



Introduction

Americans have long had a love-hate relationship with testing. As a nation that values a practical, no-nonsense approach to daily life, we are intrigued by the notion that thirty to sixty minutes with paper and pencil can cut through our foggy perceptions to provide a reliable, valid measure of the qualities we cherish, from intelligence to vocational aptitude. Popular magazines learned long ago that a sure-fire way to capture readers' attention is to offer a simple ten-minute quiz that claims to reveal readers' personality, emotional intelligence, or marital compatibility.

At the same time, we've learned to be suspicious of instruments that promise so much yet often deliver so little. Virtually all of us have had the experience of taking a test at school that somehow failed to capture the knowledge in our heads. If that can happen on a simple academic test, what can we expect from instruments that purport to measure intelligence, personality, or leadership?

Thus, when the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management asked me to prepare a book with the title *Measuring Leadership*, I accepted the assignment with some ambivalence. While I knew enough about testing to respect the ability of a well-designed instrument to capture subtle aspects of human behavior, I had also spent enough time in schools to appreciate the complexity of the K-12 environment. I wondered whether any test could pinpoint the qualities needed to lead such unruly institutions.

But as I read the testing literature I found evidence that formal assessment could provide insights into dimensions of leadership that might otherwise go unnoticed. As I examined numerous instruments (and took advantage of the opportunity to assess my own leadership qualities), I was impressed that so many of them are thoughtful, well-designed, and relevant to school leadership (even when they have not been designed for that environment). In the process, I learned some

things about my own approach to leadership, and was stimulated to think about how it could be improved. My exploration into leadership assessment left me with little doubt about its potential value.

Yet my research also underscored the hazards of taking test results out of context. It was clear that these tests were not tapping into some universal leadership “essence.” Each instrument uses different definitions and strategies to assess leadership qualities, and each offers a different lens through which leadership can be viewed. Simply learning the score is of little value unless the underlying model is understood. Productive leadership assessment requires careful attention both before and after the test has been administered.

Thus, this book focuses less on detailed descriptions of instruments than on a *process* that begins with reflection on the district’s leadership needs and ends when participants begin to act on the implications of the results. My hope is that both district officials and principals will find practical guidance in this discussion.

As with most ERIC publications, this volume is a work of synthesis, designed to report on the existing literature rather than to create new theories. However, any synthesis inevitably requires personal judgments and interpretations. In the attempt to formulate a coherent picture from diverse sources, I may have seen implications or made connections that the original authors did not intend. Thus, readers should not regard the material in these pages as the final word on the subject, but only as an initial recommendation that should be freely challenged and adapted through their own insights and experiences.

I want to express my appreciation to the Clearinghouse for offering me the opportunity to write this volume. I owe a special debt to Stuart Smith, whose patience I severely tested but whose support was unflagging. Additional thanks go to Mike Krigelski, superintendent of schools in Centreville, Michigan, whose commonsense comments put a human face on the testing process.

As always, a work of this type relies on access to good libraries, and I’ve been blessed with an abundance of rich resources, including The Evergreen State College, Pacific Lutheran University, the Washington State Library, and Olympia Timberland Library. Their assistance made a difficult task much easier.