

Focusing Your Wild Mind on Your Wildly Important Work

By: Rachel Vallance, Principal

Contact: vallancer@mcsin-k12.org

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

This is my first full year as principal, and my days were a blur. I didn't know if I was managing or leading, whether I was spending my time on the "right" tasks, if assistants and other staff were being appropriately utilized. It was difficult to discern which tasks to focus on and when.

As I observed other principals, I could see that this frenzy didn't have to be my new way of life. I wanted to figure out how to focus, how to lead and what to manage. I knew that to accomplish those objectives, I needed to find out how I was currently spending my day. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to find a balance between leadership and managerial duties in my job to become a more efficient leader.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how will identifying time spent managing and leading help me understand a balance and strategy to become a more efficient leader?

Subquestions:

- Can I delegate more managerial tasks to my assistants?
- How often am I focused on a leadership task versus a managerial task?
- Am I focused on a managerial task versus leadership work?
- What could strategic planning do to help with balance?
- How can I apply The Disciplines of Execution strategies?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I started each day with a calendar for the day and week; specified the day into 20-30 minute chunks and coded each chunk. Rearranged the week as needed.

Tracked the way I spend my time and coded tasks as (M) managerial, (L) leadership or (U) unsure. Outlined strategies from The Disciplines of Execution to be implemented. Identified daily, weekly, monthly and/or yearly implementation.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, an important thing I learned is that I was spending more time leading than I previously realized. While the data show that the time leading and the time on "undetermined" are similar, the time "managing" was much lower. This was affirming to me, because during the action research, I became more aware of asking myself what I was doing and why I was doing it. Some leadership activities were pure; for example, evaluating teachers and holding post evaluation conferences. Others were mixed, such as staff meetings where there were professional development segments mixed with housekeeping topics. As I

implemented strategies learned from The Four Disciplines of Execution, I felt more confident in what I was doing, what I was delegating, and where I was leading the school.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

After completing this action research project, I have gained confidence and direction. I've always struggled with recognizing a phenomenon and not having the nomenclature for it. I found my frenzy was the same thing; I was doing what I was supposed to, just not accurately thinking of my activities as what I should have been. The implications of this knowledge is clearer focus, ability to direct my team, and long range vision defined more clearly.

This summer, my team (assistant principals and school counselors) will read The Four Disciplines of Execution. This will increase our efficiency in the matters we deal with as a group, and also extend to weekly meetings with teams of teachers. A school wide goal for next year is to decrease the achievement gap between our students of poverty and our non-poverty students. The Four Disciplines framework will be helpful in this endeavor.

Moving forward, I wonder if this framework will be one that my team can identify with and buy into, and if so, if they too will sense the increased confidence and efficiency in what they are doing.

References:

McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2016). The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals. New York: Free Press.