Academic Role of a Principal and Continuous Professional Development

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Abstract

An institution is bound to fail in case it does not have an efficient, resourceful and professionally sound leader. Leadership is a must at each level of hierarchy for effective and purposeful management. As regards principal, he is the leader, the hub of the school / college management. A lot of power vests in him, and power brings responsibilities. In order to run his institution well and realize the set goals he, as compared to his subordinates, needs to be essentially better qualified, well-versed in his subject, better conversant in up-to-date methodology of teaching and better updated on the developments in the field of administration. He should also be proficient in human relationship. For development and successful achievement of these qualities one is required to attend rigorous training sessions. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) enables them on a regular basis to negotiate the emerging issues and deal with the challenges in day to day managerial/leadership activities. The present paper is an attempt towards exploring the academic role of a principal and need of his professional development for the amelioration of the effectiveness of teachers, as also for institutional effectiveness. A self- developed questionnaire has been used to elicit the well thought responses of the teachers (sub ordinates).

Keywords: Leadership, effective management, principal, continuous development, institutional effectiveness

1. Introduction

An educational leader, the principal shoulders various responsibilities, takes policy decisions, frame rules and regulations and adopts different means to ensure a healthy and productive environment for teaching-learning activities. He does stick to guidelines for all-embracing development.

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And for the sake of achieving coveted standard and excellence in education he works in a vibrant manner. He pays due attention to the development of his sub-ordinates. The job of a principal is quite demanding and challenging, especially in the context of educational development and institutional effectiveness. Each day affords a rare wealth experience and opportunities for creative thinking and discovering plausible solutions to the problems. It is incumbent on the principal to involve members of the staff and representatives from among the students to seek and suggest solutions to the problems. It will lead to shaping the styles and behavior of the members of the staff and students.

The role of the principal of a school has been identified as a primary factor that contributes to the proper and desired growth and excellence of the school. (Zigarelli, 1996). Research on effective schools consistently underscores vital role of the principal to help the school reach the zenith of performance. Many studies (Barker, 1997; Edmonds, 1979, 1982; Goodlad, 1955; Murphy, 2001) have claimed that good principals are the most important key to school reform. Emphasis has been put on the testing procedures as a means to hold schools responsible and reflect the perspective that effective school leadership, effective teaching and student accelerate the achievement. (Clark, 1995)

1.1. Continuous Professional Development

Continuous professional development (CPD) can be defined as a process of maintaining the existing the level, and broadening of the horizon of knowledge, skills and qualities needed to work as a professional.

CPD can be helpful in: -maintaining and enhancing one's ability and competence in one's career,-staying up to date and equipped in job market, -displaying willingness to develop and bring about changes,   -avoiding stagnation, -managing all changes in an institution.

CPD can't be viewed only as a means of further changes. It includes the tasks like training of the self and others, mentoring, attending conferences or undertaking research activities.

1.2. Principal's Job Description

There are many dimensions of the job profile of a principal. The following are some of the most crucial ones.

1.2.1. Principal's roles (General)

The principal's critical roles can be sub-divided into the following: academic, participative, motivating, leadership, supervisory roles and managerial roles.

The Principal:

1. plans and executes for the bright future of the students,
2. tries to achieve desirable standards for all students and staff,
3. supervises effectively the functioning of the school as per the policies, norms and planning,
4. evaluates lesson plans, observes classes, and encourages the use of a variety of instructional strategies,
6. supervises general discipline, attendance and related issues,
7. displays the highest ethical and professional behavior,
8. serves as a role model for students and the teaching staff,
9. encourages all teachers to display high level of professionalism,
10. assumes responsibility for the health, safety, and welfare of students, employees and visitors.
11. communicates regularly with parents, seeking their support and advice, so as to create a cooperative relationship with all the sectors,
12. keeps the staff informed and seeks ideas for the improvement of the school through meetings and interactions etc.,
13. maintains positive, cooperative and mutually supportive relationships with staff, parents and their wards,
14. oversees the development of Curriculum Committee and keep the Board apprised.
15. develops the staff and the institution.

