

Results-Based Management and School Principals HRM Training Needs

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Abstract

This research aimed to identify HRM training themes deemed most important for new principals following the implementation of a recent accountable school result-based management system in the Province of Quebec, Canada. The research favored a mixed exploratory methodology. It took place in nine Quebec's volunteered school boards and was carried out in two phases. At first, semi-structured individual and group interviews were conducted with forty-four key informants from nine school boards. Then, a questionnaire was developed and administered to 375 principals and vice-principals drawing on the results of these interviews. Data were analyzed using a theoretical framework based primarily on Runhaar's HRM practice "domains" and Buller and McEvoy's HRM practice levels. A major bundle of practices considered by principals as being at the heart of their most important training needs relate to staff professional practices supervision. Professional Development, Work Design, and Staff Selection and Induction practice domains complete an operational and integrated framework presenting a singular vision of processes related to school human resources management.

Keywords: Principals' HRM practices, HRM training needs, AMO theory, result-based management, leadership, school cultural change

1. Background and Issues

Since the late '90s, and as part of a larger public administration reform, Quebec schools are the target of numerous attempts initiated by the Ministry of Education calling on them to rationalize their management and be indebted to it (Gouvernement du Québec, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2016). This managerial approach is in line with the "New Public Management" paradigm and derives from a broader social, political and economic neoliberal current of thought. It is generally associated with values like productivity, flexibility, mobility, effort and performance (Verbeeten, 2008; Gruening, 2001; Brignall and Modell, 2000; Christensen and Laegreid, 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Schedler and Proeller, 2000; Keraudren, 1993). An article published in 2009 attests to the concern of the school community to apply organizational research to an inescapable public-school reform. It relates to the effects of teacher human and social capital on student performance (Pil and Leana, 2009). The "New Public Management" was already questioning educational administration practices assumptions, beliefs, values, and thereby creating the need for meaningful change in school principals' training.

Since the end of the '90s, Quebec Ministry of Education put forward many measures constantly urging each school to elaborate a "Success Plan" that will contribute to the achievement of its "Educational Project." By 2008, a "Result-Based Management" (RBM) system was adopted and requires school boards and their schools to put forward a "Management and Educational Success Agreement" plan. Each school was to set perseverance and success rates, identify its priorities, and plan a strategy by which to reach these levels. By the end of each year, the school had to present and justify to its school board the results achieved.

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According to Goksoy (2013), Rondeau (2008), and Schein (2004) such a managerial shift can only appeal to the culture and practices of an organization. Concretely it implied that school teaching staff would have to be accountable for the impact of their practices on student performance and that school principals should rally and lead his staff around activities and measures aligned with school priorities and objectives, set up monitoring procedures, ensure follow up, evaluate, and report on results.

Although Quebec's school principals were familiar since a decade with the steps necessary to complete a planning process, this legal mandate still constitutes a major challenge for them. A recent research highlights that 4 out of 10 members of Quebec most important principals association claim results-based management is not being applied properly and that until now this accountable system does not allow them to manage their school rationally and optimally (Lalancette, 2014, p.73). Such result suggests that implementing a RBM system still is a challenge for many of them. According to Lauzon and Begin, it is even more so as the advent of a RBM system constitutes a "counter-cultural" change compared to usually conceded principals' supervision and evaluation practices (2018, p. 251). Hence, among other needs, it seems crucial for principals, on the one hand, to develop new skills to meet national and local authorities' expectations, and on the other hand to overcome foreseeable staff resistance.

A recent study conducted in Quebec and another led by the Program Center of the University Council for Educational Administration in USA bring some light on these new skills. The first one intended to identify the most requested training needs felt by Quebec's principals and vice-principals since the implementation of the newly RBM reform. Results (Lalancette, 2014, p.52) highlight that human resources management (HRM) was the most training need area mentioned by respondents. Unfortunately, the author did not go as far as specifying topics related to these needs. By the end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s, a UCEA study conducted with principals supports Lalancette findings in this sense that it "places emphasis on the major responsibilities of the local school principal in the area of human resources administration", and insists on "the changing nature of the human resources function, from a maintenance function to a strategic function that requires new skills and leadership on the part of school leaders" (Norton, 2015, p. x). Publications by Norton (2013, 2008) and Webb and Norton (2009) attest to UCEA's efforts to identify HRM competencies principals need to develop. These two studies arouse great interest to identify, specify, and classify which HRM practices are considered by school principals to be the most important training themes to be prioritized in an accountable RBM context.

