

Title: A Study of Relationships Between Ethical Decision Making, Leadership Styles, and Demographics in Pennsylvania Superintendents

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Education is a moral undertaking and superintendents are confronted with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Historical issues such as conflict of interest still linger but current issues aligned with school reform and precipitated by cultural diversity have also arisen.

What variables are linked to the making of sound ethical decisions? Do more experienced superintendents make better decisions than less experienced superintendents? Do transformational leaders make better decisions than transactional leaders? This study focused on the personal demographics and leadership styles of superintendents in an attempt to answer these and other questions.

A three part survey was mailed in February of 2008 to all public school superintendents in Pennsylvania. The first part of the survey consisted of 12 ethical dilemmas aligned to the Code of Ethics of the American Association of School Administrators. The second part consisted of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire which identified the leadership style of each superintendent as either laissez faire, transformational, or transactional. The third part of the survey consisted of five questions about personal characteristics: age, gender, highest degree earned, amount of ethical training, and years of experience.

Descriptive statistics were used to study the population. The participating superintendents were predominantly older males with doctorate degrees, with few years of experience, and with little ethical training.

Inferential statistics were used to study the relationships between personal characteristics, leadership styles, and ethical decision making. Chi square tests were conducted to measure the significance levels between all the demographic, leadership, and ethical questions.

Three statistical relationships were found: superintendents who experienced the dilemma made better ethical decisions than those who did not experience the dilemmas; women were more transformational than their male counterparts; and transactional leaders had more ethical training than did transformational leaders.

Conclusions drawn from this study were that superintendents respond ethically about half of the time, variability exists in superintendents' responses due to different ethical frameworks and different levels of ethical judgment, superintendent preparation programs need to emphasize the various dimensions of ethics, and future research both quantitative and qualitative needs to be done to identify valid predictors of ethical decision making.