

The Principled Principal: Ethical Response to Unexpected Confrontation

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Abstract

In this study the reflection-in-action of experienced school principals was investigated. Reflection-in-action is situated in the context of action, as opposed to reflection-on-action, which occurs after-the-fact. This quantitative study focuses on what principals think about as they are in the midst of dealing with an unexpected public confrontation. Twenty-eight experienced public school principals completed surveys regarding how they would respond when verbally attacked during a staff meeting or other public situation. Listening behaviors and directing behaviors were focused on in Likert-scale survey questions. The findings revealed that experienced principals reflect on how their response will be perceived before speaking. Among this sample of principals listening behaviors were most frequently reported.

Keywords: Reflection, reflection-in-action, knowing-in-practice

1. Introduction

Many authors have written about the importance and impact of a leader's actions upon various organizational factors, including the positive impact on subordinates' thoughts, feelings, and actions when leaders choose to behave in ways that foster relationships and arouse people's emotions about the work they do.

If we accept the notion that our actions as leaders impact subordinates, shouldn't this understanding guide our behavior in all situations, but particularly in times of emotional pressure? While one could argue about what those specific behaviors should be, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Statement of Ethics for Education Leaders (Wagner and Simpson, 2009) advocates behaving in ways that protect the dignity and value of all persons, because this type of conduct will ultimately protect the entire

organization by protecting the civil and human rights of all individuals when the leader is committed to serve others above self. This type of commitment is especially important when a school leader unexpectedly finds himself or herself publically challenged.

“As Thomas Sergiovanni (1990, 1996) and Robert Starratt (2004) observed, educational leadership is productively conceived in terms of service to students, staff and society. Although there are lots of ways to get into leadership, sustaining leadership over time requires moral sensitivity and sophistication, always with an eye to service on behalf of others” (Wagner and Simpson, 2009, p. 1). Thus, understanding the importance of regularly engaging in behavior consistent with generally accepted principles of action should provide guidance for decision-making that ultimately safeguards the well-being of all involved within a school community.

Wagner and Simpson (2009) emphasize that a growing body of empirical evidence suggests there is value in trying to “get-it-right” in terms of moral thinking and behavior as individuals and professionals. The responsible and reflective educational leader is well served to consider universal moral principles because he or she must meet moral matters head on just to do their jobs. Additionally, just like physicians following the Hippocratic code, Wagner and Simpson (2009) advise that educational administrators would do well to fall back on the ideal to do no harm to those they serve.

Over the last several months in cooperation with the Association of Washington School Principals, the authors have been investigating how practicing principals in Washington deal with unexpected public confrontation. This research focuses both on the beliefs and values that underlie leadership behavior and the subsequent strategies and techniques that principals use in such situations.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Leadership

The subject of leadership ranks as one of the most studied and debated topics of organizational science (George, 2000). A small example of the wide variety of approaches that have been proposed over the years for effective leadership include ideas such as servant leadership (DePree, 1992; Greenleaf, 1998; Lee, 1997; Pellicer, 1999), the leader as provider of empowerment (Byham & Cox, 1988; Connors, 2000; Cooper, 2001; Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Manz, 1999), and the concept of transformational leadership (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Bass, 1985, 1990, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bennis, 1989; Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Covey, 1992; Goleman, 1995, 1998[a, b], 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 1995, 2003; Leithwood, 1994; Owens, 1995). Collectively, a consistent theme that seems apparent with all of these authors is that of support for the conception of leadership being defined by service towards others.

For instance, Ashkanasy and Tse (2000) emphasize the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of formal leadership behavior to exercising authority and reacting to emotions in a work group, concluding that a leader’s emotional discernment may be central to group effectiveness as well as for individual performance. In particular, the quality of this exchange could have a profound impact on work motivation and effectiveness (Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002). Additionally, Owens (1995) asserts that how a leader chooses which behaviors are most appropriate depends upon the underlying assumptions that he or she holds regarding human nature, human behavior, motivation, and the nature of the organization. Further, McGregor (1985) claims that because thought and action are intertwined, the underlying assumptions, generalizations, and hypotheses that a leader holds regarding workers and the work they do will lead to specific behaviors based upon those assumptions. Therefore, the mental processes that have taken place before a leader finds himself or herself in the survey scenario presented in this research, have

importance as we would expect to see a difference in responses from a leader who has spent time thinking about the type of behaviors that he or she wishes to engage in and why, compared with someone who has not taken the time to reflect upon and consider these important issues. Experience may be another factor that plays into what we might expect to see from one leader versus another. It would be reasonable to expect that an experienced administrator has had more opportunity to think about and develop high standards of personal behavior might choose to respond very differently from an inexperienced administrator that may not yet have taken this opportunity.