1.3.   Principal's main roles: summarized

Based on the functions, responsibilities and duties, one can summarise the crucial roles of a principal in the following manner:

1.3.1. As a Facilities/Resource Manager

A principal like any other administrator is responsible for arranging and utilizing resources of all kinds. The infrastructural aspects of a school need to receive special attention of the leader. Of course, the interest of the leader is based on his vision and future prospects. Human resource, in particular, is the ultimate focus of the organization and the leader.

1.3.2. As a Trend Setter

Morally as well as professionally, a leader has to keep a track record of good work, attach importance to sincere sense of calling, commitment, dedication and hard work. The leader has to set a trend in order to seek and receive cooperation and participation in the collaborated efforts for the sake of the uplift of the institution.

1.3.3. As a motivator

Motivation is a vital factor in the amelioration of all kinds of administrative and educational set up. In today's educational scenario, modern and dynamic principals need to be available for the groups of students, teachers and community representatives. The leader/administrator is basically responsible for employing psychological/motivational techniques to become actively involved in the existing system for the betterment of learning-teaching activities.

1.3.4. As a Head Teacher

Educationally, the principal is the head/leader of the group by being senior and more experienced, but in modern scenario, the position of the principal is viewed only from the angle of a manager of the school who runs/leads and has nothing to do with the academics.

While the fact is that by virtue of his teaching experiences, a principal can afford valuable insight into the teaching-learning setting and provide remedies if there are challenges.

1.3.5. The Principal as a Philosopher

A philosopher is often considered as a creature belonging to some other planet. But the fact is that every educationist is basically a philosopher. If one has no vision/philosophy/thought/ideology, one can't bring desirable changes in the educational system. In the same way, one can't make any contributions towards the betterment of a society. Thomas Sergiovanni (1984) observes, "The principal is… the one who seeks to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its identity."

1.3.6. As a Trainer / Professional Developer

A principal is not only a leader or a manager of the teachers, resources or the institutions but also a trainer of his sub ordinates. He has to share his experiences with his juniors to develop them as well.

1.4.   Principal as an Academic Leader

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. The following crucial roles are usually performed by the principal as an academic leader:

 -Shaping a vision of academic success for all students,
 -Creating an atmosphere conducive the growth of education,
 -Inculcating leadership values among the sub ordinates and juniors,
 -Improving instruction,
 -Managing people, records/data, resources to further the process, minimize the chance of waste and finally realize the goals.

Image-1

(leading role of a principal)

1.5. Qualities of an Effective Principal

There can be a long list of main qualities of a principal. Some are given as under in the present context:

- he is highly Knowledgeable and skilled,
- humble, honest and hardworking,- creative and innovative.
- he is participative and motivating,
- he delegates powers and responsibilities,
- he is able and confident,
- he is risk taking and task oriented,
- he develops effective educational programs,
- participates in instructional activities,
- evaluates teachers and gives professional feedback,
- arranges professional development programs,
- maintains healthy relation with the students,
- he is a true professional.

2. Review of Literature

There can be many dimension of literature review related to the roles, functions, responsibilities and duties of a principal. Some investigators identify factors that might shape how principals perceive their academic roles and how they perform in a given context in which a change is needed (Fullan, 2001). Other studies reveal how school leaders attempt to implement modified policies for better results while some researchers are related to the principals' behavior from different perspectives. (Lindle, 1999). The entire educational system has always been affected by different perspectives or issues pertaining to the organizational behavior. (Skinner, 1957).

Researches from the last two decades also show a strong link between effective leadership and effective organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Boyan, 1988; Griffiths, 1988; Lezotte, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1995 http://www.uniassignment.com/). Hogan et al. (1999) assert that "growing body of evidence supports the common sense belief that leadership matters". (p.34) Fullan (2002) expresses that schools need leaders who can change "what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it" (p.34). He continues by saying the schools "need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself" (p.18).

Lambert (1998) suggests that leadership involves "learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively to reflect on and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and create actions that grow out of these new understandings" (pp.5-6).

The successful principal administers a complex organization that is part of a larger social and political context. When exercising leadership skills, the administrator helps establish the goals, mission, and shared vision for the organization itself and for the organization within the larger context. When the vision is shared, management can generate processes and structures to guide goal attainment.

