

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

The topic of leadership has been receiving much attention in both management and education. The contemporary literature of leadership reveals that there is a substantial overlap between the contemporary theories of effective leadership and the theories of effective counselling (particularly those of Carl Rogers). This paper aims at exploring effective educational leadership through examining the management and leadership styles of a group of primary and secondary school principals in Australia. A modified Q-sort and in-depth interviews were used in this study, the principals being asked to share their perceptions of their leadership role with particular reference to the importance of interpersonal skills. The main emphasis of this paper is on the interview responses rather than the results of the Q-sort. Findings from this qualitative research analysis indicated that although the majority of the principals understood the importance of interpersonal (counselling-related) skills in school administration, they did not regard empathy as being as important as communication, authenticity and respect, and they generally regarded strategic management skills as being more important than one of the interpersonal skills. Implications for the role of principals as counselor in schools and effective leadership are discussed.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY - LEADERSHIP AND COUNSELLING

According to Sharpe (1995), there are ten qualities of leadership necessary for the 21st Century. Apart from acquiring professional skills such as obtaining a high level of knowledge and expertise in management and maintaining the focus on the real purpose of the organisation, leaders also need to have the qualities of caring for people and setting a personal example for subordinates. They also need to have a belief in the competence and

professionalism of their staff and a moral and ethical base for leadership judgment. Sergiovanni's servant leadership, described as 'furnishing help and being of service to parents, teachers, and students' (1990: 152), clearly illustrates the idea of leaders' work for the good of others. He further believed that 'servant leadership is more easily provided if the leader understands that serving others is important but that the most important thing is to serve the values and ideas that help shape the school as a covenantal community' (1992: 125).

There is a parallel here in counselling. Counsellors also have the belief that they are serving and assisting counselees to work for the good of themselves. *Self-actualizing* (Rogers, 1980) of the counselee is considered as the final goal of Rogers' approach of Person-centered therapy or counselling. Through counselling, counsellors help increase self-awareness of counselees, and consequently the counselee can find his/her own way to become a fully functioning person and a self-actualizer with the assistance of counsellors (Corsini & Wedding, 1989).

That *self-actualization* is also an aim of effective leaders is re-enforced by what Bakke called a fusion process: 'Effective leadership behavior is "fusing" the individual and the organization in such a way that both simultaneously obtain optimum *self-actualization*' (in Argyris, 1965: 211). Silins (1994: 267) described such a relationship between leaders and subordinates as a total engagement, which means an emotional, intellectual and moral relationship.

This description of relationships is well supported by the assertion of the need for a professional and personal relationship between counsellor and counselee. Counsellors believe that such a constructive relationship is crucial for effective counselling. Patterson (1985: 3) further asserted that, 'Counseling or psychotherapy is an interpersonal relationship. That does not mean counseling or psychotherapy involves an interpersonal relationship - it is an interpersonal relationship'. (The issue of relationship is considered further below).

Authenticity

Carl Rogers (1962) was a pioneer in humanistic approaches to counselling (Rogers, 1952), and the core of his therapy was the client/therapist relationship. He was one of those advocates who asserted the importance of the genuineness of counsellors. Gazda (1973: 58) further elaborated the idea of genuineness as being real, honest and authentic. They both believed that *authenticity* was significant in building a constructive and therapeutic relationship between counsellor and counselee. The counsellor needs to be a real person in the relationship during therapy. It is his/her realness and aliveness which can inspire the counselee (Corey 1986: 358). Corey also believed that 'therapists serve as models for our clients.... If we model realness by engaging in appropriate self-disclosure, we can anticipate that our clients will integrate more of this characteristic in themselves' (1986: 359).

Leadership theories stress the significance of *authenticity* too. Sergiovanni concluded that 'Faith in authenticity must undergird our actions. ... we must believe that any authentic act, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, is upheld by the universe as worthy and honorable' (1996: 96). This explanation supported Sharpe's idea of leaders needing to set a personal example for their followers. Sharpe further suggested that leaders 'will display integrity, authenticity, loyalty, honesty and trust' (1995: 19). Both Corey, in relation to counselling, and Sharpe, in relation to educational leadership, maintained that *authenticity* could be learned through modelling and imitation.

According to Terry (1993), and Duignan and Bhindi (1995), authentic leaders act sincerely, genuinely and trustfully in action and in interaction with followers. They reject motives and

actions that are deceptive, hypocritical, duplicitous (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997). Based on *authenticity*, Bhindi and Duignan further explained authentic leadership as 'the discovery of the authentic self through meaningful relationships within organizational structures and processes that support core, significant values;' (1997: 119). They believed that authentic leaders are people-centred who will encourage and support ethical thinking and doing. They further proposed that leaders in this new century have to be more sensitive and caring in their attitudes and relationships with followers, and need to be more adaptable and flexible in practising leadership. They suggested that authenticity in leadership can help restore human, ethical and spiritual dimensions to organizational relationships and make organizations better places in which to work, not only in terms of productivity but also in terms of the quality of life of constituents' (1997: 119).

