Essay on
The Evaluation of School Principals

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Executive Summary

Let me be quite clear about this: Fitz-Enz (Fitz-Enz 2000) writes that he finds widespread failure to focus on developing employees:

> "… employee development is one of the most important issues for the foreseeable future [in human capital] and one of the worst managed. In fact, it would be an overstatement to claim that it was badly managed. Our experience is that it is unmanaged." (p 121 – 124)

We, all of us concerned about our children's education and our future, cannot forgive ourselves, however, just because the problem occurs broadly.

Employee development has two distinct facets. The first focuses on the competencies required to perform effectively. The second focuses on the results achieved employing those competencies.

The proposed performance evaluation system found at the MDE website serves neither evaluation for development nor evaluation of performance well. We can pull vastly superior ideas and practices from what's commercially available and research-based. That is, we do not need more research and the concomitant delays. We can put a better proposal together quickly. I believe that we know how to do better. I feel passionately that we ought to do better.

We can build on the ideas in this document quickly and replace the proffered evaluation scheme with one that is based on actually examining the principals' performance.

We owe it to the kids to do just that.

Introduction

We have seen a great deal of attention paid to the evaluation of licensed staff in public education. This includes not only evaluation for teachers but also evaluation for principals. The media and the legislature have tied this attention to issues of tenure and retention as well as

overall accountability and justification of funding. All of this ties also to the concern about the achievement gap, seniority and union contracts, and other thorny issues.

I want to focus on the evaluation of school principals because my experience brings me closer to that issue. (See Attachment 3 on page 22 for my background in this area.)

Many people and organizations have already made the case for improving (or in some cases initiating) evaluation of principals' performance. A small sampling includes these comments:

> "It turns out that leadership not only matters: it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, according to the evidence …" (Leithwood et al. 2004)

> "Principals and superintendents who fail to produce the needed results after a reasonable period of time should not be retained." (Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto 2003)

> "Fulfilling the promise of the new leadership agenda requires that states and districts … develop reliable systems to monitor performance and hold leaders accountable, and provide support systems and ongoing professional development." (Hess 2003)

> "Principal leadership is significantly correlated with student achievement. The average effect size, expressed as a correlation, is .25. This means that a one standard deviation improvement in principal leadership is associated with a 10 percentile difference in student achievement. …
> "Just as leaders can have a positive impact on student achievement, they can also have a marginal or, worse, a negative impact on achievement. This finding is referred to as the 'differential impact' of leadership on student achievement." (Waters and Grubb 2004)

I could cite many more but they present a clear and consistent message summarized by Leithwood et al.: "There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership." (Leithwood et al. 2007)

I've recently come across a document titled *Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota*[1] *(Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota 2012)*. The MN Department of Education, the MN Elementary School Principals Association, and the MN Association of Secondary School Principals collaborated on the report. It contains a report and recommendations on the topic. From the introduction:

> "The Minnesota model for principal evaluation was developed in response to legislation passed in the 2011 Special Session. Provisions in legislation require that all principals be evaluated annually and set criteria to be met for both the substance and the process of the evaluation.
> "Legislation established a working group of stakeholders to develop a state model for principal evaluation. This model is not mandated but serves as a resource to be used by local districts that are mandated to develop and maintain a model."

An earlier document, *The Evaluation of Minnesota's School Principals (The Evaluation of Minnesota's School Principals)*, covered much of the same territory. That document took the

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[1] http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/PrincEvalWorkGroup/

sixteen MN Principal Competencies and re-arranged the sub-competencies into seven leadership competencies. That re-arrangement moved Minnesota a step in the right direction with regard to competency-level feedback – and I believe that competency-level feedback forms the correct framework for *360-degree feedback for development planning*. It does *not*, however, form the correct framework for a true performance appraisal. I suggest that feedback for development and feedback on performance have relatively little in common. I intend to use this essay to make that case.

As part of my work in a Fortune-100 company, at management direction I researched and wrote a white paper on workforce management (Ayers 2001) which included this note:

> "A comprehensive workforce management strategy will include all of the following components at multiple levels of detail and with multiple time-horizons in mind:
> - Recruiting / Selection
> - Performance Appraisal
> - Development Planning
> - Retention
> - Succession Planning."

Performance appraisal and development planning form two discrete elements among the five critical elements of an effective and comprehensive workforce management strategy.

For more than a decade, I've have had the pleasure of teaching at Hamline University in its Administrative Licensure program. In connection with that work, I have heard countless comments on the strengths and weaknesses of principals from people wanting to step into that job, comments pertaining to more than 200 teachers' bosses!

A moment ago, I asserted that feedback for development and feedback on performance have relatively little in common. I believe that premise must become fundamental in any thoughtful and compassionate evaluation plan. Let me highlight that distinction, based on my extensive reading, my lengthy history, and my familiarity with a top-notch commercial product suite used for appraisal and development.

> *Evaluation done for professional development looks at levels of <u>current</u> proficiency on critical competencies in order to plan <u>future</u> development opportunities. Evaluation done for performance appraisal looks at <u>past</u> performance in order to gauge an individual's contributions so far.*

At 3M, for instance, the cycle of review and planning with regard to staff includes both of these separate components: the employee's contribution for the *past* reporting period and the development plan for increasing the employee's potential contributions in the *future*. Indeed, 3M simply called the program EC&DP – Employee Contribution and Development Planning.

I have a threefold intention with this document:

1. to bring to bear my own broad experience,
2. to bring in the thinking of several recognized authorities in the area, and
3. to suggest a more prudent path to the development of two separate but critical and complementary evaluation plans.

