

School performance trajectories and the challenges for principal succession

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to use empirical data on new principals to clarify the connection between different succession situations and the challenges their successor principals face.

Design/methodology/approach – The study draws on two waves of interview data from a random sample of 16 new elementary school principals in a major urban school district in the USA.

Findings – New principals face distinct practice challenges depending on the nature of their successions. The less planned the succession, the less information and knowledge the new principal tends to possess. The more discontinuous the new administration's trajectory is with the previous administration, the greater the staff resistance that the successor principal tends to face.

Research limitations/implications – Few studies systematically examine how succession situations differ in schools that are in need of transformation vs those in need of stability. This study addresses this gap by illuminating the varied processes of succession and highlighting specific mechanisms that link these processes to different organizational trajectories.

Practical implications – For district officials, this study suggests that principals in unplanned successions need greater support in quickly gathering information about their new schools while principals in discontinuous successions need greater expertise in how to balance trust-building and accountability in their attempts to promote transformational change.

Originality/value – This study's primary value is its detailed articulation of how certain characteristics of succession situations are associated with specific types of challenges. Only studies at this level of specificity can be effective guides to practitioners and policymakers who are charged with preparing, selecting, and supporting new principals and their schools.

Keywords Principals, Leaders, Organizational change, Succession planning, Principal succession, Leadership practice, Novice principals

Paper type Research paper

In the public imagination, the principal is a prominent figure of the school community. As its designated leader, principals are both the symbolic and functional head of the school organization. Furthermore, educational research over the past several decades has confirmed that principals exert a strong effect on school performance through their influence on school-level conditions that shape instructional quality and student learning (Augustine *et al.*, 2009; Berman and McLaughlin, 1977; Bossert *et al.*, 1982; Coburn, 2005; Grissom and Loeb, 2011; Hallinger and Heck, 1996;

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Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Leithwood *et al.*, 2007; Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982; Louis and Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Purkey and Smith, 1985; Robinson, 2008; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters *et al.*, 2003).

Challenges for principal succession

Not surprisingly then, the succession of principals has an important effect on the long-run performance of the school. Organizational and educational research have shown that leadership succession creates organizational instability – for better or worse (Birnbaum, 1971; Brown, 1982; Gouldner, 1954; Grusky, 1960; Hargreaves, 2005; Kesner and Sebor, 1994; Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985). As Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) state, “In schools, the replacement of principals [...] is a disruptive event because it changes the lines of communication, realigns relationships of power, affects decision-making, and generally disturbs the equilibrium of normal activities” (p. 88).

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For schools that are improving, some organizational stability is needed to sustain progress over time. The instability caused by unplanned (or poorly planned) successions can derail the school’s efforts and limit its long-run potential (Coburn, 2003; Copland, 2003; Fink and Brayman, 2006; Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Mascall and Leithwood, 2010; Togneri and Anderson, 2002; Tyack and Cuban, 1995). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) explain that “the most central challenge for maintaining improvement in innovative schools is leadership succession. Schools and school districts can’t institutionalize their improvement efforts over time without a strong degree of leadership stability or continuity” (p. 56). Some scholars have shown that when leadership is heavily distributed throughout a school (Spillane, 2006; Spillane *et al.*, 2001), some of the destabilizing effects of principal turnover can be mitigated (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Mascall and Leithwood, 2010). To the extent that this is true, however, a change in the principal still changes the school’s configuration of relationships, expertise, and authority – with consequences for how the school functions moving forward.

On the other hand, schools that are low-performing or that have plateaued often need some organizational instability in order to “shake things up” and mobilize staff to engage in meaningful change (Child and Kieser, 1981; Stoll and Fink, 1996). The nature of the instability, however, must be well-devised if changes are to lead to improvement rather than chaos and continued underperformance. To that end, a new leader that is carefully selected and supported can create the needed jolt for a successful change in direction.

These scenarios suggest that, if we are to do a better job of improving school performance for long periods of time – an important next frontier for school reform – principal successions must be better planned to fit the intended trajectory for the school. A first step is recognizing that different intended trajectories present different challenges for successor principals. A new principal who strives to maintain the progress of an improving school tends to face challenges that are quite distinct from one whose job is to turn around an underperforming one. The challenges of succession are particularly acute for novice principals who must struggle simultaneously with transitioning into a new occupation. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to use empirical data on a random sample of novice principals in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to clarify the connection between schools’ different organizational situations and the problems of practice their new principals face. Understanding these specific connections is critical for helping us better support new principals, increase the success of transitions and, ultimately, improve many schools’ long-run organizational performance.

The paper begins by reviewing the literatures on leader succession and novice principals and then describing an existing typology of different succession situations (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Using interview data from a random sample of 16

beginning elementary school principals in the CPS, I then show how principals in different succession situations experienced different challenges that affected their ability to transition and lead effectively. Those in unplanned situations tended to face more intense levels of information scarcity while those in discontinuous situations (i.e. those promoting significant organizational change) tended to experience greater staff resistance. Next, I detail the nature of the challenges by using representative quotations from principals in each succession category. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and the implications they have for preparing and supporting new principals.

Anchoring the work

As they transition into the principalship, novice principals experience many challenges (Alvy and Coladarci, 1985; Bolam *et al.*, 2000; Daresh and Male, 2000; Draper and McMichael, 2000; Dunning, 1996; Earley *et al.*, 2011; Kelly and Saunders, 2010; Nelson *et al.*, 2008; Parkay and Hall, 1992; Spillane and Lee, 2014; Walker *et al.*, 2003; Weindling and Earley, 1987; see Hobson *et al.*, 2003 for a review). Novice principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility. Often times, beginning principals also have difficulty dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous principal. Members of the school community not only compare the new principal to the previous one but also often resist changes to the routines and culture to which they have become accustomed. And resonant with the literature on principal practice, new principals frequently have difficulty managing and prioritizing the multiple tasks expected of them. Ineffective and resistant staff members also bring significant challenges to the beginning principal. The new principal often finds that supporting, reprimanding, and counseling out these individuals is both difficult and stressful. Other more technical challenges – such as managing the budget and maintaining the school building – also loom large for new principals, as well as difficulties related to implementing new government initiatives.