Respect

Respect for the counselees is another vital characteristic of the effective counsellor. It means that counsellors believe in the value of each human being, and that people have the capacity to, and will behave well and be responsible for their own behavior. Rogers asserted that the counsellor 'should respect his counselee and give him some freedom to work out his own solutions to his problems' (1942: 256). He (1977) concluded that the more the counsellor cares, prizes, accepts, and values the counselee in a non-possessive way, the greater the chance of success of the therapy. Unless there exist these ingredients in the relationship, constructive client change will be less likely.

With reference to substantial leadership research by Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Argyris, 1957c; March & Simon, 1958; Viteles, 1953, Likert concluded that, 'Each of us wants appreciation, recognition,... and a feeling that people who are important to us believe in us and respect us' (1961: 102). The concept that leaders should care for people and believe in the competence and professionalism of their subordinates is similar to the meaning of *respect* in the counselling field (Corey, 1986: 108). McGregor (1960: 33) proposed two theories to explain different attitudes by leaders to their subordinates. According to McGregor's theory X, 'the average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can' (1960: 33). This assumption implies a lack of belief in and respect for people. Although theory X failed to recognise the potentialities of the average human being (1960: 43), theory Y asserted that the intellectual potentialities and commitment of the average human being were only partially utilized (1960: 48). Theory Y proposed that people would exercise self-direction and self-control in the achievement of organizational objectives when they were committed to those objectives (1960: 56). *Respect* for subordinates by leaders and trust in human potentialities were implied in theory Y, which was the approach advocated by McGregor.

Empathy

As emphasised by Sharpe, 'Schools are people organisations. The staff, the clients and the raw materials, if I can use that phrase, are people. The outcomes are changes in people' (1995: 19). Although most school principals have some good people skills, they can fail to be effective managers if they lack adequate understanding of people. The third crucial quality of the effective counsellor is *empathy*. This concept means that the counsellor can gain a complete understanding of the counselee only when he/she can see the world through the eyes of the counselee. In other words, counsellors perceive the world of the counselees by adopting their frame of reference (Corey, 1986: 109). Rogers believed that 'when therapists can grasp the present experiencing of the client's private world, as the client sees and feels it, without losing the separateness of their own identity, then constructive change is likely to occur' (1977: 10). *Empathy* and *respect* go hand in hand. *Empathy* can occur only when there is *respect* for human beings in the counselling relationship. Likewise leaders

can *respect* their subordinates and value their ideas and contribution to the organisation only when they really understand them.

Human *empathy* is not only a concept in the field of counselling but also in leadership. Alfred Adler believed that 'the striving for self-esteem and the evolution of a sense of human empathy work in harmony to bring out the potential for leadership' (in Burns, 1979: 95). In relation to leadership, the interpretation of *empathy* by Yukl (1994: 118-24) was that leaders could gain an understanding and appreciation of the frame of reference of subordinates and could see and feel their world. Being understood is facilitative. Subordinates feel more at ease to express themselves frankly and to maintain a free flow of communication with their supervisors when they feel they are properly understood. West-Burnham (1997) also explained that, in the context of leadership, empathising is the ability to understand how things seem to another person, and to appreciate the significance, value and relevance attached to that given situation.

Communication

In the practice of counselling, *communication* skills including active listening and the effective transfer of ideas by the counsellor are important for a successful and therapeutic counselling relationship. It is emphasized by Kemp that 'communication skills, honesty, and an unflinching readiness to discuss everything that the counsellee brings up may override technical skills and theoretical knowledge in importance' (1967: 199). West-Burnham further stated that 'Any form of communication is likely to be compromised unless there is a willingness to accept that subjectivity defines reality' (1997:127).

Communication is also highly valued as an important management and leadership skill. Hargie et al. (1994) identified effective communication as a significant factor in determining organisational success. In the leadership literature there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of interpersonal communication skills. Effective *communications* skills include not only the delivery of messages but also listening skills. West-Burnham stated that 'Most people can hear perfectly adequately but only a minority can actually listen in the sense of genuinely attending' (1997: 125). Active listening is about sensitivity to others' feelings and perceptions, and it is a total involvement in the communication process. West-Burnham further established that real understanding can only be obtained when active listening is involved.