2.2 Reflection-in-Action

Reflection-in-action is the “thinking on your feet” that professionals do when faced with a situation that must be responded to immediately. It is different than reflection-on-action which occurs after an event or interaction. Often, principals are faced with an element of surprise which requires them to quickly reflect “...in the midst of action without interrupting it” (Schön, 1987, p. 26). Similar to Schön’s example of the medical doctor’s experience where “...about 85% of the cases... are not ‘in the book’...” (1987, p. 35), the school principal is regularly confronted with situations that require an immediate response, often with the eyes of others on them.

When familiar routines present themselves, professionals draw on a reservoir of knowledge, or knowing-in-practice, and often act without conscious reflection (Schön, 1987). Effective principals base habits of practice on the beliefs and values that underlie their leadership. It is these deep beliefs that guide a principal’s behavior in high-stress situations such as when every eye in the room is watching. Therefore, the leader who has considered ahead of time what behaviors he or she wishes to demonstrate when strong emotions arise will have something to draw upon in that split-second moment of surprise when how the principal responds in public without preparation will either escalate or de-escalate a problem.

The term “reflection” in the concept of “Reflection-in-action” presupposes that something is being reflected “upon” before action is taken. Therefore, a leader who has not considered the types of behavior he or she aspires to, or the assumptions one holds regarding subordinates’ and the type of working relationship one wishes to develop within an organization, would have little to “reflect” upon in a time of surprise and pressure, whereas, someone taking time to consider these aspects of leadership may have something more to draw from in that split-second moment of surprise, even if the latter has not had much experience. If this is in-fact the case, spending time intentionally considering what one believes and the behavior one aspires to is a worthwhile endeavor, even before one is placed in a formal position of authority.

2.3 Moral/Ethical Theories

Ethical theory provides a framework for analyzing and learning moral lessons (Teays, 2012). However, Barrow (2007) cautions that examining differing theories can be misleading if as we begin our journey to understand morality (the terms “ethics” and “morals” being used interchangeably here) we assume that various theories are in opposition to one another and that they are supposed to provide us with clear direction for solving all our moral problems or as a guide to moral decision-making. Rather, the benefit of seeking to understand any ethical or moral theory is to delineate an ethical ideal in terms of the principles that would define it, just as an aesthetic theory helps us understand the principles of ideal beauty (Barrow, 2007). Thus, we are provided general guidance in personal conduct by a theory’s principles through a sense that certain ways of behaving are right or wrong.

While there are widespread disagreements throughout the world, and even in our own society about which theories are considered “best,” and what specific behaviors based upon a given theory are right or wrong, Barrow (2007) proposes five characteristics of moral viewpoints that cut across cultural and

historical lines, are consistent with the AASA's code professional conduct, and that most philosophers would agree with: fairness; respect for persons as ends in themselves; freedom of choice; truth; well-being. Taken together, these five fundamental principles provide, "...overwhelming reason for each and every one of us to abide [by them] ...as all humans have some notion of doing as you would be done by" (p.86).

2.4 Social Intuition in Decision Making

Recent research focusing on morality, intuition, and affect suggests that our decisions and judgments are not always the result of conscious reasoning processes, but rather automatic and intuitive reactions (DeCremer and Tenbrunsel, 2012). Haidt (2001) defines moral intuition as, "...the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence or inferring a conclusion" (p.818). Wagner and Simpson (2009) define intuitionism as, "...a philosophical position that says the intuitions one has about matters of ultimate right or wrong are profoundly reliable when issuing forth from the right source and evident in the most visceral of ones sensibilities" (p. 181). Thus, moral reflection can help administrators develop their thinking beforehand in order to avoid conflicts between personal moral principles and professional duties that may arise at any given moment. Additionally, some situations can require the need to make moral judgments quickly rather than going through an elaborated reasoning process.