2. Theoretical and Analysis Framework: sources and components

2.1 Theoretical sources

The scope of RBM requires adopting a systemwide framework that must account for the dynamic that links HRM principal's practices to a strategic conception of the mission and goals pursued by a school. It must also consider the different objectives aimed by these practices so to better understand and answer principal training needs. **Many researchers (Buller & McEvoy, 2016, 2012; Hollenbeck and Jamieson, 2015; Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011; Boxall and Purcell, 2008; Becker and Huselid, 2006; and Hayton, 2003)** rally behind a "strategic" vision of HRM. Wright and McMahan (2011, p.93) defined strategic HRM as "the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable the firm to achieve its goals." Buller and McEvoy (2016, 2012) agree with this definition relating HRM practices, organizational goals and performance. They even go further with their "Line of Sight" model emphasizing the necessary alignment between these components as suggested by Boswell and colleagues (2006).

Most models conceptualize the potential impact of HRM practices on organizational performance but do not explicit the goals and objectives they pursue. They usually just content to refer to HRM general areas. A recent model proposed by Piety Runhaar (2017) pays a specific attention at describing three HRM "domains", relying on AMO meta theory of performance (Jiang et al., 2012). The author groups HRM practices according to three key objectives: staff competencies development (A), staff motivation (M), and staff participation and autonomy (O). Her model specifically addresses HRM practices from a school principal perspective rather than from a school board human resources department. Such a perspective is recent in the history of HRM writings and joins the concern of authors such as Norton (2015) et Smith (1998) who were interested in the analysis of principals' HRM specific training needs and the development of proper and appropriate competencies.

To enrich Runhaar's HRM content areas, the theoretical framework borrows from two other sources. One is a three-dimensional model developed by Norton (2015), namely HR Environment related to school climate, safety and work life, HR Utilization pointing at usual HRM processes like planning, recruitment, selection, and assignment, and HR Performance and Development. The other model was developed by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education grouping five American universities (Heneman and Milanowski, 2007, p.10). It adds induction, mentoring, and instructional leaders' selection, training, and performance to usual HRM areas.

Besides her three dimensions' model, Runhaar also underlines the necessary fit between a specific educational context and HRM practices. This attention is most appropriate to the context in which the present research was conducted. Her choice of a "commitment" instead of a "control" HRM approach relates to a school environment. Educational administration writings generally admit this approach better fits an organizational school culture (Runhaar, 2017, p. 648). Moreover this "commitment" philosophy seems more appropriate when a school principal must lead the implementation of an accountable RBM system. At first glance, this "fit" criterion is a challenge to the professional development of new school principals.

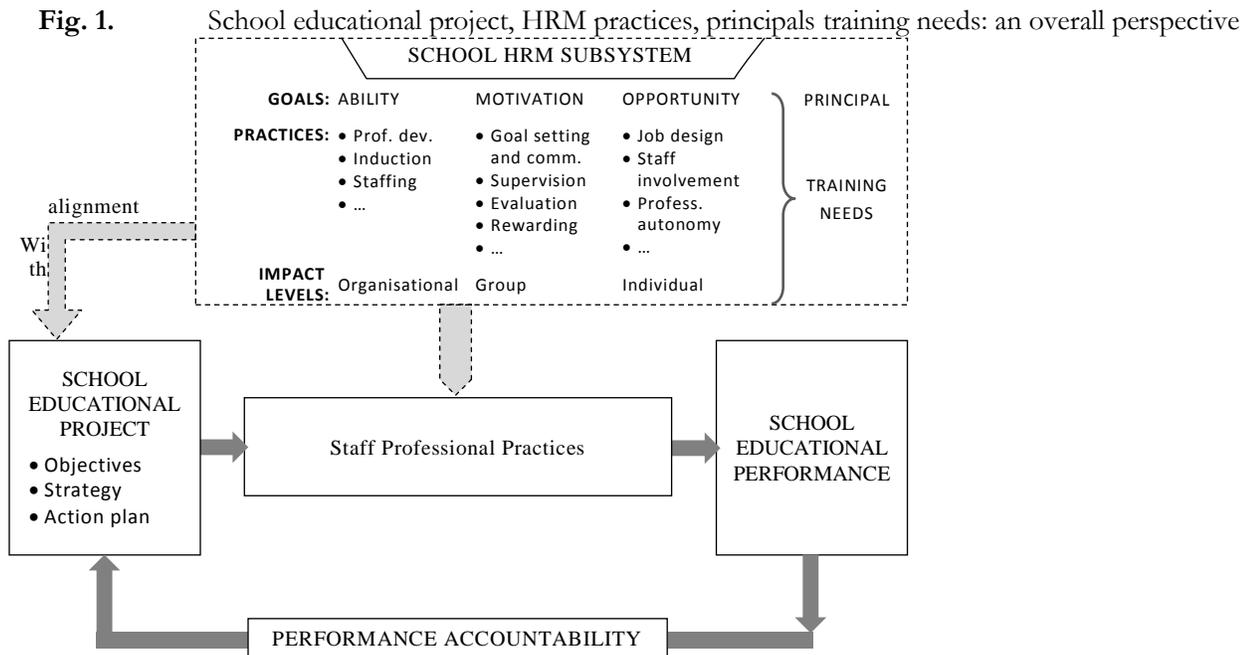
2.2 Framework Components

The research framework presented below (figure 1) takes the form of a systemic process initiated by a "school educational project," its objectives and strategy as the input components, and school performance as the output. It is inspired by Barney and Wright's Resource-Based View model (1998) and Buller and McEvoy (2012) Line of Sight model theory. They shed a light on the dynamic that relates an organization's objectives and strategy to human resources management and organizational performance. According to Ostroff and Bowen (2000), the challenge facing organizational leaders is "to connect capable and motivated people with complex and dynamic strategic objectives, organizational processes, and resulting work requirements" (Buller and McEvoy, 2012, p.46). A school principal must be able to face such a challenge.

