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New Leadership Models: Global Leadership Paradigms Within Local Perspectives

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Abstract

Throughout the world, and especially in the Middle East, education reform continues apace and the last decade has seen new perspectives emerging in research on educational leadership (Ospina, 2004). Changes in sociopolitical contexts have required a reframing of leadership (Bolman and Deal, 2008) as position power to a focused and systematic look at leadership at different levels. These new and shared leadership perspectives, grounded in an ethical moral perspective (Fullan, 2004), may prove to be more effective, innovative and contextually relevant (Pearce and Conger, 2003). This new focus invites a fresh approach to investigation of how teachers can share in leading change in schools and classrooms relevant to their local contexts and communities of practice.

This paper reports on current research that investigates how the perspectives on teacher leadership of two cohorts of graduates in a Master of Educational Leadership program align with other emerging models and what are the implications for their practice. Earlier findings have discussed their developing leadership identities and how these changed through the graduate program. The researchers' focus has now moved to questions about what models of leadership the graduates are drawn to, how they intend to practice and apply leadership in real settings and what support might be needed for them in their work.

Literature review

The new view of leadership in learning organizations centers on creating positive change and as such must address subtle and important tasks. Change in education and schooling may be a part of such elements as curriculum, assessment, administration, teaching strategies, facilities, and student enrolment. Leadership shapes this learning and change and individuals experience the change process in their own unique ways and interpret the learning process differently from each other.

The early leadership literature focuses on leadership traits and differentiating between leaders and non leaders. However, recent literature addresses leadership challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) and advocates a multidimensional approach toward leadership (Hooijberg, 1996). The leadership literature can be divided into **universalist**, **behavioural** and **situational** approaches. According to Heller (1997), universalist approaches include great person theories, personality theories, psychoanalytic theories, and visionary leadership models such as transactional, charismatic and transformational

theories, whereas, behavioural and situational models include shared leadership approaches such as distributed leadership and focus on the differences between effective and less effective leadership. In contrast to behavioural and visionary leadership models, situational approaches are based on the idea that different styles of leadership occur in different real-life contexts.

Transactional leadership involves an exchange of valued things. Transactional leadership is based on a contractual exchange of rewards and punishments between follower and leader. These exchanges for the achievement of desired results are often implicit and based on intangibles such as feelings, social acknowledgements and appreciation (Khunert & Lewis, 1987). Transactional leaders influence others by deriving power using rewards and punishments (Atwater & Wright, 1996). Transactional leaders use reward in exchange for performance and monitor for deviation from the rules. In addition, they use avoiding strategies such as abdicating responsibility and avoiding decision-making and situations of conflict (Hellriegel et al., 1998). A transactional leadership style can be compared to an administrator who sets up a management system intervening only on a by exception basis (Buttler, 1997:322).

In contrast to transactional leaders, **charismatic leaders** are able to create visions that align with their followers' emotional engagement (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Charismatic leaders focus on creating a vision of what could be, identify opportunities and increase organisational members' desire to control their behaviours. Charismatic leaders are able to change the needs and aspirations of their followers to agree with their own requirements (Heller, 1997: 341). In this manner, followers of charismatic leaders are inspired by the hope that they will find success and power by following the leader (Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Hellriegel et al., 1998). According to Hellriegel et al. (1998), charismatic leaders are able to take complex ideas and simplify them into effective communications. They embrace risk and put themselves wholeheartedly into the leadership role.

Transformational leadership is similar to charismatic leadership. Charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are the key characteristics of a transformational leader (Buttler, 1997). However, in contrast to transactional leaders, transformational leaders influence their followers as a result of the followers' acceptance of certain values that the leader espouses (Wofford et al., 2001). Just as charismatic leaders do, transformational leaders transform followers' thoughts and attitudes motivating them to perform beyond expectations. According to Hellriegel et al. (1998), transformational leaders create a vision, frame their vision of the future and use strategies designed to enhance their attractiveness to others. For this reason, transformational leadership is more appropriate in environments of change and ambiguity (Stephenson, 2004).