In addition to these challenges, all novices that assume principalships in existing schools must face challenges related to leader succession. Organizational and educational studies on leader succession have articulated key dimensions of succession situations that affect the quality of the transition and the performance of the organization (in education: Carlson, 1961; Cosgrove, 1986; Firestone, 1990; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Hart, 1993; MacMillan *et al.*, 2004; Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985; Parkay *et al.*, 1992; Ogawa, 1995; Rowan and Denk, 1984). In the corporate literature, there is an extensive literature on leader succession that dates primarily from the 1960s onward (for comprehensive reviews, see Gordon and Rosen, 1981; Giambatista *et al.*, 2005c; Kesner and Sebor, 1994). In many of the studies, successor principals are depicted as moving through universal stages of socialization, with each stage characterized by a predominant focus or pattern for the principal's actions (Hart, 1993; Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985; Parkay *et al.*, 1992; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). The early stages generally involve challenges related to shock, survival, and personal insecurity. In the middle stages, the successor principal is depicted as trying to "fit in" and achieve role clarity while also trying to gain control and authority. In the final stages, the principal reaches some sort of professional actualization, stabilization, or integration into the school. While such depictions undoubtedly capture some prominent patterns of new principal socialization, their overemphasis on universal pathways seems unrealistic given the diversity of school conditions, student and community characteristics, principal styles, and preparation experiences that exist.

Along those lines, a key gap in the novice principal and principal succession literatures is that few works systematically examine how the types of challenges faced by new principals are affected by the intended trajectory for the school. In other words, there is limited research on how succession situations differ in schools that are in need of transformation vs schools that are in need of stability or continued progress. Understanding this connection is important for selecting and supporting new principals in ways that are most appropriate for the long-run performance of the school. Indeed, Hallinger and Heck (2011) recently encouraged researchers to pursue empirical research that develops explicit links between leadership practice and school contextual factors such as the school's trajectory (i.e. stable, declining, improving). Only then can effective improvement strategies be matched to school's particular circumstances. Hargreaves and colleague's Change Over Time? Study (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2003) is one important empirical project that views the nature of principal successions as contingent upon the intended organizational trajectory of the school. Their framework will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Because of the dearth of educational succession research that focusses on the intended organizational trajectory of the school and links it to specific challenges faced by new principals, the goal of this study is to articulate this connection and systematically describe these relationships with interview data from a random sample of novice CPS principals. Furthermore, most of the research on leader succession – particularly those in the corporate literature – tend to employ perspectives and methods that are far removed from the processes of succession (Giambatista *et al.*, 2005). The nascent literature on how to adapt school improvement strategies to different school conditions also lacks empirical work that articulates specifically how leadership processes are systematically affected by each school's performance trajectory and context. As Hallinger and Heck (2011) state, school improvement researchers in this area have thus far “only been able to offer assistance at a fairly general level of abstraction” (p. 22). Therefore, by focussing on principals' practice and using detailed interview data, another goal of this study is to better illuminate the processes of succession and to begin highlighting specific mechanisms that link succession to different organizational performance patterns. In particular, the research questions that I pursue are:

- RQ1. What prominent types of challenges do new principals face in different succession situations?
- RQ2. What is the specific nature of these challenges?
- RQ3. And at a preliminary level, what are some strategies that new principals employ to cope with these challenges?

Framework on succession planning

Based on their extensive empirical project on principal succession, the Change Over Time? Study (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2003), Hargreaves and Fink develop a framework for categorizing the main types of succession situations that they observed. This framework is based on extensive research that spanned three decades (1970s, 1980s, and 1990s) and examined educational change in eight high schools in the USA and Canada. The two key succession dimensions that they identify are: whether the succession is planned or unplanned and whether the succession is intended to establish continuity or provoke discontinuity with past directions. Based on these two dimensions, four types of succession situations emerge – planned continuity, planned discontinuity, unplanned continuity, and unplanned discontinuity

(see Figure 1). However, the two unplanned situations are ultimately merged into one group as Hargreaves and Fink (2006) observe that “in reality, most cases of succession in our research ended up being a paradoxical mix of unplanned continuity and discontinuity: discontinuity with the achievements of a leader’s immediate predecessor and continuity with (or regression to) the more mediocre state of affairs preceding the predecessor” (pp. 69-70). The strength of this typology is that it connects a critical event in an organization’s life – leader succession – with long-run organizational patterns. As mentioned, linking succession with long-run organizational trajectories is an important step toward learning to manage principal successions in ways that sustain or improve school performance over time, an important next frontier for scaling up school reform (Coburn, 2003; Datnow, 2005; Elmore, 1996; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006; McLaughlin and Mitra, 2001).

Data and methods

Overview

Data for this study comes from the Principal Policy and Practice Study (P³ Study), a project-based at Northwestern University’s School of Education and Social Policy and funded by the Spencer Foundation. The primary goal of the P³ Study is to examine the transition and on-the-job socialization of new principals. Using a longitudinal, mixed-methods design, we followed two cohorts of novice principals in the CPS for the first two years of their principalship. Cohort 1 began their principalships in 2009, and cohort 2 began in 2010.

Data collection

This particular study utilizes the data from our interviews of 16 elementary school principals from cohort 2 (see Table I). Note that all names used in this paper are pseudonyms. Using a table of random numbers, these principals were randomly selected from the population of all novice elementary school principals in the district for that year (16 = 34 percent of the 47 new principals). Findings from our study, therefore, are generalizable to the population of novice CPS elementary principals for the 2010-2011 school year. During their first year, these principals were interviewed in-depth immediately before starting the school year (time 1), three months into the school year (time 2), and at the end of the school year (time 3). Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. We developed interview protocols to ensure comparable data were collected across school principals. Time 1 interview protocols were organized around the following seven topics – views on what a good principal is, the transition into the principalship, goals for the first year, expected challenges, role in developing others, the expectations of different stakeholders, and the interviewee’s path into education and administration. Time 2 protocols were also organized around seven topics: how things are going, what has gone as expected, what has been surprising, challenges, goals, role in developing others, and the

	Discontinuity	Continuity
Planned	Planned discontinuity	Planned continuity
Unplanned	Unplanned discontinuity	Unplanned continuity

Figure 1.
A typology of
succession situations

Source: Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 62)

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Yrs as teacher	Yrs in admin	School size	Preparation route	CPS performance policy level ^a
Alejandro	M	Hispanic	10	6	Medium	Traditional	High
Carol	F	White	20	8	Large	Traditional	Middle
Charles	M	Black	5	2	Medium	Prep program	Low
Damien	M	Black	10	3	Small	Traditional	Low
George	M	White	3	1	Small	Prep program	Low
Janice	F	White	6	10	Small	Traditional	Middle
Jennifer	F	Black	14	0	Medium	Traditional	Middle
Joyce	F	Black	6	5	Small	Prep program	Low
Kara	F	Biracial/Multiethnic	12	4	Small	Traditional	Low
Kathy	F	White	17	9	Medium	Traditional	High
Laura	F	White	17	1	Large	Traditional	Low
Lori	F	White	12	6	Large	Traditional	High
Manuel	M	Hispanic	7	2	Large	Prep program	Middle
Peter	M	Hispanic	10	7	Medium	Traditional	Low
Rich	M	White	5	1	Small	Prep program	Low
Sally	F	Black	8	4	Small	Traditional	Low

Notes: All names are pseudonyms. ^aThe CPS performance level is based on Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) scores, ISAT trends, attendance rates, attendance trends, and value-added scores

Table I.
Sample of novice
school principals
for 2010-2011
school year

staff's response to the principal's leadership. In order to focus on the succession situation and its effect on the challenges that the new principal faced as he/she began the school year, this paper uses data from the first two rounds of interviews (times 1 and 2).

