"Leadership Practices at Schools: An Exploratory Study of Rural Areas of Gujrat"

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this qualitative research study was to develop a better understanding of how successful principals lead at private schools of rural areas. The study was focused on the principal's role in providing transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership as defined by Bass and Avolio (1995), specifically in the context of school education. The study was designed to explore the use of four transformational leadership behaviors that are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Other leadership styles were also made part of interview questionnaire to assess whether they are practiced by principals along with transformational leadership in different situations or not. The study sample was drawn from private schools of rural areas of Gujrat. The participants were selected through judgmental sampling and one to one interviews of open ended questions was conducted to acquire the needed information. The resulting data was analyzed by identifying the common themes. The results concluded that principals used transformational and transactional leadership but none was found using the laissez-faire style.

KEYWORDS: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Laissez-faire, Principal, Private Schools, Rural area, Gujrat

I. INTRODUCTION

The quality of a school is affected by how its internal processes work to constantly improve its performance. One such internal process involves leadership. In context of leadership Bass and Avolio developed the concept of full range leadership to be an inclusive range of leadership involving four behaviors of transformational leadership, three behaviors of transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership in the full range leadership model is composed of what are now referred as the four I's; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). Transactional leadership is composed of three leadership behaviors; contingent reward, management-by-exception active, and management-by exception passive. Laissez-faire leadership is the final behavior included in this study and on the opposite end of the full range leadership model continuum from the four I's. Leadership designates the school principal as the central school figure to continuously articulate the school's mission and vision to the school's staff and community. The school principal oversees curriculum and facilitates teachers' professional development that is supportive of best practice. The school principal monitors student progress to provide individual attention for specific students and also practice the needed behaviors to make the teachers performance better. The school principal is also tasked with promoting a positive learning environment. However, there is question regarding the principal ship and school administration in general. Leadership, in education and in business, is an evolving discipline. School principals and aspiring administrators need to become familiar with leadership as a discipline to practice, learn their strengths and weaknesses infuse themselves with best practice so they can provide leadership that best fits their circumstances, and work diligently to perfect and implement the behaviors that will enable deep sustained improvement in schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of how successful principals lead and more importantly understand their behaviors. The study was conducted to determine if there existed a benefit derived from different leadership styles in terms of their application on school teacher working in private sector schools in rural areas of Gujrat. Study was proposed to find out three basic styles including Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-fair leadership.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to explore the principal's role in providing transformational leadership, Transactional leadership and Laissez-fair leadership as defined by Bass and Avolio (1995), specifically in the context of school education in rural area of Gujrat., and measuring the possible effect this principal leadership has on student achievement. The research question this study explored is that "What leadership roles are preferred by the school principal from transformational, transactional and Laissez-Faire?"

Significance

This research paper will have valuable contribution in the literatures because it will help to find out most prevailing leadership styles adopted by private school principals. Both employees and the organizations can benefit from the close observation of all the dimensions in leadership. So it can contribute in developing leadership style. It can also help school principals to re assess their leadership practices and then develop the most suitable style according to the characteristics of school teachers and other related factors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Full Range Leadership: Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The origins of the full range leadership model trace back to Burns' (1978) description of transforming leadership. Burns formalized transforming leadership as a construct in 1978. Bass' (1985) theory of transformational leadership expanded Burns' model to include the psychological mechanisms underpinning transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). "Bass's (1985) conceptualization of transactional and transformational leadership included seven leadership factors, which he labeled charisma, inspirational, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception and laissez-faire leadership" (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999, p. 441). This seven factor model was later reduced to a six factor model because charisma and inspirational were often not empirically distinguishable (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). Hater and Bass (1988) soon after separated the transactional factor, management-by-exception, into management-by-exception active and management-by-exception passive. Bass and Avolio developed the concept of full range leadership to be an inclusive range of leadership involving four behaviors of transformational leadership, three behaviors of transactional leadership, and laissezfaire leadership. Transformational leadership in the full range leadership model is composed of what are now referred as the four I's; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). Transactional leadership is composed of three leadership behaviors; contingent reward, management-by-exception active, and management-by exception passive. Laissez-faire leadership is the final behavior and on the opposite end of the full range leadership model continuum from the four I's.