While the above discussion proposes positive outcomes for a leader who chooses to engage in deliberate behaviors during the normal course of completion of one's duties, how much more important would it be for a leader to engage in specific behaviors when confronted with an emotion-laden, surprise situation with a subordinate such as the one suggested in the current survey scenario? Social psychologists have studied the notion of good intuition being used to make highly intelligent social judgments in response to uncertain situations, rather than utilizing a conscious, rational thought process. Gigerenzer (2007) asserts that, "Good intuitions must go beyond the information given, and therefore, beyond logic" (p. 103). For example, Gigerenzer (2007) discusses research results showing that experts in their field are able to use intuition well when there is limited information given and prediction is needed. However, hindsight and novices benefit from more rational, reasoning processes. Gigerenzer believes this intuition of experts has its own rationale based upon two components: 1) simple rules of thumb that take advantage of, 2) evolved capacities of the brain. "Nature gives humans a capability, and extended practice turns it into a capacity" (p. 18). For instance, research in several different fields such as those involving athletics, firefighting, law enforcement and medicine suggest that experts in a given field were able to generate the best option first, an option substantially better than the second, whereas, inexperienced persons would not automatically generate the best actions first.

Within the day to day duties of a school administrator, ethical and moral concerns come up often and frequently require quick decisions to be made without a lot of information. If we are to accept the notion that respect for others is a moral principle that is essential for administrators and thus seek ways to improve the quality of the ethical decision making being done by administrators on a daily basis, wouldn't it be appropriate for us to better understand and then to develop both our rational and intuitive decision making skills for the betterment of all who are impacted by our decisions?

3. Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how experienced principals respond to unexpected public confrontation. This study was designed to answer the following 3 research questions which focus on what principals think about and how they respond in such situations.

- a. What response strategies do principals employ when confronted unexpectedly in public?
- b. What values do principals reflect upon when confronted unexpectedly in public?
- c. Have principals experienced being confronted unexpectedly in public?

This study is aimed at contributing to the body of research on reflection-in-action, particularly related to the strategies and motives of experienced school principals.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A criterion sampling strategy was used to recruit 28 experienced public school principals for this investigation. Participants were identified through consultation with school leaders, university professors, and a professional organization. All of the participants currently served as members of a state association advisory board. The experience level of the participants ranged from 4 to over 15 years as an administrator. Of the 28 participants, 8 served at the elementary level, 13 at the middle level, and 10 at the high school level, three of whom served in 7-12 schools. Eighteen of the participants were male and 10 were female.

4.2 Procedure

An online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey to ensure confidentiality. The survey was designed to collect data regarding the frequency of strategy selection and reflection on personal values. In addition, participants were invited to explain each of their responses. The final survey question invited participants to share a personal experience in which they were publicly confronted.

Prior to completing the survey participants read a scenario in which a principal is verbally attacked while conducting a faculty meeting. The survey questions (see Table 1) were designed to identify information related to the frequency of reflection on response strategies and values that would guide participants in such a situation. The final question on the survey was an open-ended question in which participants were invited to describe an actual public situation in which they were confronted and how they responded.

4.2.1. Scenario.

The following scenario of a faculty meeting conflict provided a context for the survey responses.

The faculty of Sunny Valley Middle School is gathered to discuss how to address a problem of rising student absenteeism. In the middle of a brainstorming session, Joyce shouts out that it's not our responsibility to figure out how to get these kids to school, that it's their responsibility along with their parents, and the kids and the parents just don't care. Before you can respond to Joyce, several other teachers have chimed in and agreed with Joyce and have begun to disparage specific students. Just then, Judy snaps at Joyce and the other teachers and states that maybe it's time for them to go if they don't like the kids or the parents. Sandy tries to caution Judy about saying more, but Judy continues, "Hey don't look at me, I'm the only one around here who has the guts to speak the truth," and turning to you states, "You certainly won't do it."

4.2.2. Directions.

After participants read the scenario the following directions were read prior to their completion of the survey.

Mentally place yourself within this scenario. You have just been verbally attacked during a staff meeting in the presence of your entire staff. You feel everyone's eyes upon you. You have just "hit the pause button" to gather your wits before responding.

5. Results

The survey data and anecdotal reports identified two categories of behavior used in response to unexpected confrontations. These are listening strategies and directing strategies. Within each category two types of strategies were found (see Table 2). Listening strategies include allowing an individual disruptor to speak and tabling an agenda for broader discussion by the group. Directing strategies include a choice to handle the confronter in a private manner and telling the confronter that the issue is not on the meeting agenda and will need to be handled at another time. The survey results are reported by participant school level—elementary, middle, high (see Tables 2 and 3). Examples of actual confrontation situations and the strategies that principals practiced are also included. The scale descriptors are: 1 = Always; 2 = Often; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = Seldom; 5 = Never.