The transformational leadership model emphasizes that when followers identify with a leader and the leader's vision, they feel a sense of empowerment, and work together to achieve the vision. As a result, organisational change may occur, organisational members are more satisfied and group cohesiveness improves. Furthermore, transformational leaders have the ability to turn their followers into self-directed leaders (Atwater & Wright, 1996). They take risks, build confidence in their followers by believing in their abilities and encourage others to collaborate with them toward shared goals.

However, it is important to remember that transformational leadership is not ideal in all situations. A transformational leader's appeal to followers' emotions can lead to inappropriate, overzealous behaviour by organisational members. This style has also been criticized for its lack of focus on communication and impression management skills. Furthermore, transformational leaders have come under attack for their autocratic management style (Hellriegel et al., 1998). Universalist and behavioural leadership approaches, however, do not recognize and clarify the various situational considerations.

Situational leadership theories identify certain leadership characteristics that match the complexities of real-life (Heller, 1997). Situational approaches have dominated the study of leadership for the past three decades. Hersey and Blanchard's (1993) model for situational leadership suggests that there is no one best leadership style for all situations. They argue that a manager's leadership style must be flexible in order to meet the changing needs of organisational members and the situation. Their framework is based on the amount of relationship and task behaviour that a leader provides in a given situation. At the same time, the amount of either relationship or task behaviour is dependent on the readiness of the follower. Task behaviour refers to the control and supervision leaders use with their followers. Relationship behaviour refers to a leaders' listening skills (Morrison, 1994), the support they provide followers and the extent to which followers are involved in decision-making. Follower readiness refers to the followers' willingness and ability to perform tasks.

The most recent educational leadership literature distinguishes between leading as the quality of one person, the appointed leaders, and leadership as a collective phenomenon referred to as **distributed leadership**. Distributed leadership is a way of thinking about leadership where leadership is a collective phenomenon which empowers individuals to make their work more meaningful and effective. Thus, leadership is seen as the professional work of everyone; that is, everyone is responsible and accountable for leadership within his or her area. Individuals who share a common purpose, engage in teamwork and mutually respect one another cooperate together to create change. In the words of Ospina and Schall (2001, p.14) "leadership, then, does not reside in a person or role but in the social system". Similarly Sinclair (2007) suggests that leadership is a form of being with ourselves and others where leadership is:

a way of thinking and acting that awakens and mobilizes people to find new, freer and more meaningful ways of seeing, working and living. This form of leadership is anchored to personal self-awareness and mindfulness towards others (Sinclair, 2007, P. xviii).

Recent leadership perspectives also suggest that successful leaders are those who distribute leadership, understand relationships, and recognize the importance of reciprocal learning processes that lead to shared purposes (Harris, 2005). Leaders who draw on distributed leadership models are more connected to people than those holding the 'traditional' forms of leadership and successful leaders are those who distribute leadership, understand relationships, and recognize the importance of reciprocal learning processes that lead to shared purposes (Harris, 2005). Leaders who draw on distributed leadership models are more connected to people than those holding the 'traditional' forms of leadership (Harris, 2005).

Methodology

For the purposes of this paper data are drawn from the reflective statements of their current leadership views and the final research projects of three graduates of a Master in Education in Educational Leadership program, during which they were exposed to a wide range of western theories and Islamic perspectives on leadership. Each of the graduates completed a reflective and in-depth statement at the end of their first course in the leadership program where they critically analyzed their current perspectives about leadership and examined their leadership journey to that point. They were asked to comment about influences on their current leadership beliefs and practice and to link their perspectives to wider global theories about leadership. In the final semester of the graduate program each student undertook a specific research project that investigated an aspect of leadership practice. In the final research report they were asked to reflect on how the project had impacted their own leadership knowledge and practice. The original data from their leadership statements were revisited and later perspectives and their project findings relating to educational leadership were analyzed to identify what models and strategies are valued in the UAE context. A grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1990) was used to analyze data and to identify new theoretical standpoints in the context of current international literature.

