

A Qualitative Study on the Relationship between School Leadership Styles and the Governing Systems of School Principals in Peninsular Malaysia.

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Abstract: The significance of effective leadership and management for the successful operation of schools and colleges has been increasingly acknowledged in the 21st century. The trend towards self-management in the United Kingdom and in many other parts of the world has led to an enhanced appreciation of the importance of managerial competence for educational leaders. Today, leadership is seen as central and essential to delivering the changes, improvement and performance that community increasingly expects of all organizations including schools. The changing manner of school management has undoubtedly created reforms in the field of education with change expressed in the evolution from exterior supervision of school work to the empowerment of school's staff, principal's and teacher's roles. This study was initiated to look into the leadership style among school principals in governing school systems in Peninsular Malaysia. Secondary data consisting of various leadership styles used in administering teachers, transformational and transactional leadership and the correlation between leadership styles and organizational variables, relationship between value systems and school principal's principles were performed. Numerous researches have highlighted the fact that leadership behavior is a predictor of its efficacy and leads to the examination of leadership evolution. In this study, leaders with a high moral value system tend to lean towards a transformational leadership style in governing school systems in Peninsular Malaysia and acknowledges a positive correlation between leadership styles and value systems in school administration.

Keywords: leadership styles, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, school systems, school principals

INTRODUCTION

Back in the 80's, a lot of research was conducted globally to infuse developments in the education field. These improvements predominately focus on the structure of the school and the way they were achieved. The transformation mainly occurred from outward supervision of school leaders' obligations to the authorization of school's staff, with a change in their roles and tasks towards functional results in the administration of the school. School principals' were granted this authority after demand for obligation of the school's functioning and quality were commonly stressed in light of the efficiency in its operation. On one hand the school principal is required to solve any issue that transpire out of daily routine in school administration whilst at the same time promote transparent organizational culture in line with system and standards [1]. One cannot comprehend the factual ability of a school principal leading the school in the 21st century.

Questions arise when there's a need to evaluate and assess a school principal who's trying to promote and uphold the educational system successfully during turbulent times. A key question being; is there disparities in value systems of school principals presently? Is there a common leadership style that results in more effective functioning of schools on a daily basis? Which then lead us to the core issues surrounding school leadership; can a theoretical and research correlation between school principal's value system in governing the administration and leadership role be identified? [2]. As a result of many culminating factors, school leaders are increasingly in a difficult situation and must find innovative ways to increase academic achievement, as well as develop, nurture, and retain effective teachers [3]. This paper's objective will be to review the literature surrounding school leadership and to determine the most effective leadership style that will be of value in governing schools' system.

Principals Value System and Leadership Styles Development of Leadership

There are hundreds of definitions of leadership. Some researchers see leadership as to do with organizational change, making progress and moving forward and regard leadership in an active sense as in the verb “to lead”. I tend to favor this definition since from my own experience, research and visits to schools, I see heads and deputies trying to make things happen. Leadership in this sense is about behavior; it is action oriented and it is about improving the quality of what we do.

Over the past 3 decades, researchers have conducted studies to explain and bridge the gap between school leadership style and school administration mainly focusing on the qualities of the leader, personal traits, perceptions, behaviors and mannerism. Contemporary interest therefore in “strong”, “outstanding” or “visionary” educational and school leadership can be interpreted as a partial return to old cultural certainties. “The Great Man Theory” is a 19th-century idea according to which history can be largely explained by the impact of “great men”, or heroes: highly influential individuals who, due to their personal charisma, intelligence, wisdom, or political skill utilized their power in a way that had a decisive historical impact [4]. Early research on leadership was based on the study of people who were already great leaders. These people were often from the aristocracy, as few from lower classes had the opportunity to lead. This contributed to the notion that leadership had something to do with breeding.

Leadership research in the 1960’s emphasizes on the fact that situational leaders were born out of deferring situations as the most potent and efficient leadership style [5]. This leadership style soon gave way to pragmatic leadership style because of the notion, what could leaders do after they solve the problem? A leader is effective when they encounter and solve a problem but soon the situation changes and the effectiveness to resolve another issues requires a different set of skills when the conditions change. From the 1970’s to 1980’s, a rather unique circumstances stressed on the notion of leader and follower correlation with an analysis of situational variables [6]. Based on [7], in situational leadership, the leaders tend to mold themselves into the situation and the type of mission presented to them by adjusting to the environment thus creating a conditions most likely for them to solve the problem successfully. The leader is often seen as a mediator between the organizational goals and individual needs corresponding to the situational variables [8].