5.1 Strategies by Level

Displayed on Table 2 are mean scores for listening and directing strategies reported by level. The five-point likert scale used in the survey ranges from 1 to 5 with 1 indicating “Always” and 5 indicating “Never.” Nearly all of the mean scores fall in the midrange, between 2.5 and 3.5, with little difference in scores among the three levels. An exception to this was found in the directing strategies, where the mean score for high school principals indicated less likelihood than middle school or elementary principals of stating that a controversial issue was not on a meeting agenda (see Table 2). Among the four strategies, *Allow to Speak* and *Handle Privately* were the most frequent choices for principals at all three levels.

5.2 Strategies by Experience

Strategy mean scores are reported by experience level on Table 3. As shown in column one of the table, 26 of the 28 surveyed had more than 6 years of experience as a public school principal. As was found in comparing strategy choice by level, little difference was found when comparing strategy and experience (see Table 3). An exception to this pattern is the 11-15 year group mean score for the strategy *Table Agenda* (see Table 3). This indicates this group was less likely than the other experience groups to table a meeting agenda to deal with an unexpected issue.

5.3 Anecdotal Reports of Unexpected Public Confrontation

The final question on the survey invited principals to summarize actual cases in which they had been confronted in public situations. These reports were sorted into three categories by the setting of the confrontation. Staff meetings were the most common examples shared, followed by parent meetings, and finally central office meetings.

5.3.1. Staff meetings. Nine principals shared examples of staff meeting confrontations that they had experienced. Three examples follow. The first describes an angry outburst by a teacher during a staff meeting and how the principal responded.

A staff member threw a ticket at me as she walked out saying she didn't want a stupid prize. She claimed she had “won” at the last staff meeting and never received her prize and stated she didn't want to play stupid games. I just stood quietly, looking down. About 4 teachers witnessed her behavior and she about ran over a teacher as she was storming out of the room. People were shocked and I was embarrassed. It was frightening because this staff member has a history of attack behaviors. I left the room and went to the office, got myself together and called personnel to decide a course of action. The teacher and I met the next day to discuss the matter, re-establish boundaries and behavior norms. She and I have and will continue to communicate regarding forms of acceptable behavior.

A second principal shared the following:

I listened and allowed the attack to occur. At the same time, I tried to formulate a response that would not be divisive and/or rude. I also tried to provide rationale as to reasons behind the decision and stuck to my decision and beliefs. I tried very hard to maintain my dignity. After it was over and other staff members talked to me about it, I tried to maintain the focus on the discussion and not the person who attacked me.

A third principal described how he or she handled a challenge from a teacher regarding how routine discipline being handled in the classroom.

One teacher said, "You know, there are certain students that just need to go to the office regularly." My response was, "In my experience I have seen that one year a student is in the office frequently, and the next year I do not see them at all. What I have noticed is that certain teachers seem to refer students to the office, while others work with those same students and take responsibility for them." The result of the exchange was that the teacher was personally offended by my comment, and she confided in her colleagues seeking support for her position. She came to me several days later and said, "I was very upset by your comments, and talked to other teachers about the situation. They all said you were right. I have decided to deal with more of the things that come up in my class." I thanked her and encouraged her saying I knew she could do it. I had very few office referrals, and only what I would consider legitimate ones from her room that year.

5.3.2. Parent meetings. Four principals summarized public conflicts that they had experienced during parent meetings. One principal shared that during a public attack "...I truly believed the issue would be diffused by listening patiently. However, I later realized civility was not in place and I felt battered and beaten and, sadly, because of the attack an otherwise productive meeting was ruined.

5.3.2. Central office meetings. Two principals described situations in which they were publicly attacked in central office settings. The first summarized a conflict during a school board meeting in which a parent verbally attacked the principal.

I was viciously verbally attacked at a school board meeting. I kept my composure and poise and did not respond to the outburst. The board chair regained order and the individual was ejected from the meeting by security. People seemed to respect the way I maintained my cool and expressed a better understanding of how difficult the principalship can be.

A second principal described how he or she was angrily attacked by a central office administrator during a district leadership meeting.

I asked for clarification on a report that had been sent out to school secretaries. The administrator became defensive, rude in my opinion, and told me, "You have had this email for two months, why are you just asking for help now?" I checked my email and found that principals had not been copied the message. When I shared this the person said, "Fine. From now on everything will come to you with CC to the secretaries." I tried to explain that, no, that was not what I asking, however, it escalated from there. Our working relationship continues to be tense and I feel I am on the hot seat.