Data analysis

All interviews were first transcribed and then coded using NVivo 8. Data analysis involved four stages. In the first stage, for data reduction purposes, I identified all excerpts in which the principal described experiencing challenges, conflicts, tensions, and difficulties and coded these under "challenges" using NVivo (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In the second stage, I generated reports that displayed all the excerpts coded under challenges and then "open coded" these data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Another researcher and I both read and re-read these reports independently, noting salient themes and paying particular attention to succession and practice challenges. The primary analytical strategy here was inductive while informed by our reading of the succession and novice principal literatures, as reviewed above. I then conducted NVivo queries to calculate the prevalence of each challenge for each principal.

In the third stage, I created an excel chart that described the succession situation of each principal. This data came primarily from the principal interviews but were also corroborated with administrative records, school board actions, news articles, and case study field notes. Based on Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) research-based typology of succession situations, I developed two rubrics to evaluate each succession case: one for the succession's degree of plannedness and one for the succession's degree of continuity (see the Appendix). Using the information about the succession situations and the rubrics, I assigned each case a score of between -2 and +2 for the degree of plannedness, with -2 indicating that the succession occurred quickly and with little planning and +2 indicating that the new principal was specifically groomed to succeed

the previous principal. I also assigned each case a score of between -2 and +2 for the degree of continuity, with -2 indicating that the new principal intended to fundamentally change the school's trajectory and +2 indicating that the new principal intended to maintain the school's current trajectory.

Stage four involved adding the challenge codes and their prevalence to the succession chart. Using this chart, relationships between succession situations and types of challenges were examined and the assertions related to information and resistance emerged from these analyses.

Findings

For the findings section, I will begin by describing the information and resistance challenges that emerged from the data analysis and how they relate to the different succession situations described by Hargreaves and Fink (2006). I will then present a graph that depicts these patterns graphically and that shows where each of the principals in our sample was located on the graph. Lastly, I will describe each category of succession situation, using representative quotations to highlight the specific information and resistance challenges that each set of principals faced.

Information and resistance

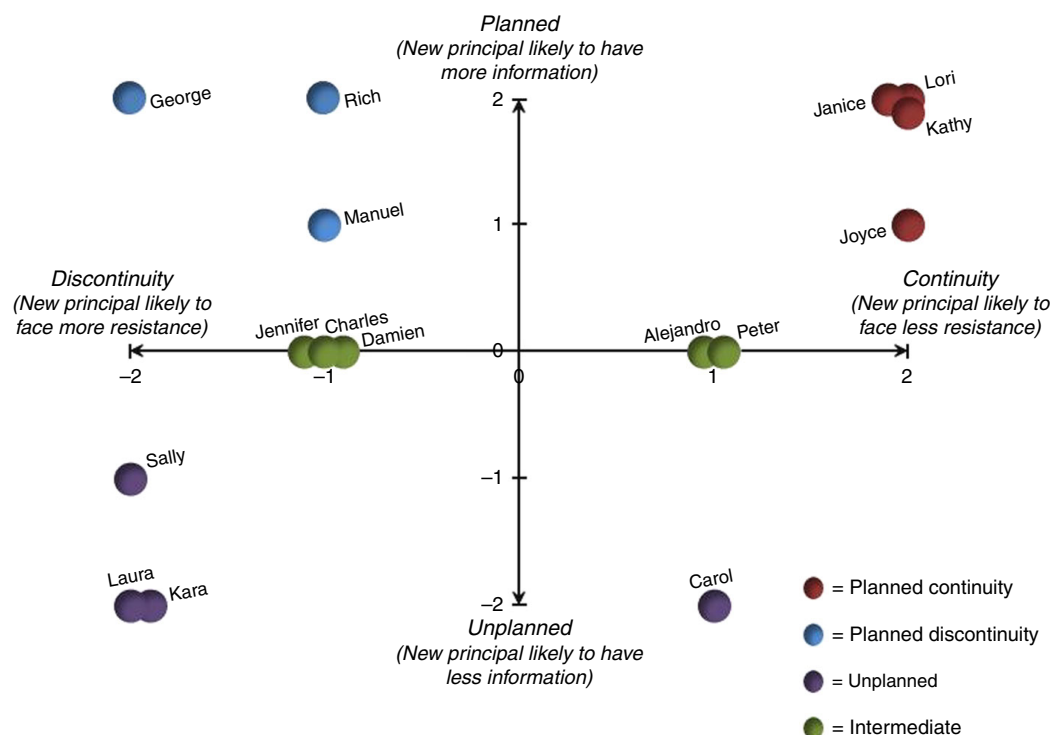
As described previously, using Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) research-based typology of succession situations, I examined the different challenges faced by a random sample of new Chicago principals during their first three months on the job. From this analysis, the themes of limited information and resistance emerged inductively and exhibited high correlations with the above typology of succession situations. I will describe these two themes generally here and then in greater detail during the description of the cases.

When a new principal enters a school, he/she faces challenges that are general to the process of transitioning into the new role of principal as well as challenges that are shaped by the particular situation at the school. The nature of the succession is one factor that affects the new principal's job in a contingent manner. If the succession is well-planned and involves significant contact with and mentorship from the previous principal, the new principal will step into his/her new role having abundant information about the school, its staff, its students and parents, and its community. Having nuanced knowledge about the quality and commitment levels of each teacher in the school or understanding the values of the local community, for instance, can provide a valuable foundation on which the new principal can begin his/her new administration. On the other hand, principals that are quickly thrown into a school and not provided much information about the school or the previous administration are faced with a more daunting succession situation. Having little information about the landscape of the school and its members, these principals usually spend a significant portion of their first year on the job scouring for information and using time-consuming trial-and-error methods to get things done (Gordon and Rosen, 1981; Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985; Nelson *et al.*, 2008; Weindling and Earley, 1987). They often end up having to "find things out the hard way."