In the 1990’s, leadership style took a unique route whereby the researchers concluded that the effectiveness and efficiency of the leader can be ranked. According to [9], leaders articulated diverse set of

styles; commencing with non-leadership style, through to transactional leadership style and finally ending with transformational leadership style. In the latter style, it was obvious that leaders are able to articulate and influence their subordinates into modeling positive behaviors which seemingly exceed their expectations using transformational leadership style [10].

Leadership in the 21st century focuses on a key question: “Do principals make a difference?”. By focusing on wider measures and a broad view of leadership attention can be devoted to examining school and environmental effects, intra-organizational processes and pupil achievements and how leaders interact with all three [11]. Clearly demonstrate that there are no simple answers to understanding how school principals actually influence the school they lead. Much hinges on the nature of a range of variables, including individual school principals themselves.

Leadership Styles

These days, the efficacy of a leader has become an essential point in organizational research. Assimilating a leader into an organization’s model focusing on key responsibilities and performances is seen as a vital task in predicting a leadership traits and behaviors. Look into a leaders’ past and predicting the future based on central element is an important development in leadership management. Organizational leadership style that focusses on detailing clear motivation and less ambiguity on forced measures, over time will lead to success [12]. In order to make work productive, managers must first understand what work needs to be done and how to organize it. To deliver services effectively, organizing work and workers into functional departments and positioning is a necessary step. When this task is achieved, the next step in achieving productivity is building a cooperative spirit among the workers through leadership and motivation [13].

The challenge for the effective leadership lies in creating a workplace environment in which each staff contributes his or her best efforts towards goals that are important to management. The effective leader understands that if work and workers are mismanaged, organizational performance will suffer no matter how good the manager may be in managing the business side of the operation [14]. This research will mainly focus on three leadership styles; autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire.

The autocratic leader is primarily concerned with task accomplishment rather than relationships. Primarily uses directive leadership behaviors. Tends to make decisions alone. Expects respect and obedience of staffs. Frequently exercises power with coercion. Useful and necessary in crisis situations. The authoritarian leaders derive vested authority through the office more than from personal attributes. He/she seeks very little

group participation in decision making. The follower becomes dependent on the leader, finding security in the fact that he/she knows exactly what is required of him/her [15].

In the democratic style, all policies are derived from group decisions. The leader participates in the formation of policies but does not dominate group action. The group may decide with whom they will work and what tasks are to be accomplished by that policy. The democratic leadership style implies professional competence and personal sincerity. Individual growth is fostered through participation in all organizational operations. Democratic leader is primarily concerned with human relations and teamwork. Communication is open and usually goes both ways. He/she demonstrates spirit of collaboration and joint effort results in staff satisfaction. With this style of leadership, participation promotes acceptance of goals and goal commitment [16].

In all leadership styles, the key is decision making, the vehicle between planning processes and the system's administration [17], writes that decision can be made in many ways which are products of leadership style. He emphasizes the value of wide involvement and consultation. However, it is important that the leaders realize his/her personal accountability. The nature of the problem will dictate the extent of participation. The ultimate goal of leadership should be teamwork. This means cooperation and mutual discussion, thus typifying a democratic control at all levels of aspirations [18]. The more people feel they are participating in what directly concerns them, the greater will be the spirit of cooperation throughout.

A purely people-oriented style (*laissez-faire*) focuses on people's feelings but ignores the task at hand. It allows employees to act without any direction. The goal of the employer will be compromised when the *laissez-faire* leadership style is used. At times, persons in leadership roles may feel the need to be liked by all team members and use this leadership style but the task of accomplishing goals will be compromised [19]. Focusing on both the task and the employees is characteristic of the democratic style of leadership. In this style the practical charge employee displays concern for the work that needs to be done, as well as for the team performing the work. When using this leadership style, the practical employees may take longer than the autocratic style for work to be accomplished but goals will be achieved, with staff having positive feelings about their supervisor and the experience [20].

From the study of different leadership styles, it was found that a leadership style articulating noble and humane characteristics in dealing with employees have been linked to increase motivation, consensus, greater efforts, commitment, satisfaction and teamwork. A

preferred style that contributes to achieve the organizational goals will include proactive decisions, rational behavior and valuing human assets as key resources to achieve organization's success and growth [21].

Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership Styles

Transformational leadership is a term which has appeared with increasing frequency in writings about education since the late 1980s. In the early to mid-1990s it was used to signify an appropriate type of leadership for schools taking up the challenges of "restructuring" meaning for the most part, some version of decentralization and site-based management. Most recently it has been involved in the interest of productivity responding to the centrally driven, large scale reform efforts that have dominated education for the past decade in most developed countries throughout the world. So any leadership with this effect may be labelled transformational, no matter the specific practices it entails or even whether the changes wrought are desirable [22].

All transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational on the part of leader's colleagues. Increased capacities and commitments are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity. Authority and influence associated with this form of leadership are not necessarily allocated to those occupying formal administrative positions, although much of the literature adopts their perspective [23]. Rather, power is attributed by organizational members to whoever is able to inspire their commitments to collective aspirations and the desire for personal and collective mastering over the capacities needed to accomplish such aspirations.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which the leader enjoys constituents in a manner that transforms or changes. As [24] developed the concept of transformational leadership he made the distinction between transformational leadership and transactional leadership. According to [25] transformational leadership exists when "leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. A transformational leader has the task of developing the school organization by bringing about a cultural shift within the school. The leader steers the behaviors of the staff by initiating a vision for the future, by inspiring, motivating, giving individual support and by setting intellectual changes.

Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leadership is one of the oldest managerial approaches applied to school systems. This type of leaders focuses on a series of “transactions” that are grounded in the belief that rewards and punishment serve as the primary motivation for people. A transactional school leader controls subordinates (ie: teachers, resource personnel, teaching assistants etc.) in part, through the exchange of rewards (ie: salary, recognition, intrinsic benefits) for effective service [26]. Thus, teachers and other personnel are likely to be rewarded by transactional leaders in schools that achieve at a high level in standards-based reform contexts. Conversely, teachers in poor performing schools are likely to be punished by school leaders that adhere to this philosophy.

A transactional leader is one who operates within a defined system and follows rules. Control is maintained through process. Transactional leader appeals to an individual’s self-interest and is mainly an exchange process. This kind of leader tries to maintain existing structures of organization. They do this by giving contingent rewards and by rewarding or punishing based on performance or proficiencies [27]. Transactional leaders cater to the self-interests of their followers by means of contingent reinforcement. If the follower carries out their assignment as agreed they are rewarded, promised rewards and praised. Leaders manage by exception if the followers fail in assignments. When leaders actively manage by exception, they monitor the followers’ performance and correct or discipline them. If the leaders passively manage by exception, they wait for problems in the followers’ performance to arise, then make corrections or discipline the followers [27].

The Link between Leadership Style and Organizational Variables

Numerous studies have attributed the link between organizational variables and leadership styles have on employees’ enactment and efficiency. Since the mid 1990’s most research have concluded that transformational leadership style of managing workforce is essentially much more production and profitable than other leadership styles mainly transactional leadership management. A study by [28] determined that the job satisfaction of an employee plays a pivotal part in an organization’s performance and productivity and not the opposite. A study conducted by [29] revealed that there is positive correlation between transformational leadership style and employees’ output in reference to innumerable criteria. Transformational leadership stimulates and inspires their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and in the process develop their followers’ own leadership capacity. These leaders help followers to grow and develop by responding to followers’ individual needs by empowering them and aligning the

objectives and goals of the individual follower, the leader, the group and the larger organization [30].

Transformational leadership and organizational variables hold the key to understanding organizational effectiveness. Any decisions taken by managers are very important as they affect a large number of people in the organization, thus the leadership skills of the manager have to be very pronounced. In an organic, non-formalized organization with a large span of control are conducive for transformational leaders to appear and have great influence over their subordinates to achieve control and enhance performance leading to greater efficiency [31, 32] distinguished between transactional leadership, which focuses on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers. Politicians who win votes by promising “no new taxes” are demonstrating transactional leadership style. Similarly, managers who offer promotions to employees who surpass their goals are exhibiting transactional leadership. In the classroom, teachers are being transactional when they give students a grade for their work completed. The exchange dimension of transactional leadership is very common and can be observed at many kinds throughout all types of organizations.

In summary, having examined transformational leadership and transactional leadership, our ideal of a connected and dynamic leadership starts from a place of solid personal inspiration. It is about the power of purpose, of passion and it leads to an engaging style of personal connection. This leadership runs deeply through the limbic system and creates a web of emotional connection through the phenomena of contagion [33]. Leaders who come from a place of inspirational presence have an effect on groups that stimulates their creativity, opens their sense of vision and expands their thinking. These leaders offer a compelling direction for others and lead through their passion and heart connection rather than through power, control or authority. While there are compelling reasons from a human perspective to lead from this stance, there is also strong evidence of the positive impact it can have on organizational performance.

