Motivation and Empowerment: A Study of Two Aspects of Transformational Leadership Practice and their Impact on the Effectiveness of the Decision-making Process in Schools in Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia.

Najla Salem Sobaih

Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

This research examines two dimensions of transformational leadership practice: motivation and empowerment. Specifically, the study evaluated the effectiveness of the decision process in schools in the Al-Khobar governorate, in Saudi Arabia. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research methodology in order to develop an understanding of the experiences of women as leaders in Saudi schools. The study elicited data through a series of semi-structured interviews with 12 leaders in six different public / private elementary, and high school schools. The study found that the impact of motivation on leaders varied considerably, as some had no real motivation to push themselves to change. On the other hand, many leaders had a desire to apply transformational leadership to perceived opportunities such as to implement their philosophy of education. However, it was found that the construct of transformational leadership with the help of empowerment, was limited by the Ministry of Education. The findings from this study have implications for management and future research; they also provide evidence for the importance of implementing transformational leadership in Saudi schools.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, empowerment, motivation.

INTRODUCTION

The modern era has witnessed revolutionary changes in various fields, as a result of which organizations seek to transform their structures. There is an interaction of systems from local to global and greater openness to innovation. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, organizations have emphasized their success as a response to the marked transformations, which brought about persistent changes in the nature of work, institutions and their various fields. Consequently, researchers have investigated the role of leadership as an important variable in paving the way for creating more effective and more sensitive educational institutions. The key concepts that have been used to describe the role of leaders from managers to procedural leaders to educational leaders to transformational leaders have been discussed. In particular, the theory of transformational leadership emerged through the establishment of modern trends in leadership, and through the assumptions of situational theory and its behavioural models, as outlined by Burns (1978), an American historian and political scientist. The transformational leadership theory presented by Burns has been studied, tested, and developed over the past two decades, and this theory has been applied in non-educational fields by many scholars and researchers such as; Techy & Devanna, and Yukl. This leadership style is required to transfer and transform organizations; it is conducive.

Bernard M. Bass took advantage of these ideas in 1985 by distinguishing transformational leadership from other leadership styles (Farazja & Khademi 2011). In addition, Bass and Volio (1993) presented their theory with a new framework, where they constructed a questionnaire called the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire, which could be used to study the impact of leaders during the span of organizations (Bass & Volio, 1993). In the early 1990s, researchers such as Sergiovanni (1995), Hallenger and Brown (1993) and Leithwood(1999) focused solely on the application of these theories in the educational fields (Korejan & Shahbazi 2016). Furthermore, Groves (1996) mentioned the merit of adopting this style in educational institutions, emphasizing that this type of leadership enabled the leader and workers to improve opportunities, take risks, recognize achievements and work in teams, which

empowered the workers to display their skills and clarify their vision. This approach emboldened creativity and growth and prepared subordinates to become leaders.

Transformational leadership is evident for all educational institutions to bring about change and transformation, as adopting this leadership style is one of the key factors involved in significantly changing educational institutions. This form of leadership is a factor in the advancement of educational institutions, especially when they are experiencing a dissatisfaction due to being under-ranked. One must identify the weaknesses and discrepancies within an institution, as it is not possible in any case to advance the educational process while it is confined within traditional leadership patterns. Therefore, there is a clear need to investigate to what extent transformational leadership is being practiced by leaders in Saudi schools. In contrast, transactional leadership is based on explicit process control. A stringent management structure that focuses on motivating team members is required; transformational leadership motivates everyone to make their best effort, provide higher quality service, produce innovative ideas, demonstrate mental fortitude, and pursue loftier objectives.

Although many leadership styles are found to focus on the actions of leaders, transformational leadership revolves around both leaders and their followers. Furthermore, it offers morality and motivation as mediating factors in improving one another (Arabiun, 2014). For example, Odumeru & Ogbonna (2013) conducted a study that explained and compared transformational and transactional leadership. They defined transformational leadership as involving a forward-thinking leader. People participating changed the company culture by implementing novel structural ideas. Employee motivation and high moral standards helped them accomplish their goals. They prioritise group interests over personal interests. Intellectual stimulation encouraged the development of original, creative solutions to problems.

