Paper Title The Role of the Teacher Support Colleague in Educator Evaluation Systems: A Work Design Approach

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A Work Design Approach to Understand the Evolving Role of the Teacher Support Colleague in

Educator Evaluation Systems

Abstract

This paper presents a conceptual framework and analysis of the role of the Teacher Support Colleague (TSC) in the context of K-12 educator evaluation systems. This paper articulates the benefits of adopting a *work design approach* to understand and effectively design the TSC role, using systems theory and job design theory as the basis of the approach. This role specification informs effective teacher practice, the design of evaluation systems that support teachers' professional growth, and the definition career ladder positions for teachers in and out of the classroom. Lastly, we will articulate how a work design approach for TSC positions fits intelligently into a human capital management strategy and provides a distributed school leadership approach to support on-going school improvement.

1. Statement of Issue

As K-12 teachers' jobs increase in complexity, content, and workload, there is simultaneous pressure from mandated evaluation systems for teachers to improve and innovate their practice. There is a strong need for alternative teacher leadership models, both inside and outside the classroom, to support the professional growth of teachers and provide career alternatives to those who wish to take on leadership roles but do not necessarily want to leave the classroom. One such model is the Teacher Support Colleague (TSC), similar to Teacher Coach, Teacher Leader, Master/Mentor Teacher, or Peer Coach, though with some key distinctions that will be articulated later in this paper. The TSC's overall purpose is the support classroom teachers' practice, curriculum design, professional development, and professional growth within the context of educator evaluation systems.

While the teacher leader or coach models have been articulated and developed in the literature and in practice (Bond, 2015; Foltos, 2013), the TSC as a specific type of teacher leader is still emergent within the context of educator evaluation systems. As such, methods and approaches rooted in job design is an essential component to effectively understanding, designing, and implementing these positions in schools. One such discipline is *human factors engineering*, an interdisciplinary field that draws from the scientific disciplines of cognitive science, organizational studies, psychology, and industrial engineering. Human factors engineering focuses on understanding human behavior and the performance of people in work systems, with specific focus on the application of that understanding on the effective system design (Wilson, 2000). This field is poised to make a unique contribution to the *work design* to support TSCs' role in schools.

2. Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

The conceptual framework represents a synergy of two areas of research adapted from the field of human factors engineering and research in job and work design. The first is the "work system" (Carayon, 2009) and the second is "job characteristics theory" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The centerpiece of this framework lies in the conceptualization of the TSC's work design and its influence on their job performance. See Figure 1.

There are 5 categories of factors that may influence the work design system of TSCs: *individual factors* (e.g., skills, motivation, experience), *jobs and tasks* with specific features (e.g., feedback, job or task control, autonomy), an *organizational context* (e.g., school culture, trust, distributed leadership), and *physical environment* (e.g., building layout, work station design), and *tools and technologies* (e.g., student assessment data, evaluation data, computers, data systems). The interplay and interactions among these various categories of factors can produce various effects on the individual (i.e., TSC), and over time, can contribute to or inhibit their work performance.

Specific job and task factors from the job characteristics theory (JCT) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), are embedded within the "job and tasks factors" category of the work design framework. This theory identifies five job characteristics main contributors to job performance, job satisfaction, and motivation: skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, and autonomy (or job control). If we are concerned with designing TSC's jobs, work, and tasks to align to expectations and goals for to support the professional growth of teachers in an educator evaluation system, then a robust approach rooted work design principles is essential.

We believe the work design framework can be successfully adapted to education. It is a well-tested framework that has been used in a variety of public and service-based settings for over 20 years (Carayon, 2009). In a previous study, this framework was effective in codifying the factors and interactions influencing teacher data use (Kraemer, Geraghty, Lindsey, & Raven, 2010). Further, the JCT has been adapted to describe distributed leadership initiatives that focus on teachers' work (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2007). In the next two sections, we will provide examples of the factors in the work design of TSCs, based on our collaborative work with the Northeast Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC), as well as implications for TSC work design and how their unique role is an important contribution to effective implementation of educator evaluation systems.