For the purpose of this research, the central part of the process limits itself to the HRM subsystem. A complete theoretical framework should include other school subsystems such as instructional, financial, material and technological services, for they also have an important role in the pursuit of school performance.

The central part of the theoretical framework, inspired by Runhaar's (2017), Norton (2015) and Heneman and Milanowski's (2007) models, contains HRM domains, goals and functional areas, and includes Buller and McEvoy (2012) HRM practice levels. It also introduces performance accountability as a feedback loop component between school performance and the "school educational project."

Figure 1



2.2.1 School Objectives and Strategy

The Quebec Education Act refers to a “School Educational Project” to designate the “input” component of this study’s framework. It includes school philosophy, mission, culture, priorities and goals as well as a strategic plan specifying measures and resources to improve school performance, adjust and possibly change educational and managerial practices needed to achieve expected results. This strategic plan is the anchor and driving force upon which a school actualizes its mission. School Educational Projects are, on the one hand, subject to governmental obligations, requirements and constraints, and, on the other hand, to internal and external stakeholders’ expectations and pressures. This plan must be proposed and endorsed by regional and national authorities and normally extends for a length of 3 to 5 years adjustable along the road if necessary. How to develop, plan, communicate, lead the implementation, follow-up, evaluate and report constitute the operational frame which a principal is called upon to answer. It particularly challenges the skills and abilities of newcomers and is inevitably the reference point for professional training topics.

2.2.2 School Performance

As illustrated in figure 1, the output dimension aims at “Student Achievement Goals” and “Teacher Performance Competency” (Heneman and Milanowski, 2007, p.10-13; 2003,p.19-27). According to Runhaar (2017, p.650), the outcomes of a “strong” HRM system are measured by both teachers’ and students’ competency, motivation and performance. In an accountable RBM system like the one implemented in the Province of Québec, the concept of performance is primarily referring to a school average rate following Education Ministry annual exams. As underline by Reynolds and colleagues [2014, p.106] in their review on school effectiveness research, this conception of performance “has been gaining acceptance as the essential criterion for assessing school effectiveness.” The use of qualitative school evaluation criteria such as students’ motivation level, teachers’ satisfaction, school climate, or students’ involvement in learning activities are not formally considered by central and regional authorities as school performance indicators. It is up to school principals and their staff to use their own criteria if they care to enlarge their own evaluation spectrum.

2.2.3 HRM Domains’ Goals

The HRM goal dimension is inspired from the “content perspective” of Runhaar’s model (2017 p.650). It relies on AMO meta theory of performance which suggests that HRM systems should aim at: 1) increasing the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees (A); 2) enhancing their motivation and effort (M); 3) and offering opportunities to fulfill their tasks and deploy their know-how and resources (O) (Jang et al., 2012, p.76-77).

Runhaar identifies three practices “domains” that mediate between a school HRM subsystem and employee performance. For their part, Norton (2015) uses the term “dimensions” and Heneman and Milanowski (2007) “areas” to refer to groups of HRM practices.

It seems relevant to advance some reservations about the scope of these domains. It is noteworthy to keep in mind the degree of overlapping and tightness between these three domains when classifying managerial practices and analyzing school principals’ training needs. A specific HRM practice like “taking individual needs into account” or “allowing teachers’ collaboration, interaction, and participation” may relate to more than one domain and consequently classified in different training needs categories. Furthermore, given the numerous needs felt by employees, the “motivation domain” is likely to play a more central and strategic role than the two others as a mediator between HRM practices and individual, group and organizational performance (Buller and McEvoy, 2012, 2017).

2.2.3.1 Ability Domain: Goals and Practices Areas

The Ability domain goals can be defined or phrase in many ways. Essentially, it aims at three targets: ensuring that school human resources have the knowledge, skills and attitudes that fit with school’s goals, needs and activities; demonstrate these resources in their practices; and update, develop and share them. The Ability domain covers many HRM practices. For her part, Runhaar’s model will refer to large areas as Staffing and Professional development, while Heneman and Malinowski, (2007, p.10) or Norton (2015, p.3) will use more specific and detailed areas like planning, recruitment, selection, orientation, job assignment, induction, orientation, and mentoring. Let’s also note that among these areas some could be more “organizationally oriented,” while others could be qualified as more “individually oriented.”

