

## CASE 10—Guide to Analysis

### Managing From the Middle

#### Key Concept: Leading Among Peers and Principals

This case highlights the challenges of team leadership in a school where there are many new teachers who are still building their curricular and instructional expertise. In this case, the administrative team designed and facilitated the school's data team meetings and tried to draw on available teacher expertise to enhance team learning. This approach, however, created tensions among staff members and required some teachers to lead "from the middle" by trying to advance improvements with both teachers and administrators. Is this the most effective approach to team leadership in this case? What are the challenges and opportunities of managing from the middle?

#### Your Facilitator

**Wait!** It would be very, very difficult to gain any appreciable benefit from your expenditure of time and energy by attempting to conduct this analysis and its series of exercises without a facilitator. You *need* to appoint someone (it can be a team member) as a designated facilitator. This is not necessarily your team leader. This person will not be your "boss." But this person *will* be responsible for:

- Copying and distributing to all participants copies of the Case and Case Analysis and all handouts
- Organizing role-plays (appointing time keepers and observers, where indicated)
- Moving the process along and staying on track

**Psst! Facilitators:** Read all the activity directions as if they applied to you.

**Psst! Team members:** You, too.

#### Materials Needed

Enough printed copies of the following to distribute to all team members:

- The Case and Guide to Analysis
- Worksheet—Just the Facts!
- Handout—The Art of Managing Up
- Chart paper and markers

## A. Analyzing the Case (20 minutes)

### Step 1: Read the Case

Distribute the teaching case, and have all team members read it through, underlining or highlighting pieces of information that they think are significant to understanding the case.

### Step 2: Establish the Facts of the Case (25 minutes)

As a whole group, make a list on chart paper of the significant *facts* of the teaching case. Include what you know about each team member. Try to withhold judgment, inferences, or evaluation, and come to agreement about what happened.

- a. *Purpose:* The purpose of this initial activity is to establish the facts of the case to support well-grounded follow-up discussion and reflection.
- b. *Directions:* Work in teams of two, or preferably three, to complete the Worksheet—Just the Facts! (Figure C10.3). In the middle column, brainstorm descriptive evidence from the case for each category. Avoid terms like *good*, *bad*, *ineffective*, or other judgmental words; only include facts and evidence from the case. Refer back to the case for specific details as you complete the chart. In the next column, form some inferences from the evidence. What might you reasonably infer from the evidence you have listed?
- c. *Suggestions:*
  1. Appoint a timekeeper, and work efficiently to pool and verify your knowledge of the facts. It should take only four to five minutes, on average, to complete each row in the chart.
  2. For greater interaction, *enlarge the table onto one or two pieces of chart paper* and ask groups to work with markers at the wall to complete a visual display of facts and inferences.

**Very Important:** When we say *facts* we mean just that—you must stick to the facts ONLY. There is a huge temptation, when analyzing other teachers' interactions, for teachers to voice *opinions* such as "She talks too much during the meeting" or "She's not a very good teacher." These are not *facts*, and negative comments such as these

are counterproductive. The group should consciously steer away from such comments and instead either ask questions such as “Does she allow other voices to be heard?” or offer statements based on *evidence* such as “She says \_\_\_\_\_, but then she does \_\_\_\_\_.”

If teachers feel they will be attacked for opening up their practice for other teachers to view, they simply will not do it. Making practice public is a risky proposition, and part of your challenge as a case analyst is to pretend that the teachers you are talking about are right there in the room with you.

## B. Exploring the Dilemma

(Note: You can choose one or more of these activities or conduct them in sequence in about an hour and a half.)

This sequenced activity includes: (1) a small-group reading (Figure C10.4—The Art of Managing Up) and discussion to explore the concept of managing up and its potential usefulness in this case, (2) a fish bowl role-play, and (3) a whole-group debrief and discussion to consider the challenges and usefulness of managing up in practice.

### Step 1: Small-Group Reading (20–25 minutes)

In this activity, participants get into small groups and use the following guidelines to explore a brief reading about a leadership strategy from the business literature: The Art of Managing Up, Figure C10.4.

#### *Procedure*

- a. Form groups of three to four.
- b. Assign a group facilitator and a timekeeper. Distribute copies of the reading.
- c. Individuals have *four to five minutes* to read and mark up the their text noting one- to three-line passages
  - with which they **agree**,
  - with which they would **argue**, and
  - behind which they feel the author holds important **assumptions**.<sup>1</sup>
- d. The first person then reads *one* of his or her marked passages, noting whether this represents an agreement, argument, or

assumption, and has up to *one minute* to explain his or her reasoning or response to the passage.