Findings

The analytical process is still in progress and for the purposes of this paper three case studies are provided. Through three narratives this section of the paper captures key elements of both the personal leadership statements of three graduates and their final research projects.

Kaltham

When Kaltham began the graduate program she was a teacher in a Middle school. Her personal statement identified a clear leadership perspective that had been influenced at an early age by her father's approach to leadership which was "to gain others' confidence through good manners...never forcing an opinion on others ...use negotiation and compromising to reach your goal". In her personal statement Kaltham used a story about warriors faced with a moral dilemma when following their leader's requests as a metaphor to analyze what she found valuable in the course. For Kaltham self-knowledge and a strong sense of values and ethics were important attributes of leadership. She stated that "many people see that leadership is leading someone else however I believe it begins with leading ourselves". Kaltham's view of leadership was that that "everyone possessed the seeds of greatness" and that it was the degree to which a potential leader developed knowledge and skills that determined the success of their leadership; i.e. leadership could be learned. She stated that it was very important for the leader of an organisation to have a clear vision of what constituted effectiveness and success but it was equally important for him/her to "focus on people and relationships as essential to getting sustained results" within a framework of reason and moral principles. Kaltham was also drawn to a situational style of leadership and believed that leaders needed to adapt their approach depending on the context, goal, time and other factors. Kaltham's statement also revealed the value she placed on shared and distributed approaches to leadership, in the comment that

“leaders...will be judged as effective or ineffective not by whom the leaders are themselves but rather by the leadership they produce in others”.

At the time Kaltham began her research project her school was undergoing a change of leadership following the unexpected death of the former very popular principal. The change was fraught with problems arising from the leadership style of the incoming inexperienced principal and the emotional upheaval and loss that permeated the grieving process of the current staff. Kaltham’s project used an action research approach where, by working with both the principal and teachers, she investigated and analyzed the sudden change in school culture and initiated action steps to improve it. Her findings underscored the importance of the leader having a very clear understanding of the school culture and developing effective communication and decision-making practices that helped teachers move through a period of change in a way that led to an appropriate ‘new’ culture. What was significant also about Kaltham’s study was the depth of her critical analysis of the contextual issues and the depth of her analysis of the implications of the change process for her own leadership practice. Her analysis discussed the importance of developing effective communication skills through trust and honesty and the value of patiently and persistently developing a ‘shared language’ between the leader and others in the organisation. She commented also on how leadership capacity increased when more people became involved in decision-making about their own contextual situation. Her action research had given her a unique insight to issues surrounding change and how she could impact those.

Mona

Mona held a middle management position at a girl’s secondary school. Her personal statement revealed firmly held views about her own leadership practice. An early role model had been her mother whose confidence and strength were a considerable influence on her. Mona was strongly attracted to trait theory perspectives of leadership and believed that some people were ‘born’ leaders, stating that she had ‘inherited’ her mother’s leadership skills and, in addition, she identified leaders from her workplace experience who exhibited particular ‘natural’ leadership traits in their practice. The second model which resonated with her personal views was transformational leadership which she believed had great potential for educational change. Mona’s personal statement was built around a metaphor of leadership as artwork where the leader was an artist who developed his/her picture (vision) and then displayed it to others in a way that would attract them to the colours and design.

Mona clearly positioned herself as an ‘heroic’ leader who led others through change guided by a personal framework that expressed specific values and attributes including honesty, politeness, respect for others, common sense, and commitment. In her view an effective leader had charismatic qualities that enabled him/her to inspire, empower and motivate others. The concept of personal responsibility for followers was also a key element of Mona’s self perception and, in her view, the most important role of the leader was to ensure the happiness and job satisfaction of those he or she led. The notion of accountability was another key element in Mona’s leadership practice. She believed it was important for all those in an

organisation to be committed to the overall (shared) vision and while resistance might be sometimes expected the leader should have a clear strategy to deal with it.

