

Full Length Research Paper

The perceptions of Senior Management Teams' (SMTs) dominant leadership styles in selected Botswana primary schools

Mhozya C. M.

Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, Botswana. E-mail: mhozyac@mopipi.ub.bw.

Accepted 16 August, 2010

This study, which was funded by the office of research and development (ORD) in the University of Botswana, surveyed 65 primary schools in South Central region in Botswana, which aimed at establishing the perceptions of senior management teams dominant leadership style. The study was done in three phases; the first phase started in June 2008 to May 2009. Data was collected using questionnaires filled by a total of 412 SMTs. The conclusion that could be drawn from the study is that senior management teams in primary schools have the inclination towards a democratic style of leadership. Subordinates are not necessarily people to be lead. They are creative, innovative and can contribute to the betterment of their organizations. However, it is worth mentioning that some people need to be lead, depending on their maturity levels, ability and willingness to perform tasks.

Key words: Leadership style, democratic, dominant, perception.

INTRODUCTION

In the world generally, especially in the developing countries, schools in Botswana were, and to some extent are still organized along authoritarian-bureaucratic model that predominantly found in commercial and industrial organizations. However, Handy and Aitken (1990) warned that schools may be adopting a system of management that is already outdated as modern businesses are moving away from hierarchies to networks that are more flexible and people friendly. The authoritarian-bureaucratic model was transported to Africa from Europe during the colonial period in order to inculcate the skills and values necessary to provide the subordinate African personnel, required for the effective functioning of the imperial administration. According to Harber (1997), "... the ministerial bureaucracies of states in Africa, learning from their colonial administrators, often attempt to manage schooling through strict, centralized regimes". This is further compounded by the fact that traditional political systems indigenous in most African societies were autocratic, authoritarian and paternalistic, with power concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. It has been argued further that such method

promote educational processes that are undemocratic and bureaucratic which ultimately strengthen the control of a centralized bureaucracy over teachers and students (Carnoy and Samof, 1990).

The Government of Botswana has always made efforts to improve the management of schools at all levels including primary schools. One of such effort was the introduction of the Primary School Management Development Programme (PSMDP). The primary school management development project (PSMDP) was a response to the revised national policy on education (RNPE, 1994). Recommendation 1.5 which states that: "The head as an instructional leader, together with the deputy and senior teachers, should take major responsibility for in-service training for teachers within the schools, through regular observation of teachers and organisation of workshops, to foster communication between teachers on professional matters and to address weaknesses" (Republic of Botswana, 1994: 47).

According to Monyatsi (2006), the recommendation emphasized the need to focus on improving the quality of primary school management. The school management

teams (SMTs) according to the policy are viewed as critical forces that need professional skills to foster change and quality in schools. Furthermore, one of the main objectives of national development plan 8 (NDP 8) was to improve the quality and effectiveness of primary education. A partnership was formed between DFID and the government of Botswana to develop these management and instructional leadership skills in primary schools' heads and their management teams, so as to make them more effective in their jobs (Ministry of Education Report, 1999 - 2000: 57). The goal of the PSMDP was 'to improve the quality of primary education in Botswana by providing effective management training and support to school management teams' (Ministry of Education, 2000). The overall aim of the project was therefore to establish a sustainable primary school management system, hence improving the quality of primary education in Botswana (Ministry of Education, 2000). The purpose of the project was to empower the senior management teams to act as instructional leaders and effective managers of schools. It used similar methods and processes as those in the SSMDP. However, there were some variations; instead of sending a team to Botswana, thirty primary school heads went to UK to pursue their first degrees in education management.

In one of the evaluation study of PSMDP, Monyatsi (2006) concludes that the programs were able to some extent achieve their mandates. However, much as the management of schools had improved, there was need to create structures that would sustain the programs after the donors had left. There was a need for more time to be given so that the partnerships could mellow and thus become sustainable. What is clear, particularly in the case of the SSMDP is that the senior officers did not fully buy the idea as they are not supporting the good job that was started. Furthermore, the conflict that is happening in the PSMDP is also a recipe for disaster. They should have borrowed a leaf from the SSMDP to avoid falling into the same trap. However, one can confidently pronounce that the management of schools has been democratized.

Literature review

Almost all modern organizations, including schools have the characteristics of the Weberian model of bureaucracy which includes a division of labour and specialization, an impersonal orientation, a hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations, and a career orientation (Harber, 1991, 1997; Hoy and Miskel, 1996; Dambe, 1996; Buchanan and Huczynski, 1997; Ballantine, 2001; Monyatsi, 2005). Ballantine (2001) and Monyatsi (2005) further contend that schools are unique bureaucratic organizations due to their different purposes and structure. Moreover, Hanson (2003) and Monyatsi (2005) explained this structural and

organizational uniqueness by referring to Weick's concept of "loosely coupled systems". The looseness of system structures and the nature of the teaching task seem to press for a professional mode of school system organization, while demands for uniformity of product and the long time span over which cohorts of students are trained press for rationalization of activities and thus for a bureaucratic base of organization. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1995) pointed out that schools have multiple goals and are expected to achieve them while they sometimes conflict with each other. He further argues that loose coupling does not mean that decisions, actions, and programmes are unrelated, but that they are only loosely related to each other. Dambe (1996) contends that "...schools are dual systems, a combination of bureaucratic approach and loose coupling", an issue supported by Monyatsi (2005) who declares that schools require efficiency and predictability in a rational and programmed environment ("... impersonal, universalistic, and consistent behaviour") while at the same time they demand a "... personalistic, idiosyncratic and flexible behaviour". It has also been argued that schools are distinctive organizations because they are expected to transmit values, ideals, and shared knowledge; foster cognitive and emotional growth; and sort and select students into different categories.

