



Personal Leadership Resources Case Studies

This section of the Personal Leadership Resource (PLRs) document presents four case studies. The case studies were written by a group of practicing Ontario principals and supervisory officers to foster leadership learning among groups of leaders within and across districts. They were designed to promote discussion about the personal leadership resources and how the PLRs influence or have an impact on leadership practice. These case studies represent composite pictures or snapshots of leadership scenarios that will promote reflection on practice. Those using the case studies are encouraged to make them relevant to their realities which may result in the development of revised case studies that more accurately represent the situations.

In order to facilitate these discussions, the case studies include a series of questions to promote discussion, and foster a greater understanding of the PLRs and their relevance to leadership practices across various leadership roles in the Ontario education system.

Each of the four case studies is organized following a common format:

- Presentation of the case study
- Connections to the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)
- A list of PLRs that is most relevant to the case study
- Leadership practices most closely linked to the case study at the school or system levels (reference purposes)
- Reflective questions

A series of reflective and open-ended questions is provided to facilitate group discussions. The purpose of the open-ended questions is to foster discussion on the importance of PLRs in the decision-making process for leaders at all levels. These questions will also encourage and promote discussion among participants in order to identify some of the leadership practices that are relevant in specific situations. Principals and supervisory officers will have the opportunity to explore different thought processes and challenges that they encounter on a daily basis. The discussions around the case studies may lead to discussions about other situations which leaders in Ontario schools and districts face on a regular basis.

The case studies were written primarily for the use of principals and supervisory officers. This however, does not preclude districts from using them with other staff members; for example, consultants, teachers or aspiring leaders.

There are many ways a district could use the case studies. One example would be during a system wide meeting. Participants could be separated into small groups. Each group would be assigned a different case study to read and discuss. Following

the small group discussion, there could be a plenary session to exchange views on the importance of the personal leadership resources and ways to develop them further. Alternately, all groups can read the same case study and the plenary session then becomes optional but would be useful to further discuss the personal leadership resources as they pertain to the case study.

The case studies are provided in Word format. Districts are encouraged to adapt them to their specific needs.

The IEL looks forward to hearing from districts on how they made use of the case studies and for districts to share other resources which could be posted on the IEL website. Please share your feedback with the IEL coordinator at communication@education-leadership-ontario.ca.

The case studies focus on the following:

Case Study 1: School Organization

- Educational Assistant in an Elementary School
 - Problem-solving expertise
 - Knowledge about schools and classroom conditions with direct effect on student learning
 - Ability to perceive emotions
 - Systems Thinking

Case Study 2: Leadership for School Improvement

- Improving EQAO math results
 - Systems Thinking
 - Resilience
 - Proactivity
 - Problem-solving expertise

Case Study 3: Decision Making

- Managing a School Crisis
 - Optimism
 - Self-efficacy
 - Resilience
 - Proactivity
 - Problem-Solving Expertise

Case Study 4: Aligning budgets and structures with the district's mission, vision and goals

- School Closure
 - Ability to perceive emotions
 - Managing emotions
 - Act in emotionally appropriate ways
 - Systems thinking
 - Resilience

Case Study 1: School Organization

Educational Assistant in an Elementary School

Context

This case study focuses on a situation where a principal agrees to allow a parent of a special needs child to volunteer in the child's classroom. While the principal's intention was to offer more support to the teacher, the principal is faced with numerous challenges.

Background

The principal has three years' experience, all of which are at Grove Elementary School. The principal has a positive relationship with the parents and the community, and is always receptive to new ideas from parents. The school community has benefited from the principal's extensive background as an instructional leader in the Arts as well as the ability to find creative solutions to various challenges. As a confident leader, the principal has demonstrated the ability to exercise sound judgement and is action oriented.

The school is located in a diverse community and has a number of students with special education needs. This September, the school was allocated eight educational assistants (EAs), which was a reduction from last year's allocation of ten. The principal has received numerous complaints from parents that the current number of EAs is not enough to meet student needs. Although the principal shared parent concerns with the superintendent, the number of EAs remained the same.

Present situation

Alex is a child on the autism spectrum who was assigned a full time EA to support him in his regular grade three classroom. Earlier this week, Alex's mother, who is a qualified EA, came to the school to meet with the principal. She shared that she had recently completed training in Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) and is excited about her new knowledge. She offered to volunteer full time to support Alex in the classroom and believes this would improve her relationship with her son as well as help him succeed.

The principal has strong empathy for families with children who have special education needs and accepted her kind offer. This decision meant that the EA assigned to Alex would be reassigned. At the end of the day, the principal met with Alex's EA to indicate that her duties had been reassigned to another classroom and would be effective the following day.