Transformational leadership

Although many authors credit Burns as having first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in 1978, Downton was first to distinguish transformational leadership from transactional leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Downton (1973) contrasted transformational from transactional leadership in Rebel Leadership, differentiating revolutionary, rebel, reform, and ordinary leaders (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Burns formalized transforming leadership as a concept in 1978. "A transformational leader differs from a transactional one by not merely recognizing associates' needs, but by attempting to develop those needs from lower to higher levels of maturity" (Avolio & Bass, 1995, p.16). Although Bass and Avolio extended the concept of transformational leadership into full range leadership, Burns and Bass are generally known for the origins of the transformational leadership construct. It should be noted that "neither Burns nor Bass studied schools, but rather based their work on political leaders, Army officers, or business executives" (Liontos, 1992, p.2). As the name implies, the heart of transformational leadership involves the ability of the leader to transform peoples' behavior or actions that in essence makes them better for the organization they serve. "Bass depicted transformational leadership as a higher order constructs comprising of three conceptually distinct factors: charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 891). By 1991, the three conceptual factors became four; these conceptual areas were then labeled charismatic leadership/idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004, p. 83). Leaders maintain high ethical and moral conduct and focus on followers' values, motives, and satisfying their needs (Burns, 2003). Ethical and moral conduct requirements are what set transformational leadership apart. This is the answer to the all too often debated question; was Adolf Hitler a leader? "Transforming values lie at the heart of transforming leadership" (Burns, 2003, p.29), but the values need to be morally and ethically grounded to be considered leadership. Transformational leadership currently is defined by four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transactional Leadership

Burns (1978) states that transactional leaders "approach associates with an eye to exchanging one thing for another [in the area of political transactional leaders it may be]: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions. There are three dimensions that underlie transactional leadership: management-by-exception passive, management-by-exception active and contingent reward. "Transactional forms of leadership are premised on exchange theory. Various kinds of rewards from the organization are exchanged for the services of the teacher who is seen to be acting at least partly out of self-interest" (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1993, p.11).

Laissez-faire

Laissez-faire is essentially non-leadership or the lack of leadership. Nguni, Sleegers, and Denessen (2006) define laissez-faire as "the extent to which leaders avoid responsibility, fail to make decisions, and are absent when needed, or fail to follow up on requests" (p. 149). Barbuto and Brown (2000) describe laissez-faire as a hands-off form of leadership often referred to as the absence of leadership. Laissez-faire "leaders avoid specifying agreements, clarifying expectations, and providing goals and standards to be achieved by followers" (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). Within the realm of education, transformational leadership has been researched through in-depth case study (Liontos, 1993), in conjunction with "expert thinking" in comparison with total quality leadership (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993), as a moderator of teacher commitment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b), its' effectiveness on student engagement and organizational conditions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b), its' effectiveness of school reform (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) stated "current educational leadership literature offers no unitary concept of transformational leadership" (p. 453). However, there is evidence that principals who exhibit transformational leadership do create a positive school climate and culture (Barnett, McCormick, & Conners, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b; Maehr et al., 1996; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 1999), and indirectly improved student achievement (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Verona & Young, 2001).

Research on Principal Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership construct provides a strong advantage for principals who practice transformational leadership, since principals can motivate and inspire staff members to perform at their best (Smith & Piele, 2001). "This may be especially important [in the field of education] because teachers are oriented to intrinsic rewards" (Mills, 2008, p. 48). The MLQ and MLQ-5X have been used in the education to determine if there is a relationship between transformational leadership exhibited by school principals and student academic achievement.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Assumptions

Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 30) explain the views regarding philosophical assumptions in following words i.e. "the researcher approaches the world with a web of ideas and a framework that specify a set of questions that he or she examines in specific ways". In above three assumptions are explained, first web of ideas and framework explains ontology, set of questions explains epistemology, and ways to examine explains the methodology.

Ontological Approach

Researcher concepts regarding ontology argues that at times there might be many (multiple) realities that constitutes a phenomenon instead of just objective reality Denzin and Lincoln (2011).

Considering the ontological approach this study has: the concepts of leadership will be explained that are adopted by different people (Principals) at rural area schools of Gujrat.

Epistemological Approach

Epistemology is about concepts that how the knowledge will be acquired according to context of social world of each individual (Creswell, 2012).

