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How Are Attitudes and Behaviors Formed?

HOW DO PEOPLE MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR BEHAVIOR?

Have you ever wished you could look inside the minds of people, to see why they behave as they do, or why they take a certain stand on an issue? Thanks to the model of reasoned action (MORA) described in this book, it is now possible for school leaders to scientifically understand the belief structures that underlie the attitudes and behaviors of diverse constituencies both inside and outside the school.

> ". . . We produce many more qualified teachers than we hire. The hard part is keeping the teachers we prepare."
>
> —Linda Darling-Hammond (2003)

This understanding offers *two powerful implications* for school leaders. The *first* is that people sometimes hold beliefs that are demonstrably untrue. In such cases, attitudes and behaviors can be influenced by the provision of accurate information. The *second* implication is that

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true beliefs suggest possible administrative changes that can influence attitude and behavior in the desired direction.

## TWO FACTORS IN BEHAVIORAL INTENTION: ATTITUDE AND NORM

When we think about the possibility of performing some specific behavior, we make up our minds—form our intentions—based on two factors: a personal factor and a social factor.

- The personal factor is our *attitude* toward performing the behavior.
- The social factor is our *subjective norm,* our perception that those people or groups who are important to us would favor—or oppose—our performing the behavior.

This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

The norm is *subjective,* because people will often never hear *directly* what their "important others" want them to do, or not do, in a given situation. Instead, they will *infer* the expectations of these persons and groups, based on what they

Figure 1.1   The Formation of Intention by Attitude and Norm
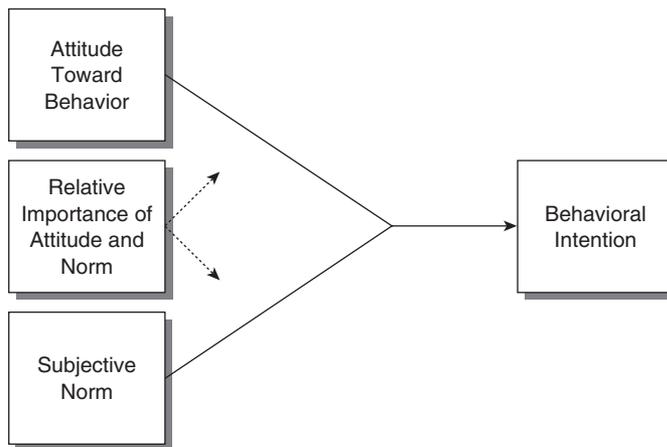
know about each of their "important others" and what they know about the behavior under consideration.

CHANGING BEHAVIORAL DECISIONS

To change people's behavior, you must change their intentions to perform the behavior. To change intentions, you must change either their attitudes or their norms regarding the behavior (or both). To change attitude or norm, you must change beliefs concerning the behavior.

> "What keeps some people in teaching while others give up?"
>
> —Linda Darling-Hammond (2003)

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF ATTITUDE AND NORM

Although both factors *can* be important in forming intention, attitude is usually more important. Sometimes, however, subjective norm is the only factor that determines behavioral intention. What accounts for the relative influence of attitudinal and normative influences on intentions?

There is evidence from research to suggest that in behavioral domains in which the decision makers have a lot of information about the behavior (e.g., mandatory testing), attitude is the more important factor. (And when a behavioral domain is important to people, they tend to acquire more information about it.) Sometimes, it is the only significant influence on intention. In domains in which people have *less* information (e.g., technology integration), subjective norm becomes relatively more important.

Research has shown differences in the relative influence of attitude and norm, based on the sex of the decision makers. Personality type might also be important in determining the relative weights. It seems intuitively correct that extroverted

people might be relatively *more* influenced by normative considerations than would introverted people.

The relative influence of attitude and norm depends on a number of factors: (a) the decision makers being studied, (b) the behavior of interest, (c) the importance of the behavior to those being studied, and (d) possibly other factors. Research continues to examine these and other possible influences on the relative weights of attitude and norm. The implication is that whenever you are interested in how people are making their decisions about some behavior, the only way to be *sure* about the relative weights of attitude and norm in that specific situation is to study the people and behavior of concern.

The results of my (BWP) first three postdoctoral studies using the MORA suggested to me that respondents who hold positions in their work organizations nearer the top (e.g., assistant superintendent) would be less influenced by norm than those who hold positions further from the top (e.g., teacher's aide). The following year when I began to study school principals' and teachers' decisions about participating in staff development, I assumed that the teachers' decisions would be more influenced by norm than the principals' decisions. The results of those studies, however, surprised me.