The next morning, the Grade Three teacher was surprised to find Alex's mother organizing Alex's work space in her classroom. His mother excitedly told the teacher that she would be working with her from now on, as Alex's EA. The teacher was speechless and stormed into the office to confront the principal.

The teacher demanded that the parent be removed from her classroom. The principal was surprised at the teacher's reaction as she is usually very flexible and supportive of parental involvement. After listening attentively to the teacher's concerns, the principal

asked the teacher to return to the classroom, promising to monitor the situation for the next week. The teacher unhappily returned to the classroom but made a quick call to the union.

The day seemed to have gone smoothly until the principal listened to two voicemail messages at the end of the day. The first was from the superintendent: “I understand that a parent is acting as an EA in support of a child with special education needs in one of your classrooms. Can you please return my call as soon as possible?” The second message was from the local trustee, thanking the principal for proactively addressing both the student and parent needs. The principal realizes that the decision to accept the parent as a volunteer has created issues that must be dealt with. The parent and trustee are satisfied with the decision. The superintendent and the teacher have concerns.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to this case study)

- Problem-solving expertise
 - articulates principles and values and identifies constraint
- Knowledge about schools and classroom conditions with direct effect on student learning
 - organizational and family conditions
- Ability to perceive emotions
 - discerning emotional responses in others through verbal and non-verbal cues
- Systems Thinking
 - engaging in futures thinking and consequences of action or inaction
 - able to understand the dense, complex and reciprocal connections among different elements of an organization

School-level Leadership Practices

- Consider staff members’ opinions when initiating actions that affect their work.
- Engage teachers in decisions that impact their instructional work.
- Demonstrate respect, care and personal regard for students, staff and parents.
- Involve staff in the design and implementation of important school decisions and policies.

System-level Leadership Practices

- Encourage staff to be innovative within the boundaries created by the district’s instructional guidance system.
- Ground interactions with, and advice to, trustees in sound evidence.
- Expect and assist schools to allocate instructional resources equitably.
- Align personnel policies and procedures with district’s improvement goals.
- Provide prospective and existing leaders with extended opportunities to further develop their leadership capacities.
- Develop open, accessible and collaborative relationships with principals.
- Expect schools to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students.

Reflective Questions

1. Has the principal successfully found a viable solution to a problem in the school? Explain.
2. What other school-level leadership challenges has the principal created as a result of the decision to allow a parent to act as EA in the classroom?
3. What could be the implications in relation to the relationship of trust between management and stakeholders (school staff, parents, the supervisory officer, trustee)?
4. What are the issues that the superintendent must deal with as a result of the principal's decision to allow the parent to act as her child's EA?
5. As the superintendent, how would you approach the trustee? The principal?
6. How will the principal maintain the relationship with Alex's mother once she is removed from the classroom?

Discussion Questions on Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)

1. What personal leadership resources (cognitive, social, and psychological) does the principal demonstrate strength in? Do you agree? Elaborate?
2. With reference to the PLRs, describe the principal's demonstrated cognitive abilities (problem solving, role specific knowledge and systems thinking)?
3. What cognitive, social or psychological personal leadership resources could the principal seek to strengthen and why?

Case Study 2: Leadership for School Improvement Improving EQAO Math results

Context

The supervisory officer in this case study is responsible for programs. The board's EQAO results are lower than expected and the supervisory officer has been asked to develop an improvement plan. While there is a sense of urgency around the situation, the supervisory officer feels isolated. Other members of the senior leadership team as well as other program consultants are not supportive of the proposed improvement plan.

Background

The Sigma Pi District School Board has an enrolment of 20,000 students from diverse backgrounds including both rural and urban communities. The senior leadership team is made up of five supervisory officers of education each with their own portfolios and family of schools. The director of education is new to the school district having been hired only a few months earlier.

The supervisory officer responsible for programs presented the Board's EQAO results to the board of trustees at the September meeting. For the past several years, the Board has performed very well in EQAO compared to its statistical neighbours¹, except for flat results in the area of mathematics. This year's results show continued improvements in literacy but a dramatic drop in all levels of achievement in mathematics and, for the first time, the board is well below the provincial standard. The local paper published a full-page article outlining the board's dismal results and even provided opinions on how mathematics should be taught. The trustees are not happy.

The director of education believes in empowering his senior leaders, and wants to support the supervisory officer responsible for programs. Following the meeting with the board of trustees, the director of education meets with the supervisory officer and explains the challenge to be resolved: find strategies for improving results in mathematics.

