

Mapping school principal selection in South America: Unsolved problems and complexities

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Selecting principals is crucial for school improvement. This study sought to describe and compare diverse principal selection systems in South America, to identify similarities and differences. Principal selection systems were analysed from six countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The findings show the selection systems of principals across these countries to be diverse in terms of scope, stakeholders involved during the process, selection procedure and criteria. Focusing on leadership performance by combining the most effective criteria and procedures is critical for improving principal selection systems across South America.

Introduction

The link between principals and school improvement is well-documented in current research (Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, Gu, Brown & Ahtaridou 2011; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). Every case of school improvement attributed its success in some way to the involvement of a talented principal capable to transform schools into learning organisations and improve student learning outcomes (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Cosner & Jones, 2016; Finnigan, 2011; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). From a distributed leadership perspective, principals are central to redesigning organisations which require lateral, flatter decision-making processes (Hargreaves, 2007). Therefore, selecting the “best” principal for each school is key. Despite its relevance, studies into principal selection process for individual countries remains lacking in both breadth and depth (James, Fitzgerald, Fellows, Goodall, Batlle & Jones 2019; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Palmer, 2018). In the research literature, principal selection processes in South America are unexplored due to the lack of reported comparative perspectives, making this study relevant (Aravena & Hallinger, 2018; Aravena, Pineda-Baez, López-Gorosave & García-Garduño, 2020).

In turn, the overall aim of this study is to compare diverse principal selection systems in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Perú) to identify similarities and differences between them. Our interest is mapping the principal selection process in the region to understand and analyse systemic and unsolved issues as well as recommend improvements. Hopefully, this discussion highlights the need for a strategic method of principal selection for building and sustaining successful school systems. This paper is structured in four main sections. The first section reviews the research literature on principal selection. Then, a description of the method is presented. The third section provides an overview of each case. In the fourth section, the discussion and conclusions are stated.

Principal selection: A conceptual overview

The selection phase of a principal's career includes preparation, recruiting, appointment, induction, professional development, and evaluation phases (James et al., 2019; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Walker & Kwan, 2012). In this paper, selection is understood as a process in which the intention is to match the most suitable candidate to be principal in a specific vacancy (Young, 2008). Following the perspective of Palmer and Mullooly (2015), selection is defined as the first strategic mechanism to ensure that a competent principal be appointed to a leadership school position.

There are two major components in the principal selection process: selection criteria and selection procedures. Selection criteria are qualifications required to be eligible as principal (Kwan & Walker, 2009). Selection criteria are fundamental to assess possible candidates. For example, Doyle and Locke (2014) developed a study in five school districts in the United States reporting that the selection criteria established were similar; most of them focused on competencies and skills, such as instructional expertise, people management, cultural aspects and problem solving skills. In Turkey, the selection criteria include knowledge, for example, instructional practices, creating a school culture, administrative and managerial skills, and ethical leadership behavior (Akbaşlı, Şahin & Gül, 2017). Globally, the most frequent selection criteria identified in the research include: professional qualifications, professional work experiences, and leadership and management skills (Akbaşlı, Şahin & Gül, 2017; Alvarez-Alvarez & Fernández-Gutierrez, 2017; Blackmore, Thomson & Barty, 2006; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Gurmu, 2019; Kwan, 2012; Peirano, Campero & Fernández, 2015; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015).

Selection procedures can be defined as formal activities to collect data to inform hiring decisions. Interviews are the most used procedure to select school principals (Walker & Kwan, 2012). For example, this is observed in Hong Kong (Walker & Kwan, 2012), Australia (Blackmore et al., 2006), the United States (Doyle & Locke, 2014) and England (James et al., 2019). However, interviewing as a standard selection procedure has a fundamental flaw because interviews cannot accurately predict job performance (MacBeath et al., 2006). Most of the interviews are not well-structured and are highly subjective (Blackmore et al. 2006; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Steed, Waniganayake & De Nobile, 2020), and decisions for selecting principals tend to be based on intuition (Gronn & Lacey, 2006). During interviews, the panel selection focuses on two main themes: candidate characteristics (e.g. biodata, demographic, work experience, etc.) and candidate quality (e.g. specific management skills, knowledge based, etc.) (Doyle & Locke, 2014). The less common selection procedures include group activities with other candidates, creating student learning tasks and meeting with parents (Doyle & Locke, 2014). The combination of different selection criteria and procedures focusing on leadership performance as well as desired skills and knowledge is pivotal for improving principal selection (Romanowski et al., 2019; Wildy, Pepper & Guanzhong, 2011).