- e. In turn, each of the other members of the group then has up to *one minute* to respond and to build on the previous comments as the other members of the group listen.
- f. This four- to five-minute cycle continues around the group, with each person having a turn to read and share a response to a passage, until the final five minutes. The facilitator should remind group members not to talk unless it is their turn, and the timekeeper should prompt the group when it is time to move on.
- g. The facilitator should then conduct a quick debrief of the discussion during the *final three to five minutes* and focus on the following two questions:
  1. What was the most important idea that the discussion helped you consider?
  2. In what ways was the discussion protocol difficult or frustrating? In what ways was it helpful?

## **Step 2: Fish Bowl Role-Play (50–60 minutes)**

In this case study, 5th-grade teacher Hillary agreed to attend the administration's open office hours, at her colleague Michelle's request. Considering the concept of managing up and the related strategies, how should Hillary use this time? What, if any, issues should she discuss, and how should she raise them with her administrators? How should Deborah, the principal, use this conversational opportunity to advance the Grade 4–5 data team's work and outcomes?

In this activity, some volunteers role-play while the rest of the group observes. Following the role-play, the group discusses the complexity and considerations of managing up to gain improved team performance and outcomes. To close the activity, the role-players reflect on their intentions and challenges while they enact the role-play.

### ***Procedure***

- a. *Invitation* (3 minutes): First, solicit four volunteers to play Hillary (5th-grade teacher leader), Michelle (5th-grade teacher colleague), Deborah (principal), and Clarisse (assistant principal).

- b. *Preparation* (15 minutes): Hillary and Michelle have 10 minutes to talk together privately to decide which issues they will discuss at the open office hours and which managing-up strategies they will use to achieve improvements for their data team work. Concurrently, Deborah and Clarisse talk together about issues they would like to discuss with Hillary and Michelle and what kinds of managing-down strategies they will use to achieve improvements for the Grade 4–5 data team.

All role-players should be prepared to discuss their intended topics and managing-up and -down strategies during a debrief following the role-play.

Meanwhile, the other participants have 5 minutes to quietly set up the role-play space to form an inner circle of four chairs facing each other and enough chairs around that inner circle to accommodate those who are observing. They then sit in those surrounding chairs. Half of the group turns and talks quietly with a partner about Questions 1 and 3 below, and the other half turns and talks about Questions 2 and 3. It may help to take notes during the conversation. Partner talk continues until it is time for the role-play to begin.

1. As an informal teacher leader, what can **Hillary** do to strengthen the data team's work, both in and away from the team meeting context?
  2. What is the single most powerful change that **Deborah** can make in her leadership of the data team to improve the team's work and outcomes?
  3. Which of these issues do you **anticipate** the role-players may try to address in their open office hours role-play?
- c. *Role Play* (10–15 minutes): Participants use what they know about their characters from the case study to remain in character while trying to use managing-up or -down strategies to gain improvements for the Grade 4–5 data team during an open office hours conversation. While those in the inner circle role-play, those on the outside remain silent and try not to react with facial expressions, gestures, or sounds. Observers may want to jot down notes for later discussion.

### **Step 3: Facilitated Large-Group Debrief and Discussion (15–20 minutes)**

A group facilitator frames a discussion around two topics:

- As observers, what managing-up or -down strategies did you observe, and how did they seem to affect the conversation and outcomes of the data team's work?
- As role-players, what did you notice about trying to implement the managing-up and -down strategies? What was challenging, what was useful, and what was surprising?

### **C. Reflect and Connect (15 minutes)**

The following questions may be used for free writing, partner reflection, or small- or large-group discussion. Think about ways that you manage up and down in your school or district.

- What *personal, interpersonal, and organizational* factors **facilitate** your efforts to manage up and down?
- What factors **inhibit** your efforts to manage up and down?
- What specific strategies do you observe others using to manage up and down?
- What benefits *and* challenges arise as a result of these activities?

### **D. What Do We Do Now? (10 minutes)**

Managing up is the process of consciously working with your supervisors or organizational leaders to ensure positive results for you, them, and the organization. Managing down is the process of consciously working with your peers or with others lower in the organizational hierarchy to ensure positive results for you, them, and the organization. It's all about fostering win-win-win conditions.

Choose one manage-up and one manage-down strategy that you will work to develop. Identify the specific places or events where you can begin to implement these strategies during the next two weeks. What will you need to learn or practice to use these strategies? What support do you need to be successful with them? Consider the risks that you might face in implementing them. What might go wrong? How can you either avoid or respond to these challenges?

Alongside managing up, the business literature also references managing down and managing sideways. Based on the types of strategies shown here for managing up, we can surmise the kinds of strategies that may be important in managing down or sideways. In fact, many of the managing-up strategies can be translated to influence supervisors, colleagues, students, and parents. They are simply effective moves for building trusting working relationships and accomplishing shared goals.

## Reference

1. This discussion format is a combined form of the Three A's Protocol and the Last Word Protocol: <http://www.nsrffharmony.org>