School Leadership and Leadership Styles of School Principals

The principal’s influence is important to school success and students’ academic achievement [34]. Studies indicate that novice principals have difficulty transitioning into the principal role due to diversity, varied tasks and lack of predictability. Assuming responsibility for such a wide variety of areas requires attention to both school management and transformational leadership duties. Getting to know your stakeholders. Being a collaborative transformational leader and maintaining a pleasant and orderly place for students and staff will be more important during the initial months. While transactional

leadership is a priority responsibility for principals, it is also important that principals be able to organize and manage their schools [35]. Furthermore, with greater demands on students' academic performance, it is important that new principals promote a culture of teacher collaboration.

The complexity of school management and the many relationships within it demand a high level of emotional intelligence in the school leader [35]. Extensive research on leadership styles in the corporate sector and their relationship to organizational climate and performance offers important insights. Of six leadership styles identified, four positively affected climate and two were associated negative influences. Versatility and a range of styles are advantages as is the ability to recognize which style is most effective in which relationship and at which stage of school development. Today's principals operate in a conflicted environment. They are expected to work effectively with increasingly diverse and vocal stakeholders. They most deal with significant educational reform, political realities, economic restraints, an increasingly litigious environment and turbulent social pressures with intense demands for accountability for success.

Meeting these conflicting demands requires many interpretations with all those who have an interest in schools which produce internal and external conflicts that require significant abilities to manage and lead [36]. Study's at schools in challenging circumstances recognized one leadership tasks as constantly managing unpredictable conflict and dissent encountered daily in the school setting. On a daily basis, principals are required to interact with a broad range of community and social agencies on behalf of students in their school. Research conducted in Canada from 200 elementary school principals discovered that personal values plays a pivotal part in the decision-making process among school principals and environment. It also emphasized that value and behavior of school leaders contributed positively to school leadership thus increasing job satisfaction among teachers in Canada [37].

According to [38] in order to improve the school and students' outcomes, the leader, in this case, the school's principal needs to involve and engage all school elements. The school's elements consist of teachers and school stakeholders. School principals need to be able to motivate and improve the conditions of all school elements. To be successful, therefore, requires principals to have cognitive and emotive qualities, strategies and skills. Furthermore [39], advise that school leadership should not be separated from the principal's decision-making styles and teachers' job achievement. Decision-making and job achievements are important elements of leadership. By understanding decision-making styles will encourage principals to perform well in making a decision. As a result, effective

decision-making by principals will effectively assist teachers to meet their job satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A qualitative study on the leadership style, leadership values and school principal leadership is explored in detail and its suggestions are presented. This study captures the essence of transformational leadership and its function on improving school management mainly on students learning reflected by the teaching developments. The positive knock on effect on the value systems of the leadership styles is scrutinized. The results clearly show that principals with transformational leadership style tend to portray a positive outlook that enhances the school's environment. The theory links the value system with the leadership style of the school principal, predominantly transformational leadership styles of engaging with school administration. Transformational leaders however, make lasting, widespread improvement by following a process that ensures all parts of the school or system are connected and share a common purpose (systems thinking). Transformational leadership goes beyond the attempts of some leaders to satisfy the current needs of followers by focusing on exchange through contingent reward behavior. Transformational leadership instead attempt to raise the needs of followers and promote positive change for individuals, groups and organizations. Instead of responding to his or her own immediate self-interests and those of followers, the transformational leader arouses heightened awareness interests in the group or organization, increases confidence and moves followers gradually from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement and growth. In short, transformational leaders develop their followers to the point where followers are able to take on leadership roles and perform beyond established standards or goals.

According to [40] there are various important functions performed by leaders in organizations. The importance of leadership in education include but not limited to guiding people, developing teamwork, maintaining discipline, building morale and representing the group. Therefore, transformational leadership is a cohesive force which holds the group intact, the disciplinary power that keeps the group working, the electric current that energizes human actions, the insight that converts despair into hope. In fact, there is no substitute for effective leadership. After reviewing the theoretical discussions and fundamentals of leadership, this paper denoted a positive correlation between a rational value system and transformational leadership style [41]. This study may contribute to the understanding of the difficulties and obstacles faced by school principals in making decisions and more intelligent introduction and use of effective organizational processes.

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