Educational leaders should have such a vision, and their professional behaviors should be shaped and guided by it. Bennis and Nanus (1985) defined vision as "an uncommon ability to visualize a better future for an organization" (p. 32).The school leader develops a vision of learning from the culture of the organization and establishes a mission for the school community. It depends on the vision and dream of where the school principal wants the school to be in the future. If it is a shared vision, it exceeds what the principal wants; it is now what the staff, students, parents and community leaders want.

An effective school principal "demonstrates a strong interest in promoting collegiality and shared leadership, an interest in shifting the norms of the school's culture from the traditional to more collaborative ways of working together" (Owens, 2004, p. 274). Powell (2004), in her research on the behaviors and practices of successful principals working with "at risk" schools, found that the school vision, mission and culture are important to the success of the school. She found that it is difficult to separate the three because one supports and affects the others. She also found other research that supports this claim. For example, it is the vision of the school that leads the way to accomplishing the goals of the school (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). Dufour and Eaker(1998) state that the shared vision motivates the staff to work together and gives a sense of direction for what they want to accomplish in the future.

Edwards (1998) found the vision of the principal a key factor in implementing change in a high-involvement school. From relevant data regarding student achievement and the need for improvement, the principal began to develop her own vision about the future of the school, which evolved with the efforts of the school staff. This shared vision led to participatory and shared leadership in the school that was a significant factor in implementing school change.

Papalewis and Fortune (2002) also cited examples of successful schools in which the goals that reflect the mission statement are displayed in every classroom. In these schools everyone knew the direction of the school and the posted goals in the halls and classrooms that reflected their knowledge and commitment.

Hughes (2004) further explains a school's culture. He states "a school's culture is a representation of what its members collectively believe themselves to be: It is their self-concept.

It reflects what they value and what they express to others as being "important around here'"(p. 65). Culture is a shared reality constructed over time; cultures may be cohesive or fragmented, strong or weak, and functional or dysfunctional depending on the degree to which the same reality is shared by organizational members (Morgan, 1986; Sergiovanni, 1990).

It is clear that schooling has reached a turning point and the need for cultivating creative cultures is at hand (Hughes, 2004). The principal has emerged as the energizer and facilitator of this process. Purposeful direction depends on the leader's ability to inspire the creative contribution of all members of the organization.

Leadership must become reciprocal as leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of moral consciousness and improvement of social order. Creative leaders recognize that excellence is facilitated through a bonding of purposes and values rather than through imposed structures designed to streamline, predict and quantify set objectives. A creative culture then is characterized by participants who examine current practices in relation to organizational needs. (p. 81)

Blumberg (1989) explains that the successful principal applies the "craft of administration" by balancing the art of leadership and the science of management to improve curriculum, instruction, and other important elements of school. He adds that by purposefully adding elements of a specific school setting into the general model, a principal can categorize and assess important site-specific school improvement actions.

Barker (1992,1997) posits that applying new ideas to the challenge of future paradigm shifts is not just changing the rules of the game, but is the formulation of a new game. He notes that the administrator manages within a paradigm but leads between paradigms.

School leadership has become increasingly more complicated and vital to ensuring school success and soliciting substantial participation from faculty, staff and students.

In responding to higher standards of increased student progress, school leaders recognize that they alone cannot be the sole instructional leaders but must coach, mentor, and empower faculty and staffing the pursuit of reform and renewal. As school leaders continue to adapt to their changing roles, effective leadership skills will be essential and the real challenge is providing the type of leadership skills necessary to assist schooling expanding their traditional boundaries (Green, 2001).

Lambert (2002) notes that for decades, educators have understood that they are all responsible for student learning, but more recently administrators have come to realize that they are responsible for their own learning and the learning of their colleagues as well.

3. The Study

The study is of qualitative type based on a case study of an institution/school in Delhi, India. 30 teachers constituted the sample. In addition, 35 teachers (from different places) also responded to the questionnaire-B.

3.1. Design of the Study

Given the nature of the question to be answered on the parts of the questionnaires (principal's quality, roles and training needs), a qualitative method of research was followed.

