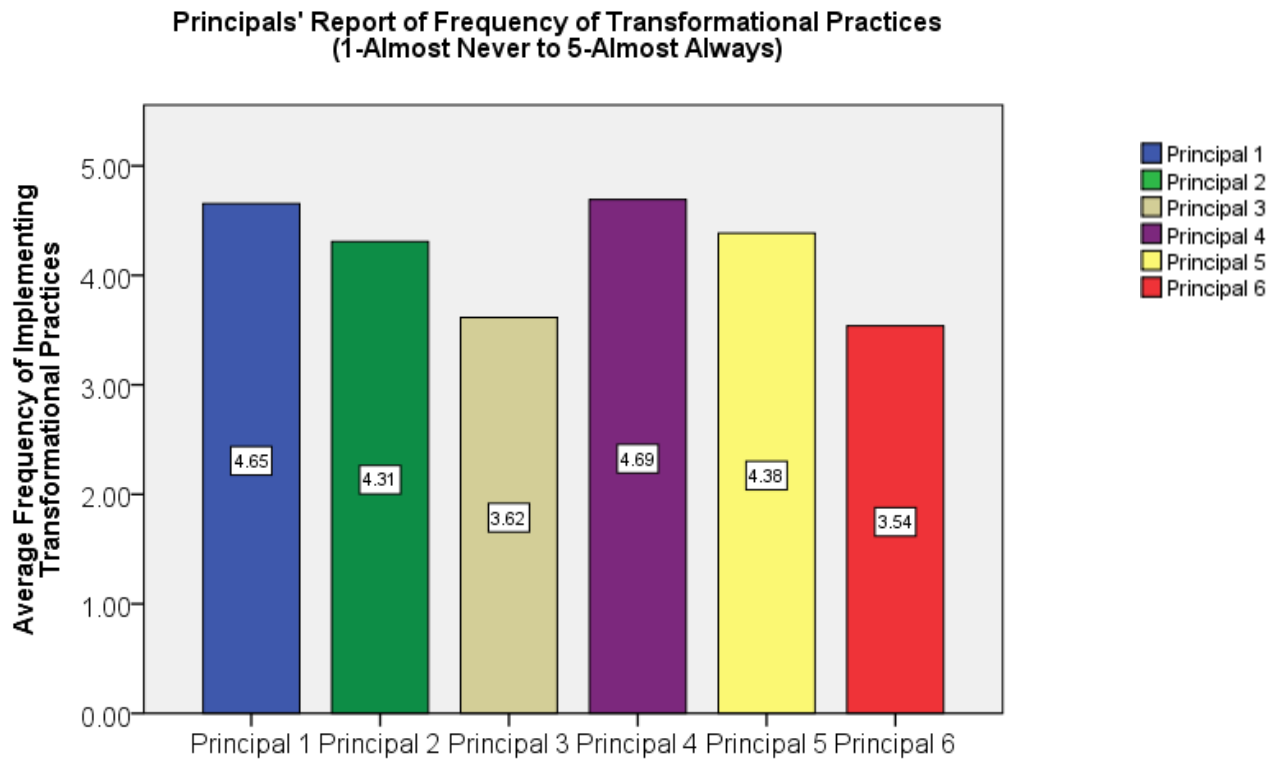


Figure 2. Frequency of principals implementing transformational practices.

Table 1

Mean Responses on MLQ Subscales

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
School Goals	3.80	5.00	4.4333	.49666
Communication	2.67	4.83	4.0833	.92346
Instruction	3.75	4.75	4.3333	.40052
Culture	3.00	4.57	3.9762	.56725