> "Keeping good teachers should be one of the most important agenda items for any school leader."
>
> —Linda Darling-Hammond (2003)

The studies found that norm was important for decision making in both groups but that it was *more* important for principals than for teachers. When I reported this finding—and my puzzlement over it—to my client's board of directors, a teacher on that board explained: "That's easy! Being a principal is a very political job!"

BELIEFS ARE THE BASIS OF ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR

The model of reasoned action (MORA) states that planned behaviors are ultimately determined by the beliefs that people

hold. As both attitude and norm are formed by beliefs, a few words about them will be helpful here. You will find more in-depth explanations of how beliefs form attitude and norm in the next three chapters.

THREE KINDS OF BELIEFS

The *first kind* of belief is a thought that links an object (or person) with a characteristic or quality. For example, a ball might be perfectly round, colored orange, and made of rubber. If you held such a ball in your hand, you would form very strong beliefs that it was round, orange, and rubber. The ball might also be large, with a pebbled surface, and used for playing basketball. It might have Michael Jordan's signature on it. You would probably believe it to be extremely likely that the ball was round, orange, and a basketball, but think it only slightly likely—or maybe *quite un*likely—that the signature is *really* Michael Jordan's! Our beliefs that an object has certain qualities, and our corresponding evaluations of these qualities, form our attitudes toward the object.

The *second kind* of belief is a thought that links your performing some behavior, such as setting a no-homework-on-Friday policy, with likely consequences or outcomes of that behavior. In the case of setting the policy, some appreciation from students and more parental support might be among the likely outcomes you would think of. These beliefs about behavioral outcomes and the corresponding evaluations of the outcomes form our attitudes toward performing behaviors.

> ". . . Attrition from individual schools and districts . . . particularly affect schools that serve poor and minority students."
>
> —Linda Darling-Hammond (2003)

The *third kind* of belief is a thought that links your performing some behavior, with the approval, or disapproval, of people who are important to you. These beliefs, and our willingness to comply with each of these "important others," form subjective norm, our perception of social pressure to perform (or not perform) a behavior.

ACQUIRING BELIEFS

We acquire beliefs in three ways. The *first way* is through *direct observation.* When you first enter a school that is new to you, you will immediately notice a number of qualities about the school. The campus is either attractive and well kept, or it is not. The building is very new, very old, or somewhere in between. You automatically form beliefs that the school has the qualities you observed.

The *second way* we acquire beliefs is by *acceptance of information* from some source such as another person, radio or television, or a written report. If you had heard from someone before your visit that the school is well run and highly successful, you might have believed this information very strongly, only somewhat strongly, or not at all.

The *third way* we acquire beliefs is *by inferring new beliefs* from what we already know. For example, suppose that you believed the information that the school is well run and highly successful. However, when you arrive at the campus, you observe that the grounds and building are quite poorly maintained. From these two beliefs, you might infer that the district lacks the funds for proper maintenance.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF BELIEFS

If, later that same day, you were asked what you thought about the school, you would immediately come up with a small number of beliefs, perhaps five to nine. However, if you concentrated, you could think of many, many more beliefs about the school based on your visit, perhaps 20 or more.

Not all of these beliefs have the same importance, however, in influencing your attitudes and behavior. Since we can keep only a few beliefs (typically five to nine) uppermost in our minds at one time, only those beliefs are important. Those five to nine beliefs are called *salient,* because they *stick*

out, from all the other beliefs we have, like the bristles from a hairbrush. (Increasingly, salient beliefs are called "accessible beliefs.")

HOW DOES THE MODEL EXTEND PREVIOUS IDEAS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

School Culture

The concept of school culture is a powerful one in the literature of educational leadership. Definitions of school culture include such factors as (a) the values and beliefs that determine behavioral norms (Kowalski, 2003), and (b) norms, values, and beliefs (Peterson, 2002).

There is evidence from research that positive school culture is related to such positive qualities as higher teacher morale (e.g., Black, 2001), higher student achievement (e.g., Bruner & Greenlee, 2000), and more successful implementation of reform (e.g., D'Amico & Nelson, 2000). There is evidence that this relationship is causal: Positive changes in culture have been followed by positive changes in student achievement (e.g., Thacker & McInerney, 1992).

