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Transactional, transformative and a servant!

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Transactional, transformative and a servant!

Does leadership theory help a school principal become a better principal? He or she needs to be head teacher, chief administrator, creator of the vision, promoter of the cause, public face of the organization, counselor of staff, listener to parents, role model for students, and conduit with system authorities. While most have the support of a leadership team, invariably the buck, in whatever forms it might take, stops with the principal. The role is challenging, often demanding, and invariably requires a fine balancing act between the myriad of responsibilities that go with the job. So, what form of leadership should the principal exercise?

Three aspects are proposed. First, the principal needs a visionary role, setting the course and destination for the school. Such a role suggests a transformational understanding of leadership, a major component of which is direction setting. That is, transformational leaders anticipate and sometimes create a future for an organization (Dubrin, 2000). Second, the principal has an implementation role, ensuring that appropriate processes are in place for the organization to function. This managerial approach embraces a transactional notion of leadership that focuses on structure and organization (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Third, the principal exercises relational power (Edwards, 1989), to ensure that as far as possible, the needs of all associated with the school are met, or at least not compromised. A concept of service best covers this aspect of leadership where the focus is less about oneself and more concerned with the requirements of others (Greenleaf, 1977).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is generally seen as embodying four factors: charisma, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Deluga & College, 2000). Charisma is the leader's ability to generate "good symbolic power which the employees want to identify" (Deluga & College, p. 302). Inspiration describes how the leader fervently communicates a future idealistic organisation that can be shared. Individual consideration characterises the leader's ability to serve as "employee mentor" (Deluga & College, p. 302), treating employees as individuals and responding to their needs and concerns. Intellectual stimulation expresses how

transformational leaders “encourage employees to approach old and familiar problems in new ways” (Deluga & College, p. 302).

The focus of transformational leadership is on the communication of a community’s vision in a way, which secures commitment from members of the organisation (Beare, Caldwell & Millikan, 1997; Quinn, 1996). The transforming leader, while still responding to the needs among followers, looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower (Beare, Caldwell & Millikan). Such leadership permits both leader and follower to engage each other in solving problems in ways that accentuate end values rather than private personal interests (Carey, 1991). As Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) observed, “transformational leadership is concerned with end values such as freedom, community, equity, justice, brotherhood” (p. 186) and “calls people’s attention to the basic purpose of the organization, to the relationship between the organization and society” (p. 186). Thus, followers become transformed into leaders who become agents of transformation for others (Carey, 1991). Furthermore, transformational leadership tends to build community in that it involves “an exchange of people seeking common aims, uniting them to go beyond their separate interests” (Telford, 1996, p. 8). It “transforms” people’s attitudes, values, and beliefs from being self-seeking to being higher and more altruistic (Sergiovanni & Starratt).

The notion of transformational leadership, especially with its emphasis on charisma, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation, has frequently been proposed as an appropriate form of leadership for school principals (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009). Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005), commenting on the work of Leithwood (1994), suggested that the four factors fundamental to transformational leadership are necessary skills for school principals if they are to meet the demands of the 21st century. For example, the principal provides a model for the behaviour of teachers through strength of character and personal achievements (charisma). She or he communicates high expectations for the school community by virtue of a dynamic and professional presence (inspiration). Through personal attention and consideration, the principal attends to the needs of individuals (individual consideration). Finally, the principal encourages staff members to think of

old problems in new ways (intellectual stimulation). Principals who exercise a transformational approach to leadership often have the capacity to move schools beyond surface changes to deeper transformations that alter the core business of a school, such as pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. These transformations can be achieved through “pursuit of common goals, empowerment of people in the organization, development and maintenance of a collaborative culture, promoting processes of teacher development, and engaging people in collaborative problem-solving strategies” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 99).

For good reason, transformational leadership is as an attractive leadership approach for school principals. However, this form of leadership is not without its shortcomings. Transformational leaders may be so charismatic that their passion and enthusiasm can sometimes be mistaken for truth and reality. Enthusiastic leadership does achieve great things. However, without careful planning, passionate people are capable of leading the charge “right over the cliff and into a bottomless chasm” (Changing Minds.org, 2010, par 14). Transformational leadership tends to adopt a “big picture” approach through its focus on vision. Yet vision is only one side of the leadership coin. Management and implementation are also important aspects of effective leadership.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders are concerned with the everyday transactions involved in the running of an organization. This leadership style frequently involves “a quid pro quo between the leader and the follower” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993, p. 186). That is, the role of the leader is seen primarily as “motivating followers to bring about intended outcomes, and to reward them appropriately” (Tuohy, 1999, p. 169). Sergiovanni and Starratt maintained that such transactions are “governed by instrumental values or modal values such as fairness, honesty, loyalty, integrity” (p. 186). It is leadership in which

the leader sees to it that procedures by which people enter into agreements are clear and aboveboard, and takes into account the rights and needs of others. It is the leadership of the administrator who sees to the day-to-day management of the system, listening to the complaints and concerns of various participants, arbitrating disputes fairly, holding people accountable to their job targets, providing

necessary resources for the achievement of subunit goals, etc.
(Sergiovanni & Starratt, p. 186)

Transactional leadership focuses on people seeking their own, individual objectives and entails “a bargaining over the individual interests of people going about their own separate ways” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, p. 186).