Additionally, if the succession is intended to be relatively continuous with the previous administration, the new principal is likely to face less resistance from the school's members since routines and expectations are not being fundamentally changed. This scenario is especially true when the previous administration had a long tenure and was well-respected. If, however, the succession is intended to provoke

discontinuity with the past, the new principal will face the challenges that all change agents face – those related to the staff's will and skill (Fink and Brayman, 2006; Firestone, 1989; Parkay and Hall, 1992; Weindling and Earley, 1987). Some members of the school organization will actively resist the changes being ushered in by the new administration because their values and ways-of-life are being challenged (Gouldner, 1954; Katz and Kahn, 1966; Muncey and McQuillan, 1996; Weindling and Earley, 1987). Other members of the school may be open to change but may not have the capacity or skill to accomplish the changes being expected (Cohen and Ball, 1999; Elmore, 2004; Firestone and Corbett, 1988; Fullan, 1991). Still others may express initial eagerness for change but then begin to resist when they discover that the changes being introduced are not the ones they had wanted (Weindling and Earley, 1987). Whichever the reason, the greater the discontinuity with the status quo, the more difficult changing staff practices is likely to be.

Given the emergence of these information and resistance themes in the data, I overlaid the two dimensions onto Hargreaves and Fink's typology of succession situations, thereby highlighting the unique set of challenges experienced by new principals in different succession situations (see Figure 2). In general, the more planned the succession, the greater the information and knowledge the new principal tended to possess. The less planned the succession, the less information and knowledge the new principal tended to



Notes: Principal placements on the graph are based on 2010 data about the succession situation from principal interviews, Chicago Public School (CPS) Board actions, CPS administrative records, and newspaper articles. Based on this data, principals were each scored using a rubric for degree of planned-ness and a rubric for degree of continuity. Their scores on these two dimensions yielded their placements on the graph (all names are pseudonyms)

Figure 2.
Succession situations
and principal
challenges

possess. Greater continuity with previous administrations usually entailed less resistance from existing members of the school. Less continuity (greater discontinuity) tended to involve greater resistance. Using the rubrics described in the data analysis section, each principal was then placed at a specific location on this 2 × 2 graph.

Planned continuity

Because this succession category was planned and continuity was the goal, these new principals had the most advantaged succession situations in many ways. They tended to have substantial information and knowledge about their school and its members, and they also tended to face less resistance because they were generally pursuing a path that was consistent with the previous administration. However, despite these advantages, principals in planned continuity situations seemed to face a different kind of challenge – that of living up to their predecessor's legacy (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Gordon and Rosen, 1981; Gouldner, 1954; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Katz and Kahn, 1966; Loder and Spillane, 2005; Weindling and Earley, 1987).

In our sample, four principals had planned continuity successions (see Figure 2). Lori, Janice, and Kathy were all assistant principals under the previous principal and each had been “groomed” to become the next principal of the school. Joyce was a co-principal with another, more experienced co-principal the previous year; she too was deliberately prepared to lead the school. Additionally, each of these principals intended to continue their schools on relatively the same trajectory. Lori and Kathy's schools were already high-performing schools with high quality staffs and strong community involvement. Janice and Joyce's schools were not as high-performing, but both their schools had made large achievement gains in the prior couple years, so Janice and Joyce were seeking to continue their schools' upward trajectories.

In all four cases, the new principals were well-acquainted with their staff and knew the contours of the student body and community dynamics. Indeed, each had already built relationships with the members of those stakeholder groups. All four principals, then, began their principalship having a great deal of information about the school that they were taking over. This facilitated their ability to “hit the ground running” on many operational fronts. It also meant they were able to diagnose and strategize about where improvements and support were needed earlier than principals without as much information. For example, upon being asked what aspects of the transition were easier for her, Janice commented:

I knew the climate and the culture of the school [...] I knew the people, I knew what the school's vision was, what we were working towards, what people were dedicated to accomplishing. So I think that went a long way because I was already part of that, so I didn't have to learn it and take the time to kind of figure out the culture of the school.

Here, Janice expressed how knowing the lay of the land greatly helped her successfully transition into the principalship. She not only knew the basic contours of the school culture and had working relationships with key stakeholder groups, she also had nuanced information that helped her strategize – for instance, Janice saying she already knew “what people are dedicated to accomplishing.”

Furthermore, since these four principals pursued strategies that were largely continuous with that of the previous couple years, their staff members did not exhibit much resistance. Even though each of the new principals in this group attempted to implement some new initiatives, the fact that the changes were in-line with the existing vision increased the chances of staff cooperation. For example, when asked why the

new role would be easy for her, Joyce explained that, in the prior year, she helped counsel out teachers who were not a good fit and hire new teachers that were committed to the school's vision. As a result, this "core group of like-minded people" have readily accepted her efforts this year to continue observing and giving feedback:

Interviewer: And how have staff responded to you this year?

Joyce: Staff has responded well because going into classrooms and observing is just part of our culture here. They've been very receptive to it, to the point where if we're bogged down with other administrative tasks or duties within the school, then they'll come to us and say, "Hey, you coming in to see me this week?" [...] Like they are used to it and expect it.

For Joyce, starting her principalship with a group of people that were already committed to the school's goals and familiar with daily expectations greatly enhanced her ability to have an effective first year. Instead of spending time realigning staff visions and instituting new routines, she was able to focus immediately on her instructional priorities.

And despite Janice having a school comprised mostly of veteran teachers, she explained how the continuity from and success of the previous year's initiatives enhanced her staff's willingness to continue improving their practice. When asked how she was able to get her veteran staff to commit to additional changes, for example, Janice explained:

It was [because] last year we started implementing some changes – like our theory of action plan [with] the scaffolding and the instruction, the instructional package, and the instructional leadership teams. That was all set in place last year. So it's not all new this year. The Common Core is new this year. So they were on board with that, and I think it helped a lot that we made great progress last year. And they saw some [of] the fruits of their labor. So I think that helped them stay on board with this year and hopefully progress even more.

For Janice then, having a veteran staff did not mean opposition to her efforts as the new principal. Because the school's action plan was a continuation from the prior year and, importantly, the staff had already experienced success with it, they were already "on board" when Janice took over.

Together, the information and cooperation that accompanied the planned continuity situations increased the chances of a smooth transition for these principals. Each of the four principals in this group indicated that they were readily accepted by their school communities and that their schools were able to continue on their positive trajectories because teachers and students were already on board and knew what to do.

Despite their advantaged succession situations, the unique challenges the principals in this group did face, however, involved living up to the legacy of their predecessor. Schools in which continuity is the goal generally are schools in which the previous administration had been in place for a long time and/or was considered successful. New principals in these situations often must follow in the footsteps of someone who is both their mentor and an individual who is highly respected by the school community.

