

Accountability: Final Paper

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ADS 730: Organizational Assessment and Accountability

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Introduction

Most, if not all, organizations exist to serve some sort of purpose. Many organizations require individuals to help lead, oversee, and manage many different operations so that the purpose of the business is actualized. The concept of accountability becomes an important item to examine when individuals attempt to carry out business operations. Bustin (2014) defines accountability as the attitude of accomplishing a task or achieving an objective despite circumstance. Accountability also encompasses the tasks related to business operations are completed consistently, on, time, and with a sense of urgency. A challenging reality that many leaders face is the varying degrees of accountability exhibited by colleagues and employees. An organization that does not have a high degree of accountability will likely fail in operating properly and delivering the services that are promised to the specific clientele (Bustin, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to re-examine many of the concepts covered in the ADS 730 course. Specifically, accountability within the contexts of the organization, employees, and self will be discussed. Additionally, the salient features indicated within the major books presented by Ph.D. students will be examined. Within the context of this paper, the organization will refer to schools since that is the area of work that I specialize in.

Organizational Accountability

Summary

Organizational accountability ought to come from the very top and embedded into most (if not all) of the functional operations. First, for an organization to be truly accountable, a clear mission, vision, and goals ought to be established. Organizational leaders then must hold everyone and every established process accountable to the already-established overarching principles that drive the organization forward. Thus, everything that the organization does must

support the objectives of the business. As previously mentioned, Bustin (2014) argues that a business will not succeed if the operations do not match the vision of the organization and not live up to the expectations of the clientele. Being accountable as an organization also means that the leaders need to be critically reflective and closely examine the progress (or lack thereof) of the business. If things are not progressing properly, then leadership ought to examine where things need to be modified so that informed decisions can be made for the future (Bustin, 2014). Leaders may have to ask themselves how well does the progress (or whatever measurable metric used) match the overarching vision, mission, and goals? How can the organization stay on track and aligned with the fundamental principles that the company is built upon?

Reflection

The following items are related to concepts specific to organizational accountability that resonated well with me.

- 1. Constant reflection.** Leaders need to ensure that they are not blindly moving the business forward. A culture of reflection ought to be developed so that leaders can actively review, examine, and modify the operations of the business as well as the needs of the clientele. If leaders do not reflect on how the business functions and what the clientele require then there could be a misalignment between the behaviours of the organization and what the organization actually stands for which can be confusing (Collins & Hansen, 2011; Bustin, 2014). Thus, the leaders need to be mean what they say and say what they mean to fully actualize the efforts of the business.
- 2. Establishing a clear vision.** A common takeaway from many of the articles and books read during this course, establishing a clear vision is paramount in creating an effective business. The business needs to have a clear and direct framework that provides the

business with direction and a connection to a greater purpose. All of the operations and services provided by the business are hopefully geared towards the overarching vision, mission, and goals.

- 3. Tracking progress.** Leaders need to make sure that they have established metrics that align with the vision, mission, and goals of the organization. Metrics ought to be regularly assessed to gauge how well organizational goals are being achieved. Leaders should also celebrate progress that is made (big or small) but remain vigilant that progress still needs to continue even if significant progress has been made (Collins & Hansen, 2011; Bustin, 2014). Leaders who rarely examine progress or only examine progress at certain points of the year may not be fully aware of the impact that certain processes are having on the overall operations and clientele.
- 4. Evidence-based decisions.** When leaders are on the verge of making decisions (big or small), they should be using evidence from their business operations to help them. Again, the decisions being made ought to support the overall mission, vision, and goals of the organization so that an alignment between outward behaviours and organizational beliefs exists (Collins & Hansen, 2011; Bustin, 2014). Thus, informed, strategic, and calculated decisions are being made. Rather than blinding hoping for a particular outcome, leaders can attempt to make decisions with the desired results in mind while using specific and appropriate information.
- 5. Creating an appropriate culture.** Culture is the sum of all explicit and implicit understandings and experiences within an organization (Mor Barak, 2022). Culture is how individuals experience the organization that they work in, and a culture can kill the espoused vision, mission, and goals of the organization (Mor Barak, 2022). Thus, leaders

need to be aware of their influence on the culture of the organization and take steps to create the environment that they want individuals to feel comfortable working in. As well, leaders need to hire individuals that will help shape a productive culture and ultimately support the vision, mission, and goals (Bustin, 2014).

