The Implications of System 4 Approach on School Leadership Practices

Steph Shuti Khumalo[1]

[1] Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Soshanguve, Republic of South Africa

Correspondence: Steph Shuti Khumalo, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Soshanguve, Republic of South Africa. E-mail: khumaloss@tut.ac.za

Abstract

School management is a highly contested research area. Credible research studies consistently argue that there is a positive relationship between school performance and school leadership. Like in any organisation, school principals deploy a number of leadership techniques to ensure that organisational objectives are achieved. School leadership is a barometer for school effectiveness. The organisation is as good or as bad as its leader. The rational for this study was to use system 4 theory of management (Likert theory) to investigate the effects of the leadership practices of the sampled primary school. Semi structured interviews, observation and document scanning were used as a form of research instrumentation. Data results to a significant extent show that (a) the case in point do resemble a system 4 organisation due to the leadership practices demonstrated by the incumbent and (b) the case in point convincingly reflects a high performing school.

Keywords: Likert, primary schools, system 4 approach, school leadership practices

1. Introduction

The South African education system is not performing well since the dawn of democracy. As a long term strategic intervention, the Department of Basic Education (Republic of South Africa (RSA)) as the custodian of the schools, developed a working document called Towards Schooling 2025 in an attempt to address the challenges the schooling system face. According to the report of the Department of Basic Education, the majority of schools in the country (RSA) are dysfunctional. In addition to the remedial approach embarked upon by the DBE, the National Development Plan (NDP) (2011) also identified strategic interventions for the country's education system. School leadership is fundamental, and this paper argues that school leadership can make or break the organisation. The DBE (2014) holds the view that school leadership, represented by principals are expected through responsible leadership to promote harmony, creativity and a sound ethic within the school community and beyond. Leadership behaviours have a direct effect on employees' job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, work pressure, motivation, and team cohesion, all of which, in turn, affect job performance (Xu, Zhong, & Wang, 2013).The manner in which one dispenses his or her leadership authority has a direct bearing on the organisation. Based on Likert Theory of system 4 management, the intention of this paper was to determine the impact of the principals' management approach on the school effectiveness. Likert holds the view that for organisations to achieve optimum effectiveness, system 4 approach to management is ideal. This study interrogated the following research questions:

· What type of leadership practices are demonstrated by the principal of the sampled case?

· Do the leadership practices of the case in point resemble that of system 4 attributes?

· What are the effects of these leadership practices on organisational productivity?

2. Statement of the Problem

The twenty first century presented organisations and schools in particular with a plethora of challenges. Globalisation, technological advances, economic and social factors are cited by credible research studies as the major contributors to the challenges. The majority of schools in South Africa are unable to function according to the expectations of the Department of Basic Education. Even though budgetary allocations in the education system far surpass other departments, the schooling system remains challenged. Apart from globalisation, technological and economic factors, a number of factors cited by research reports contribute to these

monumental challenges. These challenges could be packaged in the following broad categories: structural, systemic, technological, political, social and behavioural. School leadership is widely recognised as a critical factor in the process of achieving school effectiveness and improvement (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) in Govinda, Lingam, and Lingam (2014). Based on this assertion, this paper was intended to determine the effect of system 4 management practices on the school productivity. In trying to achieve the study objectives, the study (a) identified the school that reflected leadership practices in terms of System 4 theory and (b) established the effect of such system on organisational productivity.

3. System 4 Theory in Perspective

The system 4 approach theory was developed by Likert, who studied human behaviour in various organisations. This is a system wide intervention strategy used largely by organisational development professionals to improve organisational performance. Brown (2011, p. 399) argues that according to Likert, organisations operate on a continuum. This theorist (Likert) believes that organisations are profiled into 4 different systems, namely system 1, system 2, system 3 and system 4 based on the effectiveness and performance of each organisation. According to Likert, organisations that operate on system 4 level tend to be more productive and effective (Brown, 2011). Table 1 is a depiction of different types of systems (Brown, 2011).

