SHAPING THE FUTURE

FOUR LEADERSHIP PIVOTS

for Lasting Educational Impact

LYLE KIRTMAN

CORWIN

Thank you

FOR YOUR INTEREST IN CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Shaping the Future.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

OUR FINDINGS AND NEW LEADERSHIP APPROACH—IT'S RESEARCH BASED

Learning Intentions

1. Review the data, research, and findings that support the reasoning for why leadership needs to pivot in education.

2. Understand and begin to apply the Seven Competencies for High-Performing Leaders.

3. Consider the Four Pivots education needs to undertake.
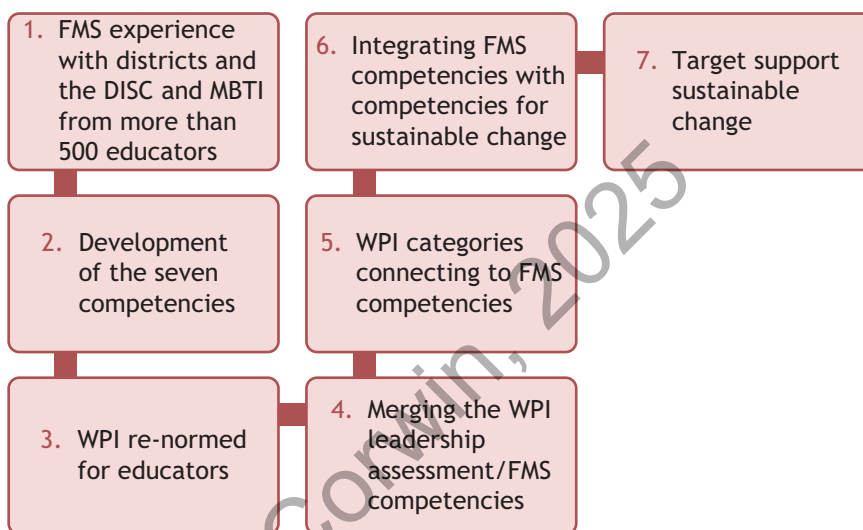
The Context of Why We Need to Pivot

The purpose of our research was to determine if our data and experience on leadership would be supported with evidence. Our intention was to deepen the

leadership development conversations and help inform educators on how to focus their practice to maximize student results.

Following is the description of the methodology of how the research was conducted and how it can be used in leadership development work in districts. Figure 1.1 illustrates the process Future Management Systems (FMS) and Pearson went through to align the Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI) and my Seven Competences for High-Performing Leaders.

1.1 The Description and Methodology of the Future Management Systems/ Pearson Research Study

1. FMS experience with districts and the DISC and MBTI from more than 500 educators

2. Development of the seven competencies

3. WPI re-normed for educators

4. Merging the WPI leadership assessment/FMS competencies

5. WPI categories connecting to FMS competencies

6. Integrating FMS competencies with competencies for sustainable change

7. Target support sustainable change

In 2011 I developed the Seven Competencies of High-Performance Leaders based on a combination of my experience working with and coaching leaders in more than 700 school districts and 1,000 schools, the DiSC inventory, and a nationwide Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) database on education leaders. I believe that "high-performance education leaders have a range of leadership skills, competencies, and personal attributes. Although the core service in education is instruction for students, the leader's role is to ensure that the highest quality of service is provided" (Kirtman, 2014). I believe that "our most successful leaders in education are results oriented" (Kirtman 2014).

Based on the Seven Competencies of High-Performance Leaders, Pearson and TalentLens wanted to conduct a study to re-norm the WPI, a self-assessment inventory, for school principals and to correlate the WPI traits to the Seven Competencies of High-Performance Leaders. To do this study, TalentLens reviewed WPI results from 200 principals. The superintendents of the participating districts rated the principals using a Likert scale on their effectiveness (school success) and rated the principals' leadership using the subsets of the Seven Competencies (see "Seven Competencies for High-Performing Leaders"). The principals then all took the WPI. As hypothesized, the WPI scales significantly predicted a number of competencies that had been identified as important for successful performance as a principal.