Gouldner (1954) refers to the difficulty of living up to a heroic predecessor as the "Rebecca Myth": New leaders are compared to idealized versions of their predecessor[1]. Lori, having to succeed an individual that had been the principal of one of the highest-performing schools for many years, struggled the most with this issue:

The biggest challenge is following someone who's been here for 17 years and who is thought of as a God and on a pedestal. As much as he's been my mentor, there are things that I will do differently. And I'm sure that they'll be met with some resistance initially because that's not the way he did it [...] So I think that's my biggest challenge.

The issue of living up to her predecessor's legacy was particularly acute when a situation arose involving a new teacher that Lori hired. When asked what the concern with the new teacher was, she explained:

There's a whole variety of problems. And so that came up out of a parent meeting, and it was [...] a difficult conversation to hear. Because first of all, it's my first year as the principal, and I don't want the perception out there to be that I hire poor quality teachers because it's somebody that I hired [...] And one of the things I heard was, "If this is the quality of people that she hires [...]" You know? It's very quick for people to make a judgment that it's personal – like it has to be because there's a new principal [...] But what I have to remind people is that I've been here six years and I've been in on the hiring of over 30 people. And out of the 30, maybe two were bad. And I wasn't the only one here at the time. So it's not like it's because of me.

In this case, Lori struggled with the Rebecca Myth as parents readily attributed the hiring of a poor quality teacher to a change in principals. In Lori's opinion, furthermore, the attribution of blame was somewhat distorted since she had been involved in teacher hiring well before the official change in administration.

Planned discontinuity

Principals involved in a planned discontinuity succession faced situations with an interesting blend of dynamics. On the one hand, their transition into the principalship involved support and information from key stakeholders as well as time to prepare for their first school year. On the other hand, the principal's intention was to change fundamental aspects of the school – such as its instructional quality or its culture. As change agents, therefore, they faced significant obstacles related to staff resistance and limited capacity. Three principals in our sample exemplified planned discontinuity successions. In examining their cases in detail, however, it became clear that two variants of planned discontinuity were represented: situations in which the principal was hired to turn around a chronically low-performing school; and situations in which the principal intended to take the school from "good to great."

George's case represented the first scenario. Hired by and strongly supported by his Chief Area Officer (CAO), George became the principal of a school that had been on academic probation for nearly a decade. In addition to low academic performance, this school had a reputation for student behavior problems and a punitive environment. George spent most of the summer prior to the school year collaborating with his CAO and assistant principal on their strategy for change, which entailed transforming the school culture to one that is positive and supportive of children and maintaining a "laser light focus on instruction." In that regard, George began his principalship with significant knowledge about the school and its situation. The most daunting obstacle he faced, however, was resistance to change from a veteran staff that routinely "puts down" students and was set in their ways. Three months into the school year, George described this resistance when asked "What has been a challenge so far?":

Transforming adult behavior, definitely, particularly in the realm of student relationships and interactions. There's a fairly good number of staff members [...] that put down kids. They verbally berate them, say not outright derogatory things, but like call 'em the "Special Ed kids." Things like that. So the changing adult behavior, which I knew was gonna be a challenge. The hardest thing to change is values and beliefs, and it's really values and beliefs transformation that those people will have to go through to get on board with what needs to happen.

Here, George acknowledged that transforming the way his staff members interacted with students had been difficult. At the same time, he appeared to have been prepared for this sort of resistance, already recognizing that it was values and beliefs that underlied this resistance and knowing that changing adults at such a deep level is difficult. Indeed, in other parts of the interview, George conveyed that his preparation program and CAO specifically prepared him to expect and handle this sort of resistance.

Rich and Manuel's cases represented the second scenario. Both principals entered schools with significant time and support for their transition – Rich from the district office and Manuel from the former principal and local school council. Rich's school was a turnaround situation; it made significant improvements in its first few years of intervention but had recently plateaued in performance[2]. Manuel entered a school in which almost 90 percent of the students had been meeting standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test. Over the years, therefore, the staff had become complacent. In both cases, the resistance challenge these principals faced was twofold. They first had to convince a complacent staff that change was necessary and then had to motivate them to enact that change. When asked three months into the school year how things were going, Rich described the challenge of motivating a complacent staff to improve:

A lot of people are feeling overwhelmed. A lot of people are feeling like they are not that excited about all of this. Several people I think fall into a category of "I really feel like I was doing fine until Rich got here, and the school was fine until Rich got here. And now it doesn't seem like we're fine." And I think it is a very difficult thing to do, to come in as a new leader in a situation where for the most part people feel like everything has been okay [...] The reality here is the way things have been going was probably about right for the first phase of the school's turnaround [but] to get to the next level, not quite right. So my difficulty is striking the balance of building relationships and making the case for how we need to work differently now to get to where we want to go.

The sort of resistance Rich faced had complex dynamics. Resistance in the form of complacency required him to shake things up, to convince staff members that, in fact, everything was not ok. As a new leader, however, he had to destabilize their confidence while simultaneously building a relationship with them. Three months into the school year, Rich found himself struggling to find the right balance between the two.

Similarly, Manuel articulated the challenge of changing his staff's frame of reference in order to convince them that their school, Hickory, can and should improve:

And my goal [...] is to have 50% of the students *exceeding* the standards. People are understanding that [...] we have a good school, [but] we can move the school into greatness [...] One of the biggest misconceptions that they had is that they used to compare themselves to Spruce [and] to Smoketree. And those are magnet schools [...] It was like, "Well when we compare ourselves to Smoketree or 20 of these schools, we're doing almost as good as they are, and we're a neighborhood school [...]" So at some point I say, "Ok, you know what? Let's look for neighborhood schools that were performing just as well as Hickory but now they're performing in the 90s and 100s [...]" I found four of those schools. I showed them the reality of those schools and where the schools were two or three years ago and [...] what the principals did and established to move the schools to where they are right now: data, reflecting on their practice, and making sure every single student received the education that they deserve.

Manuel's case also illustrated resistance in the form of complacency. At Hickory, teachers claimed excellence by seeing themselves as almost on par with the city's elite

magnet schools. Manuel's strategy for motivating them to greater heights involved changing this frame of reference. He attempted to change the measuring stick to one based on the percentage of students exceeding the standards and to make neighborhood schools that were excelling on that measure into the new reference group.