Table 1. Depiction of system 4 theory

System 1	System 2	System 3	System 4
Exploitative Authoritative	Benevolent-authoritative	Consultative System	Participative/Group System
(a) Employees abide by decisions taken (b) Deliberate exclusion in decision making processes by management (c) The concern of the organisation is the completion of the work (d) No teamwork involved	(a) Top-down approach in decision-making (b) Motivation through rewards rather than threads and fear (c) Upwards mobility of information but restricted to what makes management happy	(a) A degree of involvement in decision-making process (b) Ideas of employees welcomed to a certain degree (c) The degree of major decision-making still the competence of senior management	(a) Management shows complete trust and confidence in subordinates (b) High degree of involvement in decision-making processes (c) Team work is encouraged (d) Individual ability is promoted (e) Individual accountability specific recognition of team and individual accomplishments

There are two extremes on the continuum, system 1 and system 4. This study is focused on the effect of system 4 (participative and distributive system) on educational settings. This theory argues that system 1 organisations tend to be the least effective and unproductive, whereas system 4 organisations tend to be very effective and productive (Brown, 2011). Likert argues that organisations that are classified as systems 4 are likely to be more successful and productive. For the rest of the other systems, in particular system 1 and 2, management is top-down and exclusive. Subordinates in system 1 are told and instructed what to do. Their responsibility is to implement the decisions taken by those at the top. Finzel (2007, p. 26) argues that top-down approach to leadership is based on the military model of barking orders to weak underlings. According to Finzel (2007), this is the number one leadership hang-up and mistakes leaders make.

4. The Changing Roles of School Leadership

The office of the principal is dynamic and challenging in this twenty first century period. The role of the school principal has changed much in the recent intervening years. The changing role of principals can assist in meeting the changes in education system that has taken place in the country since two decades ago. Traditional leadership was characterised by top-down leadership practices. This system of leadership is exclusive in nature because such principals are sole decision makers. Hallinger (2004, p. 68) argues that principals who use top-down approach naturally expect their orders to be followed with relatively little discussion. Finzel (2007, p. 27)

identified the following as the practices of top-down autocratic leadership: abusive authority, deplorable delegation, lack of listening, dictatorship in listening, lack of letting go and egocentric manner. The changing nature of schools necessitates a leadership approach rethink. The nature of the current challenges facing schools requires to a large extent the paradigm shift in school leadership. Organisations that are successful are those that move from hierarchical model of authority to flattened structural model (Finzel, 2007). Top-down leadership system is no more appreciated by subordinates and is met with fierce defiance. Unlike now, (pre-democratic South Africa) principals were expected to give orders and teachers were passive role players and implementers of decisions taken. This type of leadership was given credence by the apartheid government which was the government of the day. This approach to leadership resulted in the formation of militant teacher trade unionism.

Twenty years back, South Africa embarked upon a new democratic project that impacted hugely on the majority of state entities, schools included. The transformative path the country followed impacted organisations in general and schools in particularly in the area of school leadership. Studies on school leadership argue that distributive leadership has more benefits than other leadership types. Meyers, Meyers and Gelzheiser (2001) are of the opinion that shared decision-making has the potential to encourage more democratic school organization to effect important benefits for the schools. Presthus (2006) argues that an essential ingredient in the principals work is to intentionally share meaningful information, to build a culture of care, to develop and contribute to a communication in the school where as many as possible participate and to manage different themes of discussions in different areas of communication. To Duke (2005, p. 3), participative decision-making means the sharing of decision authority among stakeholders in a given context. Shaw and Newton, (2014) postulate that if the most precious product developed in education is the student, then our most prized commodity should be the classroom teacher.

5. Method

The researcher selected the primary school purposively based on the information received from the circuit office of the Department of Basic Education in (Limpopo Province, Republic of South Africa) and the performance of the school. Semi-structured interviews, observation and document scanning were used as data collection techniques. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003, p. 450) argue that the main purpose of interviewing people is to find out what is on their minds, what they think or how they feel about something. The researcher developed an interview schedule to focus and structure the interview process. Five purposely selected educators (with more than 3 years' experience), one head of department, the deputy principal were interviewed. The participants were purposely selected. Wilson and Sapsford (2006, p. 99) explain that a standard schedule is used for each respondent in which questions have the same wording and are asked in the same order. Probing and prompting were used during the interview. Gray (2004) states that semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to probe for more detailed responses where the respondent is asked to clarify what he or she has said. The rationale for the inclusion of the circuit manager was based on the fact that he is responsible for all the schools and his judgement is perceived to be unbiased. The principal of the school was not involved in the study. The researcher presumed that involving the principal in the study will compromise validity and reliability since the principal as an incumbent might present himself in positive light. The involvement of the head of department and the deputy principal was critical since they are part of school leadership and like the circuit manager, an assumption was made that they are best suited to present a near accurate and unbiased views of leadership practices of the principal. The documents that were analyzed included minutes of meetings of different stakeholders (staff, school management team, school governing bodies, and government officials) and different school committees. The rationale was to ascertain whether engagement opportunities are created for all role players. Data was classified into categories. Analysis involved editing for completeness, accuracy and uniformity (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). All ethical issues were observed.