6. Discussion

Learning to be a successful school administrator takes time. Learning what works and what doesn't from experienced administrators could help to shorten the time it takes for inexperienced and pre-service administrators to become effective. The numerous years of combined experience of the administrators involved in this current study represent a substantial skill set that can provide rich learning opportunities for

others on how best to respond when unexpectedly confronted in public and when little or no time for reflection is possible.

Simple descriptive statistics of survey responses, along with various shared personal experiences revealed themes consistent with earlier reflection-in-action research (Bond, 2011). Experienced principals seem to think and behave in a manner consistent with the idea of demonstrating poise through self-control when unexpected public confrontation occurs. Bond (2011) stated, "When a principal handles a potentially explosive public situation with poise, authenticity, collaboration, and humility, while protecting the dignity of all present, his or her leadership status in the group is enhanced" (p. 7).

When asked to evaluate the need to display patience and compassion in the moment of confrontation, 71% of the responses indicated that they would "always" evaluate the need to display patience and compassion in response to the suggested scenario, while the remaining 29% responded "often." These findings indicate that experienced principals, whether through previous experience or by virtue of a set of personal standards of conduct, understand the importance of maintaining self-control of their emotions.

Remaining quiet in the face of verbal attack requires tremendous self-control. Regardless of what feelings may have been going on inside of this study's participants, many anecdotal responses indicated the intentional decision of the administrator to not respond in-kind to verbal attack, nor to engage in a debate. Rather, principals chose to display restraint, either by not responding at all, or by ensuring that the response given addressed only the content of the attack and not the person doing the attacking. Additionally, positive consequences of these intentional decisions in the form of greater levels of respect for the principal were reported by individuals witnessing these exchanges. This lends support to Bond's (2011) conclusion stated above.

Kouzes and Posner (2003) suggest that experienced professionals in any industry have a wealth of knowledge to draw upon when faced with an unexpected problem. The years of direct contact with a variety of situations and problems equip experienced leaders with unique wisdom, insight and intuitive abilities. "Intuition is the bringing together of knowledge and experience to produce new insights" (Kouzes and Posner, 2003, p. 105). Studying these insights can be extremely difficult, but is nonetheless a worthwhile goal for all those seeking to increase professional effectiveness, as well as for those instructing new cadres of inexperienced leaders. While this current sample of principals was small, the level of experience and expertise represented in this group is extensive. 27 of the 28 principals involved in this study had seven or more years of experience; specifically, six respondents had 7-10 years of experience, eleven had 11-15 years of experience, and nine had 16 or more years of experience. Thus, the level of knowledge and experience brought together in this sample is high and has tremendous potential for providing insights for others, particularly inexperienced administrators.

While leadership literature abounds with various theories and guidelines for behavior, the importance of school leaders engaging in principled behavior is a consistent notion that cannot be missed, particularly if one agrees with the idea of school leadership being conceived of in terms of service to others. Wagner and Simpson (2009) argue, "...that the heart of leadership begins in character and moral commitment" (p. 6) that has potential to guide and shape organizational success depending upon the strength of the leader's moral actions. Additionally, Wagner and Simpson (2009) suggest that mounting empirical evidence gives weight to the value of trying to get things right in terms of moral thinking as individuals and professionals. Strike (2007) emphasizes the importance of the study of ethical actions by school leaders for building community in the sense that being treated fairly does in-fact build community. The results of this current research seem consistent with these opinions. While neither listening nor directive behavior results produced clarity around which of these types of behavior would be best to engage in, as mentioned above, consistency in the

anecdotal responses of the leaders in our survey provides strong support for the importance of displaying emotional self-control based upon the positive outcomes reported. Additionally, circumstances portrayed in the self-reports are consistent with the notion that all leaders face times where crises test their core values. Lee (2006) calls these times of crisis, "Points of Decision" (p. 4); times when leaders are pressured and are expected to respond with character, exhibiting courageous behaviors based upon high core values. Evidence of courageous behaviors can be seen in the examples shared in this study by principals who put aside self-interests by choosing to remain quiet in the face of unexpected public confrontations.