The WPI is a highly effective, valid, and reliable tool. The WPI traits correspond with the workstyle job requirements listed in the ONET* system for the Department of Labor. Using the results of the WPI and the superintendents' ratings of each principal on the Seven Competencies, TalentLens and I drew correlations between the Seven Competencies and the WPI traits. We then mapped the traits to the competencies. Additionally, the results of the study provided a range of scores desirable in school leadership, which are outlined later in the chapter with the trait definitions. These scores are not good or bad but rather reflective of behavior at work. Finally, we drew themes from the study, which resulted in significant research findings (see "Key Findings From Our Research"). Subsequently, our database has expanded to more than 9,000 WPIs from superintendents, central office administrators, principals, and more 2,000 teachers. The original results of the research have held true through the expansion to other groups beyond principals.

Since this research, we have been working on redefining results for students through the development of a clear North Star, which combines standardized tests (hard skills) and soft skills through the process of developing a portrait of a graduate. This new concept of developing a North Star is defined and outlined in Chapter 3.

You can find the description of the research tool and the data from the study in Appendix F. It was my opinion that it was important to explain the research findings and lessons learned from the data to the reader without the complications of understanding leadership assessments. The specific results in Appendix F will be helpful for people who are familiar with these leadership assessments or are interested in pursuing their use in their district.

SEVEN COMPETENCIES FOR HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS

A High Performing Leader . . .

1. Challenges the Status Quo

   - ✓ Delegates compliance tasks to other staff

   - ✓ Challenges common practices and traditions if they are blocking improvements

   - ✓ Is willing to take risks

   - ✓ Looks for innovations to get results

   - ✓ Does not let rules and regulations block results and slow action

2. Builds Trust Through Clear Communications and Expectations

   - ✓ Is direct and honest about performance expectations

   - ✓ Follows through with actions on all commitments

   - ✓ Makes sure there is a clear understanding based on written and verbal communications

   - ✓ Is comfortable dealing with conflict

3. Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success

   - ✓ Creates written plans with input from stakeholders

   - ✓ Ensures that people buy into the plan

   - ✓ Monitors implementation of the plan

   - ✓ Adjusts the plan based on new data, and communicates changes clearly

   - ✓ Develops clear measurement for each goal in the plan

   - ✓ Creates short- and long-term plans

4. Focuses on Team Over Self

   - ✓ Hires the best people for the team

   - ✓ Commits to the ongoing development of a high-performance leadership team

- ✓ Builds a team environment

- ✓ Seeks critical feedback

- ✓ Empowers staff to make decisions and get results

- ✓ Supports the professional development of all staff

5. Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement

- ✓ Moves initiatives ahead quickly

- ✓ Can be decisive

- ✓ Uses instructional data to support needed change

- ✓ Builds systemic strategies to insure sustainability of change

- ✓ Sets a clear direction for the organization

- ✓ Deals with and manages change effectively

6. Commits to Continuous Improvement for Self and the Organization

- ✓ High sense of curiosity for new ways to get results

- ✓ Is willing to change current practices for themselves and others

- ✓ Listens to all team members to change practices to obtain results

- ✓ Takes responsibility for their own actions—no excuses

- ✓ Has a strong self-management and self-reflection skills

7. Builds External Networks and Partnerships

- ✓ Sees their role as a leader on a broad base manner outside the work environment and community walls

- ✓ Understands their role as being a part of a variety of external networks for change and improvement

- ✓ Has a strong ability to engage people inside and outside in two-way partnerships

- ✓ Uses technology to expand and manage a network of resource people

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, education had faced the need for change based on the challenges of educating students in a quickly evolving world. However, the pandemic has put a spotlight on the need to change to improve student achievement. Additionally, the current workforce crisis has created ongoing concerns regarding student achievement, and a volatile political environment has increased the pressure to change quickly. A district problem that took months to escalate in the past can move to crisis level in days or even hours. As one teacher told us, "The pandemic put the change process on steroids!"