Application

In considering the information regarding organizational accountability, the following are applications that I would be willing to implement as a vice principal.

- 1. Careful and methodical decision making.** Based on all of the information we have read this semester and during the spring semester, I believe that one of the salient themes that emerged from the literature is that decisions ought to be made with as much forethought as possible while considering the evidence at hand. As a vice principal, I believe I need to continue using the information available to me to best support students, teachers, and parents. Using careful and methodical decision making will maintain focus on both desired outcomes and the overarching vision and mission. Making decisions based on emotions will be avoided to remove my own personal agenda and feelings that may not be in the best interest of the entire school environment.
- 2. Assess the culture of the school.** Arguably difficult to do but assessing the overall culture of the school is probably necessary to fully understand what is socially acceptable within the school walls (Mor Barak, 2022). While I believe our school has a firm but fair culture, there could be blind spots that principals are unaware of. I believe that principals need to fully examine both the spoken and unspoken expectations as well as the things that are taken for granted and/or assumed. This will give principals an opportunity to examine how well outward expressions match the behaviours of the organizations. As

well, if there are several components of the culture that are unspoken, principals may wish to examine how, over time, certain things became unintentionally embedded as regular routines (especially if the unspoken components are undesirable).

- 3. Examine the mission and vision of the organization.** Our school already has an established mission and vision that was created through community meetings with parents, students, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders. All pieces of feedback were synthesized to create a simple but direct vision for the school. At our school, all of our staff, students, and visitors strive to create a safe, welcoming, and respectful school environment while also trying to revitalize the local Indigenous language. We use this every day when speaking to staff, students, and parents but sometimes I wonder if we need to revisit the messaging behind it and if we need to make modifications. I have approached the conversation with my current principal about whether we need to revisit it, and she does not feel that we need to make any adjustments at this current time but did not oppose having a future conversation about it. I believe we are in a good position if the conversations are willing to be had.

Employee Accountability

Summary

The employees that ultimately work for a given organization ought to be personally aligned with the overarching vision and mission. This will not only enhance the culture of the organization, but all of the actions, tasks, and duties will support the growth and direction of the business (Bustin, 2014). Employees who do not align with the organization's mission, vision, and goals will have a challenging time understanding the greater purpose and may cause problems for the business as well as the clientele (Bustin, 2014). Therefore, employees need to

be part of frequent and on-going feedback loops regarding their performance. As well, performance needs to be linked to the vision, mission and goals of the organization so that individuals are clear with how their job responsibilities are linked to the “bigger picture” of the organization. Employees perform better in their roles when they are able to hear feedback frequently rather than during annual performance appraisals. In fact, a constant, comfortable, and authentic line of conversation among employees and supervisors regarding performance needs to be established (Pink, 2011). Additionally, Bustin (2014) argues that organizations need to take care of their employees as well as their clientele. In fact, if employees are taken care of, then the clientele will experience improved services.

Reflection

The items below are related to concepts specific to employee accountability that resonated with me.

- 1. Follow-up and provide feedback.** Individuals need to be informed of their progress on a fairly regular basis rather than during one-off annual meetings that do not really lead to anything significant. Staff ought to have regular communication with their supervisors regarding their performance so that they know what is expected of them and so that they have time to implement and practice new strategies or techniques in their roles (Pink, 2011). Employees cannot be expected to master the skills in their role if they are only speaking to their supervisors once per year. An on-going dialogue is vital.
- 2. Mentor.** Where possible, leaders ought to provide mentorship to their employees. Mentorship should include strategic coaching conversations that encourage, guide, support, and advise rather than discourage, scold, and discipline (Collins & Hansen, 2011; Bustin, 2014; Blanchard, & Johnson, 2018). In particular, a key aspect of

mentoring employees is to allow them the opportunity to solve their own problems with some guidance from their mentor. Guiding an employee in a problem-solving scenario can be tricky because the instinct is to share the correct strategy or answer. However, the mentor should not automatically solve the problem for the employee.