Several studies have confirmed positive relationships between a transformational leadership style and individual personal performance for job satisfaction, individual and teamwork performance, and the commitment of employees and teams. Components of

transformational leadership style can produce high levels of trust and loyalty if the leaders respect and have confidence in their followers. High trust and loyalty are displayed, alongside the willingness of the followers to work with greater commitment in the event of an organization facing problems or difficulties (Mohd, 2019). Furthermore, transformational leadership requires coordination, communication and cooperation, in order to work smoothly. Influence, motivation, empathy and stimulation are found to be the driving factors of the transformational approach (Arabiun, 2014).

Study Problem

Despite well-researched, efficient and effective leadership strategies, what may have worked in the past may not work in the present or the future (Farahnak et al, 2020). The focal point of several organizations is to adapt to environmental changes, modify their conditions, and experiment with innovations to ensure their survival. Thus, organizations no longer need managers, but rather leaders who would aspire to convince the people around them of their organization's vision and mission in order to bring about the most appropriate change (Botha, 2013). Therefore, researchers have examined the transformations in the evolution of the leadership system, the impact of educational policies on the curricula, high school exam results, criteria for selecting and attracting teachers, school leaders, and many other factors. Saudi Arabia is aiming to raise the level of competencies in educational institutions, but this is a result of administrative environments. An appropriate climate is required to raise the efficiency of teachers who lead their students. An organization also requires a leader who can motivate, encourage and raise the morale of employees. Moreover, a leader must be responsible for his actions, with innovative capabilities and the ability to think out of the box; such leadership is found to be effective the most. The educational leadership adopts this style to reach the required level. Despite the importance of this style, and the abundant research and studies that have dealt with the concept of leadership and its impact, the Saudi school sector has a lack of studies that have discussed the status of leadership styles and their effects. Therefore, this study sheds light on the transformational leadership styles and the extent of their application by leaders in schools.

Study Significance

In a review of articles published between 2000-2010, Dinh et al (2014) found that the top 10 academic journals: The Leadership Quarterly, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Psychology, Organisational Science, American Psychologist, Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, and Personnel Psychology. The researchers analysed 752 cases and reached the conclusion that transformational leadership theory is still one of the most dominant paradigms as opposed to other leadership theories such as the trait theory, situational theories, and behavioural theories. Additionally, the study's focus was on the idea of transformational leadership, which is one of the crucial subjects that has attracted and continues to draw a lot of attention from researchers in the field of management.

An effort was made to alert educational departments to the necessity of understanding the connection between transformational leadership and its practicality in the decision-making process, and to highlight its importance for performance. The next section outlines the key questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

To what degree does transformational leadership apply in their workplace?

To answer this question two sub-questions were asked:

Q1: How do leaders use empowerment with transformational leadership in their schools?

Q2: What are the motivations of the leaders to apply transformational leadership in their schools?

SCOPE of the STUDY

Objective Limits: this research was limited to the two dimensions: the impact of *empowerment* on the effectiveness of the decision process; the *motivation* and the possibility of implementing improvements in schools.

Time Limits: this research was implemented during the third term of the 2022 academic year.

Spatial Limits: this research was implemented in different public / private elementary and high schools in Al-Khobar Governorate of Saudi Arabia.

Human Limits: this research was implemented with 12 leaders in public /private elementary, and high schools in the Al-Khobar governorate.

Future Research. Future studies might demonstrate a correlation between leadership positions, and hierarchies in private and public schools at different levels. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Further research might employ surveys in order to collect multi-dimensional information in order to provide richer, vivid and detailed scientific evidence about transformational leadership style and leadership thinking.

METHODOLOGY

The key objective of this research was to identify and understand the impact of *empowerment* on the effectiveness of the decision-making process in schools and raising *motivation* through implementing leadership qualities among school leaders.