Challenges the Status Quo (Competency 1) was important pre-pandemic; now it is a necessity. Our current education system has maintained strategies and practices that do not work in today's world. "Why has the 200-year-old current system in Western societies not transformed when the majority of people have known for at least 50 years that it does not work?" (Fullan, 2023, p 2). People know that we need to change our education system but fear the criticism they may receive from all sides when they try. My leadership research provides objective data to help us understand what needs to change, why we tend to maintain the status quo, and information on how we can move forward.

KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR RESEARCH

- District and school leaders need leadership skills and competencies beyond instructional leadership.
- Top-down leaders do not create sustainable change.
- Most leaders are cautious and don't have a high sense of urgency for student achievement.
- External networking and partnerships increase results.
- Motivating staff gets better results than the traditional evaluation process.
- Stress and defensiveness from data and critical feedback decrease positive results and improvement.
- Leaders who are overly concerned with others are less able to give feedback and often get lower results.
- Focusing on compliance and rule following decreases positive results.

My book with Michael Fullan, *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole System Change* (Kirtman & Fullan, 2017), provides more depth on the Seven Competencies. In addition, my second book with Fullan (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019) connects the Seven Competencies to his framework for creating coherent districts and schools.

The Pearson/TalentLens study provides data on leadership for administrators and teachers and the traits that are most critical for thriving in today's educational environment. The data also show how some traits that leaders have are not conducive to success.

Teachers prioritize the work that their principal and the district leadership deems must be completed. The data show that most teachers focus on completing those tasks rather than doing what they believe is best for students. To succeed the teacher who is closest to the student needs to focus on student learning, not task completion and compliance. For example, if a teacher is asked to use a new lesson plan because the central office thinks it is better, a high-performing teacher may resist because they believe the students are learning with the current lesson plan, especially if the reason for the change is not clear. Conversely, a teacher who is task oriented and compliance driven will do what they are told and follow the directive from central office and the principal. This task orientation can be a problem when student achievement does not improve. The teacher may not feel responsible because they did what they were told to do. This can result in a teacher believing that it is the principal's job to improve student achievement, not theirs.

Another key point derived from the data is that the superintendents are focused on behaviors that relate to achieving results. These behaviors show results orientation and a high sense of urgency (Competency 5). The superintendent may also use other leadership traits such as innovation, analytical behaviors on how data can help focus on improving results, independence, and persistence. However, their leadership teams, comprising central office leaders and principals, are generally more focused on implementing and not leading improvement efforts. Therefore, the traits of this team may be lower in the leadership traits exhibited by the superintendent.

This major gap between many superintendents and the central office and school leadership has several implications. The superintendent can lead change but must encourage their leadership teams, including teachers, to not only implement goals and initiatives but be partners in the leadership efforts. Closing this gap will enhance the change and improvement effort and create more sustainable change (Competency 5).

The research also confirmed our concern about educator stress, especially teachers. Most educators' results indicated a high level of stress and a potential to be defensive when sharing data on improvement strategies. Our study showed that defensive behavior, and lack of focus on data, is directly related to stress along with the pressure of completing an overwhelming number of disparate tasks. This teacher stress can affect the students, and we will reference data confirming this

result from a leadership assessment called Indigo, which can be completed by students and adults (see Chapter 5).

Stress can also be related to a lack of self-control behaviors by several leaders and especially teachers. This lack of self-control manifests itself in frustration and resistance to change. The use of data to prove the importance of change tends to increase the defensiveness of educators in most cases. The ability to discuss how changes will improve results and address teacher concerns is more effective than showing data on students' low performance and failure. When I discuss data, I use the phrase *data informed* rather than *data driven* to decrease defensiveness. *Data informed* shows more respect and value for the teacher's viewpoint and brings them into the conversation. *Data driven* highlights an external factor that distances a teacher from the data you are trying to use to get their attention and commit to change.