2.2.3.2 Motivation Domain: Goals and Practices Areas

For Runhaar, “The primary objective of HRM practices is to increase teacher motivation to strive for the highest possible pupil achievements” (2017, p. 645). It includes Performance Appraisal and Reward Systems practices’ areas. She underlines the importance of revising this domain goals considering the “recent accountability movement.” Among Performance Appraisal practices, the author emphasizes their formative role. She underlines that principals should use appraisal practices not only to have teachers be accountable for their students’ performance, but mainly as a strategy to improve their teaching practices and their professional development goals. To phrase it another way, performance appraisal should mainly be oriented towards staff development rather than towards staff assessment and evaluation. For his part Norton (2015, p.3) chooses to group Performance Evaluation with Growth and Development processes under his HR Development dimension, while Heneman and Malinowski use “Performance Management” to cover supervision, coaching, remediation and evaluation areas (2003, p. 19). For the purposes of this paper, it is important to confine ourselves to recognizing that since the 1980s different conceptions of performance management and appraisal emerged from educational administration theorists (ASCD,1992). The data analysis will limit itself to identify what supervision and evaluation practices principals deem important as training topics whatever the objectives they pursue and the values who underlie them.

Reward systems also fall under Runhaar’s Motivation Domain. Her review of literature points out that research findings on the relationship between pay system and teacher motivation are inconclusive, especially since teachers are intrinsically highly motivated (2017, p.646). Referring to Chiang and Birtch (2012), she underlines other forms of rewards addressing nonfinancial teachers’ needs. This precision is of interest as far as principals’ financials means are strictly speaking marginal. Therefore, practices like positive feedback, highlighting and rewarding professional achievements, or facilitating innovative projects and work arrangements are training needs’ topics principals should select as more important. Norton’s and Heneman and Malinowski’s models mainly refers to financial rewards and choose the term “compensation” to talk about pay, fringe benefits and alike incentives.

Once more, it is noteworthy to remember the difficulty related to the classification of certain practices. This is the case with orientation, induction, and mentoring practices. They can as well relate to professional development or performance management and be classified under AMO “Ability” or “Motivation” domains. Jiang and his colleagues [2012, p.653] confirm this possible ambiguity. According to them, to improve employee’s performance so they contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives, an organization needs to provide a context that will allow the use of their skills and cultivate their motivation,

2.2.3.3 Opportunity Domain: Goals and Practices Areas

Runhaar specifies that Opportunity Domain practices “are geared towards offering teachers the opportunity to exert their competencies and effort” so they feel they are essential artisans of their school plan and strategy and have the power and means to truly motivate students and, so doing, their academic performance (2017, p.647). She retains “participation” and “job design” as the two practice areas expected to play a major role in achieving Opportunity Domain goals (Runhaar, 2017, p.647-648; Jiang et al., 2012, p.75). She closely relates these two areas. She underlines that in order to offer employees opportunities to better fulfill their tasks and deploy their know-how and resources, a principal must implement a decision-making structure respectful of teachers’ need for professional autonomy, define fields of expertise and participative processes, and align tasks and responsibilities with significant objectives and targets. In his “Environment dimension”, Norton (2015, p.3) put the accent on practices that relate to Opportunity Domain such as ensuring a safe and respectful school climate and work-life balance.

2.2.4 HRM practices impact levels

In presenting the theoretical sources of the study that underlies this article, we underline the contribution of Buller and McEvoy (2012). Their “Line of Sight” model not only agrees with the strategic HRM approach relating practices with organizational goals and performance but emphasizes on the need of such alignment within HRM practices themselves. It is worth mentioning that in the mid-2000s a model developed by Heneman and Milanowski offers a detailed description of how such an alignment can contribute to teacher professional development and performance (2007, p.9-15).

For purpose of data analysis, the main interest of Buller and McEvoy model is the insistence to the effect that HRM practice alignment plays a developmental role not only at the individual level but also at the group and organizational levels (2012, p.44). This strategic dimension is deemed especially relevant when analyzing practices pursuing a cultural change like the implementation of an accountable RBM system.

3. Methodology

The research favoured a mixed exploratory methodology (Aldebert and Rouziès, 2011, p.6-7). It took place in nine Quebec’s volunteered school boards. The information gathering consisted of two main steps.

At first, individual and group semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty-four school board key informants among which we find superintendents, human resources directors, instructional directors, experienced principals, and assistant principals having less than 5 years experience]. As just mentioned, the purpose of these interviews was to identify HRM practices that should be favored as training topics for new principals, so they meet challenges arising from a new accountable RBM system approach. In a second phase, using data from the semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire was developed to identify new principals’ most important HRM training needs. The option of an online questionnaire was chosen to rapidly reach many respondents and make sure they send back questionnaires as quickly as possible (Zhang, 2000).