The strength of the transactional model of leadership is that clear managerial structures are detailed whereby people know exactly their roles and what is expected of them. Schools benefit significantly from good organization and clear lines of communication. In his practical guide for new principals Daresh (2006) argued that, “a person can never serve as a true leader if he or she does not also survive as a manager. The job has to be done” (p. 40). Moreover, research by Sayce and Lavery (2010) into the needs of beginning Catholic school principals in Western Australia found that it was the managerial side of leadership that caused the most concerns for these beginning principals. Yet a transactional approach to leadership does have an Achilles heel. Structures and procedures may develop into the endpoint of leadership rather than as the process of leadership. The system then becomes rigid, whereby change and development are extremely difficult to enact.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Do principals need to be either transformational or transactional in their leadership approach? Authors such as Deluga and College (2000), Sultmann and McLaughlin (2000) and Tuohy (1999), have remarked on the interrelation between transactional and transformation leadership (as opposed to a love-hate relationship). Tuohy, for instance, argued that the development of transformational leadership involves “a radical shift from leader behaviour which focuses on planning, control and predictability, to an ability to live with ambiguity, trust and uncertainty” (p. 182). He stressed that central to this development was “the integration of the personal, transactional and transformational approaches to leadership” (p. 182). That is, individuals focus on their personal beliefs, ensuring that these beliefs represent a human, ethical and moral stance with regard to others and to their work. Leaders who strive for authenticity examine their transactional styles, seeking correlation between their behaviour and beliefs, and ensuring that they are not attempting to dominate

others. Finally, the leader needs to be aware of transformation, showing concern for others, their growth and development.

Deluga and College (2000), on the other hand, maintained that transformational leaders “incorporate and amplify the impact of transactional leadership” (p. 302). That is, transformational leaders “recognise and exploit those employee higher-level needs that surpass immediate self-interests” (Deluga & College, p. 302). Sultmann and McLaughlin (2000) highlighted the complementary nature of these forms of leadership. Transformational behaviours, they explained, extend transactional leadership, with its emphasis on structure and rewards, by “being innovative and engaging others personally and professionally in contributing the vision and inviting commitment to the organisation’s mission” (p. 89). In the recently implemented two-year Aspiring Principals’ Program conducted by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, the focus of the first year is on the managerial (transactional) requirements of the principalship, while courses in the second year concentrate on the transformational nature of the role (Glasson, 2010).

Servant Leadership

Vision and management are essential elements in effective school leadership. Yet, what constitutes the underlying motivation fuelling such leadership? One possible answer lies in the desire to serve. Robert Greenleaf (1977) is often attributed with the concept of servant leadership. Specifically, he argued that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*” (p. 13). Greenleaf stressed that at the heart of such leadership is the wish “to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (p. 13). He concluded that the best test of servant leadership is: “Do those being served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (p. 13). Moreover, he asked: “What is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?” (p. 14).

The central dynamic of servant leadership is nurturing those within an organisation. Accordingly, critical skills that the servant leader needs to develop include: appreciating the personal requirements of those within the organisation; healing

wounds caused by conflict; being a steward of the organisation's resources; developing the skills of those within the organisation; and, being an effective listener (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). In this way the servant leader empowers members of the organisation. Sergionanni (1992) noted that the school principal, as servant leader, can empower members of the school community through a common vision based on a "shared value system for living together (that) forms the basis of decisions and actions" (p. 73). People are encouraged to do what makes sense as long as decisions embody the values shared by the school community. The emphasis shifts from what is simply needed for the school to function to one's responsibility to the school community (Sergionanni, 1992).

Servant leadership may appear a weak approach to leadership. Consider, however, that it takes substantial confidence in one's leadership skills to know how to empower others to assume leadership responsibilities. It takes commitment to place the interests of the organisation above one's own. It takes personal strength to repeatedly seek out and remove barriers to the optimal performance of others (Culver, 2009). Indeed, as Culver observed, "the weakest form of leadership can be that which relies solely on power brokerage" (p. 123). At best, she deemed that the wielding of power results in compliance; at worst it leads to deep resentment "and all the dysfunction that results from that" (p. 123). While servant leadership is not usually considered a comprehensive theory of leadership (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005), it is a key element in the thinking of many leadership theorists (Sergiovanni, 1992; Covey, 1992; Sofield & Kuhn, 1995; Adair, 2001).

Conclusion

The principal is, in many ways, the single most influential person in a school. It is the principal's leadership that "sets the tone of the school, the climate of teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become" (1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity, quoted in Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005, p. 5). One suggested way that principals can exercise their leadership entails blending transformational, transactional and servant concepts. Two caveats, however, do need to be raised. First, leadership blends can and will differ. The actual combining of transformational, transactional and servant concepts will most likely depend on the

principal's personality and his or her innate and learned skills. There is no 'right' combination. Second, the principal is not super-person. Various support structures such as leadership teams and school boards are vital in helping augment a principal's leadership attributes (as opposed to mere replication). Eventually, however, it is the principal who has ultimate responsibility for negotiating short and long-term visions for the school, for ensuring that the school is organizationally sound, and for developing a sense of community and a common value system. That is, she or he has ultimate responsibility for making schools awesome places to learn and work.

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