Unsolved problems around principal selection

The selection of principals has been conceptualised as problematic (Blackmore et al., 2006; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Gronn & Lacey, 2006; Naso, 2011; Palmer, Kelly, & Mullooly, 2015; Palmer, 2018). Blackmore et al. (2006) explored the Australian context summarising five problematic points in every principal selection process: (1) the dependence of selection panels on a written application; (2) the dilemma of experience versus potential; (3) the covert rule about the appointment of preferred applicants hired through nepotism; (4) the quandary of panel competency; and (5) the evidence of inconsistency of decisions (p. 302).

In the United States, Doyle and Locke (2014) identified two main problems: (1) evaluation of the wrong qualities of candidates and (2) failure to provide adequate opportunities for all candidates to demonstrate their skills. These problems limit the possibility to obtain the best clues to select the most suitable candidate for the principalship post (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Based on the point of view of Naso (2011) three problems can be inferred; (1) the idealistic view of selecting principals based on a computed score; (2) the uneven progress in terms of research literature of school leadership and principal selection; (3) the unstructured procedures to capture and predict real-life practices of principals rather than rather than theoretical discussions in interviews. Palmer and Mullooly (2015) added two other problems: (1) the highly subjective procedures during the selection process and (2) the prevalence of non-merit factors within principal selection. Findings of the same study indicated that 78% of participants believe that the selection process considered non-merit-based factors such as incumbents, gender, race/ethnicity, politics, favouritism, time in service, etc. (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). This generates a sense of inequity within the pool of candidates in which the less-qualified candidate has more chances to win the vacancy (Blackmore et al 2006; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015).

This suspicion of inequality is also observed in Ethiopia (Gurmu, 2018), Indonesia (Bambang et al., 2015), Pakistan (Quraishi & Aziz, 2016), Chile (Donoso, Fernández & Reyes, 2019) and Qatar (Romanowski et al., 2019). In these contexts, political affiliation of candidates is a critical point in being selected as principal. This situation raises ethical issues that negatively impact the confidence and transparency of the whole process, due the fact that unqualified candidates are selected most of the time (Gurmu, 2018; Palmer, 2018).

Different studies have reported that the selection of principals is moving towards a standardised process, however in most of the cases, the selection is still based on the premise of “who you know” (Blackmore et al., 2006; Gronn & Lacey, 2006; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). This implies that panels prefer to ‘play safe’ and select ‘one of their own’ (Steed, Waniganayake & De Nobile, 2020). Based on the latest studies, this issue remains largely unsolved (Gurmu, 2018; Palmer, 2018), commonly cross-comparing value to the competency of the panels to determine how execute and manage the process (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Most of the time, rather than rising to the rigorous challenge of searching for the “best candidate”, panel members opt to dismiss candidates (Blackmore et al., 2006). This idea was also corroborated by Steed, Waniganayake and De Nobile’s (2020)

indication that 'hidden rules' are observed, even in merit selection processes. Improvements in selection criteria being clearer and more shared, as well as selection procedures reducing subjectivity and unproductivity, are not enough. Selection panel competencies require development in order to yield the most thorough and accurate results of in arbitrating a candidate pool, and thus making the best hiring decision. As this is the reality among many educational systems across the globe, the tendency in selecting principals remains towards the reproduction model in which selection panels select people like themselves (Blackmore et al., 2006). There is no clear evidence that the idea of the 'homosocioability' during a selection principal process is being removed (Blackmore et al., 2006; Palmer, 2018).

Method

The aim of this study is to compare diverse principal selection systems in South America (represented by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) to identify similarities and differences between them. The study adopted a qualitative approach based on comparative cases (Creswell, 2014). In comparative case studies, the selection of cases is key (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). To do so, firstly, available principal selection processes from Latin America were inspected on official websites for ten countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela). Then, the case selection logic followed the maximum variation sampling method (Creswell, 2014). This method allowed enough and diverse information to be obtained. The countries were selected by the following criteria: (1) diversity in terms of selection criteria and selection procedures (see Table I); (2) having an official public system for principal selection; and (3) different stakeholders involved during the process.