Kent Peterson (2002) noted, "Being able to understand and shape the culture is key to a school's success . . ." (p. 10). He suggested that school leaders transform school cultures in three steps: reading, assessing, and shaping the culture. School leaders shape the culture by reinforcing positive aspects of the culture and working to change negative aspects.

The *model of reasoned action* (MORA) presented in this book can *extend* traditional approaches to reading and assessing a school culture by providing more specific information about the beliefs, values, and norms held by various groups in a school, community, or district. The MORA can assess both the strength and direction of the unique sets of beliefs and values held by teachers, students, parents, or other groups.

School Change

Thompson (2001) noted that current challenges to education require that "Principals must, above all, become expert at leading change . . . [and] be skilled at dealing with resistance to change" (p. 2). This requirement applies to school leaders at other levels as well. Resistance to change can come from groups within the school, as well as from groups outside the school.

Teacher Attitudes

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hall & Hord, 2001; Hord et al., 1987) was developed to monitor and increase the adoption of educational innovations. The instrument measures concerns that educators hold when faced with change. Data collected with the instrument are used to indicate which stage of adoption of the innovation a group currently occupies.

A review of the research literature on change (Waugh & Punch, 1987) identified five factors related to teachers' receptivity to change: (a) basic attitudes toward education, (b) resolution of fears about the change, (c) personal cost appraisal for change, (d) practicality of the change, and (e) perceived school support for the change. Welch (1989) asserts that in responding to a proposed change, teachers assess the advantages and disadvantages for them *personally,* not just those for student growth.

The MORA explained in this book extends CBAM by helping you to understand the beliefs and evaluations of a *specific* group (e.g., at the grade, school, or district level) that most strongly contribute to resistance to a *specific* planned change. This information tells what actions or information are most likely to reduce resistance by changing attitudes and behavior in the desired direction. The MORA takes into account all of Waugh and Punch's five factors, as well as the advantages and disadvantages calculation mentioned by Welch.

Student Attitudes

Michael Fullan (2001) reminds us of the importance of students in planning any educational change that requires them to do something new. Their failure to perform as desired can doom the change effort.

The MORA can be used to understand student attitudes toward a change effort, toward a new policy, or toward staying in school to graduate. Application of the MORA can tell you exactly what administrative actions or information provision will be most likely to influence student attitude and behavior in the desired direction.

Community Attitudes

John Goodlad (2004) reminds us of the importance of constituencies outside the school when considering change. School boards, parents, and taxpayers in general can be supportive, indifferent, or hostile to change efforts and must be considered during planning.

The MORA helps you to understand the beliefs and evaluations of a specific group that most strongly contribute to resistance to a specific planned change. This information tells exactly what actions or information are most likely to reduce resistance by changing attitudes and behavior in the desired direction.

Is This the Right Change to Adopt Now?

Administrators in education (especially at the upper levels) generally favor change, but is all change good? Constant change, particularly when the benefits are not immediately apparent, can have a negative effect on the attitudes toward change held by administrators, teachers, and students. All changes are not likely to be concurrently (a) useful, (b) appropriate for the time and setting, and (c) sufficiently supported by those who will actually have to implement the

innovation. Sometimes, a given innovation is just not the right thing to do.

Shirley Hord and her colleagues (Hord et al., 1987) argued that it is critical to understand the points of view of those involved in a change effort.

Administrators will benefit from knowing not only *how* key constituencies feel about an impending change but *why* they feel the way they do, that is, which beliefs and evaluations formed their attitudes. Given the current emphasis on "data-driven decision making" (e.g., LaFee, 2002), such an in-depth understanding is especially important.

It is likely that good leaders know how their key constituencies feel about important issues. Until they use the MORA, however, those leaders will not know how those attitudes were formed. They will not know *specifically* what they have to do or what information they have to provide to change attitudes or behavior in the desired direction. Use of the MORA in a diagnostic way—in advance of initiating change—will tell school leaders what they need to know to make the best decisions about change efforts.

Force Field Analysis

Kurt Lewin's (1951) "force field analysis" is a widely used planning tool in business, industry, and education. It was developed for use in diagnosing situations and considering all the important factors. Typically used for planning change, it offers a holistic view of all the forces either for (*driving forces*) or against (*restraining forces*) a plan of change. This "big picture" approach aids thinking of ways to strengthen the driving forces and reduce the impact of the restraining forces.