In all three planned discontinuity cases, regardless of whether the goal was to upright a low-performing school or to take a functioning school to the next level, the new principals found themselves torn between, on the one hand, trying to foster trust and cooperation and, on the other hand, using formal accountability measures to overcome resistance and establish authority. For example, George told us that his staff members "want to revert back to the way they've been doing it." He then described his attempts at addressing that resistance:

So far [...] you could classify it as soft management. It's been conversations in the hallways, it's been sidebar conversations, it's been listening during impromptu team meetings and conversations there. It's been some emails saying you're not meeting expectations as far as what the routine should be [...] I haven't written anybody up yet or done the formal discipline as far as like the employee code of conduct. That's the next step, and it should've happened after Thanksgiving. I didn't get there yet. But it's gotta happen because there's still people that are not adapting and changing and are resistant.

In his attempts to modify the routines and attitudes of his staff members, George first tried a "soft management" style because he hoped this sort of strategy would motivate them to change but not damage the relationship he was simultaneously trying to build with them. When some individuals continued to resist the changes, however, he hesitantly considered the next step, which involved formal accountability channels. His hesitancy highlights the challenge that new principals face when attempting to improve a school. These principals usually understand that they need to earn their staff's cooperation in order to achieve the improvements that they envision. When some individuals continue to resist, however, change is being halted, and the new principal must then decide whether forcing some level of change – even if it strains relationships – is preferable to no change at all. Interestingly, George told us that, after being on the job for a few months, he now understands why the previous principal had eventually resorted to following teachers around with a clipboard, marking down their every infraction. Although he still planned to avoid such an extreme approach, he said that he at least understands now why his predecessor felt like she had no other choice. George's situation suggests that, when faced with a very resistant teacher culture, even intentions to be discontinuous with the past may trend toward continuity.

Like George, Rich began his principalship trying to promote change without alienating his staff. And like George, he continued to face resistance and thus found himself in the same dilemma with regard to formal accountability. He stated:

One of my biggest struggles has been coming in as a new person – not necessarily wanting to come in with a hammer but needing to build in some real accountability. So I think at this point I've allowed there to be too many question marks around, "Well, what happens if I don't do what he says?" So I would say, at this point, the implementation of the vision that I've laid out for the school has been okay. Some people are really trying to do it. Some people are waiting around to see what's going to happen if they don't [...] This next phase in the year [...] needs to be characterized a great deal by some real accountability measures for people, some along the lines of, "Look, you haven't been meeting the expectation [...] [or] I don't see movement in that direction. Is there a problem that we need to address?" And for some people, "You really haven't been meeting expectations, and I think that's leading to the decision that

this is probably mutually not a good fit.” [...] There needs to be a real sense of, “Yeah, he actually really does mean what he says, and the expectations are not going to change. It wasn’t just, he came with the vision and he’s going to eventually come around to whatever I want to do.”

While Rich’s case also illustrated the tension between building relationships and using “the hammer” to force change, his case highlights another dimension – the organizational consequences of allowing his authority as a new principal to be challenged. Rich was aware that change could be halted not only through direct resistance but also through the destruction of his authority. If staff members see that they can disregard his expectations without suffering consequences, his authority and thus one of the means for promoting his new vision might disintegrate like a house of cards (Metz, 1978; Weber, 1958). If, however, he responds to the buildup of “too many question marks” with strategic accountability measures and counseling out, he might be able to bolster his authority and vision. But, if he relies too heavily on these measures, he risks alienating his entire staff, thereby losing the goodwill and the legitimacy he needs for promoting change (Barnard, 1938; Blankenship, 1980; Bucher and Stelling, 1980; Dornbusch and Scott, 1975; Rowan, 1990; Smylie and Perry, 1998). Even under planned conditions, then, the task of a new principal attempting to create change amongst a resistant staff is a difficult and delicate balancing act.

Unplanned

In many ways, the principals entering unplanned situations faced the most daunting transitions. With limited time and support prior to their entry, these individuals were thrown into the principalship blind; they spent a significant portion of their first year just trying to figure out the basic contours of their school. Technical tasks such as how to assign teachers to position numbers, facility issues such as how to fix the boiler, and personnel matters such as which staff members are capable and trustworthy are all examples of items that principals in these scenarios struggled to figure out. Having to spend so much time orienting themselves to these basic items made running the school, let alone improving it, a formidable task.

Four cases in our sample exemplified unplanned successions – Kara, Sally, Laura, and Carol. All were chosen as principals by district administrators when the previous principal was removed for either misconduct or poor performance, and all had very limited time between being offered the job and starting it. (Indeed, Sally and Carol were only given a few days to prepare.) And because the previous principals were all removed under negative conditions, all four of these new principals were unable to communicate with and get support from the previous principal. One key obstacle that all four of these principals struggled with as a result of their unsupported transition involved technical systems that affected staff positions and the budget. In their interviews, they articulated how having to figure these things out hampered their ability to get into classrooms and improve instruction. Laura described some of these frustrations when asked how the role of principal would be difficult for her:

All these not knowing the systems, that has been challenging. I worked for days on this position thing – this filling positions and who’s cut and who’s able to come back. And so that one system has sort of halted everything else [...] That’s been challenging and frustrating because it’s keeping me from getting the instructional piece done that I want to get to, because the scores have been stagnant here. So I wanted to make action plans and how are we going to

monitor progress. I wanted to do all that kind of stuff, but I have to get people in place first. So I'm sort of starting the year out a little behind because we had no planning time.

Laura was able to articulate specifically how having “no planning time” and thus being unfamiliar with the school’s technical systems had a cascading effect on her other duties. Without knowing who was coming back and how to assign them to positions, she could not move forward on any of the other technical systems. And without setting everything up in the technical systems, she could not focus on her instructional leadership duties, including creating action plans and monitoring progress. And without being able to focus on instruction, she could not help the school raise its stagnant scores. In other words, Laura articulated how her unplanned succession situation substantially delayed her ability to improve the school.

It is not only technical systems that principals in unplanned situations often struggle to figure out. The social-political landscape of the school was also a key dimension that these principals had to assess before they could focus on their goals for the school. When asked about her school staff, Laura said, “Just a lot of politics I don’t know about yet. I really don’t know who has an agenda, who’s really just here to be a thoughtful teacher, and who’s here to sabotage others [...] So that’s gonna be a challenge, knowing what to believe, how it’s gonna affect student learning, and does it need to be dealt with now.” For Laura, not knowing the political dynamics at her school added an extra layer of difficulty to her job as new principal. Without knowing who to believe and who to trust, Laura eventually found herself stepping on landmines of which she was unaware. For instance, she slowly discovered that due to the nepotism of her predecessor, there were many personal relationships amongst her staff: best friends, couples, sisters, and cousins. Laura realized later that “if I have to discipline a sister, the other one’s gonna be on her side, and then they’re gonna be with their groups of friends.” And with her local school council, she did not fully understand the conflict amongst its members and so unwittingly offended one faction. She found out later that this faction had secretly been retaliating by reporting her to the district office whenever she did not follow precise local school council procedures. Once again, being unfamiliar with her school hampered her ability to improve the school. Instead of uniting the staff and mobilizing them toward the common purpose of school improvement, Laura wound up unintentionally igniting conflicts and making enemies because she was unaware of the political landscape. Missteps such as these, which are a function of insufficient information, can permanently compromise the effectiveness of a new administration.