In terms of the authorities, I'll rely on the writing of such persons as Robert Eichinger and Michael Lombardo, John Carver, W. Edwards Deming, and Eliot Jaques.

This paper contains three major sections: Evaluation Generally, Results Contrasted with Actions, and Conclusions and Implications.

Evaluation Generally

Evaluation for Development

We can take some small comfort in the observation of Fitz-Enz (Fitz-Enz 2000) quoted earlier that public education does have sole ownership of the problem of developing employees:

> "… employee development is one of the most important issues for the foreseeable future [in human capital] and one of the worst managed. In fact, it would be an overstatement to claim that it was badly managed. Our experience is that it is unmanaged." (p 121 – 124)

Research from the Lominger people supports this conclusion (Lombardo and Eichinger 2001). Their research shows that in ranking the observed proficiency levels of their 67 competencies, the competency *Developing Direct Reports* falls dead last for individual contributors, for managers, and for executives. The problem does indeed appear pandemic.

However, we should note that this failure has more obvious and profound impact in public education – obvious because the taxpayers must foot the bill and profound because our kids must pay the ultimate penalty for performance below the levels our principals could deliver.

Let me offer an operational definition of just what I mean by the word *competency*. Fitz-Enz (Fitz-Enz 2000) notes the concept's history:

> "The concept of competence sprang from David McClellan's pioneering work for the US Information Office in the early 1970s. … he was able to accomplish the task [of determining the critical competencies connected to successful performance] by focusing on the person in the job rather than on background factors such as education or aptitude test scores. From that came the first standardized definition of the term *competency*: 'A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective or superior performance in a job or situation.'
> *Criterion-referenced* is a fancy way of saying that a given competency actually predicts behavior and performance." (p 148 – 149)

Over time the focus broadened from individual competencies to a *competency model*. That is, how might we analyze work output in terms of the competencies required to perform effectively? We can look to the work of Lucia and Lepsinger (Lucia and Lepsinger 1999) to define it this way:

> "[A competency model] is essentially a pyramid built on the foundation of inherent talents and incorporating the types of skills and knowledge that can be acquired through learning, effort, and experience. At the top of the pyramid is a specific set of behaviors that are the manifestation of all the innate and acquired abilities discussed earlier." (p 6)

That is, one's level of proficiency with regard to a competency manifests itself in *behavior* – what one *does* not just what one *knows*. Descriptions of behaviors must focus on active verbs.

As a consequence, valuation intended to drive development planning must examine what behavior an individual demonstrates. Ideally, the definition of a competency will outline the actions associated with skilled performance and the actions associated with *un*skilled performance.

Since different people surrounding any given staff member will see different sides of the individual and see that staffer in different situations, 360-degree-feedback forms a critical basis for this variety of evaluation. Thus the boss might see one side of the person based on her/his performance in one set of circumstances. Those who report directly to the individual often see another side of the person. Similarly, peers or colleagues and customers / clients will see another side. A well-done 360-feedback plan also includes all these as well as the individual's self-assessment – how the individual perceives her/his own performance.

Lombardo and Eichinger (Lombardo and Eichinger 2001) caution us:

> "Why should 360°s be confidential? Why are police tips lines anonymous? Why is there a curtain between the penitent and the priest in the confessional? Because confidentiality and anonymity increase the chances of honesty. 360° for development works best when the results are confidential, the raters are guaranteed anonymity, and the information is owned and controlled by the target person. Anything less than that will compromise accuracy." (p221)

Clearly development feedback from the boss cannot possibly meet the standard of anonymity! Frankly, the boss ought *not* offer anonymous feedback; the boss owns the legitimate responsibility to appraise the subordinates' performance. The boss, however, has a unique perspective usefully complemented by other confidential sources. Thus effective 360-feedback depends on both the individual's own and the others evaluating the person's level of proficiency, competency by competency.

Further, they write:

> "Our recommendation is to have people choose their own raters. … Because acceptance of the data is key to the 360° process, it's best to have people select their own raters. … Have the *learner* pick raters using the following criteria:
> - Direct boss and either an old boss or the boss's boss; up to five peers; five direct reports; and five customers. Why five? Because usually one or two will not participate …
> - People who have seen them in multiple performance situations
> - People who have worked with them one to five years." (p 227)

In order to have maximum effectiveness, the 'learner' must have awareness of the feedback, then accept it and act on it. The learner will have the goal of building new proficiency, blending that into her/his daily practice, then reaping the consequences of the improved performance. That implies that the individual learner has voluntarily engaged in the process of getting feedback for professional development. (Performance appraisal, on the other hand, *must* happen; an effective organization cannot permit bosses to offer appraisal only when a staff members asks for it!)

Feedback for professional development does not focus on the work product, or the goods or services provided, or the actual results of the work in a holistic manner. Based on the 360-feedback we can talk usefully about whether someone exhibits skilled or unskilled *behavior*. This ought to drive *professional development*.

Furthermore, an individual should not base a development plan on an unfocused random intent to 'work on the weaknesses'. Rather a genuine professional development plan (for growth as a professional) targets its focus on competencies where (a) the individual has demonstrated a relative lack of proficiency (b) knowledgeable people have found that those competencies have importance in the context of this (or the next) job. The boss has an especially critical view with regard to what competencies have the greatest importance. This big question should drive development planning: *What level of proficiency does the individual show now and what level of proficiency will she/he need in the future?*

W. Edwards Deming (Deming 1982) put it this way:

> "The aim of leadership should be to improve the performance of man and machine, to improve quality, to increase output, and simultaneously to bring pride of workmanship to people. Put in a negative way, the aim of leadership is not merely to find and record failures of men, but to remove the causes of failure: to help people to do a better job with less effort." (p 248)

That is, leadership should act to increase staff proficiency, and that action ought to take into account more views than just that of the boss.