The lists of driving forces and restraining forces are typically developed by brainstorming, either individually or in a group. (A sufficiently diverse group is more likely to list all of

the most important factors that need to be considered.) Some practitioners assign scores to each of the forces based on their estimates of its strength. Other practitioners add a second dimension and include in the score a measure of their estimates of the likelihood that the force can be changed (e.g., either strengthened or weakened). The benefits of this technique are clear, and this is a good starting point. The limitation is that these *estimates* of driving and restraining forces and their relative strengths are typically not based directly on empirical evidence.

The MORA has a sharper focus than force field analysis and extends it by offering leaders a way to measure how opposed a group is to a given plan.

Even more useful for *changing* the opposition, MORA tells the user exactly what information and actions are likely to be most effective in reducing opposition. Neutral groups and groups who are in favor can also be studied to determine how to increase their support for the plan.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON USING THE MODEL

When Is the Model Useful, and When Is It Not?

The model is useful for understanding the attitudes and behavioral decisions of groups. However, the understanding it provides regarding how people form attitudes and how people make decisions might serve as a guide in dealing with individuals.

For example, when you encounter someone whose position on a policy you simply don't understand, you might ask what the person sees as the advantages and disadvantages of the policy. This could give you a rough idea of how that person's attitude toward the policy was formed.

USING MORA CONCEPTS
WITHOUT CONDUCTING A STUDY

- What if I do not have the **time or resources** to use the full MORA?
- What if I want to **use MORA for one just person**, not a group of people?
- Can I use MORA for a **quick but limited understanding of beliefs?**

Interview Tip

- Interview the parents, students, teachers, principals, etc.
- Ask questions that will lead to the identification of beliefs such as:

    What are the advantages of _____?

    What are the disadvantages of _____?

Evaluation Tip

- Ask them to tell you the likelihood of each of the advantages (belief strength).
- Ask them to tell you the likelihood of each of the *dis*advantages (belief strength).
- Ask them how bad (negatively evaluated) or good (favorably evaluated) each advantage and disadvantage is.
- Multiply the strength of each belief by its evaluation and sum the scores.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN
THE MODEL BE USEFUL?

Teachers can use the model in a variety of ways. One would be as a form of needs assessment at the beginning of a course. You could ask students what they like and what they dislike about the course. This should give you a general idea of why their attitudes are favorable or unfavorable. It might also suggest ways to make the course more attractive to these students.

Teachers can also use the model to teach about decision making. Take the example of an advanced placement U.S. History (1600–1865) class, at the point of teaching about the beginning of the Civil War. The teacher might ask students to research who the decision makers were concerning the firing on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. The teacher might ask students, "Who were the decision makers in the Confederacy?"; "What beliefs did they have about outcomes of their firing on the fort?"; "How did they evaluate those outcomes?"; and "How realistic were their outcome beliefs?" Students might also be asked to research the referents ("important others") who might have exerted pressure on decision makers and what they believed referents wanted them to do.

Building administrators can use the model to see why parents will support or oppose a new school policy (e.g., closed high school campus at lunchtime). Administrators can use the model to see why teachers will or will not adopt a curriculum innovation, such as cooperative learning in mathematics. Administrators can use the model to see why teachers will or will not integrate technology into their instruction.

District administrators can use the model to see why voters will or will not support a new bond issue or why principals oppose or support a new policy on site-based decision making.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE CONCERNS

District Level

- The school district and teachers continue to have contract disputes.
- Testing drives our curriculum and instruction.
- Administrators require teacher accountability, not professional responsibility.
- Our district does not provide for career ladder benefits.
- Our district does not offer paid teacher sabbatical time.
- Our sick leave policy is inadequate.

(Continued)

- Teacher pay is low.
- The amount of paperwork increases every year.

School Level

- The administration at my school believes in drill-kill activities.
- The administration at my school holds all the power.
- Class size is too large.
- Our school facilities are poorly maintained.
- We do not have adequate technology for our students.
- We do not have adequate support for teachers' use of technology.
- Our students are poorly motivated.
- Parents do not help students with homework.
- Parents do not support teacher decisions.
- Student attitudes on this campus are poor.
- The community does not support our school.
- There is no mentoring program for novice teachers.
- There are few resources for teachers—we run out of supplies.
- Our school is not safe.
- The faculty members at this campus are inexperienced.
- The faculty members at this campus lack a spirit of cooperation.
- This campus lacks a consistent and appropriate discipline policy.

IS IT ETHICAL TO USE THE MODEL TO INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR?

This is a rational, information-processing model. You can attempt to influence attitudes and behaviors by providing information. If you have a reputation as a credible source, and if you provide information that is believable, people will probably accept what you tell them. If you do *not* have a reputation as a credible source, or if you provide information that is *not* believable, people will probably *not* accept what you tell them.