Although she saw herself as an ‘up front’ leader, Mona’s statement also revealed her understanding of the complexities of leading a team and the negotiation that was sometimes necessary. She saw her leadership role as one of supporting, praising, encouraging and providing feedback to her team as they attempted to implement curricular change in the school. In turn she looked for their support in meeting her expectations, stating “we are all on the same ship”. At the end of the first course in the graduate program Mona’s view was that her current leadership practice had been reaffirmed and validated by particular theoretical perspectives she had learned about in the program.

Mona’s final research project was an investigation into principal perspectives about aspects of teachers’ work and school culture. Her findings and discussion highlighted the importance of good communication, a culture of care and respect, and distributed leadership responsibilities as factors that leaders should be aware of when interacting with others. In her reflective comments Mona reiterated the importance of the leader taking responsibility for others in the organisation. Mona believed that this was best done through the establishment of effective communication between the leader and followers and of sound administrative structures that ensured resources, benefits and support were in place for all who worked in the organisation. She also affirmed the importance of the leader being visible, acting as a role model and having skills to manage negativity and conflict to ensure overall happiness and satisfaction among the members of an organisation.

Majida

Majida held a curriculum supervisor’s position in the Ministry of Education and was responsible for both the support and evaluation of teachers. Her personal statement drew from an important saying of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) “*each of you is a guardian and each of you will be asked about his subjects*” which, in her view, implied that every member of an organisation was responsible for its leadership. Her analysis of the various leadership theories discussed in the course led her to the view that trait theory and situational theory were two complementary aspects of leadership. What was significant in her focus on these approaches was the development of her thinking about gender issues in leadership indicated in her statement that “if leadership is inherited, women can inherit it and if it is situational, women can also practice it effectively”. However the styles of leadership that resonated most strongly with her were transformational and transactional. These approaches, she believed, could be effective in raising awareness and opportunities for women to practice leadership within the current cultural expectations and norms of her society. In her view the transformational approach with its emphasis on the relationship between leader and follower, offered an opportunity for women to use what Majida termed “the power of commitment and inspiration”. Majida’s commentary indicated that exposure to new ideas and theories had moved her from a perception of the leader as “a person who gave the instructions and did the superior things himself” to one where the leader “exercises the appropriate leadership style demanded by the situation”. At the end of the first course Majida had positioned herself as a ‘situational’ leader who would call on whatever approach was most

effective for a specific context. Within this perspective she also commented on the importance of interpersonal aspects of leadership – communicating effectively with others and providing support and encouragement for others to “attain high levels of performance”.

For her final research project Majida used an action research approach to investigate her own leadership practice within a specific curriculum area for which she held responsibility. She was appointed by the Ministry to lead a team of teachers in a local school through a professional development program related to a curricular requirement. Majida did this by introducing a ‘learning circle’ model and, in addition, gathered feedback from the teachers on her leadership practice. Her findings identified several important elements of leadership practice including the importance of team leadership, the nature of relationships among the team members and the researcher as team leader, the professional development model, and conflict and resistance in the team. Majida commented that leadership required “enhancing relationships, building communication through team leadership to create a culture of supportive learning in a community, and foster greater understanding of each other”. What was significant in her findings was the growth in her awareness of the importance of effective communication and relationships among the leader and team members and the insights into her own practice gathered from her analysis of the day-to-day interactions and the teacher feedback about her leadership. Her view of leadership had changed to incorporate the concept of shared leadership as a key aspect of the way she could lead teachers through curricular change.

Discussion

These previous analyses revealed a number of similarities and differences in the way that each graduate initially positioned herself as a leader and how this played out in the leadership research. In their initial leadership statements each of the three took slightly different positions in terms of Heller’s (1997) typology. Her attraction to charismatic and transformational leadership perspectives together with a view that some people were ‘born’ leaders placed Mona squarely in the universalist camp. Majida was initially attracted to the transformational and transactional approaches but, reflecting on her coursework and practice, was increasingly drawn to the situational perspective. Although there were some elements of the transformational approach in her statement, Kaltham’s views aligned more closely with the situational perspective.