- 3. Provide autonomy.** Pink (2011) encourages leaders to provide employees with structured autonomy. Autonomy with absolutely no structure will not be productive because they employee is unlikely to accomplish anything. However, if specific amounts of time that are loosely dedicated to a task or passion project, employees are more likely to be productive and feel that they are making a significant contribution to the organization. Pink (2011) argues that many leaders are hesitant to provide autonomy due to fear of decreased productivity, but only if the task is not managed properly. In contrast, providing autonomy can be quite internally motivating for staff which can increase productivity significantly (Pink, 2011).
- 4. Take care of your employees.** Bustin (2014) argues that employees ought to be the main priority for the company and not their clientele. Specifically, if employees are well taken care of then the employees will not have a problem going above and beyond for the clientele. Thus, leaders ought to be strategic in supporting their employees because they could ultimately be supporting the bottom line (or ultimate goals) of their business. Bustin (2014) also admits that pivoting from a clientele-focused business model to one that focuses on the wellbeing of the employee seems counterintuitive but encourages leaders to try it. Explicit staff appreciation will support retention of both staff and clientele.

- 5. Provide choice and creativity to employees.** Pink (2011) believes that another way to motivate staff is to provide opportunities for choice and creativity in their projects. Thus, leaders and supervisors are discouraged from micromanaging the task completion process which could stifle and discourage employees. If productivity increases from being more flexible in the ways that a task could be completed, then leaders are encouraged to trust their employees in how a task is completed. Providing choice and creativity also promotes capacity building and respects the professionalism of their employees.

Application

The following items are ways that I will attempt to apply concepts of employee accountability in my role as vice principal.

- 1. Feedback conversations.** My school division does a good job of emphasizing performance evaluations as a conversation between teachers and principals. There are several key performance factors that teachers are expected to be working towards, but principals are expected to elicit input from the individual teacher on the specific metrics before a formal assessment is finalized. This provides principals with insight into how the teacher personally believes they are doing in their role. This also allows principals to gauge the level of self-reflection within their staff. Through this process teachers are also expected to take some ownership for their work ethic and professional development as they can see where they may need additional support. Since my school division already does this, I will continue to do it because I believe this type of evaluation is helpful for both the employee as well as the supervisor.
- 2. Provide autonomy.** I am not a micromanager, but I will take control of an employee if I absolutely have to. I always try and help employees identify and hone the skills necessary

to do their jobs well or to help them solve some of the problems that they may be experiencing. In my current role, when a problem comes to me, I try my best to not provide a direct answer. Instead, I re-direct the employee to clarify the issue or concern and point them in the right direction of where the answer may be. Sometimes, I may also suggest connecting with a specific staff member that has gone through something similar (without breaching confidentiality) and encourage them to collaborate if they feel comfortable doing so. A perception among our staff exists that the principals have all of the answers and solutions, but we simply do not. However, I do think deeply about issues related to the school and I am a solutions-focused individual, but I have to resist the urge and guide staff in adopting a similar mindset.

- 3. Mentor.** I believe one of the biggest things that is missing from the culture of leadership in our school division is mentorship, especially if someone wants to become a principal or vice principal. Before I was a vice principal, I had to seek out the mentorship from the out-going vice principal. I believe one of the hesitations of mentorship with principals is because of the sheer amount of confidential information that we receive and exposing someone to mentorship conversations could be deemed as a liability. However, I have decided that not engaging in mentorship is a poor choice so this year I have been more open with staff about the challenges of the role as well as the successes. I believe this makes our administration team seem more approachable and eliminates pre-conceived notions of what the staff believe principals do. In fact, I have had three staff members come forward in the past two weeks express interest in being acting administration if the principals have to be away which I believe is a positive thing.

Personal Accountability

Summary

There were several different models of personal accountability that were discussed in this course and selecting one individual model is challenging. Regardless of the model being examined, the following salient themes emerge from many areas of leadership readings and research. First, leaders establish clear expectations both of staff and themselves. Leaders also establish and communicate company goals that all employees ultimately work towards. Additionally, leaders build relationships with other key stakeholders by first seeking to understand different perspectives rather than imposing views or agendas on others; a collaborative working environment is key. Leaders hold themselves accountable by constantly reflecting on their own disposition and actions which ultimately support or hinder the growth/development of the organization. It is through the continual reflection where leaders hone and enhance their skills in overseeing effective organizational and adjusting as necessary to ensure staff are on track to support the vision, mission, and goals.