3.2. The Questionnaires and Data Collection

Questionnaires (Appendix-A) included 30 items (as a whole) divided into three main components: leader's quality, expected roles and training needs for further enhancement of leadership styles. Questionnaire-B was administered to the external teachers (from different schools scattered to different places. The questions/statements particularly belonged to the area of academic roles of the principal(s).

4. Analysis

4.1. Analysis of the Questionnaires

4.1.1. Teachers' Perception on the Quality of the Principals

The data revealed that the teachers perception on the leadership quality was quite positive as most of them agreed. It leads to the interpretation that the existing principal is good enough, and the sub-ordinates respect him for his personal and professional characteristics.

Image:1
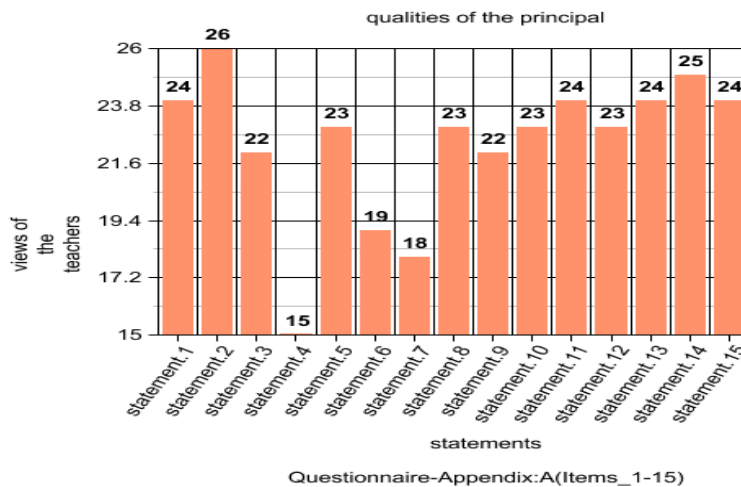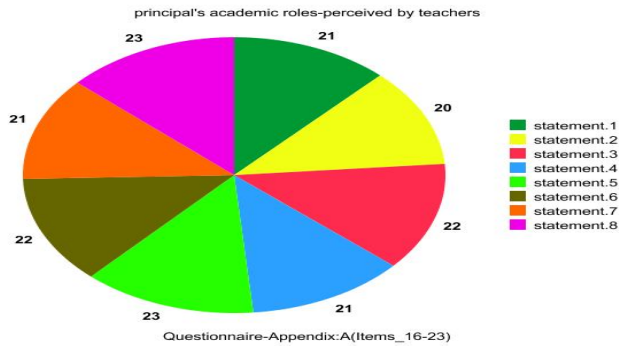

(Teachers' agreement)

4.1.2. Leadership Perception on Academic Role

The teachers' response on selective item showed that the teachers expected some critical roles in the academic area of the institution. The responses on the items are indicative of the expected academic roles of the principals, and the he performs according to the prescribed and agreed roles.

Image:2

principal's academic roles-perceived by teachers

- statement.1
- statement.2
- statement.3
- statement.4
- statement.5
- statement.6
- statement.7
- statement.8

Questionnaire-Appendix:A(Items_16-23)

(principal's academic roles)

4.1.3. Developmental Needs of a Principal

The selective items' responses showed that the leader should also go through developmental activities.

Since professional development is a continuous process, even if a principal is well equipped, he should update himself with upcoming changes in the field of education in general and e-learning in particular.

Image-3

principal's development need-perceived by teachers

Questionnaire-Appendix:A(Items_16-23)
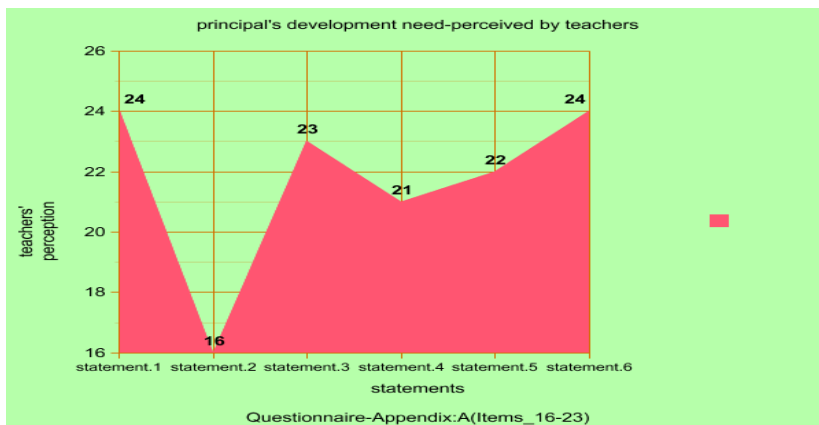
(teachers' perception on the developmental needs of the principals)

