

## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

*“The role of the principal as manager is key in the daily organizing, functioning, and execution of numerous processes and tasks that permit a school to accomplish its goals as a learning community.”*

—Marsha Speck

**I**t's not very glamorous to talk about management or operational leadership these days. Such leadership is too often taken for granted, yet as we mentioned earlier, it's important, because it serves as the foundation for all other forms of school leadership (see Figure 1.1). A perusal of recent books demonstrates that operational leadership is often neglected or given scant attention. The Davies (2005) book titled *The Essentials of School Leadership*, although a wonderful text covering a variety of important forms of leadership, including strategic, transformative, ethical, constructivist, poetical, emotional, and sustainable, omits any mention of the operational or managerial responsibilities of school leaders.

This book on operational leadership represents an important aspect of a principal's work. Each book in the series addresses a specific, important role or function of a principal. Discussing each separately, however, is quite artificial and a bit contrived. In fact, all seven forms of leadership (instructional, cultural, ethical/spiritual, collaborative, operational, strategic, and school-community) form an undifferentiated whole. Still, we can glean much from a more in-depth analysis of each form of leadership. It is with such understanding that this book is framed. Operational leadership reflects

## 2 Operational Leadership

an educational paradigm based on the following assumptions or premises:

- You, as principal, play the most vital role in managing school operations. In fact, without your commitment and efforts, little will be accomplished regarding other forms of leadership without dutiful attention to this one.

- Your effectiveness as a principal is predicated on willingness and ability to engage in all forms of leadership. Although management of day-to-day operations in your school building is

*“School principals have an extraordinary opportunity to improve public schools.”*

—Roland S. Barth

vital, do not let yourself become immersed in managerial imperatives to the exclusion of other important forms of leadership.

- Principal operational leaders balance the requirements of the organization with individuals’ needs. In fact, good leaders fit organizational structures to suit individual needs. After all, an organization is made up of individuals in order to serve individuals. Too many administrators lose sight of this reality.

- A principal must possess the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

- Getting organized, managing facilities, handling the budget, attending to human resource issues, and communicating effectively form the essence of good practice as an operational leader.

- Managing a school is an important yet burdensome task. Some of you may have an AP or two to assist in these matters. Yet many, if not most, of you may not. Still, this book is premised on the notion that your obligations to operational leadership are nonetheless essential. Creative principals will find ways to balance operational imperatives with other forms of leadership.

- Finally, you cannot function as an operational leader, or any leader for that matter, without managing your own welfare. Taking care of yourself so that you may care for others is often forgotten.

**Reflective Questions**

1. Consider leaders you have known. Assess their operational leadership skills. What stands out as particularly noteworthy? Unworthy?
2. Assess the degree to which your school is well managed. Do you prefer to engage in nonoperational matters? If so, who's "watching the ship"? What else might you need to learn in order to function as a good manager?
3. What operational leadership challenges do you face? Explain.
4. React to the assumptions listed above. Which make the most sense to you?

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This book and series are also aligned with standards established by the prominent Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC). ELCC standards are commonly accepted by most educational organizations concerned with preparing high-quality educational leaders and as such are most authoritative (Wilmore, 2002). The ELCC, an arm of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, developed six leadership standards used widely in principal preparation. These standards formed the basis for this book and series:

1.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

2.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

#### 4 Operational Leadership

\*3.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

4.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

5.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

6.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

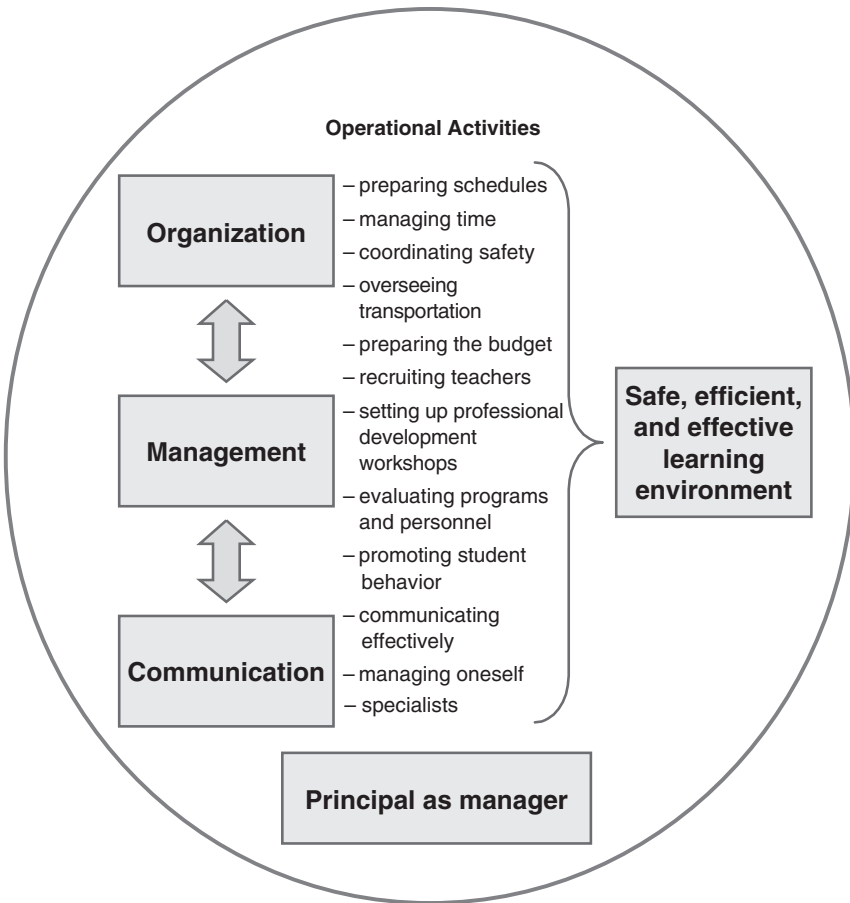
\*This standard is addressed in this book.