Bennis (1994: 38-39) believed that the leadership skill of communication is a two-way process developed through listening, enabling every member to learn where he/she can fit into a team. Moreover, the skill of 'facilitating' within the team can enable everyone to perform at his or her peak level within a common vision and mission. This idea of Bennis (1994: 39) implied a shift from a management style based on control and aggression to one centered upon caring and connection. This characteristic is shared by counselling because its activity also involves relating to people. Thus, *communication* skills such as active listening and empathy in listening are crucial factors in effective counselling as they are in leadership.

Leadership as a set of relationships, permeating the whole organisation

It will be noticed from a reading of the above section on counselling and leadership that the term "*relationship*" continually emerges. In the literature, the emphasis is not so much on the counsellor or the counsellee as people but on the *relationship* between them. Rogers (1957) stated that there is one shared therapeutic component of psychotherapy or counselling which is the emotionally charged, confiding relationship with the helping person. This *relationship* with the counsellor is considered a necessary, and perhaps a sufficient

condition for improvement in counselling. Patterson also stressed that 'Counseling or psychotherapy is defined as the helping process in which the relationship is necessary and sufficient' (1974: 13). Piper and Davenport further emphasized the vitality of the therapeutic relationship by suggesting the term "alliance" which is more than rapport between counsellor and counsellee. 'It means two parties share a common goal, a mutually defined direction or destination; they share a joint commitment to the client's growth' (1990: 126).

This is also true for some important contemporary leadership literature. Blank introduced the concept "Quantum Leadership". He believed that 'leaders do not exist without followers and that their individual characteristics or habits are relevant only as part of the leader-follower field of interaction' (1995: 30) The concept 'focuses attention on the interaction, not the separate parts, as the key to understanding leadership. A central interaction is the leader-follower relationship' (1995: 31). Blank stressed that leadership will be better understood as a field of interaction between leader and follower. Quantum Leadership recognises the vital importance of the *relationship* between the leader and the follower, because 'The leader's individual characteristics and behaviors have meaning only in relationship with followers-allies' (1995: 31). Both leader and follower help establish the mutual trust and *relationship* which enhance the possibility of effective leadership. Leaders and followers are necessary participants in establishing the *relationship*; they cannot be separated from each other. They connect to one another when leaders empower followers and followers support the leader's initiative. The building of a base of relationships is labeled by some as "networking" and by others as "bonding" (1995: 32). Much earlier Barnard had defined "authority" in terms of communication and relationships: 'Authority is the character of a communication (order) in a formal organization by virtue of which it is accepted by a contributor to or "member" of the organization as governing the action he contributes; that is, as governing or determining what he does or is not to do so far as the organization is concerned.....If a directive communication is accepted by one to whom it is addressed, its authority for him is confirmed or established..... Therefore, under this definition the decision as to whether an order has authority or not lies with the persons to whom it is addressed, and does not reside in "persons of authority" or those who issue these orders' (1971: 163).

THE RESEARCH ISSUE

Literature research therefore reveals that contemporary leadership theories stress a leader-follower relationship characterised by *authenticity* (Bennis, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1996; Sharpe, 1995; Murphy & Louis, 1994), *respect* (Cartwright & Sander, 1960; Likert, 1961; Sergiovanni & Staratt, 1971; Viteles, 1953; Wallace & Wildy, 1995), *empathy* (Burns, 1979; Yukl, 1994; Zaleznik, 1977) and good *communication* (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 1994; Hargie et al, 1994). Effective counselling also requires therapeutic elements in the relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. Again, these elements are *authenticity* (Corey, 1986; Egan, 1990; Rogers, 1962), *respect* (Corey, 1986; Egan, 1990), *empathy* (Corey, 1986; Rogers, 1989) and *communication* with an emphasis on listening (Corey, 1986; Rogers, 1962).

Hays & Thomas stated directly (1967) that even 'military leaders are expected to be counselors' (in Bass, 1985: 89), and that all leaders have to cope with the apparently conflicting roles of commanders and counsellors. Ayres (1978) also believed that, 'personal counseling skills are at a premium' for military leaders (in Bass, 1985: 89). Kaplan and Cowen (1981) shared the view that individual counselling skills such as listening and offering support and sympathy were important even for industrial foremen (in Bass, 1985: 89). When these relationships are successful they lead in both circumstances to self-actualisation, personal growth and the capacity for followers to take the lead themselves. These concepts and relationships are illustrated in Fig. 1 below which represents the conceptual framework for the study.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Counselling and Leadership Relationships



Figure 1 illustrates the contention of this study that both leadership and counselling essentially represent a relationship between, in one case, the counsellor and the counsellee, and in the other, the leader and the follower. They are placed on the same plane so as to de-emphasise the hierarchical or power factors that may be inherent in such relationships.