> *Finally, professionals in education know the essential role of feedback for learners – they strive to let the learners know how they're doing, where they can focus for improvement. Why do we find ourselves in the paradoxical situation where the school environment is feedback-rich for the kids and feedback-poor for the adults?*

Ackoff and Greenberg (Ackoff and Greenberg 2008) challenge us:

> "Faculty can serve as role models – it is in that sense that they are the most effective motivators. But then they have to be seen learning, not only teaching. … Anyone who has no desire to learn should have no involvement in the learning of others." (p 11)

How do we focus on learning across the board, both for the kids and for the adults? We need to create an environment where the professional staff (including principals) do not simply tolerate feedback but actively seek it out and use it as the basis for next-steps in their development.

Presumably any effort to put in place an effective evaluation mechanism will encounter resistance. As Fitz-Enz (Fitz-Enz 2000) observes,

> "The bottom line on change failure is simply that [nearly all] projects deal with *doing* something differently. The only way to make bedrock, large-scale change in an organization is to teach it how to *be* different. *Doing* focuses on the processes. *Being* focuses on context. This is a seminal difference. It is a difference not of magnitude but of essence. Rather than trying hard to change more processes, the idea is to change what *is* to what *must be."* (p 260 – 261)

The children and taxpayers of Minnesota need a better system.

Appraisal of Performance

First, note that I want to substitute *performance appraisal* for *performance evaluation*. Since we also use the word *evaluation* in conjunction with professional development efforts, I want to limit potential confusion by using *appraisal* when discussing *performance*. I choose this usage as an analogy with what an expert offers in looking at the value of a work of art – an *appraisal*.

I believe that we can usefully draw a clear distinction between evaluation for the purpose of future professional development and appraisal for the purpose of measuring past performance. They feature different levels of granularity and rely on input from different sources, with development feedback at a much finer level and coming from multiple sources.

We can contrast evaluation for development with performance appraisal this way – performance appraisal ultimately drives the decision to retain / promote / increase the pay of staff members. *The boss has sole ownership of this responsibility* – the superintendent in the case of the school principal.

Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota (Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota 2012) put it this way:

> "The superintendent is responsible for on-the-job observations as part of an annual evaluation of each principal assigned the responsibility of managing a school. The evaluation must be consistent with the job description, a district's long-term plans and goals, and the principal's own professional multiyear growth plans and goals."

This comment identifies three elements: job description, district goals, and the principal's own goals. I suggest that we eliminate the job description from these three. At the end of the day, we want to know whether the individual accomplished the goals for his/her district and for his/her school. The job description typically has too little detail (sits at the role level) or too much detail (at the activity level – able do this, able to do that). It offers no real value in this regard. In most cases, the job description has its focus on *how* to do something, not *what* that

something *is*[2]. Further, the boss and the individual must have set and agreed to 'that something' – these goals – and whether the individual meets those goals forms the gist of performance appraisal.

Put another way, *performance appraisal* depends on the results achieved in a holistic way (overall performance in terms of what we set out to do), with little attention paid to the competencies.

Performance appraisal dwells largely on the Ends achieved with only modest attention to the effectiveness of the Means employed. The organization's values will determine the legitimacy of the Means used[3]. Carver asserts that the assignment has two components: (1) achieve the identified and intended ends (2) without violating any of the legitimate limitations also specified up front. Thus performance appraisal *might* partially consider 'how did you achieve these results?' It *must necessarily* include 'what results did you achieve?' Note that responding to the first point implies knowledge of the second: the actual results.

Consider if you will an analogy: You hire a contractor to build a garage next to your house. When do you evaluate the contractor's performance? When she/he has finished the garage, of course. Or, if the contract included a deadline, you evaluate the performance at the deadline. In either case, you and the contractor have identified up front what constitutes successful accomplishment of the contract.

Now … do you evaluate the contractor's performance on the basis of such items as these?
- Had a blueprint
- Acknowledges the value of the building code
- Scheduled an electrical inspection
- Shared decision-making with crew members

I'd suggest you do not. You might find those very effective practices. Your fundamental concerns, however, lies with the overall quality of the garage. Does it indeed match the blueprint? Will the roof withstand the weather and snow-load? Does it have wiring that meets the requirements of the code? You do not focus on whether he *had* a blueprint, but whether the product *matches* the specifications. You do not focus on whether he *understood* the code, but whether the resulting structure *abides* by code's requirements. You do not focus on whether he shared decision-making, but rather the cumulative effect of all the decisions results in a satisfactory product. You did not hire the contractor to employ 'best practices in human resource management.' You hired him/her to build a garage. (We might agree separately that

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[2] A position sketch would offer superior value in this context. We define a *role* as a generic assignment – for instance, the *role* of High School Principal. We define a *position* as a specific instance of a role – for instance, the *position* of Principal of Mpls South High School. We use the term *sketch* because we do not consider it a formal portrait. To serve as the basis for performance appraisal, we need to know about this specific position – what does the boss, the larger organization expect to see, what defines success for this position? I've included a sample position sketch in Attachment 1 on page 14.