6. Results and Discussion

The results that follow are based on the empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. Data analyses resulted into categorization of findings into thematic components. The following dimensions were used to confirm the attributes of the system: the degree of stakeholder engagement, the agenda of the engagement, the nature of engagement, the frequency of engagement and quality of engagement and exposure of staff to staff development opportunities. Data gathered to a large extent confirmed that the units of analysis indicated that a case in question resemble attributes of a system 4 organization as proposed by Likert. This is despite the divergent views of the minority of participants in particular the deputy principal and two educators who participated in the study. The participants also gave their views on the effects of such a system on school productivity. The views of respondents were categorized under the following dimensions: the degree, the agenda, the nature and the frequency of stakeholder engagement.

6.1 The Degree of Engagement

The general and popular views of the majority of participants indicate that engagement of stakeholders is of quality and depth. This implies that the nature of involvement by the school leadership is genuine and authentic. Subordinates are afforded opportunities to participate in meetings where quality and strategic decisions are taken. These views were held by the majority of participants despite two of the educators and the deputy principal who did not agree with the rest. The documents scanned particularly minutes of the meetings of different structures, indicated that truly role players are engaged in decision making processes. According to these documents surveyed, there is sufficient proof that stakeholders are canvassed on critical matters affecting the school.

6.2 The Agenda of Engagements

The majority of educators who participated in the study indicated that to a large extend the principals engagement of stakeholders is genuine. Participants do not just rubber stamp decisions taken by the principal. Robust debates and differences of opinions are allowed without victimization. To support this finding, the head of department expressed himself this way on the item: Does the principal allow debates? "The school also has what is called open ended agenda meetings where staff members are given the opportunity to freely register what are in their hearts". In this kind of meetings the principal encourages constructive criticism. They argued that the principal is transparent and has an open door policy where role players have access to him any time. According to the majority of respondents all critical issues relating to the school are discussed in different platforms. These issues include but not limited to strategic planning, development of school policies and allocation of responsibilities. The perceptions of the majority of these participants gave an impression that the principals' agenda is transparent and genuine.

6.3 The Nature of Engagements

Different meetings are held at the school. According to the respondents, various meetings including sports meetings, staff meetings, and curriculum meetings, school governing body meetings, finance meetings, school management meetings, workload (allocation) and the school development team meetings are held at the school..The majority of participants indicate that they enjoy such meetings because even though the principal is criticized, he does not hold grudges and uses this as a platform to motivate some of his decisions.

6.4 The Frequency of Engagements

According to the feedback received from the participants, there are different kinds of meetings. These meetings could be packaged into the following kinds depending on the type stakeholders: SGB meetings, SMT meetings, formal staff meetings, morning briefings and sports committee meetings. This finding was also supported by the minutes of the meetings scanned by the researcher. The contents of the minutes indicate that resolutions taken involve different stakeholders.

7. The Effects of the School Leadership Practices in the Case Study

Of all the participants in the study, the majority indicated that the way the principal manages the school motivates teachers to be committed to their work. Despite these popular views, the deputy principal had a divergent view indicating that there are no signs of commitment from teachers. On the item related to teacher commitment, one educator responded this way: "The principal does not give what I will call forceful leadership. Eh, you know if he can differentiate between negotiable and the non-negotiable, the better. There is lack of commitment on the part of educators. Firstly, they are not well guided and they are not given clear-cut directives. Because if we say somebody is committed what it means whatever he is given to do he does that according to plan. This lack of commitment expresses itself in the manner in which teachers are doing their job where you find teachers teaching unprepared. Actually what I have realized is that teachers are just send out there, the principal does not guide them".

In addition to the views of the participants, the researcher also had an opportunity to work through important and critical documents of the school. Documents which were subjected to intensive scanning included amongst others, minutes of different structures such as the SGB, SMT, sports committee, SDT, staff, principals meetings, time book, etc. In addition to that, the internal quarterly results, progression results of the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 were also scrutinized. The researcher also studied and compared Annual National Assessments test results of 2011, 2012 and 2013.To check on teacher absenteeism patterns, the leave records of the academic years 2012-2013were also put under scrutiny. The register for the attendance of parents meetings were also analyzed. The deduction made from the analysis of these documents pointed to one conclusion that there has been a progressive and quantum improvement with regard to the general performance of the school.

Participants believed that this can be credited to the leadership practices of the principal who started in 2012. His

distributive leadership style changed the culture of the school. This is corroborated by the views of the circuit manager who indicated that since 2012, the school has been identified as one of the high performing schools in the circuit. Despite the views held by participants in the study, the majority of participants to a significant extent intimated that the rate of teacher absenteeism and teacher late coming improved. On the issue of late coming, one teacher participant was quoted as follows: "Late coming is the thing of the past. Emergencies at times make us late, but we inform the principal. Absenteeism is there but is not frequent or rife. Educators who are absent do have valid reasons".