The proposition is that if such relationships are characterised by authenticity, respect, empathy and effective communication they will be likely to result in the self-actualisation, personal growth and willingness to take on leadership roles of the counsellee or follower.

The acceptance of this proposition will be examined in this study by analysing the views of a group of school leaders in government and non-government schools in New South Wales, Australia.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

This study, 'The Educational Leader as Counsellor', has two major purposes.

The first purpose is to examine the contemporary literature of leadership and counselling to determine the degree to which the attributes of effective leadership are seen to parallel those of effective counselling and how conscious and deliberate the parallels appear to be.

The second purpose is to examine how school principals actually perceive their leadership role with particular emphasis on the degree of importance they place on the relationship skills of communication, empathy, respect and authenticity in the context of their total leadership role, and what effects they expect these relationships to have on their staff.

THE NEED FOR THE STUDY

Despite the very clear parallels between the contemporary concepts of effective counselling and effective leadership as demonstrated above, and the growing convergence of the leadership literature with that on the helping relationship, the researcher has not been able to find any study, either in Australia or anywhere else, which specifically links these two concepts and explores these relationships in depth. Such a study could fulfil the useful purpose of further clarifying these relationships in the context of school leadership.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The literature review on leadership and counselling indicates the significance of interpersonal relationships, for effective leadership and counselling. The study is based on the proposition that one of the most important components of both effective leadership and effective counselling is the relationship between leader/ counsellor and follower/ counsellor. It is proposed that if these relationships are characterised by authenticity, respect, empathy and effective communication, it is likely to lead to self-actualization and, personal growth and the ability of the counsellor/ follower to take up leadership opportunities of his/ her own. The outcomes of the study are expected to add to the theoretical understandings of the nature of these relationships, and how they operate in the field of educational leadership. They could also have a positive impact on the way in which educational systems define the role of the principal and select people for that role. It may also assist systems and universities in preparing people for the role of principal and developing them professionally within that role.

METHOD

Subjects

Almost all school principals of two Sydney metropolitan districts in the New South Wales Department of School Education and one Sydney metropolitan Catholic school region were involved in an innovative survey involving a modified Q-sort rating (Block, 1978) to discover the qualities, attributes and skills they perceived as being essential for effective educational leaders in schools in the 1990's. The qualities could arise from their own management experience or their perception of other principals' effective administration. Four of these principals nominated by their district supervisor, from each district/ region were interviewed, two primary and two secondary, a total of twelve. An additional special school principal of

one of the Sydney metropolitan districts was also interviewed. Among those interviewed were six female and seven male principals thus maintaining a balanced sex ratio.

Q-sort methodology was a technique for scaling statements initially devised by William Stephenson (1935, 1953) and subsequently extended and elaborated by Jack Block in 1961. Block (1971) recommended this person-centered assessment approach in the study of personality development. 'The letter-Q- was simply generalized from its original meaning of an emphasis on correlating persons to include also a method which scaled data for this correlational approach..... In fact, the method stands in its own right as a valuable scaling technique, with no necessary relation to factor analysis (Block, 1978: 11). As defined by Best, it was 'a method of ranking attitudes or judgements and is particularly effective when the number of items to be ranked is large. The procedure is known as a Q-sort, in which cards or slips bearing the statements or items are arranged in a series of numbered piles..... The respondent is asked to place a specified number of items on each pile. (1977: 175). A large number of statements which were believed to be relevant to the topic studied were given, and the respondent would be required to sort them into a specified number of groups. This sorting process was a means to ask the respondent to assign values to the statements. Thus, the Q-sort method had the purpose of giving a picture of the point of view or attitude of the respondent towards a particular topic. The aim of the Q-sort was 'to get a picture of the individual's own view of, or attitude toward, the object being considered' (Kidder, 1981: 223). Therefore, the criterion for sorting was the respondents' judgement of the degree of favourableness or unfavourableness and not the sorters' agreement or disagreement with the statements. However, the typical Q-sort technique was adopted with some modifications in this research.

The two major groupings used in this study were: "Counselling related interpersonal attributes" and "Management skills for educational leaders". The forty statements of eight built-in categories were in. The eight categories established were related to strategic leadership roles, relationships with individuals and groups, managing physical resources and time, evaluating and controlling, communications, genuineness (or authenticity), respect and empathy.