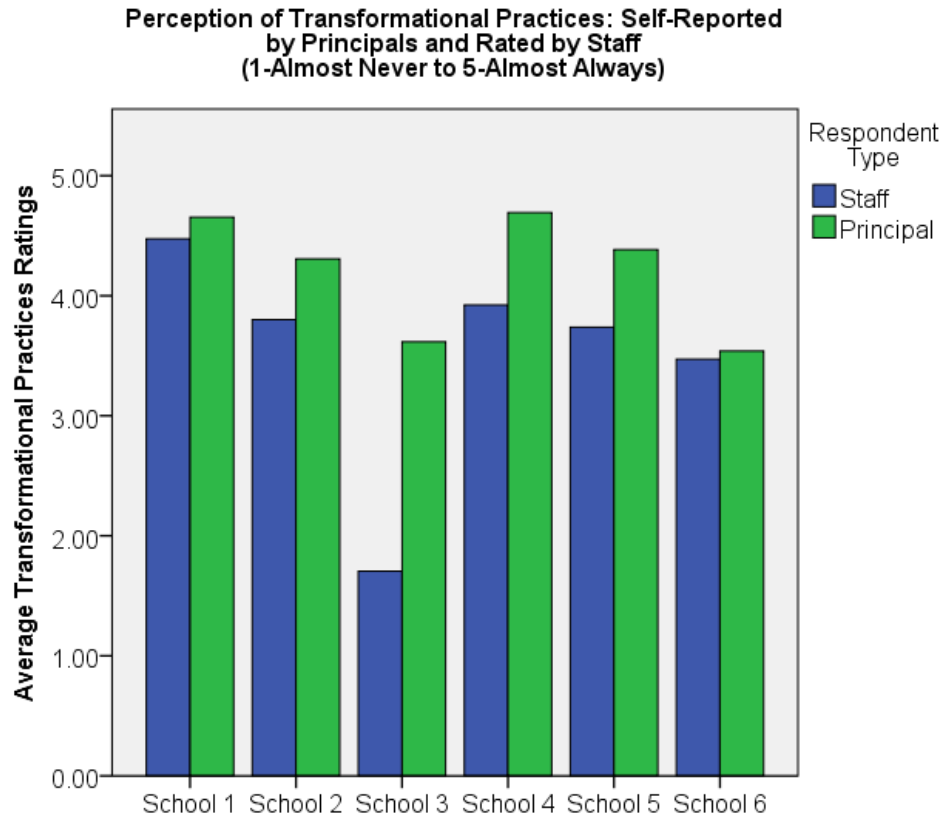


Figure 3. Frequency of transformational practices, self-reported and ranked by staff.

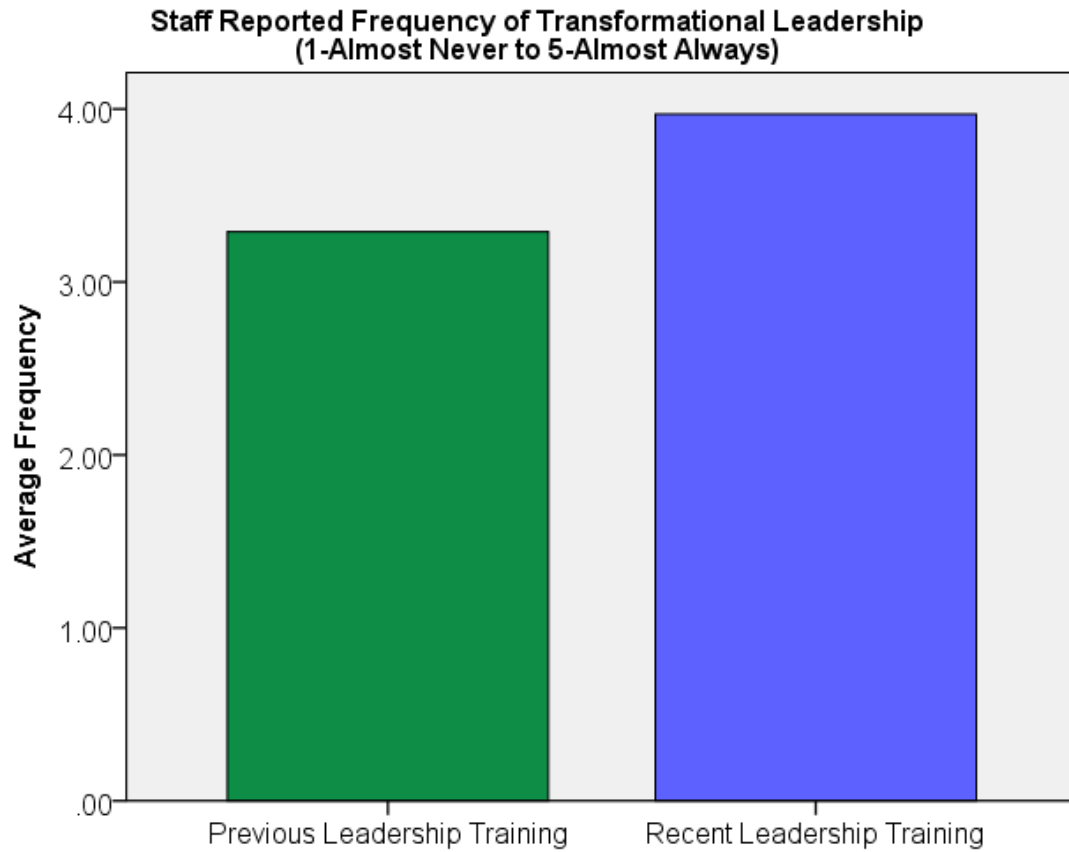


Figure 4. Perceptions of staff whose principals attended previous or recent leadership training