An interpretive approach was chosen for this research in order to generate detailed qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The interpretive approach enabled the participants to express their opinions and understanding of their life-world environment, exploring the way people acquire knowledge and adapt to external factors from person to person (Alase, 2017). As a consequence of this feature of the interpretive approach, and because the objective of this

research is to investigate the experiences of leaders in relation to the extent of application of transformational leadership among leaders in Saudi schools' factors, an interpretive approach is highly suited to achieve the aims of this research.

Data collection

Before collecting the data, leaders in the six schools were invited by email to participate voluntarily in this research. To ensure that the interviewees gave the most honest feedback it was necessary to make them feel comfortable.

The participants

The study sample from six different schools included 12 educational leaders. The purpose was to generate richer information. According to Patton, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size" (2002, p. 245). By limiting the number of participants, I was able to have more in-depth discussion and include all of their comments.

Data analysis

Data analysis is an organizational procedure for discussing the interview texts and field notes (Richards, 2009). The stage of data collection included a large amount of data consisting of texts from transcribed interviews. At first glance, the interpretation of the material, the analysis and its extraction for meaningful findings seemed complex. Nonetheless, good researchers find huge amounts of data useful and rich in information for in-depth and creative outcomes (Punch, 2013). Moreover, according to Baxter and Jack (2008) the data analysis stage is crucial within qualitative research; there is an opportunity for creativity in both synthesis and analysis. Creswell (2017) notes that the analysis stage is divided into five parts: data management, coding and developing themes, data description, data interpretation

and data representation. This comprehensive process allows for information refinement, leading to useful and usable sets of date.

Accordingly, the follow process was undertaken in this study. All interviews were transcribed with written consent from the leaders. Coding focused on leaders' ideas about action and aspirations, by reflecting on the data collected through the use of the two dimensions. Data were analyzed iteratively by looking at patterns and inconsistencies in the discourse of individual leaders.

RESULTS of the STUDY AND DISCSSION

Results Related to the first Research Question:

If you were to ask a random group, "what's the best type of leadership style?" you are most likely to get a response of 'leaders must be transformational leaders.' A considerable number of leaders consider themselves to be transformational leaders, albeit, in reality, that is not the case and it's hard to use it. To understand why, it is necessary to understand the Ministry of Education (MoE) system in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's MoE sets national educational standards, which apply to both public and private sector schools. The result is a system which produces a highly regulated and structured mechanism for overseeing all aspects of the country's K-12 education. The Ministry is administratively top-heavy and highly inflexible. There is little administrative autonomy with decisions originating from and being referred to 'the top' for approval and implementation (Mathis, 2010).

Ten of the participants expressed opinions that policies created and distributed by the MoE needed to be more flexible in how they are implemented. For example, there could be a delegation of some authority to leaders specifically. Moreover, participants believed that the scope for them to influence ministerial policy was limited, resulting in a working environment which was inadequate for them to fully achieve their desired goals.

In reality, all educational curricula and programmes are prepared and organized by the Ministry on an annual basis. This kind of management style will affect the implementation of the main goals and will cause leaders to focus on programme implementation rather than its development (Al-Aqeel, 2005). For example, Leader A mentioned that

The Ministry is very structured either by rules or routines. When we wish to do something, it must be pre-approved by the Ministry, even down to the small things that will be utilized. So, they could not benefit from me or other leaders before passing through many rules.

Moreover, participant B provides an example of this: "Leaders are committed to the job hierarchy; for example, if they want to add something significant, they cannot bypass the job hierarchy, which takes time and may result in its cancellation."

The leaders in my study resented the fact that decision-making was centralized because leaders who lead their respective departments hold very little power. Rather, their only job is to follow the national policies as decided by the MoE. The MoE explained that these policies were written in the form of general instructions that could be applied to all possible colleges and schools at the same time and, sadly, did not take into account the schools' geographic locations and what can be done in case of contingencies. Therefore, there were specific cases where leaders ended up facing difficult struggles as they felt unable to handle the situations promptly without seeking the approval of the MoE. Typically, the Ministry took a long time to respond, thereby aggravating the problem. (Ghitis, 2002).