[3] Carver describes these as 'the executive limitations policies' – what means you can<u>not</u> employ while attempting to accomplish the ends established by the next higher authority in the hierarchy.

following prudent HR practices increases the likelihood of the production of satisfactory results over the long-term … but *your* focus rests properly on *your* garage! *Your* agreement covers *this* garage.)

Now the crux of my complaint about the proposed appraisal for principals – *I do not detect any clear and explicit attention with the actual result; I don't see how anyone can possibly conceive of it as a performance appraisal.*

My business partner, Mike Marois, and I developed the following premises a decade ago when working with the Saint Paul Public Schools:
1. The next higher level in the Organization owns responsibility for defining what constitutes success for each directly subsidiary level – that is, the Superintendent has the responsibility to appraise *the performance of the school-as-a-system* and ought to establish suitable goals and processes for appraisal.
2. Evaluation legitimately ought to include both short-term and long-term indicators of success.
3. The Principal has accountability for the *actual performance* of the school.
4. Over the long term (circa 3-to-5 years), you cannot separate the *performance of the Principal* from *the performance of the school* – that is, you cannot have an effective Principal and an ineffective school (or *vice versa*); thus the performance of the Principal for all intents and purposes equals the performance of the school.
5. The Superintendent ought to engage in monitoring based on the performance of the Principal and the school – that is, schools performing more poorly will naturally get closer monitoring.
6. A Principal's poor performance appraisal might well result in an increased focus on performance *management* by the Superintendent.
7. The Principal owns the responsibility for her/his own *professional development* (as a professional); this differs from a performance *appraisal* and consequent performance *management* (responsibilities which lie with the Superintendent).

I think they're sound.

Jaques (Jaques 1996) offers clear guidance on what the manager (or "next higher authority") owes the organization:

> "Here are the requisite managerial leadership practices for the exercise of which all immediate managers must clearly and unequivocally be held accountable if they wish to retain their positions.
> > *Two-way managerial team working …*
> > *Context setting …*
> > *Planning …*
> > *Task assignment …*
> > *Personal effectiveness appraisal …*
> > *Merit Review …*
> > *Coaching …*
> > *Selection and Induction …*
> > *De-selection and Dismissal …*
> > *Continual Improvement"* (p 99)

And here he explains performance appraisal:

> **"Personal effectiveness appraisal** *is the manager's judgment of how well a subordinate did in achieving given output*, with the shifts and changes that were imposed and with all the other unexpected and unplanned-for circumstances that inevitably arise in the course of working. How well (or how badly) a subordinate has done is a matter of pure managerial judgment – and always will be a matter of judgment – and should be accepted as such. It is among the most important decisions a manager is faced with making." (p 108)

Appraisal thus requires judgment and examines carefully the results obtained.

> *This brings us to the big question – just what ought we to use as the basis for performance appraisal? Beyond the basic "Did you meet the goals and abide by the limitations?" – can we identify other facets to guide this variety of appraisal?*

Results contrasted with activities

The Lominger product suite includes 67 discrete competencies (Lombardo and Eichinger 2004). I want to draw attention to just four right now, in two opposed pairs:

> Timely Decision-Making and Decision Quality
> Action Oriented and Drive for Results

In the first pair, we can tell just from the name of the competencies that a reasonable person can distinguish between a good decision and a bad one as well as between a decision made on time and a decision made too early or too late. Hence, 360-feedback covers both competencies.

The second pair highlights a key differentiator where we broadly focus appraisal of performance. The results achieved matter much, much more than the activities undertaken to achieve those results. (As noted above, the individual should not get credit for results obtained illegally or unethically, but that depends on the organization's values guiding the activities). Carver (Carver 1997) puts the distinction this way:

> "*Activities are always means, no matter how complex or important. External outcomes, results, and impacts are ends, whether or not they are parts of a broader end*." (p 58)

Activities serves as Means not Ends. In making cookies, experience tells us that we must add the ingredients in the correct sequence; the goal however is always *cookies* not just following the steps of the recipe in adding ingredients. If you follow the steps and do not produce cookies, you do not get credit.

Elsewhere Carver (Carver and Carver 1997) elaborates:

> "*Ends* policies should be *pre*scriptive, that is expressed positively, as in the example, 'The XYZ agency exists so that homeless teenagers will secure safe housing and job skills.' *Means* policies, on the other hand, should be *pro*scriptive, as in the example, 'In pursuit of the Ends, the CEO may use any available Means except that he or she may not allow this programmatic practice or that fiscal ratio.'" (p 19)

The Ends *pre*scribe the goals, the mission, the purpose. We might employ various Means to achieve those Ends. We legitimately prohibit some Means – we *pro*scribe them. Means which we do not proscribe we implicitly approve.

We draw this careful distinction between results and activities with the understanding that (a) we only engage in activities in order to lead to results, and (b) we rule out some activities. Thus we might afford some attention to activities / Means as a very minor portion of a performance appraisal; but the bulk of the focus must lie on the results delivered.