In this study the proposed epistemological stance is based upon the sociological theory of social constructivism which supports the concepts that produced knowledge is local and also specific to the situation (Bryman and Bell, 2008)

Methodological Approach

As the topic "Leadership Practices at Schools: an Exploratory Study of Rural Areas of Gujrat" itself states that this is an exploratory study which will help to find out the leadership approach which is adopted

by principals in schools. So the better approach will be interpretive which will help us to throw light upon the leadership phenomena (Gracia and Brush, 2012)

Sampling Strategy

In this study the method of sampling will be judgmental. Miles and Huberman (1994) states that judgmental also named as purposive sampling is a strategy which helps the researcher to select those cases which have rich information related to the phenomena being researched.

Recruitment Criteria

Following recruitment criteria will be adopted to select the participants in this study.

- [1] Any individual/ principal who is working in a private school can be selected.
- [2] The work experience should be at least 3 years in the same school
- [3] The teacher must either be principal or must be at the post of headship
- [4] There is no age limit set for the selection of the respondent.

IV. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

According to Kvalve (1996) qualitative interview is a good approach for the purpose of getting information which can help to achieve research objectives. So semi structured interviews will be conducted in order to collect the qualitative data from the respondents. Bryman (2012) proposes two techniques for qualitative interviews i.e. semi structured and unstructured. In this study semi structured approach will be adopted as an interview guide will be developed to guide the data collection procedures (Creswell, 2012).

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative research data analysis is comprised of the assessment of words or pictures as they evaluate data (Creswell, 2005). This research study is based on the assessment of the oral responses from participants during one-on-one interviews. The data analysis methodology for the research study relied on the participants' ability to provide descriptions of their experiences for classification of common themes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The themes were identified by a number of data codes which are linked to create a larger idea and are typically no more than two to four words in length (Creswell).Neuman (2005) described content analysis as a technique for identifying information through the examination of written data and was conducted for the purposes of the research study. Qualitative research is interpretive, as themes were created regarding the personal assessment analysis of the data received from the one-on-one interviews. Creswell (2005) explains that the themes can be evaluated by reviewing the material where the data occurred over multiple instances from the one-on-one interviews, same method was used for this study as well.

Demographic Analysis

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

Age	Number	Percentage
20 - 30	1	8.33 %
31 - 40	6	50.00%
41 - 50	3	25.00%
51 - 60	2	20.00%

There were twelve respondents in the study. One respondent (8.33%) was in age limit of 20-30, six (50.00%) were in age limit of 31-40, three (20.00%) were in age limit of 41-50 and two (20.00) respondent were in age limit of 51-60. The demographic analysis of age was important to note that different age groups were part of this study.

Table 2: Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Married	8	67.77%
Un Married	4	33.33%

Of the 12 respondents 8 (67.77%) were married and 4 (33.33%) were unmarried.

Table 3: Salary Level of the Respondents

Salary	Number	Percentage
Less than 10000	0	0
10000 - 15000	0	0
16000 - 20000	3	25.00%
21000 - 25000	4	33.33%
More than 25000	5	41.66%

The respondents who were receiving salaries in between the range of 16000-20000 were three (25.00%). There were four (33.33%) respondents receiving salaries in the range of 21000-25000 and five (41.66%) respondents received more than 25000.

Table 4: Education Level of the Respondents

Educational Qualification	Number	Percentage
Bachelor	1	08.33%
Master Degree	9	75.00%
M. Phil	2	16.66%
Any Other	0	0

From the People included in the study one (8.33%) of the respondents held a bachelors degree, nine (75.00%) of the respondents held a master's degree and only two (16.66%) people held an M.phil degree. This demographic was important to note that 11 of the 12 respondents held masters or above degree.

Qualitative Findings

A single research question guided this research study: "What leadership roles are preferred by the school principal from transformational, transactional and Laissez-Faire?" The following information is a discussion of the findings from responses to the study's individual interview research questions.

Interview Question 1 asked: What does u think about yourself that do you go beyond your self interest for the good of the group?