The way that their initial positions played out in their research projects was interesting. While Kaltham and Majida chose to use the action research approach (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) with its explicit analysis of their own leadership practice, Mona chose to stand outside the process and analyze the leadership perspectives of others. Her analysis thus tended to reinforce the position she already held – that the leader needed to take responsibility and to care for followers and to make decisions within the context of an institutional vision that the leader had chosen. She did comment however on the importance of communication between the leader and others.

Majida's action research involved her leading a group of teachers, who she did not know well, in a professional learning context to improve their knowledge about a particular curriculum area. Significantly, she sought feedback from the teachers about her own leadership practice. This approach moved her away from an uncritical situational perspective to a deeper understanding of the crucial importance of the relationships between a leader and others. The insights into her own leadership practice gained from the teacher feedback and her own critical reflections, gave her a new depth of understanding about how she might go about the work of leadership.

Using an action research approach was also beneficial to Kaltham. Although she was not in a designated leadership role, her data gathering and analysis of the complex issues of school culture allowed her to take a lead in assisting the principal and teachers to also understand what was happening. Consequently they were able to take actions that slowly led to improvement and a rebuilding of the sense of community and shared purpose that was so important to the organisation. Implicit in these actions were strategies for improving communication, building trust and sharing decision-making. Kaltham's leadership practice was very much in line with the views of Ospina and Schall (2001) in the sense that she was an integral part of the shared leadership of the organisation.

The action research approach to leadership analysis appears to offer significant benefits in the process of educational reform. What came through clearly were the opportunities this approach provides for real depth of understanding about leadership issues in specific contexts, anchored in personal self-awareness (Sinclair 2007) that is unlikely to be ascertained through a more traditional research lens. The application of critical inquiry allowed Kaltham and Majida to move beyond a more simplistic commentary about what leaders 'should do' to others, to a deeper understanding of the reciprocal, negotiated and often contested nature of leadership for change, and also to a recognition of the strengths and shortcomings of their own leadership practice in relation to others (Sinclair 2007). Mona's study developed her breadth of knowledge about principal-teacher relationships but did not explore the subtleties in the same way as the other two graduates.

The literature is replete with theories and views about specific approaches to organisational leadership, many of which exhort those in leadership positions to follow certain 'recipes' and formulae in order to achieve specific changes. The implicit assumption in this view is that a particular or 'right' leadership framework that can be applied to any organisation to achieve successful growth and change. What is required however, for the ever-evolving, chaotic and complex nature of organisations is a flexible and idiosyncratic leadership framework that will fit the contours of particular organisational contexts grounded in local cultures and communities.

The findings of this study indicate that the kind of support that might be beneficial to emerging educational leaders would include the particular skills of action inquiry (critical reflection and experience of theoretical perspectives to inform knowledge in the local context) and ongoing leadership learning opportunities through courses, networks, mentoring and coaching. Such approaches align with Conger's (1992) 'personal growth' and Sinclair's (2007) 'personal awareness' as

elements of leadership learning. Rather than looking for a 'best way' or 'one size fits all' strategy leaders need to focus on better understanding of themselves within the social context of their particular institution.

This current paper gives some initial ideas about how analysis of graduate beliefs and leadership research can contribute to a greater understanding of what approaches to leadership seem to be most effective in an educational system that is undergoing rapid change. The use of action inquiry has revealed significant implications for leadership practice in the UAE context. Findings of action research projects are specific to particular contexts and are not seen as generalizable. However they allowed for shared narratives that may shine a fresh light on long-held beliefs and allow others to rethink aspects of their own situation. A more detailed picture and fresh theoretical perspectives are expected to emerge as the analysis continues.

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