> *The setting of goals by rights ought to start at the board level. That is, the school board should give clear marching orders to the superintendent – "We expect you to accomplish this." The superintendent should do the same for the school principals. And the principals should do the same for the teachers. (If the first step does not happen, the superintendent and principal must nonetheless provide such expectations from their level on downwards.)*

The focus should rest on the goals; the selection of the Means used or the activities undertaken should remain with the staff, left to their professional judgment. The boss must focus on what to accomplish, not how to accomplish it. Again, from Carver (Carver 1997):

> "The total message the board sends to staff, then, consists of what outputs are to be achieved (Ends) and what may not be done in the process of achievement (Executive Limitations)." (p 80)

Deming (Deming 1982) reinforces this view:

> "Improvement of the process includes better allocation of human effort. It includes selection of people, their placement, their training, to give everyone … a chance to advance their learning and to contribute the best of their talents. It means removal of barriers to pride of workmanship … . (p 51)

> "Barriers against realization of pride of workmanship may in fact be one of the most important obstacles to reduction of cost and improvement of quality in the United States. There are other losses from incompetent leadership, as if poor quality and low productivity were not by themselves enough cause of loss." (p 83)

When we take a hard look at the output of an individual's efforts on behalf of the organization, we find only a handful of criteria to consider. Further, the broad dimensions (Eichinger, Lombardo, and Ruyle 2007) apply across the gamut of organizations. We want to evaluate the results in terms of the quality and quantity of the output attained in consideration of the resources (time, money, whatever) consumed. We want to evaluate whether the individual required extraordinary supervision to accomplish those results. We want to evaluate whether the individual continued to develop professionally her/his own skills and whether she/he invested in the professional development of those who report to her/him. We want to evaluate whether the goods / services produced satisfied those who received them. We want to evaluate whether the goods / services produced showed consistency with the intent of the overall larger organization. That's pretty much it.

The legitimate responsibility for this variety of appraisal rests entirely with the boss, the next higher authority within the organization. Only that higher individual, one who understands the fitness of the results in light of the larger organization's intention, can determine whether the

product of the work effort qualifies as a contribution to that larger organization. (See Attachment 2 on page 21 for a graphic representation of contribution.) We do not allow 360-feedback here because the boss alone owns that responsibility. The boss alone has a) accountability for this person's contribution to the organization's success and b) a comprehensive overall understanding of the person's role within the organization.

What results ought the superintendent to hold the principal responsible for achieving? Directly? Nothing other than the performance of the entire school. Indirectly? The performance of the staff. More indirectly? The performance of the kids. That is, the boss's performance appraisal depends on how the school did in terms of its goals. Lominger suggests ten performance appraisal criteria, alluded to above. Anecdotally I'd think a principal did an exceptional job if his school had a list of kids wanting to get in and if staff lined up to join the team. Why would they want to get in? The school has demonstrated its success … that implies strong support from parents, relationships with the unions and surrounding community … But what specific goals might the superintendent delineate?

Need for goals

The research shows a strong evidence for having well-thought-out goals. Ford (Ford 1992) reports that

> "Nearly 400 studies have shown that specific, difficult goals lead to better performance than specific, easy goals, [or] vague goals such as 'do your best,' or no goals. These results are based on studies conducted in the U.S. and seven others countries. The studies have used more than 40,000 subjects, 88 different tasks, time spans ranging from one minute to three years, and many different performance criteria, including behavior change, quantity and quality outcomes, and costs." (p 110)

Let's add to the mixture so far this note from Eichinger et al. (Eichinger, Lombardo, and Ruyle 2007):

> "The research is crystal clear – individuals and teams perform better when they have goals. Not only that but research shows that when performance goals are set appropriately and communicated clearly, job satisfaction increases, motivation improves, and there is increased acceptance of the performance management process.
> The planning and goals-setting phase is focused at the beginning of the performance management cycle." (p C-1)

They go on to say even more:

> "Performance management is a fundamental process owned and applied by bosses. … The process starts with aligned goal setting. Business objectives aligned with your organization's strategic intent start from the top and cascade down through each level all the way to individual contributors – so that everyone has meaningful stretch goals aligned with the strategy. The goals form the basis for an ongoing dialogue between bosses and employees …."

> *The boss must base the appraisal of performance on goals established at the outset of the reporting period. Furthermore, the boss must identify meaningful goals and measures, not simply easy-to-count goals.*

As Deming (Deming 1982) says,

> "It is easy to count. Counts relieve management of the necessity to contrive a measure with meaning." (p 105)

Potential varieties of goals

At present, student test scores seem to serve as the primary – some might say only – goal. They are easy to measure. I don't believe any thoughtful person believes that test scores tell the whole story of a school, and may not even tell the most important story. What ought we to use instead or in addition?[4]

We could easily adopt the dimensions suggested by Lominger (Eichinger, Lombardo, and Ruyle 2007). We could instead cluster those into four even simpler but broader categories, as suggested by a former Fortune-100 executive. He commented (in a private meeting) that his appraisal essentially paralleled the Balanced Scorecard layers (Kaplan and Norton 2001). It included four areas focused on performance related to

- financials (or mission in the case of not-for-profit organization);
- customers;
- processes;
- learning / growth.

The boss must, however, identify realistically attainable goals. Deming (Deming 1982), identified a series of points connected to revitalizing American productivity --

> "The 14 points apply anywhere, to small organizations as well as to large ones, to the service industry as well as to manufacturing. They apply to a division within a company." (p 23)

Within the fourteen points, he specifically points out the need to recognize the limits of the current system –

> "10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the workforce asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. Such exhortations only create adversarial relationships, as the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force." (p 24)

That is, the boss cannot reasonably establish goals beyond the capabilities of the system. Ford, in *Motivating Humans* (Ford 1992), writes

> "Achievement / Competence = Motivation (Goals *x* Emotions *x* Capability Beliefs *x* Context Beliefs)
> "This formulation makes it clear that it is not enough to have a goal in mind and the objective skills and circumstances needed to attain it. People must also *believe* that they have the capabilities and opportunities needed to achieve their goal." (p 123 – 124)

Thus, the goals must be within the system's capabilities and also within the individual's capabilities.