Data collection and data procedure

Data was collected over the course of two months (April-May 2019). Official websites for the ministries of education in the selected South American countries provided documentation, policies and laws related to school principal selection. Most of the official websites contain direct links to download the file in which the principal selection system is outlined. In some cases, official documentation was not made available on the government websites because it was provided by external stakeholders (e.g. Argentina, Chile, Colombia). Once the documents were collected and the cases selected, a document analysis was employed (Creswell, 2014). According to Bowen (2009) "document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents ... Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (p.27). Document analysis provides us the option to interpret, structure and generalise information in order to reveal the similarities and differences between the emerging categories (Bowen, 2009). After carefully re-reading the documents collected for each respective country, emerging categories were defined to integrate data in a comparative approach (Creswell, 2014). The following section presents a brief overview of the principal selection system of each case-country.

The cases: Principal selection systems in South America

Argentina (Buenos Aires): A natural principal selection system

Argentinian school principals are regarded as teachers in the highest hierarchical scale. In Argentina, there is no specific documentation providing principal selection guidelines. These guidelines are officially stated in the legal dispositions of teaching career (Law N° 10.579, 2005). As a federal country, each province has their own procedures for selecting principals. To further investigate, Buenos Aires Province was selected as a representative case for the country due to the province hosting more than 40% of the national student enrolment. In Buenos Aires, the selection criteria are general and only focused on teaching previous experience. The selection process has two phases: (1) validation of professional experience (years of teaching experience, professional qualifications, responsibility, among others) and two exam scores. These exams are (1) a theoretical test measuring skills and knowledge to manage the school, and (2) an oral exam in which a candidate presents an educational project that elaborates on a previously written paper. Once the authorities of the jurisdiction select the principal, the position is held until they retire, quit or for other causes. Argentinian principals have a “natural” principal selection system in which senior teachers are the successors to administrative/ principal/ leadership positions. However, there are few incentives for teachers to take on the leadership responsibilities of a principal's role (Romero & Krichesky, 2019).

Brazil (Rio de Janeiro): A democratic principal selection system

In Brazil, the selection of principals is highly heterogeneous. Each state and municipality has its own selection policies. The National Education Plan (2014) establishes that municipal schools require a democratic and participatory management that fosters interrelationships between the school community and families. This organisational structure extends to the selection of principals associated with practical considerations, for example, school principals are selected through a voting process, which demonstrates an attempt to reconcile merit with and democracy (Prado de Oliveira & Giordano, 2018). The municipality of Rio de Janeiro was selected as the representative case for the federal government of Brazil, because the schools in this region experience a wide range of problems present in other Brazilian states (e.g. stratification in high rates of socio-economic segregation, student-on-student violence and below average test scores compared with the national data). In Rio, two stages are clearly defined during a principal selection process: (1) registration and (2) popular election (vote). In a second phase, the potential candidates present their candidacy for the position. According to the latest resolution, the Municipal Education Secretariat No. 4 in 2017 (Resolution No.20, (2017) indicated that principals are chosen through direct, confidential and facultative voting. Two demographics are polled in this voting process: (1) teachers and (2) students, parents (one vote for each student), administrators of the secretary of education, and the president of the neighbourhood board. The school principal is selected by majority vote and the appointment is for a period of three years.

Chile: A micropolitical principal selection system

In Chile, in 2011 the selection of school principals in the public sector was modified in order to strengthen the school system. With the enactment of Law No. 20.501 (Law N° 20.501, 2011), the selection process was carried out by the Civil Service through a system of concurrency of Senior Public Management (ADP) with the goal of achieving the most transparency possible. The selection process now considers the input of external consultants registered in the National Civil Service who pre-select the candidates in order to ensure their professional experiences and psychological profile. In a first stage, the municipal education department defines the profile of the position and reviews the admissibility criteria. In the next phase, candidates must pass psychological tests. After clearing the psychological test requirements, the rating committee conducts individual interviews.