EMOTION IS A BIG PART OF DECISION MAKING: HOW DOES THE MODEL TAKE IT INTO ACCOUNT?

Our emotional responses to all the aspects of our world are indeed important. They are a summary of all we know and feel about a given object, issue, or behavior. Emotion is part of the model in that it is used to weight beliefs in the formation of attitudes. In this context, emotion is the evaluation of beliefs about qualities that form attitudes toward objects as well as the evaluation of beliefs about outcomes that form attitudes toward behaviors, as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3.

OK, THIS IS A RATIONAL, INFORMATION-PROCESSING MODEL: BUT WHAT ABOUT IRRATIONAL PEOPLE?

One of the many benefits of the model is that it demonstrates the importance of the values we hold. Often people with extremely different value systems might appear to be irrational, but once you understand their value systems, then their positions on issues and their behavior appear more rational.

There are, of course, truly irrational people, and most of us behave somewhat irrationally on occasion. Typically, however, the great majority of people who are considering a given issue or behavior will be thinking rationally, and the thinking of a *group* of people is what the model is designed to help us understand.

EXAMPLES USED IN THE BOOK

To help illustrate the principles in this book we use a variety of examples, especially in the chapters on formation and change of attitude and norm, and in the chapters on data collection and analysis.

Some examples illustrate processes, and these more complex examples are labeled case studies. There are three of these, all of which concern a hypothetical teacher, Mrs. Thompson.

Case Study 1 is about the formation of Mrs. Thompson's unfavorable (negative) attitude toward her school, and how her principal might change that attitude in a favorable (positive) direction.

Case Study 2 is about the formation of Mrs. Thompson's favorable (positive) attitude toward resigning from teaching, and how her principal might change that attitude in an unfavorable (negative) direction, so she is less likely to retire.

Case Study 3 is about the formation of Mrs. Thompson's perception of social pressure (norm) to resign from teaching, and how her principal might change that norm in an unfavorable (negative) direction, so she is less likely to retire.

In these case studies, we use an individual as an example in order to most simply demonstrate the processes of formation and change of attitude and norm. The model, however, is designed to explain the behavioral intentions, attitudes, and norms of a group of people. Therefore, in Chapter 9, we describe use of the model with a group of people.

The costs of teacher attrition to school districts are extremely high and are necessarily a concern to educational leaders. Whether good teachers leave a school, leave a district, or leave teaching entirely, there are a variety of costs.

One is the cost of recruiting, hiring, and orienting new teachers. A second cost is the continuity in curriculum alignment that has been developed. A third is the lost investment in professional development.

Although teacher pay is important, it is not always the most important factor in teacher attrition. Often other beliefs about teaching in the school or district and working with parents or students are the greatest influences on teachers' attitudes toward remaining in a school, a district, or the field. To most effectively reduce teacher attrition, it is essential to understand the *particular beliefs* that underlie the attitudes

toward leaving or remaining in a school or district of the *particular* teachers of concern.

Many of the examples in this book, therefore, focus on teacher attrition. There are a variety of other behaviors for which the model will be useful and a variety of other groups (e.g., students, parents, principals) that might be studied using the model.

We use hypothetical data in all these examples in order to illustrate an idea or principle, something that is not always possible with actual data. For example, there are three ways of influencing attitude and norm in the desired direction, but not all *actual* data sets would allow each of these three ways to be used.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Part I: A Useful Model for Changing School Behavior

• Chapter 1 introduces the basic concepts of the model of reasoned action (MORA), the formation of beliefs, attitudes, perceptions of social pressure, and behavioral decisions. The chapter shows how the MORA fits with previous thinking in educational leadership, and it also answers frequently asked questions such as those about the utility, practicality, and ethics of using the model.

• Chapters 2 through 4 provide a more detailed explanation, including plenty of examples, of how we form our attitudes toward things, toward performing behaviors, as well as our perceptions of social pressure concerning future behavior.

• Chapter 5 puts all the parts together and helps you see the model as a whole.

Part II: Conducting Your Study

• Chapter 6 helps you refine a situation in your school or community into a resolvable question using the MORA.

- Chapter 7 tells you—step-by-step—how to collect the data.

Part III: Understanding and Applying Your Results

- Chapter 8 tells you how to analyze, understand, and report the results.
- Chapter 9 tells you how to use these results for school improvement.