Three of the Participant responses revealed that they go beyond their self interest as it helps to build the trust among schools teachers; they also said that it also helps them to better manage the school activities and teachers as well. Two of the respondents were of this view that it helps them to increase the learning among team members and ultimately contribute to the teacher's productivity. Four respondents concluded that their actions of going beyond self I beyond self interest are because if the increased benefit for the institution. As a whole all nine respondents agreed that one must go beyond self interest in order to get positive outcomes for the institution (School).

Interview Question 2 asked: What's your view about considering the moral and ethical consequences of decisions that you make?

All the respondents claimed that they always consider the moral and ethical consequences before making any important decision. One respondent said "I think over it again and again to make a decision". Another respondent described that "Good decisions come from bad decisions and bad decisions come from mistake. But whenever I take any decision first of all I see its effects on the moral values and ethics. If it disturbed any moral values and ethics I review my decision to overcome this problem".

Interview Question 3 asked: How do you explain the motivation of your teacher? Do u optimistically discuss about future?

All of the respondents agreed upon the concept of motivation and were of view that it should necessarily be part of a principal's job. Most of the respondents' views revealed that they are using both intrinsic and extrinsic elements to motivate their teachers. One respondent stated "*it is a driving force to get performance*". He also said that "*motivation is relevant to the specific situation and time as well*".

Interview Question 4 asked: Do you reexamine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate? Respondents were of the view that extreme care is required to include all the aspects while making decisions. They emphasized that critical assumptions and their review in the context of problem helps them to prevent mistakes in their decision making. One of the respondents was of a contradictory view and answered *"Well,*"

many a times you don't get enough time for a look back and reconsideration. As a head you are always in a quick decision making state. As sound decision power and skill to do so are enough to make me feel contented, so I don't have to look back for any decision".

Interview Question 5 asked: Kindly explain your views about helping others to develop their strength.

A respondent answered "It is necessary in the organization that you have to develop a climate of cooperation. This cooperation and help will provide the strength to the employees so that they will become capable to face any problem and overcome difficulties. In this way, employees feel that they have support which gives them courage to step forward". Other responses were also of similar nature and emphasized on helping others and playing a supportive role to develop the teachers and other staff. They said that it will provide support to solve problems and also help the sharing of knowledge and skills among all.

Interview Question 6 asked: What's your concept of reward?

Respondent's views about rewards were that it is something which differentiates good performers from average and bad ones. Reward is any monetary or non monetary return which a person gets on the bases of the best performance. One of the respondents view was that "*Rewards give motivation to employees that will give us benefit in building profits and reputation of organization. Therefore rewards are important to make organization attractive for employees*".

Interview Question 7 asked: How do you make these rewards for your employees?

A respondent stated "In our school, in addition to salary, appreciation is an important form of reward which is given to employees in every meeting. Moreover employees, who perform their duties qualitatively, will be awarded by increments and promotions annually. Sometimes, I also provide financial benefit (can be cheque or cash) on the spot for good performance of employee. For example, recently I have given Rs. 2000 to Miss Hafsa on remarkable preparation of result cards". Another respondent explained his view that "I make these rewards for the employees in the form of a verbal word of encouragement, a certificate or by providing them some relaxation in duty hours. Secondly there are some annual rewards for best teacher, most regular teacher etc".

Interview Question 8 asked: What's your view about developing records of your employee's doings?

Similar views were gathered regarding making records of employees, respondents said that records are necessary and they also help in understanding the logic behind decision making. They explained that records give a deep insight about evaluation of employees and necessary for making teachers satisfied. One respondent explained *"Record keeping is necessary to keep track of the progress of each employee. According to my view rewards system can best be practiced when there is record of every important activity"*.

Interview Question 9 asked: Explain your views about Decisions?

Respondent stated "Decisions should not be made autonomously, especially about those areas which can affect the work of others. Therefore, according to me, participative decision making is the most suitable way of taking decisions". Another respondent explained "To me decision is choosing among different options. Decisions should be made after studying everything. Once made, decisions should not be changed". Common words noted were rewards, decision making, candidates, and promotions. Respondents views were that decision can be taken about above discussed words.

Interview Question 10 asked: In different circumstances at your school, what's your strategy of making decisions?