The rating commission is made up of the Head of the Department of Municipal Education Administration (DAEM) or the Municipal Corporation, a member of the ADP Council and a teacher from the same municipality who belongs to the network of teachers or is accredited as an expert teacher in accordance with the results of the national evaluation. A selection of three to five candidates is presented to the school district leader from the pool of candidates who were interviewed. The commission carries out an interview to evaluate the competencies of the candidates, and from that, the school district leader decides with the majorities' ratification or rejection of the decision, being a highly micro-politicised selection. Although Chile has a set of guidelines called the *Framework for Good Leadership and School Leadership*, during the selection process there is no reference to how municipalities can effectively integrate it.

Colombia: A managerial principal selection model

According to the legal disposition No. 1578 enacted in 2017 (Decreto 1578 de 2017, 2017), Colombian school principals must build and sustain a peaceful climate in a post-conflict society. The national principal selection system is carried out by the National Civil Service. The selection process is described as a “merit contest” based on principles of equity, objectivity, impartiality, efficiency economy, and other principles. The process contains ten stages, from being hired to the evaluation of the first month's performance on the job. However, there are two distinct phases of selection. The first is eliminatory in which candidates have to prove their knowledge and competencies through university-administered written exams. These tests measure the following: (1) specific pedagogical knowledge, (2) critical reading skills, (3) management, administrative and financial knowledge (4) academic management and (5) psycho-technical abilities. Next, the candidate's academic and professional backgrounds are validated in an interview conducted by an expert in school administration and management. According to interview performance, candidates are scored by rank from the list of all eligible candidates (referred to as a “ranking league table”). Then, at a public hearing, candidates can choose which educational institution they will serve. Candidates choose their positions in descending order of score-ranking, the highest scoring candidates are awarded the opportunity to choose first. School principals in Colombia do not necessarily have to be educators, if they have at least five years of professional experience.

Ecuador: A national system of merit and opposition

According to Ecuador's Ministry of Education, school principal candidates demonstrate eligibility through a process called "Merit and Opposition". The lowest acceptable score is category "D" in the national teaching career with a prerequisite of 12 years teaching experience. Eligible candidates with a high ranking take psychological and logic tests. Only successful applicants enter into the national selection process, in two sequential phases: (a) merit (35%) and (b) opposition (65%). The merit phase considers information based on academic degrees, teaching experience, professional development courses and research. In the opposition phase, two components are evaluated in a written exam of theoretical educational management and a project of practical educational management. In this last segment, the candidate will have two and a half hours to design a project and then, thirty minutes to present the project orally to the panel judges. Additional to the points scored on the two-step evaluation, the Organic Intercultural Educational Law (Law N° 0, 2011) established bonus points for candidates able to show evidence of living in the same district of the school for which they are applying, if they have more than four years of previous experience in the public sector or in leadership of a rural school. These bonus points are also eligible for candidates with disability or who are immigrants.

Peru: A national and decentralised principal selection system

The Ministry of Education (MINEDU) establishes a trajectory of professional development for school principals that includes training, evaluation, remuneration, recognition and well-being. This trajectory is defined in the Public Teaching Career (CPM), which aims to retain and promote teachers based on merit. Within this career, teachers belonging to the third scale can qualify for principals. The principal selection process is designed and implemented by the Ministry of Education (MINEDU), the Local Educational Management Unit (UGEL) and the Regional Directorate of Education (DRE). The non-delineated conflation of these two entities speaks to the reasons why the selection system has a mixed model between national and decentralised systems. In the national stage, the MINEDU is responsible for designing and applying the National Test (PUN). The PUN includes three exams: (1) reading comprehension (20 questions), (2) management cases (20 questions), and (3) specific pedagogical knowledge (60 questions). Each of these exams is independent and requires a minimum score. In the case of school principals, the test questions concerning management cases are those that have the highest value overall. When the applicants pass the PUN, the decentralised stage begins. In this stage, an evaluation committee composed by the Director of the UGEL, two school principals of the same educational jurisdiction of the highest magisterial teaching scales, chief of personnel of the UGEL, and a specialist in education of the UGEL uses a rubric to evaluate the applicants' professional careers. The rubric measures three areas: (1) academic and professional qualifications, (2) merits and (3) professional experience. The Peruvian education system uses the *Framework of Good Performance Management* (Law N° 24.029, 2018)) whose focus is to guide the work of school principals, starting with the selection process.