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[4] MN has recently released a new scheme for rating schools: "Under the new system, schools were judged on their students' scores in math and reading, plus academic growth in individual students, a strong high school graduation rate and a shrinking achievement gap between middle-class white students and their classmates." (http://www.startribune.com/local/152398685.html)

Bill Sommers, my co-author and a principal with wide experience in several districts, suggested that he would like to have goals set and have his evaluation based, not on student test scores, but rather on such items as:

- Has the level of trust within the building moved to / stayed in the high range?
- What is the 'state of the school' with regard to collaboration, transparency, shared leadership, reflective practice used by each staff member on her/his own performance?
- How has he grown professionally this year, modeling ongoing learning for the staff?
- How has he elevated the teachers' efficacy, and helped them grow professionally?
- How has he evaluated the staff's performance?

Interestingly, this list parallels the broad dimensions suggested by Lominger noted above (see page 11).

Efforts in other states

It's a truism that you cannot copy your way to excellence. Excellence requires innovation. An organization cannot attain premier performance by simply applying 'solutions' developed elsewhere, under different circumstances with different staffs with different histories implemented in different cultures with different funding.

Minnesota can and should do better than follow the inferior model adopted by other states. The Minnesota Model[5] shown contains seven core competencies.

1. Strategic Leadership
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Managerial Leadership
4. Cultural Leadership
5. Communications Leadership
6. School Community Leadership
7. Ethical and Professional Leadership

That document also shows models from several other states. I don't find any of these particularly good. The North Carolina Model also features seven elements, apparently overlapping the Minnesota Model on four (based on the descriptors). The Illinois Model also contains seven but with no apparent overlap. The Iowa Model contains six with little apparent overlap. The Massachusetts Model contains four with no apparent overlap.[6]

Those seven core competencies identified as "The Minnesota Model" oddly did *not* find their way from *The Evaluation of Minnesota's School Principals* into the final version *Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota*. Instead we see the following five performance measures:

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[5] Cited in a document captioned Principal Evaluation Working Group – November 14 (available at http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/PrincEvalWorkGroup/) and incorporated into *The Evaluation of Minnesota's School Principals*.

[6] *The Evaluation of Minnesota's School Principals* also refers to other sources considered including the work of Marzano and McRel (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty 2005).

1. Establish a Vision and Mission Focused on Shared Goals and High Expectations.
2. Provide Instructional Leadership for High Student Academic Performance
3. Manage Human Resources for Quality Instruction and Professional Growth
4. Build Professional and Ethical Relationships through Collaboration and Effective Communication
5. Strategically Manage Resources for Systemic Performance Accountability

While we might find these appropriate dimensions of evaluation for professional *development* purposes, they contain *no* attention to the actual results produced. Competencies focus on the present tense and active verbs – these do begin with a present tense verb (or adverb). Performance appraisal, however, does *not* focus simply on actions; it focuses on the *results* obtained through those actions in the past tense.

What about "*Accomplished* the Mission Focused on Shared Goals and High Expectations"? What about "*Achieved* High Student Academic Performance"? What about "*Demonstrated* Quality Instruction and Professional Growth"? What about "*Built* Strong Relationships and Collaboration"? What about "*Achieved* Systemic Performance Accountability"? These restatements actually move toward the dimensions outlined above by the Lominger work.

Furthermore, how would one assess the achievement of those? Surely not in pages and pages of details contained in the document. For instance, the report elaborates the performance measure "Establish a Vision and Mission Focused on Shared Goals and High Expectations" into five sub-measures. These include

> **Indicator 1A:** Engages all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a shared vision of learning, a strong organizational mission and high, measureable goals that prepares every student to succeed in post-secondary learning and to become responsible and contributing citizens.

This sub-measure gets a page-and-a-half of explication. Then we find

> **Indicator 1B:** Articulates a vision and develops strategies, for change that result in measureable achievement gains for all students including closing the achievement gaps.

This sub-measure also gets a page-and-a-half of explication. Then we find

> **Indicator 1C:** Fosters a shared commitment to high expectations for student achievement and high standards of teaching and learning in a culturally competent environment where diversity is valued.

This sub-measure also gets a page-and-a-half of explication. Then we find

> **Indicator 1D:** Establishes rigorous, measureable goals for instructional program decisions and staff learning experiences that are consistent with school's mission, vision, goals and core beliefs.

This sub-measure also gets a page-and-a-half of explication. Then we find

> **Indicator 1E**: Builds a strong and positive sense of community in the school by honoring the important role of race and culture, its traditions, artifacts, symbols, values and norms, as a contributor to student and school success.

This sub-measure also gets a page-and-a-half of explication. Thus we have *seven-and-a-half pages* to explain what the report intends with one of five performance measures. This results in

nearly 40 pages of explanation spread over 65 pages in the document. That level of detail shows significant overkill and has no real place in the appraisal of the work done over six months or a year.

This whole enterprise strikes me as a misguided attempt to bring the thinking behind standardized testing to the world of performance appraisal. Whether standardized testing serves the students well would take an entirely different essay. But bringing that mindset to the performance appraisal of professionals would fundamentally diverge from proven practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Let me summarize the essence of this essay. I've attempted to make these key points:

1. Evaluation for development and performance appraisal comprise two different activities.
2. Different tools / approaches should drive the two different processes.
3. Activities (or evidence of activities) do not equate to results.
4. Only if the boss identifies the intended results at the outset (i.e., goals) can she/he determine whether the actual results attained align with the intended results.
5. Intended results which lie beyond the performance limits of the current system might qualify as dreams but not as goals.
6. Each higher authority owes the next lower authority a clear expectation of the nature of the intended results.