Measures

Structured interviews with these thirteen principals to provide an in-depth understanding of the meanings of the survey responses and the reasons lying behind the responses. The interview schedule was specifically developed from the results obtained from the Q-sort exploratory survey. Principals involved in the interviews were first required to do the Q-sort again. They were not asked to replicate what they had done the first time but the repeated process was to help them to remember the original process and remind them of the forty statements of the Q-sort exploratory survey. After finishing the Q-sort, they were asked to reflect on what criteria they used on this occasion to establish such an order of importance. They were then given feedback on the analysis of the Q-sort exploratory surveys of the three districts/ region and asked to comment on various aspects of the results. They were also asked to share their experience and points of view about educational management to provide information about the issues raised by principals in the Q-sort exploratory survey and other emerging issues.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the modified Q-sort exploratory survey were analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Means of responses to the forty statements of the modified Q-sort exploratory survey were calculated, as well as the means

for the eight categories of the forty statements. Comparisons of means were also made according to sex, region, type of school and experience of the principals. Data from the structured interviews were analysed qualitatively using the Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD.IST) program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

After completing the Q-sort exploratory survey again in front of the researcher, the principals being interviewed were asked to respond to the following question:

For example:

- To what extent do you think the interpersonal attributes - communication, genuineness, respect and empathy - were taken into account in your selection as a principal?

All thirteen interviewed principals believed that communication skills were highly valued for their selection as principals, and that other criteria might be genuineness and respect. However, empathy was not considered as an important selection criterion for their appointments except in the view of one Catholic principal. One of the principals elaborated his idea on the relationships between these interpersonal skills:

If you are authentic, genuine, then your communication is more effective and you get respect..... empathy is a subset of respect and genuineness.

OTHER ISSUES ARISING FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The importance of human relations skills

One Catholic principal said she was surprised why communication and relationships skills did not come up a bit higher in the overall results of the one hundred and sixteen responses to the Q-sort exploratory survey. She believed in the importance of communication in education because of the nature of schools.

The importance of students in the eyes of the newly appointed principals

The analysis of the qualitative interview data gave evidence that although newly appointed principals believed in the importance of their teacher relationships, they put their prime priority on students. They spent much more time on affairs related to students than on teachers. It seemed that they may have to a degree underestimated the importance of teachers as the key resources or elements in realising the school's targets and goals for students. An experienced government school principal supported this view and stated 'In teaching, people are important. Having good relationships with teachers is important in schools. Principals perform a kind of model to teachers for teacher-student relationships.'

The issue of sensitivity

One government school principal stressed the importance of the sensitivity of school leaders. He believed that sensitivity was the most important quality for educational leaders. He further elaborated on sensitivity in relation to two aspects, 'one was sensitivity to the

progress towards the vision of the school, and the other was sensitivity to the needs of people in the school.'

The role of educational leader and counsellor

An experienced Catholic school principal told the researcher that 'My experience for nine years has told me that we are called upon to be counsellors.' She further explained that because of the stress from family problems and the complexity of society, teachers would turn to principals to help them in managing their family stress and other problems when they emerged. It was because they did not have a school counsellor in the Primary school that principals need to counsel students, teachers and parents.

This principal illustrated her role as school leader and counsellor with a real case which had just happened before the researcher entered her principal's room. She told the researcher that the teacher involved was an excellent staff member who had a child doing the HSC that day, and that she was a bit worried. She had another boy with a hurt leg, and her mother was very ill. The principal strongly believed that by listening and understanding, she could share the teachers' burden she carried before she went to classes. She understood that paper work could wait and might not need her immediate attention. With nine years' experience, she could manage her time better now and knew what paper work was absolutely important. She believed that 'paper work is nothing urgent. Some of the work can wait. Nothing is more important than spending time with teachers or parents who need her personal attention and listening.' She further concluded that 'I feel good if I can help. Paper work is always less important than human relationships.'

CONCLUSION

The results of the study generally support the importance placed by principals on human relations skills of educational leaders. Authenticity, respect, empathy and communication skills have key roles to play for educational administration and management. Both experienced and less experienced principals believe in the significance of human relations for effective school management. However, only the more experienced principals appear to be able to manage their time to focus primarily on their priorities. Less experienced principals are often overloaded and constrained by their paper work and the technical management of their schools. Nevertheless, all principals involved in the structured interviews understand that the vitality of their human relations and counselling skills can help can create an atmosphere that fosters effective educational leadership.

The majority of principals in the study tended to support most of the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework for the study. They did not, however, place as much importance on the quality of "empathy" as the framework suggests, and they regarded the needs of students and the strategic issues of vision and quality as more important than any of human relations (counselling) skills. School systems may benefit from the outcomes of the study in re-conceptualising the principal's role and in selecting and professionally developing future principals.

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