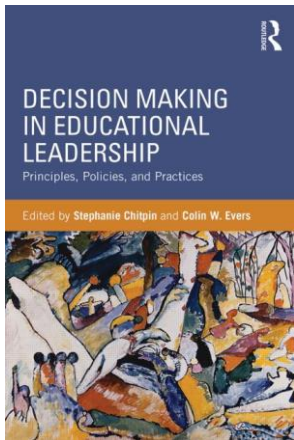## Book Review

Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices.
By Stephanie Chitpin and Colin W. Evers (Eds.)
New York: Routledge (2014)

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Reviewed by **David Cameron Hauseman**

Leaders are defined by their decisions. This sentiment rings true for principals and headteachers as they bear the burden of making decisions concerning the operation of every facet of their schools. Despite the knowledge that good decisions are key to success in any endeavour, little is known about the processes or concepts that lead to effective decision making in school leadership contexts. Chitpin and Evers say just as much in the preface to *Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices*, declaring that, "there is no established consensus as to how decision-making should be conceptualized" (p. iix). This curiously constructed exploratory volume is packed with compelling articles that illuminate factors influencing complex decisions school leaders make every day. Scholars seeking to "explore a range of aspects of educational decision-making that are relevant to educational leaders in general and school leaders in particular" (p. iix), will find this book has much to offer.

Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices covers 244 pages. In addition to a short preface and index, this volume offers twelve chapters of original research from a variety of international contexts, which are nested within four sections. Titles for each of the sections are derived from four key themes related to decision making in a school leadership context which emerged amongst the contributed chapters. The sections (and themes) include: Data-driven Decision Making; Emotional and Epistemological Decision-making Structures; Complexity and Decision-making; and Ethical and Legal Issues.

The contributed chapters vary in structure, though they do share the use of similar frameworks and orientations to the work. The first part of *Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices* explores school leaders' experiences with data-driven decision making. This refers to the ways in which principals and other school leaders use evidence to inform decisions. This section of the book only contains two chapters, but they are among the more compelling and noteworthy found in the volume. Worth mentioning is Jingping Sun's extensive literature review that found principals largely use data to inform decisions about the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, set shared goals or visions for the school and identify professional development needs for teachers. The greatest barrier preventing principals from engaging in data use is lack of time according to Sun's study. The findings of this exploratory study help position the field for further inquiry into this important topic, especially considering the need to explore data-driven decision-making in the principal because "empirical research on its status and impact is thin and sporadic" (p. 21).

Emotional and Epistemological Decision-Making Structures is the second part of the book, which is comprised of three loosely grouped chapters exploring how emotions and one's beliefs about the nature of knowledge influence decision-making processes. In chapter five, Lakomski rigorously and skillfully 'debunks' the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI), stating, "Just because Emotional Intelligence has become a commonly used term, does not mean that EI is real" (p. 79). She argues that EI is folkpsychology and suffers from irreparable theoretical problems. These problems include the fact that, as currently constructed, EI cannot be tested and therefore fails to propose and/or explain causal relationships. Further, results from many validated EI questionnaires are distorted because these tests are typically administered under laboratory conditions, which do not represent the context of situations where EI is seemingly beneficial. This thought provoking addition to the scholarly discourse has implications both within the educational leadership field, as well as the broader academic community.

The third part of this volume, Complexity and Decision Making, contains four chapters. These chapters rightly consider the roles played by prior knowledge, current beliefs, vested interests, emotions, trust, and the values school leaders hold inform both the decisions they make and the rationale behind making them.

Highlights of the book's fourth and final section are policy and legislative constraints faced by school leaders when making decisions involving ethical quandaries and solving problems that feature some sort of involvement with the law. This section, titled Ethical and Legal Issues contains chapters which collectively serve as a reminder that political, ethical and legal concerns often frame both the decision-making processes of school leaders, and the options available. As *Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices* lacks a formal conclusion of any kind, this is a fitting sentiment on which to close.

Mentioned briefly above, one of this book's few blemishes is the lack of more traditional introductory and concluding chapters. Concise and well-written, the preface serves as an introduction of sorts. Though effective at informing the reader about the purpose of the book and providing insight into each of the contributed chapters, the five-page preface is not of the necessary depth or sophistication to effectively tie together all of the themes presented in the chapters that follow. This is relatively disappointing as the contributions are of high quality and practically beg for comparative analysis.

The editors' failure to unpack the four central themes that emerged from *Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices* was slightly disappointing, especially considering the high quality chapters. However, that minor flaw and the book's odd structure are far outweighed by the positives associated with it. These positives include a dozen compelling, well-written chapters, some of which make important contributions to the field. With the potential to further debates amongst scholars of studying educational administration as well as broader academic discourses, *Decision Making in Educational Leadership: Principles, Policies, and Practices* stands out in an increasingly crowded school leadership bookshelf.