Reflection

The following items indicated below are what resonated most with respect to personal accountability.

- 1. Be clear and direct.** When communicating with staff within an organization, communicating clearly is an important skill. Being clear helps everyone clarify information and minimizes confusion. While some people believe that being clear and direct can appear to be harsh, I learned at a conference that communicating in this way can also be a form of a kindness. Not only is an effort being made to be truthful as well as

concise, but an attempt is being made to not waste the other person's time (Blanchard & Johnson, 2018).

- 2. Establish expectations.** Staff need to know what is expected of them as well as the tasks being assigned to them (Bustin, 2014). Expectations allow for supervisors to truly understand the scale of work being assigned to the staff that report to them. Examining expectations also allows supervisors to gauge what specific skills are needed to complete a certain task or project and delegate strategically to individuals who are the best equipped to successfully handle it. If expectations are not provided, then staff will not be able to perform the task properly or they might not even attempt the tasks at all. Thus, lack of expectations can be a detriment to the goals of the business.
- 3. Taking care.** One thing that emerged in conversations with colleagues and one of our guest speakers this semester is the idea that leadership is hard work. When people think of leadership, often romanticized images and situations come to mind. However, the majority of situations are difficult and individuals in leadership positions are often grappling with complex and highly controversial issues. Thus, leadership roles can be incredibly stressful. Leaders need to make sure that they take care of their mental wellbeing and find a hobby or different outlet to focus on outside of work hours. Work can be all-consuming, but leaders are encouraged to resist the urge to think about work all the time. This will promote longevity and a healthy work-life balance.
- 4. Don't be afraid to seek advice when mistakes have been made.** Leaders have to be humble enough to admit when they don't know something or if a mistake has been made. Knowing all the answers to every situation is virtually impossible and leaders must have enough self-awareness to connect with more experienced individuals or their mentors

before proceeding with a particular decision (Bustin, 2014). As well, when leaders admit they do not have the appropriate or enough knowledge to make a decision acknowledges that their influence is real and can have significant ramifications so taking appropriate steps is demonstrates tact and restraint. Rather than being viewed as a savior or someone who “knows everything,” employees may actually appreciate a response that acknowledges personal limits.

- 5. Seek first to understand.** When speaking with other individuals, a default approach to communication is seeking first to understand rather than with the intent of immediately responding (Sinek, 2014; Blanchard & Johnson, 2018). People respond well to being understood and I believe that this is an important approach to take, especially when meeting with people that may be upset. Seeking to understand helps clarify the needs of the other individual and helps develop a much more robust response when one is needed. Moreover, seeking to understand fosters a collaborative relationship with others because the conversation is not monopolized by a personal agenda which also demonstrates respect for the other individual(s).

Application

The following items are ways that I will attempt to practice personal accountability in my role as vice principal.

- 1. Continue to have tough conversation with people.** I have discovered that several aspects of the vice principal role require us to be ready to deliver uncomfortable information to either staff, students, or community members. I have had to inform teachers that they need to be more professional. I have had to deliver news of a student death. I have also had to suspend several students (and call their parents to inform them

of this) this semester due to inappropriate behavior. I have also had to mediate several conflicts among different groups of people. Ultimately, despite the emotional toll it can take, the work still needs to be done. And, if done properly, delivering uncomfortable information need not be a daunting task if a balance between friendly but firm can be made. I will not shy away from these conversations that still need to happen. In fact, I need to engage in them more often because I am able to learn new strategies for future conversations.

- 2. Prioritize myself.** As stated previously, leadership is hard work. Leaders often “eat last” which is the default tendency with many leaders. However, there should be important points where leaders must prioritize themselves over others. In preparation for my new heightened role, I started seeing a therapist in the summer to help with the transition from teacher to educational leader. We worked through various points of concern which included self-care, establishing barriers, and dealing with a different type of spotlight. I believe that connecting with a therapist was really helpful for me because I prioritized my mental health and began building my capacity in serving as a leader in the best possible manner. I have continued to see my therapist and our sessions have been really helpful for my overall health and levels of job satisfaction. I have also been open with some other staff members about my decision to see a therapist and many people have been very receptive to it. Some have been shocked and surprised to know that I was feeling uneasy about my new role because my outward expression of the role is confidence.
- 3. Do the right thing (which is not always easy).** In my job as an educator, we are bound to a certain amount of ethics with respect to students and staff members. The public also place an incredible amount of public trust in educators. Now, more than ever, I must

ensure that I stick to my ethical obligations and use those foundational underpinnings to guide my decision-making processes especially when navigating unfamiliar scenarios. Essentially, I need to do the right thing even when the right thing is not easy. Doing the right thing involves all of the components that I have stated in the previous reflection section (i.e. be clear and direct; establish expectations; take care; ask for help or connect with an expert; and seek first to understand). I believe that if I can do the right thing, then I will be able to serve my school and community to the best of my ability while also remaining true to my vice principal position.