Present situation

The supervisory officer has strong problem solving skills and knowledge of effective school and classroom practices but is not strong in all areas of the mathematics curriculum. The supervisory officer understands the need to move the system forward by improving student achievement and would like the senior leadership team to share the belief in the strength of working together. The supervisory officer recognizes the need for an intensive focus on professional development for all staff in mathematics and, within the current budget, has struggled to find the funds to ensure teachers receive the professional development they require. To make matters worse, earlier that budget year,

¹ Ontario Statistical Neighbours (OSN) is a tool that enables a dynamic analysis of school performance, demographics, and school program information.

there was a reduction in the number of program coordinators and consultants who provide instructional support to teachers.

The supervisory officer is concerned about how principals will respond to potential complaints from parents, given the news articles published by the local media. The supervisory officer has observed during school visits and in district reviews, an inconsistency in teaching practices, low student engagement, and general apathy. Staff confidence to provide strong mathematics instruction is a barrier.

After reviewing the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-being, the supervisory officer calls an emergency meeting with program coordinators and consultants in order to develop a strategy to address professional development in the area of mathematics instruction. The supervisory officer meets another challenge: not all shares the sense of urgency.

At the next senior leadership meeting, the supervisory officer requests support from the senior administrative team to reallocate funds from other budgets, as there are insufficient funds for system wide professional development at this point. The team remains silent. The supervisory officer responsible for Information Technology suggests that the focus be on the enhanced computer resources that were recently placed in the schools. No other supervisory officer offers suggestions. The supervisory officer responsible for presenting the plan for improving math EQAO results feels isolated. He is annoyed and disappointed that the team does not recognize the consequences of attaining results below the provincial standards of EQAO math results and that they are not helping with the situation. The supervisory officer responsible for programs remains silent as the director moves to the next item on the agenda dealing with parking space allocations.

The supervisory officer responsible for programs is frustrated by the lack of support from his colleagues and the director. He is at a loss personally and at a professional level, is not used to not being able to find solutions more easily and collegially. The question that is posed is how to get through this and how to create a sense of urgency around the issue of EQAO mathematics results. The supervisory officer reflects on how he will deal with this situation.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to this case study)

- Systems Thinking
 - engaging in future thinking and consequences of action or inaction
 - able to understand the dense, complex and reciprocal connections among different elements of an organization
- Resilience
 - being able to recover from or adjust to change

- Proactivity
 - being able to stimulate and effectively manage change on a large scale under complex circumstances
 - showing initiative and perseverance in bringing about meaningful change
- Problem-solving expertise
 - articulates principles and values and identifies constraint

System-level Leadership Practices

- Spend sufficient time to ensure the mission, vision and goals of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of the organization.
- Insist on ambitious goals for teaching and learning.
- Encourage collaboration in the interpretive use of data.
- Set a manageable number of precise targets for district school improvement.
- Create structures and norms within the district to encourage regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement progress within and across schools, as well as across the system as a whole.
- Align the allocation of resources with district and school improvement goals.
- Create structures to facilitate reciprocal forms of communication. These structures and norms should result in deeply interconnected networks of school and system leaders working together on achieving systems directions.
- Knowledge of effective business practices that directly affect or improve our business practices.

Reflective Questions

1. How would the supervisory officer engage the senior leadership colleagues to develop a system solution?
2. As team leader, how might this supervisory officer approach program staff to engage them more fully in the solution ensuring accountability and collaboration?
3. Since this supervisory officer is fully accountable for the outcome, in what ways can the supervisory officer engage the director of education in fostering a sense of collective responsibility and accountability?
4. As the newly appointed director how might the supervisory officer nurture productive working relationships with and among staff and stakeholders?
5. What role does the director have in collaborative implementation of the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-being?
6. As a member of the senior leadership team what is the supervisory officer's role in addressing this issue and how would the supervisory officer support school principals?
7. Would the supervisory officer's approach to this scenario be different if the supervisory officer had applied for the director's position and was not successful?

Discussion Questions on Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)

Cognitive

1. What cognitive resources has the supervisory officer demonstrated?
2. What cognitive resources does the supervisory officer need to work on?

Social & Psychological

3. What social and psychological resources will the supervisory officer need to reflect upon to get through the situation?

Overall PLRs

4. In what areas does the director of education need to focus for the development of personal leadership resources?
5. Reflecting on the Personal Leadership Resources (cognitive, social and psychological) what appear to be the needs of the senior leadership team? As director, what steps would you take to address these needs?

Case Study 3: Decision Making - Managing a School Crisis

Context

Facing a crisis in the school, the principal must make decisions that will impact the students and the school staff. Prior actions and decisions come into play and influence how the principal will deal with the situation.