The views of the respondents to a large extend indicated that even though that the principal engage role players in key decision making processes, a lot of responsibility and accountability is demanded from them. They also submitted that the principal considers the issue of staff development serious. They are also given space to operate in their different environments as long as there is accountability and responsibility. They are also recognized and at times the principal give them individual letters of appreciation. The researcher observed that the manner in which the school is led and managed resulted in teacher motivation and satisfaction. These led to teacher commitment and resulted into high performance. Scholars on the theories of motivation and job satisfaction argue that motivated and satisfied employees tend to be more committed.

8. Limitations of the Study

Even though the objective of the study was achieved, there were limitations that were identified. These limitations can be stated as follows:

- In terms of the sampling of the study, it cannot be confidently concluded that the sample is representative of the population.
- Inadequate data collection techniques were employed and this was considered a limitation because more tools could have been employed.

9. Conclusion

The views of the majority of participants to a large extent corroborates with that of the circuit manager. All these respondents held the views that the school leadership of the case in point reflects characteristics of system 4 management approach. Likert argues that system 4 organisations tend to be effective and productive. This is as result of the distributive nature of leadership. Flowing from this argument, there is sufficient evidence from data collected that the leadership practices of the primary school in Limpopo (RSA) in the case study resembles that of system 4 organisation. Data further indicate that the school is functional, effective and productive. In conclusion, this study confirms Likert Theory that system 4 organisations tend to be effective and productive.

References

Asmal, K. (1999). *A call to action! Mobilizing citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21st century*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Brown, R. B. (2011). *An Experiential Approach to Organizational Development* (8th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2005). Research methods in education (5th ed.). New York: Routledge Farmer.

Cummings, T. G., & Worley, G. W. (2009). *Organization Development and Change* (9th ed.). Canada: South-Western Cengage Learning.

DBE. (2014). *Action plan to 2014. Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*. Department of Basic Education. Republic of South Africa.

Duke, K. Z. (2005). *Principal's practices regarding teacher participation in school decision-making* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Minnesota, Minnesota.

Finzel, H. (2007). *The top ten mistakes leaders make*. David © Cook, England

Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Govinda, I. L., & Lingam, N. (2014). *Leadership and Management Training in School Heads: A milestone achievement for Fiji*.

Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing research in the real world*. London: Sage.

Hallinger, P. (2004). Meeting the challenges of cultural leadership: The changing role of principals in Thailand. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 25*, 62-73.

Jaussi, K. S. (2007). Attitudinal commitment: A three-dimensional construct. *Journal of occupational and organizational Psychology, 80*, 51-61. http://dx.doi.org/10.1348/096317906X107173

Kadalie, D. (2006). *Leader's resource kit. Tools and techniques to develop your leadership.* Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House.

Kearney, C. A., & Bensaheb, A. (2006). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior: A review and suggestions for school based health. *Journal of School Health, 76*(1), 3-7. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2006.00060.x

Meyer, B., Meyer, J., & Gelzheiser, L. (2001). Observing leader roles in shared decision-making: A preliminary analysis of three teams. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 12*(4), 277-312. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S1532768XJEPC1204_01

NDP. (2011). *National Development Plan*. South Africa Government, Republic of South Africa.

Nguni, S., Sleegers, P., & Denessen, P. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership effects on teacher's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior in primary schools: The Tanzanian case. *Journal on School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 17*(2), 145-177. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450600565746

Nuku, A. S. (2007). *The management tasks of principals in promoting professionalism amongst educators in the Eastern Cape Province* (Unpublished thesis). University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Presthus, A. M. (2006). A successful school and its principal. Enabling leadership within the organization. *ISEA-Staff issues and professional development, 34*(2), 82-99

Shaw, J., & Newton, J. (2014). Teacher retention and satisfaction with a servant leader as principal. *Education, 135*(1), 101-106.

Squelch, J. (2003). Governance of education. In L. Lemmer (Ed.), *Contemporary education, global issues and trends* (pp. 127-146). Sandton: Lebone Publishing Services.

Trimble, D. E. (2006). Organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intention of missionaries. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 34*(4), 349-360.

Wilzem, E., Van Dyk, H., & Coetzer, L. J. M. (2002). *Management of educational institutions*. Pretoria: Ithuthuko Investments.

Xu, X. D., Zhong, J. A., & Wang, X. Y. (2013). The impact substitutes for leadership on job satisfaction and performance. *Social Behaviour & Personality: An international journal, 4*1(4), 675-685. http://dx.doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2013.41.4.675