4.2. Analysis of the Questionnaires on the Academic Roles

4.2.1. Questionnaires for other Teachers (Appendix-B)

The questionnaire-B was designed for other group of teachers to elicit their perceptions on the academic roles of the principals. The data showed that most of the responses are similar in tendency like the responses on the questionnaire (appendix-A).The respondents were of the opinion that the principal should be highly knowledgeable, skilled and dedicated. He should have vision to lead the employees to realize the goals. It is always desirable that all the principals should perform at their level best to justify their academic roles. In case, they are not fully aware of any such critical roles, professional development programs may bridge the gap.

**Image:4**
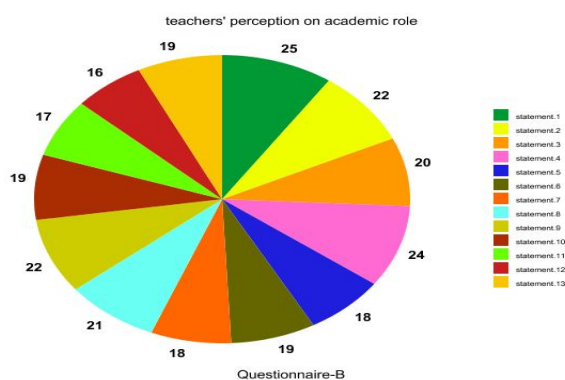
Teachers' perception on academic role (appendix-B)

4.3. Comparisons of the Two Groups

The common elements were compared between the two sample groups(internal and external), and was found that the responses of the respondents indicated their affirmation on the academic roles. However, it was noticed that the degrees of perception varied a bit.

Academic roles of the principals					
Appendix-A			Appendix-B		
Item No.	statements	%	Item. o	Statements	%
17	achieves standards in teaching and learning	6	9	achieves standards in teaching and learning	62
20	Modifies curriculum when required	6	1	Modifies curriculum when required	49
21	He has clear vision of development	0	2	He has clear vision of development	45
22	He is a role model for teachers and students	0	3	He is a role model for teachers and students	54
23	Communicates well with teachers and parents	3	6	Parents can interact with him easily and share thoughts.	4

All the principals should be knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated and risk taking. They have to modify curriculum for the ultimate realisation of the academic goals. The principals should implement their academic roles in the dimensions of their managerial premise and achieve the curricular targets.

Image-5

chosen items from the two questionnaires
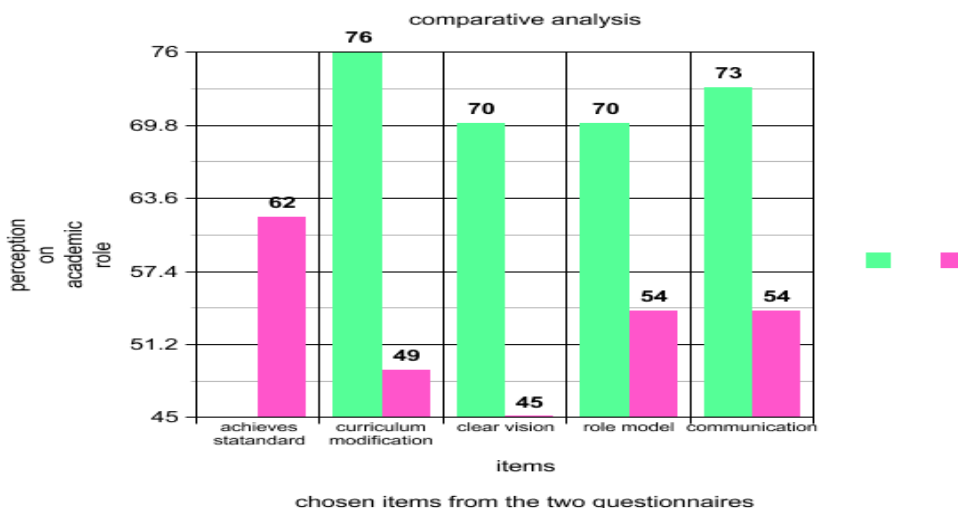
(Comparative analysis on chosen items).