Group Presentations

Summary

Several books related to leadership and accountability were presented by Ph.D. students during this course. While each book discussed several different topics, there were some themes that emerged as important for leaders to consider in the operation of their own organizations. Daniel Pink (2011) discussed how to motivate individuals intrinsically as opposed to externally. Brene Brown (2018) focused on striking a unique balance friendliness while also being fierce in upholding the mission of the organization. Brown (2018) also discussed the importance of incorporating vulnerability into everyday interactions with people. Sinek (2014) argues that leaders must be seen as a guiding light rather than a drill sergeant. Finally, Dweck's (2016) key message included the importance of mindset. The following reflections and applications are what I personally took away from the presentations on the aforementioned books.

Reflection

The reflections below include some of the key take-aways from the books presented in our class.

- 1. The word “yet.”** Dweck (2016) believes that mindsets establish a scaffold and direction of outward expressions of individuals. Not surprisingly, leaders are susceptible to changes in their behavior by shifting the mindset. During the presentation, one of the key elements included the word “yet.” By adding the word “yet” to a defeatist statement would allow the individual to begin to internalize the possibility that they could, eventually, achieve a particular task or outcome. Then, the seemingly impossible slowly becomes a possibility as an individual continues to find ways to achieve a particular outcome. Ultimately, this speaks to a growth mindset and that adopting a growth mindset is healthy for progressive growth within a company (Dweck, 2016).
- 2. The infusion of emotion into leadership.** Brown (2018) talks about the importance of infusing emotion into leadership. Leaders can be seen as cold, remote, and stoic which may provide the impression that they are unapproachable or that they do not demonstrate a level of care to their employees. By incorporating emotions into leadership, leaders are able to show their employees that it is okay to be affected but the operations of the business can still continue. Showing emotions also reinforces the idea that leaders are human too and that the barrier between leaders and staff can be broken. Ultimately, Brown (2018) argues that leaders ought to show some aspect of vulnerability in their roles because it is healthy both for the employees and business operations.
- 3. Being courageous.** Yet another piece of information taken from Brown (2018) is the idea of courage. Being a leader takes a considerable amount of courage and hard work simply because the work of a leader is not easy. By being courageous, individuals are better positioned to take risks, make mistakes, reflect on teachable moments, and engage in tough conversations. Anecdotally, leaders are often seen as fearless but Brown (2018)

argues that there remains significant work to do in this regard. Thus, some leaders are not being as courageous as they could be. Again, showing courage in the role demonstrates to others that the mission and vision of the organization is worth fighting for. Some may also see this as an inspiration, and inspiration can be contagious.

4. **Motivate from within.** A common misconception of successfully motivating people is through external reward systems. Pink (2011) argues that this is not the correct way to motivate people because external rewards elicit unethical behaviour, focus more on the reward rather than the task, and employees become conditions to work towards the next bigger and better reward rather than fulfilling the mission of the organization. Instead, Pink (2011) believes that internal motivation comes from trusting staff through structured autonomy (discussed in a previous section), allowing choice of tasks, and incorporating creativity into projects. Staff are more productive in their roles and see their work as connected to a greater purpose.
5. **Learning leadership through questions.** During the presentation on Sinek's (2014) book *Leaders Eat Last*, there was a comment made about asking direct questions to leaders about their leadership decisions and strategies. Specifically, I often find myself analyzing decisions that my principal makes, and I will ask her "how did you come to that decision?" I am not questioning or belittling her decisions. Instead, I am trying to understand the nature and scope of the decision. Rather than making assumptions or guessing, asking directly is sometimes the best way to truly understand the thought processes behind the decisions that someone makes. I believe that this is an important concept because it shows that people are paying attention and acknowledging that we do

not know everything about a particular scenario. Thus, investigating demonstrates empathy, development of leadership skills, and being in possession of the facts.