While the principals in unplanned situations all struggled with a lack of information, some found more efficient ways of overcoming the obstacles than others. Sally, for instance, recognized the disadvantage she faced because of her situation and immediately took steps to gather critical information through the means and resources available to her. As soon as Sally began her job at Redspire School, she met individually with each of her teachers and asked them what their experiences at Redspire had been, what their vision for the school was, and what their strengths as teachers were. In the following excerpt, she also explained how she reached out to her contacts for help:

It was like a storm just happened and when I got there, everybody’s calling, “Okay Miss Sally, you’re the new principal. We need you to do this, we need you to do that, you need to go to this meeting on this day, we need you to sign this.” Like everybody’s in here and it just took a lot of breathing, a lot of calling and relying on colleagues. Sometimes you have that problem too,

some people are isolated, they don't want to ask for help. I had to call people who've been doing this for a few more years or more: "Please come over here and help me!" Help me get this done and that way, once I know it, then I can tuck it away as something learned. But what I didn't know, I had to reach out for help. And some people will spend a lot of time trying to figure it out themselves without asking. And because I was a citywide administrator, I know a lot of people and so I was able to call and network with people. "Hey, call me. Answer this question for me." And so that helped.

Here, Sally illustrated how overwhelming her first few weeks were because of the unplannedness of her transition. Instead of spinning her wheels trying to gather information on her own, however, Sally used the social capital she had built as a citywide administrator to speed up the information gathering process. Her methods suggest that having a network of contacts spanning a wide range of expertise can be critical for new principals, especially those with unplanned transitions (Daresh and Male, 2000; Earley *et al.*, 2011; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Parkay and Currie, 1992; Weindling and Earley, 1987).

While all four of these principals faced issues related to limited information due to their unplanned succession situations, they varied with respect to the degree of continuity or discontinuity they intended to bring to the school. Those principals that also tried to significantly change their schools not only faced the challenge of limited information but also the challenge of staff resistance. Laura and Kara, who became principals at low-performing schools, exemplified principals in that situation. For example, a group of Laura's staff members enlisted the teachers' union to help them defy the change efforts. Kara, on the other hand, described the resistance to her new instructional program and implicated the high principal turnover at her school as one reason for this pushback (Gordon and Rosen, 1981; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2003; Macmillan, 2000; Macmillan *et al.*, 2004; Mascall and Leithwood, 2010). She explained:

[The teachers are implementing the new program], at different levels and a couple pushbacks [...] The pushbacks are coming from a couple of teachers [...] that have been here for years and [...] I'm the fourth principal here in the past like five years. And so those sort of pushbacks of will I still be here or "I don't wanna do it because I'm used to doing it this way" [...] I'm like, does everything have to be challenged?

Here, Kara explained how being the fourth principal in five years has led some teachers to wonder whether she will "still be here" long enough to make it worthwhile for them to invest energy in changing. Based on Kara's remarks, it appears that high administrator turnover has fostered an attitude of resistance in some teachers, as a way for them to preserve personal stability and conserve energy in the face of organizational turmoil. Unfortunately, many troubled schools suffer from frequent administration changes (Griffith, 1999); as a result, schools most in need of change are often the ones that also develop cultures of resistance (Fink and Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2003; Macmillan *et al.*, 2004; Mascall and Leithwood, 2010).

Intermediate cases

The remaining five cases in our sample fell at various other points along the planned-unplanned and continuity-discontinuity dimensions (see Figure 2). Each of these principals was hired by the school's local school council prior to the school year and had at least some contact with the previous principal during the transition period. None of them, however, was hired from within the school (i.e. were not "groomed" to become that school's principal) nor did any of them have significant contact with the previous

principal. As such, these five principals all fell at some middle point along the planned-unplanned dimension. As for the amount of discontinuity that the principal expected to make, Jennifer, Charles, and Damien all attempted to make some fundamental changes. All three of their schools were on probation when they assumed the principalship. Alejandro and Peter took the helm at schools that were already relatively high-performing. While they each still tried to make changes, their cases fell more on the continuity end of the scale since they intended to preserve a significant part of the status quo. In general, those on the discontinuity end of the scale faced more resistance from their staffs. And since all of their successions were not wholly planned, they all faced some areas in which they had limited information.

Discussion and conclusion

From this study of new elementary school principals in the CPS, it is evident that new principals face distinct problems of practice depending on the nature of their transitions. The more planned the succession, the greater the amount of information about the school and its members that the new principal is likely to have. And the more continuous the intended trajectory is for the school, the less resistance the new principal is likely to face. These patterns mean that principals entering unplanned situations are likely to have significant gaps in the information and knowledge they need to lead the school. And principals intending to alter the school in ways that are significantly different from the previous administration are likely to experience staff resistance due to either will or limited skill.

While these findings are not necessarily surprising, what is particularly valuable is the detailed articulation of how certain prominent characteristics of succession situations (i.e. degree of unplannedness and discontinuity) are associated with specific types of challenges. Only studies at this level of specificity can be effective guides to practitioners and policymakers who are charged with preparing, selecting, and supporting new principals and their schools. For instance, principals in discontinuous situations often struggle to find the right balance between, on the one hand, building relationships and cooperation with their new colleagues and, on the other hand, using formal accountability measures to promote change amongst resisters. Relying too much on one or the other can have important organizational consequences: Not using any accountability measures may lead to resisters and potential resisters ignoring the mandates to change while relying too much on them may lead to alienation and the spread of retaliatory resistance. A prudent strategy may be for new principals in change situations to rely as much as possible on building relationships and fostering change through motivation and support. To the extent that resisters remain, strategic use of accountability measures may be needed to limit detractors and signal the principal's commitment to change. These findings resonate with the literature on new principal socialization, which emphasizes the importance of new principals' building trust (Hart, 1993; Kelly and Saunders, 2010; Northfield *et al.*, 2011; Parkay and Hall, 1992; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006), and the literature on leadership for turning around schools (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke, 2006), which emphasizes the need to hold people accountable in order to build a unified and change-oriented staff. The key insight from this study, however, is that successor principals in discontinuity situations find themselves in a particularly difficult bind, being strongly wedged between both the need to develop trust and the need to ensure rapid change in a stagnant environment.