Background

The current principal of Chutney High School has three years experience. This is an urban school of 750 students. The principal demonstrates strong instructional leadership skills and has worked as an educational consultant in various environments for fifteen years. The principal has a clearly focussed approach to education and has started leading the school team in this direction. The principal has committed to seeing staff succeed and grow professionally and has introduced professional learning communities (PLCs). The school staff has started showing interest and openness to the professional conversation approach. A climate of trust between and among most staff and the principal is beginning to emerge. The principal understands that change is slow and incremental and provides strong support to staff. The principal demonstrates a high level of emotional intelligence with students, parents and staff alike and is very much present within the school community. The principal is actively involved in the community as a member of the Optimist Club and is a model of community leadership.

The principal finds it difficult to strike a proper work-life balance. His children are in university, therefore leaving lots of free time to invest in the school. Long hours are spent at school during the week as well as on weekends. The principal prefers working alone and avoids delegating and distributing leadership. He is able to recognize the accomplishments of most staff members and has previously worked with some members of this staff when in the role of instructional consultant. Although there is a certain element of trust between the principal and staff, some feel that the principal demonstrates favouritism. He is always available to students, parents and to some, but not all, staff members. One of the principal's objectives is to increase the school's graduation rate by being especially present and supportive of at-risk students.

Current situation

A teacher of the cooperative education program meets with the principal to voice concerns regarding students' safety as they travel to and from co-op placements. The principal senses that the co-op teacher may only want the best students to get placements and does not want to help at-risk students. The teacher's concerns include reports of student drug use, students having trouble getting to placements, and student absenteeism, which make it seem as though the teacher's intent is to exclude at-risk students from placement opportunities. The principal feels this is the real reason the teacher has shared the concerns and doesn't investigate any further.

An employer meets with the principal to ask that more students be admitted to the co-op program. The employer's experience has shown that these placements encourage students to stay in school and graduate. Since both the principal and the employer are

members of the Optimist Club, this discussion takes place during a club meeting. Some parents have contacted the principal to say how proud they are of their child's improved achievement.

The principal has analyzed the absenteeism rate of co-op students and has noted alarming absenteeism rates for some. The principal decides to meet one-on-one with students demonstrating a high absenteeism rate and explains the importance of being on time and present at their placements.

The following week, during one of the principal's rare absences, the school secretary calls to report that one of the students in the co-op program was involved in an accident on his way to a placement and at this time there is no further information. The police have come to the school and are trying to reach the parents.

A group of students have gathered in the guidance office and it is rumoured that the student has died.

The principal must return to school to deal with this situation. The principal experiences a high level of stress while returning to school. He trusts in his ability to exercise sound judgement and to manage emotions but seriously questions his ability to deal with everyone else's emotions and how to maintain a safe and secure learning environment that is now being threatened.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to this case study)

- Optimism
 - taking positive risks
- Self-efficacy
 - persistence in the face of initial failure
- Resilience
 - recover from misfortune
- Proactivity
 - show initiative and perseverance in bringing about change
- Problem-solving expertise
 - articulates principles and values and identifies constraint

School-level Leadership Practices

- Demonstrate respect for staff, students and parents by listening to their ideas, being open to those ideas, and genuinely considering their value
- Distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities.
- Regularly encourage staff to evaluate their progress toward achieving the school's goals.
- Distribute leadership roles on selected tasks.
- Demonstrate respect, care and personal regard for students, staff and parents.

- Model responsibility, integrity and thoroughness in carrying out tasks.
- Exemplify, through their actions, the school's core values and its desired practices.

Reflective Questions

1. What next (or first) steps should the principal consider in order to address the impact of the student accident on students, staff and parents?
2. What possible solutions to the situation could the principal devise/address with the teacher of the co-op program?
3. Given the various circumstances, which are, the accident, safety issues, student engagement issues, staff agendas, how could you use your personal leadership resources to be better aligned with school priorities?
4. Based on the board transportation policies and procedures, what is the process you would follow to revise the school transportation policies/procedures for students and ensure that these are put in place on a daily basis?
5. What are the implications of this school-level situation for the system? What is the role of the supervisory officer in providing support?

Discussion Questions on Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)

1. What personal leadership resources (cognitive, social, and psychological) does the principal demonstrate strength in? Do you agree? Elaborate?
2. With reference to the PLRs, what impression do you have of the principal's demonstrated cognitive resources (problem solving, role-specific knowledge and systems thinking)?
3. Using this principal as an example, comment upon the dissonance that may be created as a result of what appears to be an imbalance between the cognitive, social and psychological personal leadership resources.