Innovation is important in today's world. We can't solve today's challenges with yesterday's solutions. We also need to help students develop their innovation skills for the workplace. Innovation is a relatively strong trait for administrators and teachers. However, the pressure on compliance and rules decreases innovation. Our data show how innovative people can become frustrated and blocked from pursuing new ideas for fear that they will find themselves in trouble if they do not follow the rules. Some innovative people can decrease their initiative over time because they meet resistance and are discouraged from trying to challenge the status quo. We have also found that educators can become less flexible because of the focus on compliance. This lack of flexibility can have an adverse effect and result in less innovative and affect a teacher's openness to change. Concerns about stifling innovation show up in our disaggregated data on race and gender. Leaders of color tend to have a desire to be innovative but show a decrease in initiative from feeling a lack of support.

One more result from our research is that caring and concern for others, which tends to motivate many to become teachers and administrators, has become a strength *and* a weakness. Caring for students and colleagues is important. However, caring (i.e., avoiding hurt feelings) can prevent an educator's willingness to be open and honest with others. The ability to be direct with caring is important. Educators need to be direct and identify issues early to make sure that their and their colleagues' work and behaviors are focused on results. As some people say, clear is kind, and this is a theme that we will refer to in future chapters.

The implications of the data on educational leaders will be woven into each chapter. The data have also been disaggregated for race, gender, and age, which will be referenced in Chapter 4 on talent management.

SETTING A GOAL TO STRATEGICALLY IMPROVE ACHIEVEMENT SCORE

Danielle Hinkle, a member of the school leadership team who coaches and supervises principals in Modesto School District in California, has been working on increasing her achievement score for two years. She was an excellent member of several teams in student support services and was known for her ability to get tasks done on time. Everyone wanted Danielle on their team. Her achievement score, which reflects results orientation, was low, and her leadership score was also low when she took the WPI for the first time. After gaining self-awareness of her personality traits and their impact on her work performance, she set a clear goal to improve her achievement score. She recognized the need to shift her focus from detailed, task-oriented project management to addressing broader challenges and solutions. This meant starting with focusing on the desired outcomes and strategically determining the steps to achieve them, allowing her to align her work more effectively with high-impact results. By adopting a strategic, outcome-focused approach, she has seen significant improvements in the results of her work and the work of the school leadership team. This shift has enhanced her project execution, ensuring initiatives align more closely with the district's strategic goals. The impact on student achievement has been evident through more cohesive program implementations, streamlined processes, and the fostering of a learning environment that prioritizes both academic rigor and student engagement. These improvements have translated to more targeted support her principals and her colleagues and, ultimately, a more effective pathway for student success. The outcome-driven mindset has reinforced alignment between district strategies and measurable student outcomes, creating a more unified and impactful educational experience.

Detailed student data with improvements:

- Increased graduation rates
- Decreased dropout rates
- Successful implementation of a college and career readiness platform designed to support students in a greater level of career awareness and how high school course plans can support postsecondary goals for college and career

---

As part of our leadership development work, we disaggregated the WPI data based on race, gender, and age. I found several themes in our leadership development work. There will be some references to these themes throughout the chapters of this book. This data have been reviewed by the Pearson research team and are aligned with our research study. Although the data have not been peer reviewed or published, they have been integrated into the work with school districts nationally. The following are some of the most applicable themes that have implications for how leaders need to pivot their leadership approach:

1. Young leaders (ages 25-30) have high focus on results, which decreases as they get older and gain more experience. One cause may be that culture in education drives leaders to be more focused on tasks over results over time.

2. Leaders of color have high scores in many of the traits we are looking for to lead and manage in today's educational environment. These include high scores in results orientation, analytical thinking, innovation, and persistence.

3. Leaders of color tend to be able to manage stress relatively well and are open to critical feedback on how to improve.

4. Leaders of color, although having several strong leadership behaviors, tend to have low initiative. The culture in education seems to frustrate leaders of color, and they tend to decrease their initiative over time.

5. Women have high concern for others. They also have low stress tolerance and can struggle with hearing critical feedback if it is not presented constructively.

While I will be expressing my opinion based on extensive experience, the data support these thoughts and recommendations.