This questionnaire contained 38 HRM practices items addressing three staff categories [teachers, educational specialists, and support employees] and three organizational levels [individual, group, and school]. Of the 375 school managers employed by participating school boards, 146 (39%) completed the questionnaire. Fifty-nine (60%) were principals and 40% assistant principals. The respondents’ average years of experience was 8.55, including years as assistant principal.

Respondents were invited to score each training need importance on a five-level scale (0- not at all important; 1- very little important; 2- little important; 3- important; 4- very important) considering two aspects. They had to evaluate each need importance having in mind it would be part of a training program for new school principals, and considering they were responsible for implementing a School Educational project focusing on students’ achievement and school accountability.

4. New Principals Training needs

An overall analysis of the data collected suggests that the thirty-eight (38) HRM practices identified by key informants reveal to be relevant training topics to principals and assistant principals who participated to the present study. Indeed, thirteen (13) were chosen as “very important” or “important” by more than ninety percent (90%) of respondents, twelve (12) by eighty to eighty-nine percent (80-89%), nine (9) by seventy to seventy-nine percent (70-79%) and the last four (4) by sixty to sixty-nine percent (60-69%). Such results could be considered as a good indicator of the questionnaire’s content validity.

It also attests of a shared understanding by school board key informants and respondents as to the potential requirements deriving from the implementation of an accountable result-based school management system and its impacts on skills new principals must develop to ensure HRM practices' relevancy.

4.1 Training Needs and Motivation Domain

The major impact of RBM on new principal training needs falls under AMO's Motivation Domain. Eighteen (18) of the questionnaire 38 HRM practices were selected as "very important" and "important". They relate to performance management and appraisal and aim at ensuring teacher practices quality and conformity with administrative regulations and teachers' legal duties. It also underlines the strategic nature of principals' practices selected in the sense that emphasis is put on teaching practices relevancy and coherence with the School Success Plan, its objectives and measures.

Thirteen (13) of Performance Management practices were selected as "very important" new principals' training topics. They refer to supervision and evaluation activities and address teachers, educational specialists and support employees individually, in groups or as a school team. They include "communicating and explaining expectations and requirements," "coaching, supporting, and assisting activities in case expectations and requirements are not met" or "teachers have difficulty meeting School Success Plan objectives agreed upon," and "leading follow-up and update meetings." Other "very important" supervision and evaluating practices selected as "very important" relate to topics like "evaluating probationary employees," "using and enforcing legal duties, official regulations, and collective agreements' clauses," as well as "warning, suspending and other disciplinary actions." Six other practices choose as "important" training needs topics refer to formal individual, group, or school team follow-up meetings, among which we find special activities "to evaluate and recognize a teacher, an educational specialist or a support employee contribution to the achievement of the School Success Plan."

The major importance given by respondents to Performance Management practices confirm Milanowski, Heneman and Kimball's thought to the effect that they constitute "the heart of performance management" (2011, p.4). Firstly, it underlines their strategic nature when an organization chooses to implement an accountable RBM system, and secondly it shows the contentiousness and the complexity of such a challenge for new school principals. If some of these practices may be meaningful, constructive and gratifying, others can rather be uncomfortable and emotionally demanding for a new principal. No training or in-training program can ignore or neglect the crucial skills these newcomers require and deserve in this domain. Here's how an experienced interviewee sees the benefits for a new school principal to develop skills related to Management Performance practices:

In the coming years, our challenge as principals is to learn how to insist and put more emphasis on the responsibilities people have and the goals they must pursue, in short, a school manager that will confront a little. There are teachers or other staff members who should not be there. When someone does not apply the instructional program, when his will or his educational beliefs and values leave something to be desired, then we should be able to put our panties and intervene.

In a similar vein, another experienced principal affirms that new principals need to know how to supervise teaching practices, how to monitor, reframe and follow-up the work of a new teacher or of a more experienced teacher whose behavior or practices are not aligned with the School Success Plan objectives.

Finally, a former principal, now a school board HR director confides the delicate situation in which is placed a principal:

Since the time I am a school manager, I think what is most difficult for principals, at least when they start and even after, is educational supervision, staff supervision. How to supervise former coworkers? I notice that it's their Achilles heel. Breaking the wall between when they were teachers at one time and when they became principal. Cross this border, take a necessary distance. I do not know many who dared to do it.

4.2 Training Needs and Ability Domain

Three HRM practices selected as "very important" training topics relate to the Ability Domain. Two refer to coaching individuals and groups of teachers looking "to implement new educational strategies" or "to align their teaching practices with the School Educational Success Plan" so to "better fit students' educational needs, problems and difficulties."

The third training topic has to do with promoting the establishment of “learning communities” within a school. Finally, a last training topic chosen as “important” by more than 50% respondents was the support a principal must give to teachers and educational specialists when identifying their individual or group training needs.