Case Study 4: Aligning budgets and structures with the district's mission, vision and goals - School Closure

Context

A supervisory officer who has very strong ties to the community must face the closure of the local school. The supervisory officer faces conflicting loyalties in regards to the employer and the community. The actions have consequences for the supervisory officer and for others.

Background

The supervisory officer has been in the role for nearly seven years. He grew up in the community and has been asked to participate in the school closure review process of St. Rupert Elementary School, the community school. The supervisory officer has been a teacher and the principal of this school and is now the school's supervisory officer. He is well known in the community as a hockey and baseball coach.

The supervisory officer knows the school board trustees very well. The local school trustee is a childhood friend.

The supervisory officer strongly believes in transparent and consultative decision-making and tries to reach consensus when making decisions. School principals thoroughly appreciate this approach. The supervisory officer models shared leadership and gives the principals quite a bit of autonomy, which may give the senior leadership team colleagues a negative impression. The supervisory officer is sometimes perceived as making decisions that are more in the interest of the community than the system.

Current situation

The local community has been impacted by the loss of the town's main employer which has caused many families to leave in order to find employment elsewhere. Since the appointment of the new director of education a year ago, the supervisory officer has been concerned that the loss of the town's main employer has resulted in a decline in the school's enrolment and therefore, a decline in the available financial resources. The director is required to implement a systemic plan to streamline board and school operations in light of this significant decrease in the budget.

For a year now, difficult discussions concerning potential school closures have been ongoing. The supervisory officer is often left to defend the need for community schools with dwindling populations to the board of trustees.

The supervisory officer is very committed to St-Rupert School, and knows it must close, even though there are many positive aspects to keeping the school open, particularly since the school has excellent academic results and was awarded the EQAO Recognition of Achievement Award last year. The nearest school is in the neighbouring community and there has been a healthy sports rivalry between the two schools for a long time.

The school board trustee has tried asking the supervisory officer questions regarding the fate of the school, but the supervisory officer remains silent. During a senior leadership team meeting, the supervisory officer learns that another school is even more at risk of losing students, but the director of education is still recommending the closure of St. Rupert School because there is room for growth in the other neighbourhood, which is more strategically located near urban centres.

The supervisory officer learns that attendance at consultation meetings regarding the potential school closure is mandatory, but that the superintendent of operations will lead the project. Following a board of trustees meeting, the director meets with the supervisory officer. The supervisory officer voices disagreement with the potential school closure. Understanding the supervisory officer's personal convictions, the director reminds the supervisory officer of the duty of a senior leader to support decisions made by the senior leadership team and insists that the supervisory officer support whatever the board of trustees decides.

At the board of trustee's subsequent Tuesday evening meeting, the director announces the consultative process and the potential closure of St-Rupert Elementary School. The local trustee meets with the supervisory officer following the meeting to discuss the recommendation and to ask why the supervisory officer hasn't spoken about the decision previously.

Personal Leadership Resources (specific to this case study)

- Ability to perceive emotions
 - recognizing one's own emotional response
- Managing emotions
 - reflecting on our own emotional response and their potential consequences
- Act in emotionally appropriate ways
 - being able to control what emotions guide our actions
- Systems thinking
 - engaging in futures thinking and consequences of action or inaction
 - being able to understand the dense, complex and reciprocal connections among different elements of an organization
- Resilience
 - recover from misfortune

System-level Leadership Practices

- Encourage trustees to focus on district policy and the achievement of the district's goals and priorities (policy governance model of trustee practice).
- Align organizational structures with the district's improvement goals.
- Encourage reciprocal forms of communication with and among schools.
- Demonstrate the importance the district attaches to its community connections.
- Develop communication systems and processes throughout the district to keep all members informed.

Reflective Questions

1. What are the consequences of this decision? Who should this information be shared with? Why should it be shared and how should it be shared?
2. Should the supervisory officer outwardly support the decision by being the lead instead of the operations supervisory officer? Why or why not?
3. In these circumstances, what key elements should be included in the board communications plan?
4. What steps are required in order to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff?

Discussion Questions on Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)

1. What personal leadership resources (cognitive, social, and psychological) does the supervisory officer demonstrate strength in? Do you agree? Elaborate?
2. With reference to the PLRs, describe the supervisory officer's demonstrated cognitive abilities (problem solving, role-specific knowledge and system thinking)?
3. Using the supervisory officer as an example, comment upon the dissonance that may be created as a result of what appears to be an imbalance between the cognitive, social and psychological personal leadership resources.