As for principals thrown into unplanned situations, an important first step is recognizing that limited information is likely to be a significant hindrance to making

effective decisions, accomplishing goals, and uniting the staff. As such, new principals in these situations should prioritize developing information-gathering channels and be willing to rely heavily on them at the beginning of their tenure. For instance, new principals in unplanned successions should be prepared to use their existing networks to gather information (i.e. mentors, fellow principals, district personnel, former colleagues, etc.). Talking to as many stakeholders as possible in their first few weeks on the job will also help the new principal get up to speed. The evidence from this study suggests that information-gathering is a critical first step for a principal with an unplanned transition; without sufficient information, a new principal may unwittingly make decisions that permanently compromise the goodwill of their staff or may become bogged down in fighting fires that significantly delay their ability to improve the school. While existing research highlights the importance of information-gathering for new principals (Gordon and Rosen, 1981; Miskel and Cosgrove, 1985; Nelson *et al.*, 2008; Weindling and Earley, 1987), this study adds to the literature by emphasizing that this task is even more critical for principals thrown into unplanned situations.

At a district or policy level, the findings from this study suggest that recognizing the different circumstances under which novice principals begin their tenure is important for better tailoring support and increasing the success of transitions. Specifically, unplanned transitions should be reduced as much as possible. To the extent that some unplanned successions are unavoidable, districts should provide additional expertise and support to those principals in order to compensate for the information disadvantages associated with the situation. These might include a more structured transition process that helps successor principals, especially novice ones, get to know each key stakeholder group right at the outset of the transition. For instance, districts can support these principals by facilitating meetings with each key group (i.e. teacher and staff representatives, union leaders, community representatives, parent leaders, and students). These principals could also be assigned specialized coaches who support them on-site for the first few weeks of the transition, helping the principals understand and get their technical systems up and running quickly (Strong *et al.*, 2003; Villani, 2006; The Wallace Foundation, 2007). To the extent that districts do not have the resources to provide such coaches, an alternative or supplemental strategy would be to enhance these principals' information networks through professional development or networking events that allow principals to meet peers and district support personnel (Daresh and Male, 2000; Earley *et al.*, 2011; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Parkay and Currie, 1992; Weindling and Earley, 1987). While such efforts at building principals' social capital may not be as efficient as coaches in supporting unplanned principals' immediate needs, they might offer additional benefits such as providing camaraderie and long-term support. As for discontinuity situations, districts and school boards should either select individuals that can be effective change agents or provide targeted professional development to enhance that skill. Providing special change agent coaches can be one way to bolster support for new principals in this situation (The Wallace Foundation, 2007). Additionally, districts should consider placing new leadership teams in planned discontinuity schools rather than expecting a sole principal to accomplish the task (Chirichello, 2003; Eckman, 2006; Gronn, 2003; Grubb and Flessa, 2006; Spillane, 2006; Thomson, 2009). Given the short time-frame for turnaround results that is expected in this era of accountability and given that staff resistance is one of the most difficult obstacles for new principals to overcome, a team approach may help overcome the intensity and diversity of obstacles that characterize planned discontinuity situations. Both the coaches and the leadership team approach require those that have expertise in motivating teachers and, if necessary, counseling them out.

In terms of research, the primary next step for this study is to explore principals' and districts' various strategies for dealing with information scarcity and resistance challenges and to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. And, as this study focusses on novice principals, future studies should also examine how experienced principals transferring to new schools handle the unique challenges presented by their succession situation. Another next step for this work is to include other stakeholders' perspectives about the succession process – such as staff, students, parents, and community members. Finally, we also need an examination of principal succession in high schools – which are usually larger and organizationally more complex than elementary schools – to extend the knowledge base on succession challenges.

Overall, district leaders and policy makers should recognize that leader succession is a critical event in the life of an organization. Whether an innovative school is able to sustain its progress or a low-performing school is able to transform hinges critically on whether the succession process is adequately managed. Years of progress can be erased simply because of a poorly managed succession. By using a framework that highlights key features of succession situations and links them to specific types of challenges and support needs, district leaders can begin increasing the success of transitions across many different schools – thereby helping not only to scale up reform but also to sustain it.

Notes

1. The Rebecca Myth is in reference to a book by Daphne DuMaurier. In the book, a woman marries a widower but finds it difficult to live up to the memory of his first wife, Rebecca. Rebecca's virtues are widely extolled, more so than when she was alive.
2. In a turnaround situation, the district attempts to "turn around" an academically underperforming school by replacing all or most of the school staff. Students, however, are allowed to remain in the school.

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Challenges for
principal
succession

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(The Appendix follows overleaf.)

Table AI.
Rubrics for
evaluating
principals'
succession situation

Discontinuity-continuity rubric

- 2 Principal intends to change many fundamental aspects of the school, with the intention of turning around the school's trajectory
- 1 Principal intends to change several fundamental aspects of the school, with the intention of substantially altering the school's trajectory
- 0 Not assigned
- +1 Principal intends to change very few fundamental aspects of the school, with the intention of keeping the school mostly on the same trajectory
- +2 Principal intends to preserve the fundamental aspects of the school (perhaps just a few small or cosmetic changes), with the intention of keeping the school on the same trajectory

Unplanned-planned rubric

- 2 Principal's transition to the principalship was unplanned, with very little time to prepare and very little/no contact with the previous principal or with the members of the school community prior to or during the transition
 - 1 Principal's transition to the principalship was more unplanned than planned, with little time to prepare and little contact with the previous principal or with the members of the school community prior to or during the transition
 - 0 Principal's transition exhibited a balance of unplanned and planned elements, with some time to prepare and some contact with the previous principal and/or with the members of the school community prior to and during the transition
 - +1 Principal's transition to the principalship was more planned than unplanned, with fairly substantial time to prepare and fairly substantial contact with the previous principal and/or with the members of the school community prior to and during the transition
 - +2 Principal's transition to the principalship was planned, with extensive time to prepare and extensive contact with the previous principal and/or with the members of the school community prior to and during the transition
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About the author

Dr Linda C. Lee recently completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy and is now a Researcher in The University of Texas at the Austin's Educational Administration Department. Her work centers on schools as organizations, educational reform, and new principals. Specifically, she is interested in scaling up and sustaining education reform by understanding different organizational contexts and then tailoring reforms to those contexts. Dr Linda C. Lee can be contacted at: LLee654@austin.utexas.edu

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