3. Analysis of Concept

This section summarizes the applicability of work design system to the work of TSCs in a consortia of rural school districts in Northeast Florida, led and managed by NEFEC. The NEFEC districts are implementing educator evaluation systems and human capital management strategies in each of their districts. These school districts are part of the U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) 4 Program, and have been piloting TSCs in their schools to support teachers in the implementation of their educator evaluation system.

In this program, TSCs are teachers who had a history of effective instructional practices and demonstrated student growth. The teachers chosen to be a TSC were respected by their colleagues and administrators, viewed as a change agent, were self-directed in their work, creative, and had a positive attitude. Table 1 describes the various work design factors for TSCs in the NEFEC districts.

4. Significance and Implications

Applicability of Work Design Framework

The work design framework has applicability and value to defining the roles of career ladder positions such as the TSC, as well as understanding how the various factors within the work design framework interact with one another and influence the performance of the TSC. Many research approaches to understanding the influence of teacher leader focus on a single factor, such as teacher collaboration (Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015) or a small set of factors, such as teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2015). The contribution of adopting a more comprehensive and relational framework, such as the work design framework, is that the factors that influence the TSC position are defined (in relation to one another) and contextualized to their settings.

The work design framework also encompasses the JCT model and the specific job and task characteristics of the TSC. The TSC job and related tasks fit within 5 JCT categories:

- *Skill variety*: the TSC supports teachers in the classroom and practice, participates in administrative decisions and committees, delivers differentiated professional development, and maintains expert knowledge about the educator evaluation system.
- *Task identity*: TSCs work spans across many functions processes of the school, from classroom teaching to administrative decision-making.
- *Task significance*: TSCs view their roles as critical to the success of teachers in the classroom and ensuring student success; teachers and principals highly value their role in supporting teachers in the evaluation system.
- *Feedback*: The principal and teachers provide the TSC feedback about what their needs are for their (respective) work, and how they can assist them in ensuring their work is done with high quality.
- *Autonomy (job control):* TSCs enjoy a very high level of job autonomy, control over their work, and independence. Because the work is inherently complex and driven by specific teacher and school needs, TSCs need the freedom to define their own efforts, timelines, and decisions, rather than on the instructions from the principal or a manual of job procedures. TSCs experience a greater level of personal responsibility for their work performance.

When a job encompasses most or all of these job and task characteristics, internal work motivation increases, which eventually leads to higher employee productivity and effectiveness (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The JCT factors, within the context of the broader work design framework, provide a proof-of-concept for

effectively designing job roles such as TSCs such that individual and organizational needs are met.

Teacher Support Colleagues and Educator Evaluation Systems

The role of the TSC is ever more critical in era of teacher accountability, and highly valued by districts who are designing more systematic human capital management systems with their educators. The unique role of the TSC defined by NEFEC, in the context of educator evaluation at the school level, extends the teacher coach or leader model to include implications for educator evaluation. First, the TSC role is one of a supportive colleague to teachers, not evaluator. However, one of the TSCs main roles are to be 'experts' in the evaluation system and therefore can assist teachers in their understanding of the evaluation system, as well as how to improve their teaching to meet the evaluation requirements. The TSCs translate the evaluation system requirements and the processes around completing the evaluation ratings to teachers; these areas are usually not provided by any other role in the school.

Educator evaluation systems requires a significant amount of technical knowledge about standards, practice, and the process for implementation. Typically, there are very little, if any, school-level supports for teachers outside of those who are evaluating them. Since the TSC role is dedicated toward supporting teachers' understanding and use of the evaluation system, this role is highly valued by teachers *and* administrators. Principals and administrators typically do not have the time nor experience to provide the coaching and training for teachers to fully understanding the system (in addition to their roles as evaluator and supervisor). A TSC is a much better fit for these tasks, given their experience in the classroom, trust among teachers and principal, and expert knowledge of the evaluation system – all the while *not* in the role of supervisor or evaluator of teachers. Further, TSCs connect evaluation system results (i.e., teaching observation rubric) to individual differentiated professional development to improve teaching practice. This is a feature that evaluation systems typically do not have in place; many times teachers are unable to decipher the practical meaning of the evaluation system results, identify appropriate professional development, and implement changes due to lack of time (Means, Padilla, & Gallagher, 2010) and lack of knowledge about how to use accountability data to improve instructional practice (Little, 2012; Marsh, 2012). The role of the TSC addresses some of these obstacles.