To complete the portrait of the Ability Domain, three practices selected as “important” by more than 40% respondents deserve a mention. They pertain to the staffing area and are closely related to Performance Management. Two are akin to Staff Development. They cover activities related to the induction process of new teachers and new experienced employees to the School Success Plan and the school result-based and accountable context. By ensuring that these newcomers receive appropriate information about the needs, goals, values and practices of the school and, by entrusting them to the attention of an experienced mentor or colleague, a director may facilitate and possibly enhance his supervisory role and his staff development leadership. The third one is relevant with the School Success Plan. It refers to the selection process of human resources available to help carry out school projects better aligned with school priorities.

Ability Domain practices like those in the field of Motivation are influenced and tainted by the cultural change context facing new principals. Moreover, they benefit from being associated with Performance Management practices a principal must deliver and are an important lever of strategic measures to be implemented for the improvement of teaching practices and ultimately student achievement. Here is how an experienced principal details his role and practices in this domain:

It is my responsibility to see to the organization of training activities; to convince group or individual teachers to attend training activities; to facilitate their attendance; to insure transfer of new competencies in day-to-day teachers’ practices and make sure they align with the school educational success plan; and to define monitoring tools with school team.

4.3 Training Needs and Opportunity Domain

As just mentioned by the experienced principal, staff participation in defining how new practices will be implemented is a perfect example of an Opportunity Domain practice. As previously mentioned, the primary goal of this domain is to provide employees with a context that can help them achieve their full potential and allow them to be involved in school decision-making processes. Runhaar’s model suggests Participation and Job Design to differentiate her two opportunity practice categories. Eleven (11) practices suggested by key informants as possible training topics were selected as “very important” and “important” by more than 78% respondents. They aim at implementing a larger consensual decision-making culture and, in doing so, build a school managerial context more favorable to the establishment of an accountable RBM system.

Eight (8) practices selected testify to the relevancy of participative management in instructional matters and in the development and the implementation of the School Educational Success Plan. They mainly underline the role of a principal in “promoting a school teamwork approach,” “implementing, involving and supporting committees responsible for the development of the School Success Plan and the study of measures to improve students’ academic success,” “assessing progress made in achieving school stated objectives,” and “preparing the annual report to parents and school board.” One of these practices refers to the principal’s role to “involve, cooperate and chair meetings of internal and external committees prescribed by the Education Act.” Corollary to leading group and committee meetings, respondents suggested training topics emphasizing skills “to ensure planning, conducting, animating and following up these meetings,” “to “share his vision of the School Success Plan,” and to “develop consensual objectives and measures.”

Three practices selected relate to Work Design. Paying a wink at McGregor’s basic needs theory (1960), Runhaar insists on employees’ need for professional autonomy, self-development, empowerment, and relatedness. The following training topics suggested by respondents are relevant measures conducive to ensure such “opportunity.” They refer to the relevancy of “establishing information and communication mechanisms,” “defining school participative structure,” and “clarifying roles and responsibilities of individuals and groups involved in the development and achievement of the School Educational Success Plan.” These practices can be considered as unavoidable measures without which participatory management has every chance to be perceived as a lure. They put a principal in better position to undertake justifiable and effective individual and group supervision practices, and to arrive at consensual decisions about training activities that align with school educational goals.

Here are some worries a key informant beginning his career as a school principal communicates about some requirements he is facing in the short run:

I just arrive on duty. I will have a monthly meeting with committees. How am I going to do this? How do I manage such meetings? How do I prepare myself? What is more important at first meetings? How do I relate committees' mandates with the School Educational Success Plan or other school priorities?

The following testimony of a human resource director attests to the crucial importance of training needs related to some "Opportunity" practices and their possible impact on school context and performance:

Among training needs, how to hold and manage staff and parent general meetings, how to deal with participation committees stood out clearly. There are schools where it's going very well, but there are schools where people tell us: "we waste time, no decisions and actions are taken, no follow-up insured, long and painful meetings, unstructured, ineffective, nonproductive. People are not respectful."

5. Discussion

After presenting selected new school principals' HRM training needs, the following lines first intend to explain results by referring to contextual parameters that may have influenced respondents' choices. In doing so, results are linked to HRM theoretical sources that inspired this research framework. Then a closer look at the results leads us to reflect on required leadership practices required to implement a new supervision and evaluation school culture. To conclude discussion on a practical note, an attempt at designing a cyclical school HRM model is presented. It is based on practices selected as "important" and "very important" training targets by respondents.

5.1 New HRM practices, School Cultural Change and Principals' Training Needs

To contextualize, analyze and explain the feeling of urgency who sweat from respondents' choices and their imperative need to develop or consolidate HRM competencies, it is crucial to recall the legal and administrative requirements they face since a decade. Principals are now held responsible to elaborate a School Educational Success plan, justify measures his school chooses to improve its performance, and report and explain school achievement rates. An annual national school ranking also generates an undeniable incentive if not a heavy pressure for new as well as experienced principals. Other factors than RBM and political agendas might explain the importance of HRM practices selected as possible training topics. For example, it would be rational to explain the large number of performance management training needs selected by the fact that respondents had never experienced supervision, evaluation or other such practices during their teaching career and may well be uncomfortable to experience such practices without developing appropriate skills.