Speaking in terms of Ends and Means, we can identify four broad combinations.

1. Good Ends employing Good Means
2. Good Ends employing Bad Means
3. Bad Ends employing Good Means
4. Bad Ends employing Bad Means

An effective performance appraisal ought to focus on the first. The proposed principal evaluation, however, permits the third – that is, it offers no concentration of results, on Ends. The second might work in the short-run but an effective organization cannot tolerate them in the long-run. (A principal might get great test scores but if the staff remains highly contentious and divided, with neither gifted nor neediest kids appropriately challenged, with a focus only on tested material – the principal cannot last.) And the fourth … well, some might suggest that the fourth item describes the current state of affairs.

We can accomplish the evaluation of the principal's need for development in specific areas via 360-feedback. The superintendent, however, has sole responsibility for the appraisal of the principal's performance and must look at results.

The recognition that Minnesota needs a thorough and comprehensive agenda for evaluating the performance of its school principals moves us a step in the right direction. The construct put

forth in *Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota* does not contain the essential focus on results. Instead it seems mired in a focus on activities. While Minnesota might fashion the seven core competencies (Measuring Principal Performance 2009) into a useable 360-feedback instrument, they remained focused on Means rather than Ends.

Management tweaks the system to make it more predictable. Leadership takes the system to a whole new level of performance. The invention of a new performance appraisal system for Minnesota principals calls for leadership.

Superintendents need guidance in identifying reasonable goals for *this* year for *this* principal in *this* school. She/he must set the goals at a broad enough level (perhaps two paragraphs on one page?) to encourage the principal to use her/his own best judgment to determine how to achieve those goals. The guidance must take into account Deming's admonition that you cannot hold someone accountable for performance beyond the capability of the system to actually deliver. Clearly a principal in a 'turn-around' situation needs different skills and must meet a different performance standard than a principal in a stable and effective school. The superintendent must assess the situation and determine the concomitant goals school by school, principal by principal.

Can we develop a nation-leading program to assess the performance of our principals? Yes, we absolutely can. And we should. We owe that to the community. We owe that to the parents and most importantly to the kids.

> "To advocate human conversation as the means to restore hope to the future is as simple as I can get. But I've seen that there is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation. When a community of people discovers that they share a concern, change begins. There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about. …
> "Somewhere in the description of how it all began is the phrase: 'Some friends and I started talking …'" (p 22)

Meg Wheately (Wheatley 2002) has hit the nail on the head. We need a different conversation bringing in people with different perspectives and prepared to engage in genuine dialogue. I'm ready. Are you?

Recommendations

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions" – a quote widely ascribed[7] to management guru Ken Blanchard sums it up concisely. Let's focus our efforts effectively to create more champions among our school principals.

I offer here a high-level list of essential tasks if we intend to seize this opportunity to develop and implement a first-rate principal performance appraisal system.

1. Abandon the proffered plan which confuses evaluation for development with performance appraisal.
2. Pull together a small team (aided by a skilled facilitator) to prepare an alternative plan keenly focused on appraisal.

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[7] http://www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com/site/feedback_is_the_breakfast_of_champions/ on 25 May 2012.

a. A couple superintendents
b. Another individual accustomed to operating at the executive level, perhaps a business executive
c. A couple principals
d. An individual with broad experience in developing, implementing, and monitoring appraisal systems
e. An individual representing the collective interests of the principals (union or professional association)
3. Start with the ideas brought out in this document, integrating and synthesizing the cited resources and industry / discipline authorities. (By discipline I do not mean not *public education* but rather *organization development*, including human resources and work-force management.)
4. Develop a system map to discover the systemic causes and effects which affect the development of a legitimate principal performance appraisal approach.
5. Include representatives from various organizations who have familiarity with effective performance appraisal systems across the board.
6. Pilot the goal-setting and appraisal process at the first possible opportunity – the fall of 2012, the beginning of the next school year.
7. Find one or two superintendents who are willing to have these conversations with the principals to set clear goals and then follow through with candid and timely appraisals.
8. Refine the process and implement it more broadly for the fall of 2013.

I believe that we can realistically adopt these recommendations. We can start now and evolve the new system from a solid start to an effective future.

We need a different conversation bringing in people with different perspectives and prepared to engage in genuine dialogue. I'm ready. Are you?