Lastly, the TSCs participate as leaders in school administration meetings and contribute to critical human capital management decisions, such as participating in hiring committees and facilitating teacher induction. The TSCs extend the teacher leader and coach models in that they are inform school administrative decisions, yet are not evaluating or supervising teachers or their performance. Therefore, the TSCs are viewed with a high level of trust by both teachers and principals.

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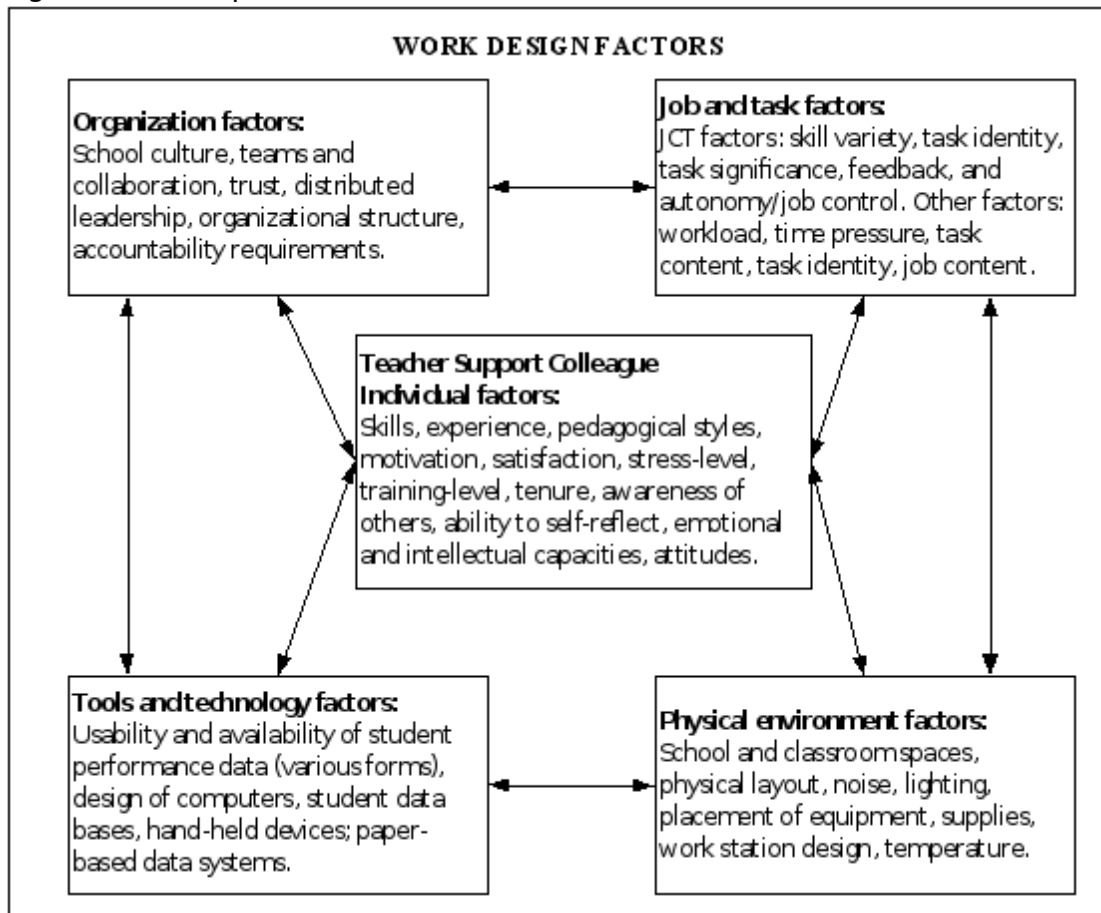
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

WORK DESIGN FACTORS

Organization factors:
School culture, teams and collaboration, trust, distributed leadership, organizational structure, accountability requirements.