All the respondents emphasized upon participative decision making to get the results from their teachers. One respondent said "Most of the times I try to collaborate with senior members and it also depends upon the importance of the decision. But let me tell you that still there are decision which must be and should be taken alone by you". Another respondent described his strategy of decision making as" Well I try to take fair decisions and take them after proper investigation and study. As I mentioned earlier that decisions when taken with proper care and concern can have a positive impact and vice versa so one needs to be careful in it.

VI. DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that all participants were exercising leadership practices in their schools.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership in the full range leadership model is composed of what are now referred as the four I's; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). According to the collected data and responses from the interviews it

was observed that all principles (100%) were involved in practicing all I's. only one respondent (8.33%) was not consistent in the intellectual stimulation dimensions as he denied its involvement in all the situations. All the respondents were involved in idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration as well. But their views of implementing were different and also according to the situation as well. There was a strong belief found that principal leaders decisions should go beyond their self interests to stimulate school achievements, also the decisions should be made under the basic guidelines of moral and ethical values. It was also found that different motivational tools must be applied to keep the teachers motivated in various situations. Almost 91.77% respondents believed that critical care is required to see all the aspects in any situation and context of the problem must also be matched while making important decisions. Need for cooperation, helping others when required, support for others was found to be the necessary part of leadership behaviors adopted by the principals. It can be concluded that transformational leadership was the most frequently used leadership style schools in the rural areas of Gujrat.

Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership is composed of three leadership behaviors; contingent reward, managementby-exception active, and management-by exception passive (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). In school leadership 100% responses were experienced in developing and applying rewards as they had a positive impact on the teacher's performances. Rewards were defined as any monetary or non monetary return which a person gets on the bases of his/her performance. It is consistent with the ideas as Employers expect rewards to stimulate favorable employee attitudes and behaviors and discourage unfavorable ones, a notion which is derived from various classical theories. In a first phase, theories expounded a direct relationship between rewards and behavior (Skinner 1953), implying that rewarding employees for achieving a favorable outcome will reinforce the behavior that leads to this outcome (Luthans & Kreitner 1975). At the time of need or upon the situation record keeping was given importance by almost all the respondents. They believed that this will help them in making decisions and also support in keeping the track records which can provide deep insight about evaluation of employees. Transactional behavior was found to be used along with transformational according to the needs of the situation and also the employees.

Laissez-faire leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is the final behavior and on the opposite end of the full range leadership model continuum from the four I's (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). All the respondents 100% believed the idea of participative decision making and also emphasized it in making quality decisions. There wasn't enough evidence found from the views of respondents that they seemed to be involved in Laissez-faire leadership.

VII. CONCLUSION

The data analysis and discussion and findings suggest that transformational leadership style was the most prevalent leadership style at private schools in the rural areas of Gujrat. There was enough evidence to support the ideas of different authors Burns (2003), Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, (1991), Bass and Avolio (1995) regarding transformational leadership and its four factors i.e. idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. All were practiced by school leader. Second most used leadership style was transactional as the principal stated that they need rewards to reinforce the positive behaviors of the teachers. Burns (1978) states that transactional leaders "approach associates with an eye to exchanging one thing for another. The results of the study was consistent with the ideas of theories expounded a direct relationship between rewards and behavior (Skinner 1953), implying that rewarding employees for achieving a favorable outcome will reinforce the behavior that leads to this outcome (Luthans & Kreitner 1975). None of the response from the respondents supported the Laissez-faire leadership style from which it can be concluded that this leadership style is not been adopted by school principals. Nguni, Sleegers, and Denessen (2006) define laissez-faire as "the extent to which leaders avoid responsibility, fail to make decisions, and are absent when needed, or fail to follow up on requests" Barbuto and Brown (2000) describe laissez-faire as a hands-off form of leadership often referred to as the absence of leadership. Respondent's belief were more on participative ways of making decisions regarding school activities and teachers performance.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In writing this article the researcher faced a problem that there was Limited time frame for data collection and transcription of data. Small pool of participants limited any possibility of making generalizations from the results as well. As mlq-5x is a shorter version of original MLQ, so there can also be certain limitation of the instrument (mlq-5x) used in this study.

Further studies can be made upon male and female principals regarding assessing their leadership styles. Results of this study can be confirmed by performing this study using larger sample. Future studies can be made in relation to other variables like satisfaction, teacher's performance, student achievement etc.

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