Gigerenzer (2007) contends that nature gives humans the ability to follow gut feelings which he defines as "simple rules of thumb" that take advantage of the capabilities of our brains for fast and simple solutions to complex problems. When coupled with extended practice these innate cognitive abilities become increased capacity that can be accessed at times of need. Is it this capacity alone, or this capacity coupled with lessons learned over time that enable leaders with extended experience to exhibit poise in the face of emotional discomfort? As many psychologists attest, extreme emotional situations throw most humans into a "fight or flight" response where little to no logical thinking occurs. The consistent results from the current study seem to provide support for the importance of leaders remaining calm and composed even in the face of what for most of us would be extreme emotional discomfort and perhaps a lack of clear thinking. These results also suggest support for Gigerenzer's (2007) claims that intuition is often a guide through life and is not based upon a complex weighing of pros and cons. Experts exhibit the ability to generate the best options first, extracting only a few pieces of information from a complex and uncertain environment in order to make decisions. This intuitionist idea is consistent with Schön's (1983) assertion that competent professionals typically know more than they can say, exhibiting a kind of implicit knowledge-in-practice. Additionally, in applying this notion to the workplace Schön (1987) used the term *professional artistry* to refer to, "...the kinds of competence practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice" (p. 22).

7. Conclusion

"Clearly, in this era of accountability and the pressures that accompany it, there is a premium placed on the interpersonal skills of school leaders" (Hallam & Hausman, 2009, p. 403). In the current study, a pattern of behavior emerged from the anecdotal responses that emphasizes the importance of high levels of personal character and the positive outcomes for school leaders who possess and thus demonstrate exceptional interpersonal skills. The school administrator who has considered ahead of time what behaviors he or she wishes to demonstrate when strong emotions arise will have something to draw upon in that split-second moment of surprise when how the principal responds in public will either escalate or de-escalate a problem. The current study is a follow-up to research (Bond, 2011) aimed at contributing to the body of knowledge on reflection-in-action, particularly related to the strategies and motives used by experienced school principals when facing unexpected public confrontation. The pattern of findings in this study suggests that pre-service and inexperienced school administrators would benefit from understanding the rationale behind the actions of experienced administrators demonstrated in highly emotional circumstances, which appear to be more intuitive rather than logical. Gigerenzer (2007) asserts that once the rationale underlying professional intuition is understood, it can be taught, developed and improved. According to Gigerenzer (2007):

Many psychologists oppose feelings to reasons, yet I have argued that gut feeling themselves have a rationale based on reasons. The difference between intuition and moral deliberation is that the reasons underlying moral intuitions are typically unconscious. Thus, the relevant distinction is not between

feelings and reasons, but “between feelings based on unconscious reasons and deliberate reasoning” (p. 191).

Within the regular course of duties of a school administrator, unexpected situations requiring an immediate response occur frequently, often with the eyes of others on them. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, these unexpected events are part of the typical day for most school leaders. However, there is not much information about the reflection of school leaders, particularly in situations that require immediate response (McCotter, 2009; Wright, 2008). Therefore, future research might involve the continued analysis of information gained around the thinking patterns of experienced professionals. Such information has the potential to provide guidance and insight to develop decision-making abilities for future educational administrators.

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Table 1*Survey Prompts*

Allow the staff member to speak his or her mind
Tell the staff member that the matter was not on the agenda
Scan to see how other staff members were responding to the outburst
Try to quickly resolve the matter and return to the agenda
Table the agenda to allow discussion of the issue raised by the staff member
Respond differently to teacher leaders than to negative staff members
Evaluate the need to display patience and compassion
Distinguish the person from the problem
Think about my values & beliefs
Say a silent prayer before responding

Table 2*Mean Scores by Level*

	Listening Strategies		Directing Strategies	
	<i>Allow to speak</i>	<i>Tables agenda</i>	<i>Handle privately</i>	<i>Not on agenda</i>
Elementary	2.50	3.17	2.83	3.00
Middle level	2.56	3.10	2.91	3.55
High school	2.25	3.38	2.75	4.00

Key: 1=Always; 2=Often; 3=Occasionally; 4=Seldom; 5=Never

Table 3*Mean Scores by Experience as a Principal*

<i>Years experience (N)</i>	Listening Strategies		Directing Strategies	
	<i>Allow to speak</i>	<i>Tables agenda</i>	<i>Handle privately</i>	<i>Not on agenda</i>
4 to 6 (1)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
7 to 10 (6)	2.67	2.67	2.83	3.83
11 to 15 (11)	2.40	3.78	2.90	3.50
16 or more (9)	2.50	3.00	2.83	3.17

Key: 1=Always; 2=Often; 3=Occasionally; 4=Seldom; 5=Never