Readers should also familiarize themselves with ISLLC and National Association of Elementary School Principals standards (see, e.g., [http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate\\_School\\_Leaders\\_Licensure\\_Consortium/](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_School_Leaders_Licensure_Consortium/) and <http://www.boyercenter.org/basicschool/naesp.shtml>).

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In order to establish a framework for the chapters, Figure 1.1 illustrates the role of the principal attempting to facilitate and influence the critical elements of operational leadership. Effective principals pay careful attention to this mundane yet important responsibility. Principals work best as operational leaders when they manage their school smoothly and efficiently, creating a conducive

**Figure 1.1** A Model of Operational Leadership That Promotes a Safe, Efficient, and Effective Learning Environment



learning environment so that all the other good and necessary work in the school gets done with excellence.

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Allow me to offer a word on chapter format and presentation of information. Information in each of the six main chapters is presented as concisely as possible to make for easy and quick

## 6 Operational Leadership

reference reading. Each chapter begins with boxed material called “What You Should Know About.” The box will list and briefly explain the concepts covered in each chapter. Certainly, each chapter will not cover every bit of information there is to know about a given topic, as mentioned earlier. Each chapter culls, though, essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a successful principal.

A brief word on chapter organization is in order to facilitate reading. Chapter 2 includes some best practices for getting organized, which is so foundational for all operational work in schools. The third chapter highlights practices for managing facilities. Establishing a warm, safe, and secure school environment is among the first steps you take as operational leader. The fourth chapter addresses budgetary issues, over which principals across the country today are assuming greater control than ever before. Human resources management takes up the fifth chapter. Managing others is essential in our work. Chapter 6 discusses the importance of effective communication, without which confusion and chaos reign supreme. The final chapter addresses your personal management. Taking care of yourself is too often taken for granted, as we alluded to earlier. Taken together, these six chapters provide you with information and strategies that promote an efficient and effective school environment. This book is not meant to be the definitive treatise on operational leadership, but rather to raise some relevant issues for your consideration. It is my hope that the ideas in this book will give you pause to think about your own role in management issues.

As a concluding activity to this Introduction, read the boxed material that contains nine quotations meant to inspire and, more important, to provoke critical thinking about your role as operational leader. Read each quotation, and ask yourself these questions:

- What does the author convey about management, directly or indirectly (in other words, what’s the message in a nutshell)?
- Critique the quotation. Does the thought reflect your beliefs? Explain.
- What practical step(s) could you take to actualize the idea behind each quotation?

### Some Key Quotations Related to Operational Leadership

"School leaders must first of all be skillful managers. . . . Whatever else a district may want from its leaders, managerial skill is essential; without it, no school leader will last long."

—Stuart C. Smith and Philip K. Piele

"The overlap between leadership and management is centered on how they both involve influencing a group of individuals in goal attainment."

—Peter G. Northouse

"Success is good management in action."

—William E. Holler

"Principals must continue to upgrade their effective management practices that keep students safe and public policies and funds appropriately addressed, even as they commit their primary energies to the issues of teaching and learning."

—William A. Owings and Leslie S. Kaplan

"With the additional stress of federal and state mandates, we need every effective tool we can find to help our school principals and classroom teachers meet the new challenges of the 21st century."

—Jim R. Watson

"Organizational life need not be an endless series of meetings run by *Robert's Rules of Order*. There can and should be excitement and energy there."

—Susan R. Komives, Nance Lucas,  
and Timothy R. McMahon

"Viewing schools as relationships linked together as circuits is useful in understanding the interconnectedness of human social organizations and how information flows through them."

—Randall B. Lindsey, Laraine M. Roberts,  
and Franklin Campbell Jones

"A manager is responsible for consistency of purpose and continuity to the organization. The manager is solely responsible to see that there is a future for the workers.' [It is our responsibility

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## 8 Operational Leadership

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as a society to manage our schools so that almost all students get a high-quality education].”

—William Glasser, quoting W. Edwards Deming

“Every great manager I’ve ever interviewed has it. No matter what the situation, their first response is always to think about the individual concerned and how things can be arranged to help that individual experience success.”

—Marcus Buckingham

### CASE STUDY AND REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

*Anita Valez is proud of her school. She’s worked hard, as have her teachers and staff. As a first-year principal, she was awarded Principal of the Year by the Central Office for her ability to provide “uncommon leadership and meticulous attention to managing” the district’s most challenging school. Located in the “rough” part of town, PS 999, according to its mission statement, is a “diverse collaborative school community committed to excellence and equity.” The statement elaborates:*

*We aim to provide for a clean, safe and orderly environment. Our students will learn about self, community and the world. They will have the opportunity to be problem solvers, critical thinkers and effective communicators. We will encourage students to experiment, predict and take risks. We will cultivate parent participation in all aspects of school life. We will embrace challenges and obstacles and learn from them and grow. We will continue to strive to reach our goal of creating a school of lifelong learners. Our job as leaders is to provide for a conducive learning environment so that all students can achieve their personal best.*

*The following school demographics can be found on their Web page:*

*Students in full-time special education (self-contained students):*  
**8.8%**