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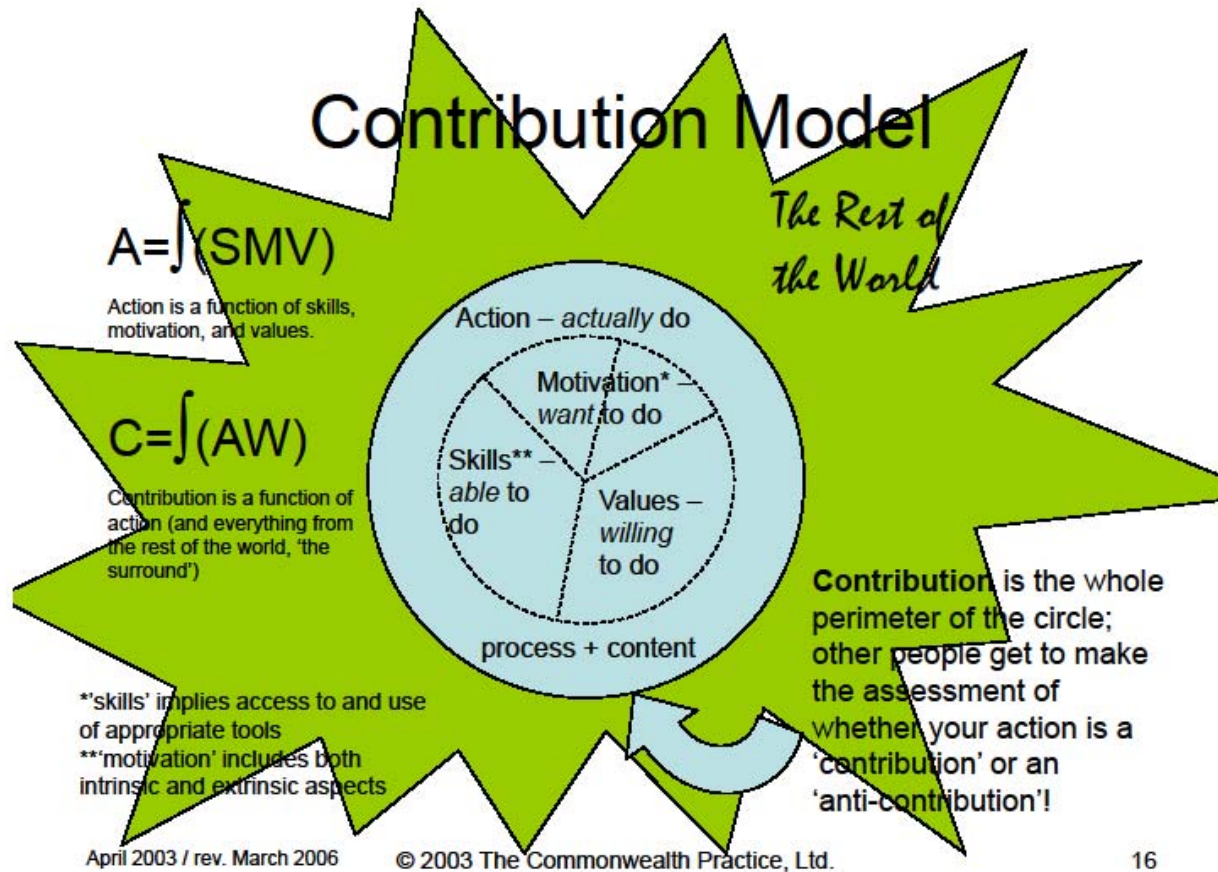Wheatley, Margaret. 2002. *Turning to One Another*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Attachment 1

Position Sketch

For the Position _____ as documented on _____

Use this form to collect your thinking about this particular *Position*. While this Position may be based on a more generic *Role* (or Roles), this Position will certainly require some adjustment. For example, consider Middle School Principal as a generic Role, but consider Principal for Roosevelt Junior High School as a specific Position. ***Your primary focus should remain on the unique Position.***

Key Relationships & Needs	Mutual Objectives
Who are your key relationships in the value web, and what are their highest priority needs? 1. 2. 3. 4.	*What agreed upon results will help satisfy their needs?* 1. 2. 3. 4.
Contributions	Environment Factors
What products, services, or information can you deliver in your key relationships that will support your mutual objectives? 1. 2. 3. 4.	*What are the key circumstances, features, or characteristics in your and/or their work environment?* Helps: 1. 2. 3. Hindrances: 1. 2. 3.
Knowledge Areas	Essential Competencies
What knowledge is needed for quality contributions? ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦	*Taking all the rest into account, what competencies appear <u>essential</u> for effective and high-quality contributions?* 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. *What personal behaviors or actions will <u>prevent</u> effective, high-quality contributions?* 1. 2. 3. 4.

Attachment 2

Contribution Model

The Rest of the World

$A = \int (SMV)$

Action is a function of skills, motivation, and values.

$C = \int (AW)$

Contribution is a function of action (and everything from the rest of the world, 'the surround')

Action – *actually* do

Motivation* – *want* to do

Skills** – *able* to do

Values – *willing* to do

process + content

Contribution is the whole perimeter of the circle; other people get to make the assessment of whether your action is a 'contribution' or an 'anti-contribution'!

*'skills' implies access to and use of appropriate tools
**'motivation' includes both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects

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Attachment 3

Why should *my* opinion carry any weight in this area? Who is Michael Ayers?

I have had involvement in performance appraisals of various sorts for 40 years. During my service in the military in the early 1970s, I worked in personnel monitoring both enlisted and officer evaluations. I worked for 15 years through the 1980s and 1990s in a Fortune-100 company involved in my own and others' appraisals. Within a large division of that company, I was assigned the tasks of drafting of white papers describing the implementation of competency modeling and workforce management. I led the effort to convert an internal course catalog from a traditional course listing into a competency-based document. I've served on the boards of several nonprofits and have led the appraisals of the agencies' Executive Directors in the 1990s and 2000s.

I've read more than five dozen reports on educational leadership. I've published an article on succession planning in MN School Board Journal. I wrote a book, *The Principal's Field Manual*, with my co-author, experienced high school principal Bill Sommers. I've consulted with a large local school district and various individual schools in other districts. I've been a volunteer with another large local district.

I've been involved with leadership development for nearly twenty years both in the for-profit sector and the public sector. This includes both ongoing consulting with a Fortune-100 company and teaching at the university level.

I have a Master of Arts Degree in Organizational Leadership. Finally, I've been certified to use an 'industrial strength' suite of tools, from one of the two largest international players in that arena, a suite which includes both performance appraisal and professional development components.