Job and task factors:
JCT factors: skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, and autonomy/job control. Other factors: workload, time pressure, task content, task identity, job content.

Teacher Support Colleague
Individual factors:
Skills, experience, pedagogical styles, motivation, satisfaction, stress-level, training-level, tenure, awareness of others, ability to self-reflect, emotional and intellectual capacities, attitudes.

Tools and technology factors:
Usability and availability of student performance data (various forms), design of computers, student data bases, hand-held devices; paper-based data systems.

Physical environment factors:
School and classroom spaces, physical layout, noise, lighting, placement of equipment, supplies, work station design, temperature.

Table 1. Teacher Support Colleague Work Design Factors

Work Design Factors	School-Specific Examples
Organizational	• Climate of respect and trust for teachers and TSCs. • Highly valued by teachers. • TSC role as a career ladder position. • TSC promotes a teacher-led culture: teachers have more control and ownership over their practice and professional development, TSCs participate in school administration meetings. • Increase teachers' collective confidence and trust in evaluation system. • Culture of support: TSCs alleviate a significant portion of evaluation system-related stress of the evaluation system by continuously providing differentiated professional development and up-to-date knowledge of evaluation criteria. • Induction processes at school level supported by TSC. • Communication and confidence: TSC has confidence of teacher – they do not share everything teachers say to them with the principal (and the principal knows this). • The specific TSC role and tasks defined by the unique needs and characteristics of each school. • Highly valued "middle link" between administration and teachers.
Job and Task	*Related to teachers:* • Help teachers understand evaluation system and metrics. • TSCs are NOT evaluators – their role is peer and supportive colleague. • Provide immediate feedback on teaching practice. • Help teachers develop their individual PD plans. • Connect teachers with resources for curriculum and teaching practice. • Model classroom effective instructional and management strategies, but do not give teachers the answers. • Review data with teachers. • Mentor and encourage teachers. • Provide individual and differentiated professional development, as well as informal coaching. • Liaison between and among teachers; builds and facilitates teachers' communities of practice. • Reflect with teachers on their practice (one-on-one and within groups). • Highly valued role to support teachers in evaluation process; TSC works with teachers to be "highly effective" (rankings defined by the evaluation system). *Related to principals and school administration:* • Member of school leadership team. • Review interview questions and participate in teacher hiring. • Liaison between school administrators and teachers. • Assist school administrators in decision making. • Principal is careful to not put TSC in role of evaluator or supervisor.
Individual	• Experienced teacher with multi-year classroom experience. • Respected by peers.

Work Design Factors	School-Specific Examples
	• Have first-hand knowledge of kids in the school. • Have obtained trust and confidence from school administrators. • Expert in state standards and evaluation requirements, continuously update knowledge. • TSCs are different than teacher coach roles – TSCs are not content experts (though they may coordinate content-specific professional development for teachers). • Flexible in their work and their approach with teachers, aims to meet the needs of teachers and school.
Tools and Technology	• Use of student data, evaluation data, and state standards to support teachers' knowledge and teaching practice improvement. • Pedagogical and instructional resources found on the Internet, books, discussion boards, and other peers or colleagues. • Computers and hand-held devices, when appropriate (e.g., observation data capture). • Builds success plans *with* teachers, uses evaluation system to identify areas of improvement and strength.
Physical Environment	• TSCs have individual offices or group offices in school building. • Work with teachers in their individual classrooms. • Contend with busy and sometimes noisy environments; need for quite spaces to reflect and discuss (one-on-one and in communities of practice). • Building lighting, noise, space layout, and access to work stations.