Table 1: Features of principal selection systems in Latin America

	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
Period (years)	Tenured	3	5	Tenured	4	4
Scope	Local	Local	National	National	National	Mixed
Stakeholders involved	Jurisdictions	Municipalities; Municipal Education Secretariat; School community	National Civil Service; Municipalities	National Civil Service; Ministry of Education; Universities	Ministry of Education; School district	Ministry of Education; Local Educational Management Unit UGEL; Regional Directorate of Education (DRE)
Selection criteria	Years of teaching experience	At least five yrs teaching experience in a school of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro or at least three years leadership experience	Master degree Years of teaching experience	Years of teaching experience through an evaluation matrix through an evaluation matrix	At least category D in the teaching career (12 years of teaching experience)	At least third level in the Public teaching career
Written exams	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oral interview	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Author's elaboration (2019).

Discussion

Length of principal tenure

According to the principal's selection system in Latin American region, durations of principal tenure may be categorised in two groups. The first group is brief posts (e.g. 3 years in Rio de Janeiro, 4 in Ecuador, and 5 in Chile). The system is designed for leadership succession to be an inevitable and more frequent phenomenon than in other countries. A recent study in Chile investigated turnover rates for principals since the ADP system was implemented, finding that 60% of schools observed a turnover period of less than five years (Valenzuela, Allende & Vanni, 2018). High rates of principal mobility directly impact leadership sustainability and improvement efforts. How the educational systems establish and manage leadership succession in school life is key for sustaining possibilities for school improvement (Aravena, 2020; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). A second group of principal selection systems appoint for a life term (if they can and want to serve in that position). Having an extended-tenure principal increases opportunities to sustain and maintain changes and reduces the effects of organisational trauma caused by the arrival of new leadership. The underlying disadvantage in life-long tenure is the

challenge to continue leadership development and avoid professional stagnation. A principal at a single school for a continuous 20 years (possible in Argentina or Colombia) may fail to prioritise professional growth (Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). In the region, educational systems have to find a balance between sustainability and facilitating change, through the definition of a suitable tenure length in which a leader can make sustainable and meaningful impact. Strength of leadership succession strategy and volume of human resources are contingent on length definition for principals' tenure.

System scope

Each region studied represents a different, unique system scope for selecting school principals. Brazil and Argentina present a local selection system because there is no standardisation of the process at the national level (Prado de Oliveira & Giordano, 2018; Romero & Krichesky, 2019). In contrast, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador have unique national selection systems. Meanwhile, Peru, relies on a mixed selection system, with a national stage and local stages. It is important that all the systems have a national selection process in order to ensure minimum conditions. It is also essential that the local arena has been considered in the process if they are already implemented, because leadership on this level is contextual (Bush, 2018; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Goldring, Huff, May & Camburn, 2008; Hallinger, 2018). In the selection process, a candidate who is familiar with the local system should advance. With this candidate requirement in mind, only Ecuador and Brazil consider the "contextual knowledge base" as a selection criterion for the role. For example, the selection system in Rio recognises that teaching experience in the Amazon is not directly applicable in Rio. In comparison, the selection system of Ecuador does not take contextual knowledge of a local system into account in its process, but instead awards bonus points to a candidate's application. It is pertinent that each principal selection system includes contextual knowledge as a selection criterion, to create more bespoke and accurate decisions. This could reduce the "cultural shock" experienced by the school community and the appointed principal, thus serving as a catalyst for integrating the principal into the community. This phenomenon was not observed in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru.

Stakeholders involved in the selection process

Different stakeholders are involved in the process of selecting a school principal. In Colombia and Chile, the National Civil Services are responsible for developing each country's process. The National Civil Service works as an external agent that is responsible for compliance with the stages of public competition. The presence of an external body independent of the Ministry of Education grants transparency and validity to the process by virtue of third-party accountability, however it does not solve the issue of selecting the best candidates. In Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, the selection processes are controlled by organisations that schools are dependent on politically (e.g. jurisdictions, municipalities, MINEDU). The continual reliance on these agencies assumes their implicit capabilities to determine the best candidates. In these areas, there is a resistance to systems that stress the relationship between transparency and merit. A more integrated strategy utilising the competencies of the Civil Service and those of the

municipalities and the Ministry of Education would improve the quality of the selection process. Stakeholders must foster a transparent process to ensure selection of the best candidates.