Application

Based on the group book presentations, I will endeavor to try and apply the following items in my role as vice principal.

- 1. Admit that leadership is hard.** I believe that it is important to be open with staff when days have been challenging or that there are situations that you're having a hard time dealing with. Of course, staff do not need to know specific details. However, I do believe that being open with staff when things have been challenging creates a much more humanistic connection with individuals. While it is important to acknowledge that leadership can be difficult, leaders should still remain motivated to handle difficult tasks or situations. Thus, acknowledging difficult situations should not equate to defeat. Rather, I will reassure staff that I am committed to working through the difficult situations with courage and conviction despite the fact that the circumstances may be undesirable. After all, I do not believe that staff wish to have a leader that disappears during difficult times. I believe that staff look to their leaders for stability and direction which is what I will aim to provide.
- 2. Continue to ask questions.** I am a curious person, and I want to learn as much as I can from the individuals that I view as mentors. I highly respect and admire my principal and vice principal. Each of them has had a unique history within the education system and I learn from them every day that I get to spend with them. Thus, I will continue to ask them about the decisions they are making in an attempt to understand their thought processes behind certain decisions. I will inevitably make mistakes in my role but if I can avoid

them by asking questions then I will. I believe this will show that I am eager to learn and lead our school in a much more productive manner.

- 3. Keep using the word “yet.”** I used to use this word a lot when I was working in the classroom with my students. I would always add the word “yet” when a student would tell me that they did not know how to do something. During the presentation on mindsets, I was reminded that using the word “yet” remains an important task to do with students as well as staff. I believe that I possess a growth mindset, but I have stopped using it in my new role as vice principal. I believe I ought to start using it again, especially with staff who continue to express an unwillingness or an inability in completing tasks.

Final Summary and Key Take-Aways

As stated in the introduction, Bustin (2014) argues that accountability is the ability for individuals to complete a task or project consistently with a sense of urgency. There are different levels of accountability, such as organizational, employee, and personal. Organizational accountability refers to the alignment of espoused values and outward behaviour of staff. Employee accountability refers to how well performance supports the overarching mission and vision. Personal accountability is the strength of individual pledges made to support all aspects of the organization. Considering all of the information presented in all three categories of accountability, the following items are my personal key take-aways.

- 1. Establish a clear and concise mission and vision (organizational accountability).**

Without clear and concise mission and vision, organizations may be lacking important functional foundations. All staff ought to be working towards a common goal and this should be embedded into all aspects of the business to support the organization’s purpose and clientele.

- 2. Establish clear expectations for all staff (personal accountability).** Expectations for all staff are important so that individuals are aware of their responsibilities and what is expected in their individual roles. Without clear expectations, individuals may find themselves questioning their individual role and greater purpose within the organization. Thus, individuals may stall or halt the important work needed to propel the organization forward.
- 3. Promote feedback loops with staff (employee accountability).** Individuals need to be given an opportunity to be told where they need to improve. Individuals also need an opportunity to practice suggestions or new skills. Thus, annual (or one-off) performance appraisals are not encouraged. Individuals should be given an opportunity to take ownership for their own learning professional development which means that leaders need to consider employee feedback as well.
- 4. Infuse emotion into my leadership (personal accountability).** I do not believe in leaders that appear to be robotic, cold, and remote. Employees that are disconnected from their staff may struggle to effectively lead because they may appear to be unapproachable. Leaders are human and they have human emotions despite being asked to handle very controversial and difficult scenarios. Thus, in building realistic and humanistic connections with their staff, leaders should demonstrate vulnerability and courage in their daily work.
- 5. Engage in the mentorship process (employee and personal accountability).** I believe that effective leaders surround themselves with other leaders that inspire them. It is virtually impossible to operate well in a complete silo and important connections ought to

be made. Continuing to seek out opportunities to learn from experienced leaders but also being a mentor to aspiring principals is an important role to assume.

Admittedly, narrowing down all of the content from the course into five actionable items is challenging. While the list represents my key take-aways, it is by no means exhaustive.

Ultimately, I will continue to do the very best in my role as vice principal with the wealth of resources that I have available to me.

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