5. Findings, Discussions and Conclusions

The main findings of the study are:

The principal of the present study possesses good qualities. He is visionary, knowledgeable, skilled and dynamic. He knows how to lead the sub-ordinates and run an institution. He uses all the techniques of leadership and related aspects. He has been perceived by his sub-ordinates as effective in his academic roles, however, the teachers feel that professional development can enhance him further.

5.1. Recommendations

Other studies can be carried out to study further such as:

1- Comparative study of the roles, effectiveness and training needs of different types of leaders/principals.
2- Perceptions of the young and experienced employees,
3- Factors affecting the academic roles, expected roles and institutional effectiveness,
4- Developmental needs of the principals,
5- Attitude of principals towards the training and development of the teachers.

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Appendix. A

Questionnaires for the teachers' perceptions on the principals role and CPD

S.N.	Statements	agreed	undecided	disagreed
Name (optional)				
(A) Qualities of the Principal				
1	My principal is highly Knowledgeable and skilled.	24	3	3
2	He is humble, honest and hardworking.	26	2	2
3	Teachers like him because he is a true professional.	22	4	4
4	I like him because he is friendly with me.	15	6	9
5	He develops effective educational programs.	23	4	3
6	He participates in instructional activities.	19	7	4
7	He formally evaluates teachers and gives professional feedback.	18	8	4
8	The focus of all the meetings is the school's enhancement.	23	3	4
9	He arranges professional development programs.	22	5	3
10	He actively takes part in teacher development activities.	23	4	3
11	He maintains healthy relation with the students.	24	3	3
12	Parents can interact with him easily and share thoughts.	23	3	4
13	Most parents like him a lot.	24	3	3
14	He maintains the school campus in proper manner.	25	2	3
15	He arranges and manages the school infrastructure quite well.	24	4	2
B	**Academic roles of the principals**			
16	My principal plans for the future	21	3	6
17	achieves standards in teaching and learning	20	5	5
18	involves teachers in different activities	22	4	4
19	he is a trend setter	21	3	6
20	Modifies curriculum when required	23	4	3
21	He has clear vision of development	22	4	4
22	He is a role model for teachers and students	21	5	4
23	Communicates well with teachers and	23	3	4

	parents			
(C) Need of professional development				
24	In- service training is always needed for further development	24	2	4
25	My principal needs professional development courses for his enhancement	16	4	10
26	He needs development courses to develop his staff	23	3	4
27	Training in technology integration is an urgent need for everyone in an institution.	21	4	5
28	He needs training in management techniques	22	4	4
29	He should know about other successful models of different standard schools.	24	2	4
30	He should be modern, innovative and dynamic to lead properly.	26	2	2

Appendix-B

Questionnaires for other teachers' perceptions on the expected role of the principal(s)

Name (optional)				
Academic roles of the principals				
S.N.	Statements	agreed	undecided	disagreed
1	My principal is knowledgeable.	25	6	4
2	He tries hard for institutional effectiveness.	22	5	8
3	He professionally evaluates teachers and gives professional feedback.	20	6	9
4	He maintains discipline among students and the staff.	24	5	6
5	He maintains healthy relation with the students.	18	7	10
6	Parents can interact with him easily and share thoughts.	19	8	8
7	He formulates policies and implements.	18	9	8
8	He arranges and manages the school infrastructure quite well.	21	8	6
9	achieves standards in teaching and learning	22	6	7
10	involves teachers in different activities	19	8	8
11	Modifies curriculum when required	17	9	9
12	He has clear vision of development	16	8	11
13	He is a role model for teachers and students	19	9	7