

Building Capacity – Recruitment, Orientation, Induction and Mentoring

Part A – Recruitment and Orientation

Essential to the process of building and sustaining our culture for high quality school performance is the development of the staff we have supplemented by the quality of our recruiting practices for the additional staff we desire.

In essence, a school leader who wants their school to have a rich and supportive learning culture, there's no better place to start than in the Recruitment, Orientation, Induction and Mentoring of staff. If you refer back to the three previous articles in this series, the common thread is the importance and value of leadership in influencing school culture and performance.

Recruitment

For some, recruitment is considered a technical task; typically to replace somebody leaving, to cater for student population growth, to introduce new programs where current staff are not qualified. And as such a recruitment online position is created, people apply, shortlisting then interviews, hopefully referee checks and then selection and notification. Sounds easy, doesn't it?

Thankfully many more recognise the value of recruitment as an opportunity for adding to our desired school culture. As such, careful consideration of the important role each new staff member must play for your school to continue to flourish is vital in the recruitment process. This may include the strategic identification of a new role in leadership to support performance and cultural change and growth.

Hence, our most successful school leaders identify the interpersonal skill set and expert knowledge required; using recruitment as a vital stage of building a high capacity workforce - who will be best suited to be a quality contributor to the school improvement plan, and be the type of person you would be proud of. And in following the concept of reciprocal accountability, consider for each candidate what might be needed to support them in adjusting to your school's life, and nurturing them in their career progression as lifelong learners.

It would be strongly recommended that the Principal be on the selection panel for each ongoing employment position; and depending upon the size of your school and where on the Leadership Development spectrum your Leadership Team is, maybe contract positions as well. Having the team leaders of the prospective staff member engaged in selection is another important element in building capacity.

In fact, during the selection process, particularly in the interview process, there is an ideal opportunity to model your identified and expected professional and personal behaviour and standards.

Orientation

Orientation and Induction are two different but interdependent processes, essential to the successful introduction of new staff to our schools; and even more importantly for any graduate teachers.

Orientation, an essential early stage of induction, may take a variety of forms, with a variety of appropriate personnel in support. Suffice to say, be it for multiple new staff in preparation for a school year, or for one or few throughout the year, attention to the quality and importance of orientation should not be different.

Consistent in all would be the role of a School Principal in setting the scene and welcoming new staff into their community - remembering the importance of vision and narrative. Self-perception of what it will be like as your employee and as a member of your community is critical to a person's likelihood of success in being a satisfied, quality professional practitioner and contributor to your school's improvement journey.

Typically, this would include (a) Understanding of context of the work at your school, (b) Identifying the school values and goals, in the context of current school performance and aspirations, linking to School Strategic Plans (typically 4 years) and Annual Implementation Plans - overview only as appropriate, (c) Understanding of expectations of each staff member as a colleague, community member and member of the profession, and (d) Understanding the school's teaching & learning practices, both explicit and implicit, what we should see, what we hope to see, what is each staff member's responsibility in this context.

Consistent with our previous articles, the typical responsibilities to each other in considering a school's values and how to apply them to our professional and collegial practices might include

- Team orientation, collaboration, peer observations
- Shared responsibility, shared decision making, shared support
- Mutual Respect, trust and tolerance through our behaviour
- Maintain high levels of optimism, be curious, take risks, always aim to learn and improve practice!
- Highlight and celebrate successes – be proud

Clearly orientation is not just about the teaching and learning agenda. It requires introductions to a range of school and professional practices; some simple "need to knows", others more complex processes. And as mentioned above, an understanding of the school and professional culture, the mutual responsibilities and supports shared around teacher well-being, together with professional and emotional development.

In a nutshell if we hope for our employees to joyfully go about their daily professional lives over extended periods of time - and for many of us it's been a lifetime – the opportunity for our leadership influence starts at recruitment!

Attention to induction and mentoring will be the focus in ***Part B - Induction and Mentoring*** of our ***Building Capacity – Recruitment, Orientation, Induction and Mentoring***.

Part B - Induction and Mentoring

In part A on ***Building Capacity*** the focus was on ***recruitment and orientation***, including the importance of each Principal's leadership in establishing expectations, defining the school's culture and beginning to establish trusting, professional relationships with staff throughout these phases. However, just as important is the identification and provision of effective induction and mentoring.

Both the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) provide exemplary advice on the more effective practices in both staff induction and mentoring. AITSL via its ***National Induction Guidelines/Graduate to Proficient: Australian guidelines for teacher induction into the profession*** at www.aitsl.edu.au is an outstanding document for outlining what works best for graduate teachers. VIT in conjunction with the Department of Education

provides an ***“Effective Mentoring Program”*** designed for experienced teachers who are mentoring provisionally registered teachers. The outline of this program may be sourced at www.vit.vic.edu.au.

Recent research has shown there is considerable variation in the quality of school induction programs. And there is often a marked difference in the assessment of the quality of such programs by Principals and graduate teachers. Such a finding highlights something each Principal might consider – seeking honest feedback on the quality and effectiveness of your induction programs.

As shown in the Induction guidelines, there are 3 key elements – the range of supports and strategies provided, provision of practice-focused mentoring, and a focus on professional practices, professional identity, wellbeing and orientation.

Hence, the greater the breadth and quality of your inductions programs, the more likely graduates will be to develop as teachers, and enjoy life in your school.

Let’s remember that the overall context of these articles is with respect to developing and sustaining high performing schools. And we know any school is only as effective as its teaching staff. Hence, the importance of investing in their development from day one.

Much of the available advice focusses on graduate teachers. However, the engagement in all elements of the school’s improvement journey, committing to each school’s culture, and the likelihood of sustaining such a culture and high performance is critical for more experienced teachers and school leaders joining your school. Hence, there is little doubt that the investment of time and support for all new employees will result in greater cohesion, commitment to your vision and increased well-being of staff.

Recently many Victorian state government schools have established more coherent links between individual staff Performance and Development Plans (PDPs) and each School’s Strategic Plan (SSP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). By strategically constituting PDP teams led by designated School Leaders, including members of the School Principal Team, Principals and their leaders have an opportunity to continue to actively interact with staff in an ongoing way.

In schools with significant numbers of graduates, it would be prudent to include them in the same team, complemented by a couple of teachers with four to five years of experience, and led by an Assistant Principal or Leading Teacher with explicit responsibility for induction.

The focus in these teams needs to support individual development and career planning, as well as play an ongoing role in shaping and supporting the school’s improvement pathway; with regular interaction, this should build increasing levels of trust and mutual respect, and enable school leaders to play a more prominent role in the professional practice and well-being of their colleagues.

In a previously published article, *New Principalships*, a model of personal behaviour was highlighted:

Underpinning any desire to be a high performing school is the quality of human interaction

– the quality of personal and professional relationships.

The opportunities in recruitment, orientation, induction and mentoring for Principals, School Leaders and Mentors to value the quality of their personal and professional relationships abound.

John Handley
APF Advisor