The context we just summarize can logically explain why almost half of HRM practices privileged by respondents as "important" or "very important" training topics were related to Performance Management, and more specifically to supervision and evaluation practice areas. They mainly focus on ensuring teaching practices quality, their relevancy and coherence with the School Success plan, objectives and measures, as well as their conformity with administrative regulations and legal duties. Most practices chosen to insure performance concern leading meetings be they individual, in groups or school team. Principals mostly use them to share their vision, specify their expectations, support employees having problems and difficulties, recognize success and special achievements, recall school rules and regulations, and warn or suspend a misbehaving or unruly employee. Respondents' choices are in phase and support Milanowski, Heneman and Kimball's assertion to the effect that goal setting, supervision, coaching and evaluation practices constitute "the heart of performance management" (2011, p.4).

By choosing practices related to Performance Management, respondents likely understood it implied adjustments to their school usual monitoring and regulation practices and by the very fact questioned their staff values, practices and habits. How to lead a school staff to shift from usual soft and informal supervision and evaluation practices to more formal and systematic ones and, in the same breath, avoid the impact of such a metamorphosis on school climate, was perceived as a strategic challenge. Before engaging in such predictable minefields respondents could not help but want to develop skills they perceived crucial to rally school staff around new HRM practices and the process by which implementing them. The felt needs go beyond conceptual, technical and procedural considerations and aspects. They address skills required to manage the organizational dynamic sparks by of such a significant change. Runhaar (2016, p.648) alludes to these two training need levels when she quotes Guest (1997) who argues that "for organizations it is not enough to have good HRM practices" and underlines Nishii and

Wright's (2008) assumption to the effect that "good practices will not lead to desired outcomes if they are not implemented in the way they were intended to be." Like Norton (2015, p.3), she insists on the necessity to create a strong climate and argues that HRM processes must be founded on values like clarity, transparency, coherence, consideration and search for consensual decision-making. For her, "assuring the execution of HRM practices in the way they were intended may necessitate team leader training (Runhaar, 2016, p.648-649).

Joining Runhaar's thought about leadership training, authors like Goksoy (2013), Shaw et al. (2013), Rondeau (2008), and Schein (2004) use the term "cultural change" to describe the type of experience an organization undertakes when it makes major changes to its practices. They contend that managers encountering such a challenge have no choice but to perform a leading role. So does Weiner (2009) by focusing on the manager's leadership to increase the organization "readiness for change."

There are a lot of educational writings that allude to the importance of principal leadership when a school undertake an important shift in its practices. Using TALIS research data from 32 countries, Liu and Bellibas (2018, p.15) conclude that "a school needs principal's leadership to learn how maintain effectiveness or transform from failure to success." Following their school effectiveness and school improvement reviews, Hopkins (2014) and Reynolds (2014) confirm that leadership practices are instrumental in managing a school cultural change. In response to the need for leadership training expressed by Runhaar, Hopkins underlines that since the 90s, "School improvement tradition was beginning to provide schools with concrete guidelines and strategies for the management and implementation of change at the school level" (Hopkins, 2014, p.261).

Researchers' unanimity on the importance of leadership in a cultural change context might explain the importance respondents place on training needs related to performance management. Indeed, on the one end they might have perceived new principals need to better know how to perform "good" HRM practices," but on the other end were aware these newcomers badly need to develop skills to lead the implementation of new practices able to meet the requirements of a school RBM system.