Furthermore, women leaders could not implement any of their new ideas without reporting back to higher authorities the (MoE). Again, this process typically takes a long time, and the school year might actually come to an end before they receive approval. For example, one of the participants tried to arrange a guest speaker visit from a public figure who is active in the community, but she was unable to gain approval from the Ministry. It actually took so much time to finish the paperwork that by the time she received approval, it would have defeated the purpose to host the guest speaker at the schools, since the scheduled event had passed. It is clear that leaders were generally exhibiting transactional leadership rather than

transformational leadership, and there were numerous obstacles affecting motivation and creativity.

However, Dr. Mohammed Al-Harthy, the Under Secretary in the MoE has in fact reported that the MoE was aware of the dissatisfaction of leaders (especially women leaders) and he has stated that the MoE is committed to preserving the rights of women leaders but Lacked the capacity in many cases to meet the requests of supervisors (Al-Harthy,2019).

Results Related to the Second Research Question

Organizations are not going to have great innovation if frontline employees are not intellectually stimulated and generating innovative ideas. In my study, eight of the participants had complaints about the education sector's benefits in schools as they did not receive any financial entitlements above a transportation allowance. There was no difference between leaders dealing with the burden of changes which may affect them, and thus add to their workload, and other leaders who may be experiencing no significant changes. Leaders are paid the same irrespective of their widely different burden of responsibilities. Consequently, for many leaders there is no incentive to seek transformational leadership. For example, Education Leader C highlighted this point: "I am well aware that my job will not provide me with any incentives or higher pay, so how can I possibly have the ambition to change my leadership style?"

Upon applying transformational leadership, leaders are not rewarded with a higher salary. This anomaly leads many staff to consider that they are being treated unfairly, as their workload increases, yet there are no tangible financial rewards. The position of leaders also takes a toll on their social lives and may also negatively impact them professionally. Without a financial incentive, the motivating factor for leaders to accept the role of transformational leadership is derived from a sense of community service, duty, or prestige. Community service, and a heart-felt desire to improve education and develop the talents of students, are also motivating factors that are difficult to measure. Meanwhile, others are happy to accept the role of leader, irrespective of the lack of additional pay. Five of the participants stated they were

motivated by a possibility of implementing improvements in their schools, which they have dreamt of earlier.

Four of the study's respondents expressed frustration with work colleagues who exhibited complacency with regard to the unsatisfactory status quo. Such individuals appeared to have accepted the inability to change the situation and saw no justification in seeking to improve the school's or individual students' performance. Such leaders felt their personal efforts were undermined by less motivated teachers. For example, D, an education leader supported this notion:

It is discouraging when the leaders and teachers who work with me are reluctant to change and lack motivation for a brighter future. While I am committed to change and seeing our school improve, it is easy to return to the status quo in the face of this lack of enthusiasm.

Seven of the interviewees recalled examples where leaders accepted suggestions for improvements but failed to carry them out, allowing situations to return to how they had been previously. Ambitious and conscientious teachers, working with unenthusiastic colleagues, also acted as a motivation for promotion. Consequently, motivated leaders accepted transformational leadership roles in order to initiate changes they believed were necessary to improve their school's performance, which they had little, if any ability to implement in a junior position.

The general picture which can be drawn from this is that there are numerous obstacles preventing leaders from improving their professional skills and justifiable reasons which extinguish many desires for leadership. Ultimately, these barriers put leaders under a lot of stress and create conflicts. However, many leaders still desire to apply for a variety of reasons, including perceived opportunities to implement their philosophy of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results and conclusions that were attained on the basis of the theoretical framework of the study and analysis of the data, the following recommendations were made:

- Strategize the application of transformational leadership in the Saudi schools, making it conducive to improving the decision-making process in public and private schools.
- Reconsider the programmes and methods of motivation enforced by the Education Ministry of Saudi Arabia
- Enhance the morale of leaders working in the Ministry of Education, through comprehensive visions of work, emphasizing the potency of its implementation, which would then encourage them to step up.
- Boost the school principals' degree of awareness of the importance of transformational leadership practices by conducting lectures relevant to their behavioral performance in the schools.
- Conduct more studies and research while attempting to link the different dimensions of transformational leadership.

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