Selection criteria

Selection criteria in each region are similar. According to Kwan and Walker (2009), criteria for selecting principals should be clear about evaluating possible candidates. In each region, professional background in education is used as a selection criterion. South American selection systems value a high quality of teaching experience from potential candidates. In some cases, the selection criteria are only associated with years of experience (Argentina, Rio de Janeiro and Chile). Years of teaching experience does not directly correlate to teaching quality, therefore, selection processes should not only consider years of experience but also the level of performance, as in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The selection criteria connected with previous leadership experience was not observed in the selection systems studied. When designing these selection processes, criteria that closely align with practical, daily responsibilities of a principal should be chosen and implemented. To improve the current selection systems in the regions studied, each system should consider using previous leadership experience in school (e.g. vice principal, curriculum coordinators, head of department, etc.) as a criterion to select principals. More criteria focusing on leadership capabilities are necessary for each system.

Written exams

South America implements written exams widely to evaluate candidates for principalship. Different educational systems have used this method, however in the case of Argentina and Colombia, the tests seem to be disconnected with the managerial task and more connected with assessing the level of generic knowledge. Ecuador and Peru have developed instruments that focus on educational management. The next step should be to focus more on evaluating leadership than management (Bush, 2018). If exam evaluations are used as a filter to identify qualified candidates, the assessments must be redesigned to evaluate leadership related skills. Using performance-based tasks with established validity and rigorous procedures related to school principal's work is essential (Wildy, Pepper & Guanzhong, 2011). Thus, testing the candidates in authentic principal leadership situations would increase the chances of obtaining useful data in regard to predict a future principal's performance.

Oral interviews

Oral interviews are widely used in selection of principals (Walker & Kwan, 2012). However, clear criteria are not always identified on how to conduct an interview. The next step in improving this process is to define what topics should be the focus of attention, beyond the typical factual topics of professional experience and academic background. Establishing clear focus and selection criteria aligned with the leadership framework could improve interview productivity. Suggested interview discussion topics include the following: the learning potential of the candidate on instructional leadership, willingness to

make and learn from mistakes, and openness to guidance and support of peers. Palmer and Mullooly (2015) suggested that oral interviews should move forward from generic, vague, and diverse questions among candidates to identical and highly structured questions focusing on leadership and student learning. This reinforces the ideal of analysing candidates equally, to reduce the risk of bias (Gronn & Lacey, 2006).

Conclusion

Providing standardised and articulated guidelines is an important step in orienting a principal's work. A national leadership framework is useful because it has systems available to identify key leadership practices for principals to implement in their schools. Only Chile and Peru have an official leadership framework fostering instructional practices. However, there were few real-world references on how to use such a framework successfully during a selection process. A clear and explicit alignment between the leadership framework should be stated in official documentation for selection of principals. This will be also useful to panel or committee evaluations that focus on detecting the potential of candidates developing the leadership practices identified in the framework. In that sense, it should be recommended to integrate performance-based assessment tasks focusing on principals' daily work practices. Also, refinements in principal selection systems should be accompanied by refinements in the organisational environments in schools, perhaps most notably in stronger "embedding" of team leadership or distributed leadership principles. Selecting principals capable of creating and contributing to developing other leaders is vital for sustaining school improvement efforts.

As previously stated, selection of a school's principal is critical for a school's success. As Wildy et al. (2011) stated, "Principal selection may then be a combination of merit selection and negotiation between educational authorities and parent organisations" (p.277). A principal selection system requires considering diverse procedures and criteria to determine an adequate match between "the best candidate", and what a school needs for its improvement. This challenges educational systems and specifically their hiring cultures to attain a balance between rigorous contextual knowledge based on what a school needs to improve, linked to the national leadership framework or professional leadership standards, and scored by valid, explicit and fair selection criteria and procedures for candidates. A coherent system cares not only about selecting the best candidates, but also about utilising them where their unique capabilities can make the most highly valued contribution.

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