5.2 Principals' training needs and HRM practices Levels

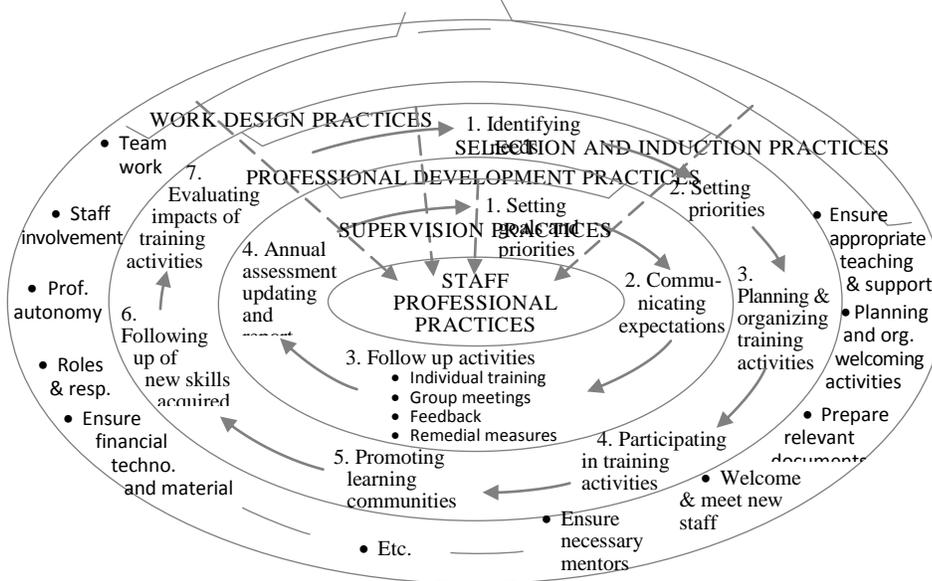
Buller and McEvoy's (2012) three-level model makes it possible to look at HRM practices from a different angle and consequently allows to further analyze and interpret the results of this study. A closer look at practices considered by respondents as "important" or "very important" confirms Runhaar and Hopkins point of view to the effect that a principal's leadership must be played out at the group level. Two thirds of the practices that were chosen as training targets pertain to groups, committees and school assemblies. Such results point to the fact that respondents consider that nowadays principals must count and rely on the engagement, complicity, and competencies of these instances in order to improve staff and student performance. Their real and strategic challenge is to mobilize internal and external resources around the largest consensual school vision, achieve objectives agreed upon, and implement required practices.

5.3 A School HRM Practices Framework

To consolidate this research results and attempt a synthesis, it appears useful and timely to propose a school HRM practices framework. It is first and foremost an attempt to model HRM practices from the opinion of a sizable group of key school board managers and principals. More specifically it reflects and clarifies the role and practices of a school principal evolving in an accountable RBM context. Apart from providing school principals an operational and integrated representation of school HRM practices, this framework could be used to identify training needs.

The literature consulted as part of this research mostly addresses HRM from a school board HR department perspective. However, we found authors (Runhaar, 2016; Norton, 2015; Heneman and Milanowski's, 2007, 2003: and Smith,1998) who were interested in the analysis of principals' HRM specific training needs and the development of proper and appropriate competencies. The frame of reference presented below does not mean to question in any way the usefulness and the theoretical foundations of these models. They rather served as guides and benchmarks in designing an operational synthesis of principals' HRM practices following this research data analysis. The following lines are limited to a brief overview of the model.

(Figure 2) School Principal HRM Practices Frame of Reference



First, this research results underline that as far as most principals are concerned, staff management practices mainly cover four HRM areas: supervision of professional practices, professional development activities, school participative processes and work structure, and selection-induction of newcomers. Using superimposed cycles, this model connects and positions these four HRM areas and suggests they influence more or less directly the quality of teachers' and other employees' practices. Based on practices selected by respondents as "very important" and "important," it positions principals' supervision activities in the cycle closest to staff practices and describes them as a process. The middle circle relates to professional development activities and is also viewed as a process. Its proximity to the first circle underlines the intimate and continuous relationship existing between staff supervision and development management activities. Finally, in the furthest cycle, the model groups together practices related to staff participation structures, empowerment work design, staff selection choices and formal induction planning. It implies they interact with and influence supervision and professional development activities, and ultimately the quality of staff practices.

6. Conclusion

The results of this research are quite conclusive regarding the HRM training needs hold most strategic by respondents in a context of school accountable RBM. The emphasis they place on staff supervision, professional development, involvement, induction and mentoring practices bring out a principal HRM profile characterized by the proximity and often intimacy of his practices. To use McGregor expression, it emphasizes the "human side" of a principal HRM practice. It clearly prevails over his more distant and technical "resources side" role. Such a specificity brings us to better understand HRM selected training topics chosen in this research. The implementation of an accountable HRM system challenges the way principals used to play their role and somehow goes against teaching staff expectations. Since the 70s, collective agreements have greatly influenced schools HRM practices by limiting, complicating and even almost eliminated any chance for a principal to supervise, question, and evaluate staff practices and behaviors. Even if principals were to develop HRM skills they need and expect, it is foreseeable that if significant changes are not made to the collective agreement clauses ruling teachers supervision and evaluation mechanisms, it is more than likely that training activities risk to generate more disillusionment and frustration rather than desire and hope to exercise their leadership among them especially for newcomers wishing to transfer their new skills into practice.

Regardless of these political aspects, it is relevant for training purposes to broaden the field of research on possible relationships between principals' influence on teaching and educational matters and the specific HRM practices they privilege. And if only to expand the breeding ground of HRM practices, it remains rewarding to

compare school HRM practices used both in school systems like the one presented in this study and in systems using other management approaches or have different ways to measure school performance.

This is probably what leads Norton (2015, p.24) to say that “Evidence for quality results in the areas of student achievement has led to increased attention to the human resources processes. Competency-based leadership focuses on the primary skills, competencies and indicators of competency required of the effective HR principal.”

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