

A Study of School Boards and Their Implementation of Continuous Improvement Practices

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Summary

School board practices can impact student achievement in either positive or negative ways. Schools are not only responsible for increased student learning but also for developing social, emotional, and behavioral skills as well as 21st century learning skills. Just as teachers and administrators are called to implement research-based practices, school boards must also do so to obtain maximum student achievement results.

This research study, conducted in conjunction with a doctoral dissertation program, measured the extent to which school board presidents in Illinois perceived their utilization of continuous improvement practices in their boardsmanship. Continuous improvement practices have been identified as an effective practice of school boards.^{1,2,3}

Purpose of the Study

The research study examined the extent to which school board presidents utilized continuous improvement practices. Three sets of variables were studied including: school board president demographics, school district demographics, and continuous improvement variables.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between the number of years serving on the board of education and the use of continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship?
- What is the relationship between the number of years serving as school board president and the use of continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship?
- What is the relationship between the education level of the school board president and the use of continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship?
- What is the relationship between school district size and the use of continuous improvement practices in boardsmanship?

Methodology

Data for this study was gathered through a 31-item survey that measured the application of continuous improvement practices in school boardsmanship. The survey contained a six-point Likert-type response scale anchored with "very untrue of our board" (coded as "1") to "very true of our board" (coded as "6").

An expert review panel validated the survey instrument and provided feedback to ensure content validity as a true measure of continuous improvement. Further evidence of the instrument's validity was determined using principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation after data collection. Factor analysis combined variables that were correlated moderately or highly with each other.

The survey measured board presidents' perception regarding the implementation of various continuous improvement factors in their boardsmanship. The factors were based on the Malcolm Baldrige *Criteria for Performance Excellence* and included: leadership; strategic planning; student, stakeholder, and market focus; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; workforce focus; process management; and results.

Three primary continuous improvement resources were used to develop the survey items: *The Key Work of School Boards*,² *Leading Change: The Case for Continuous Improvement*,⁴ and *Systems Quick Check for School Boards*.⁵ Survey items were coded to align with one of the appropriate categories of the Baldrige criteria.

Research Conclusions

Pearson product moment correlations, one-way analysis of variance, and t-tests were computed to examine the relationship between the implementation of continuous improvement practices and the independent variables. No statistically significant correlations were found for any of the four research questions.