Monyatsi (2005) contends that schools were organized bureaucratically to teach the impersonal, contractual values and relationships. The values reinforced in schools aimed at the functioning of the bureaucracy and the maintenance of social order such as obedience, abiding by the rules, loyalty, respect for authority, punctuality, regular attendance, quietness, orderly work in large groups, response to orders, bells and timetables, and tolerance of monotony. Despite the negative connotations attached to the concept, it has been argued that bureaucracy serves a vital function in society because it is believed to be the most efficient and rational form for organizations with goals of high productivity and efficiency. Traditionally, in pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness, schools have been, and are still structurally organized along bureaucratic lines; with the common feature of tight control, a somewhat rigid and inflexible dependence on top-down authoritarianism.

Handy and Aitken (1990) argued that unlike other organizations which have layers of full-time managers, schools have two or three at the top and a few others as part of their job. In the former category are the school head, deputy and assistant head while in the latter are heads of departments and senior teachers grade one who have to contend in most cases with normal teaching duties, thus allowing very little time for management.

Due to the nature of the structure and purposes of schools described previously, the only viable options available for the management of schools were either autocracy or autonomy. According to Monyatsi (2005), on the latter method, autocracy became the most favoured

by educationists and therefore dominant, with the managerial task placed in the school head's office with all decisions being sanctioned and taken at his/her desk only. The school head also assumes all responsibility as the other colleagues needed time to prepare, teach and mark students' work. Autocracy suits the bureaucratic organization as it can be personal and charismatic or it can be exercised more formally through rules (school rules), procedures (management manuals and supplies procurement manuals), and regulations (code of regulations, secondary schools regulations), and school handbooks and/or prospectus.

However, it should be pointed out that there are some disadvantages militating against running a bureaucracy like a school by autocracy; for instance it overloads the top of the pyramid because all decisions drift up to the top of the organization. It is such situations whereby management in an attempt to free teachers to perform their core job of teaching, end up performing odd jobs such as collecting mail, arranging sport trips, laying out the school hall for examinations, punishing students for making noise in class or not doing home work; jobs which in other organizations could be done by junior officers because management is managing – getting the job done through others. As a result, school heads end up being overworked, stressed and frustrated with a lot of backlogs of important and crucial work, and in most cases with more nutcases of heads who masquerade as tyrants or dictators to mask their insanity.

However, 'autocracy' is ideal for small systems in that it is believed to facilitate efficiency and effectiveness. Handy and Aitkin (1990) posit that "... realistically, autocracy loses touch if there are more than 15 to 20 subordinates, degenerating into dictatorship", sometimes leading to anarchy.

The statement of the problem

The quest to improve the management of primary schools has been on going for a long time in Botswana. It has evolved from a few days induction courses to formal tertiary studies up to post graduate level. For instance, one of the objectives of the department of primary education at the University of Botswana is to "prepare personnel for higher posts of responsibility in the field of primary education who are capable of being agents for the improvement of basic education". This was further realized through the introduction of the B. Ed educational management programme in August 2002. The primary school management development program has also ushered in another avenue to improve the management of primary schools.

Despite all these efforts, it appears that primary schools in Botswana are still managed differently. The purpose of this study is therefore to establish the most dominant or favoured leadership styles as perceived by SMTs in primary schools.

Significance of the study

The researcher is entrusted with training the school managers through the bachelor's degree in educational management. Some of the school managers in the schools are therefore products of the program. As a result, finding out the dominant leadership style in the schools, and whether or not such leadership style is appropriate might inform the program in terms of whether or not it should be reviewed to provide relevant training in the use of leadership styles. Since the program is unable to accommodate a large number of candidate managers, the researcher, through the department of primary education may adopt interventions that may be intended to in-service those managers who may want in the appropriate leadership styles in the schools. Such interventions may be in the form of school visits and training workshops. The Ministry of Education, which has shown interest in the study, is keen to receive the results and use them as appropriate.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a survey research design which according to McBurney (1990: 60) "is simply to determine how people feel about a particular issue". Surveys are popular as they allow the collection of a large amount of data from sizeable population (Saunders et al., 2007:138). Using survey strategy allows the researcher to collect quantitative data and analyse it using descriptive and inferential statistics. The quantitative approach involves a questionnaire survey, because it gathers data at a particular time with the intention of describing the nature of existing condition (Cohen and Manion, 1995: 43).

Population and sample

The survey was conducted in 65 primary schools in the following areas: Gaborone, Lobatse, Molepolole, Ramotswa, Tlokweng, and Mochudi. The research was funded by the Office of Research Development (ORD) in the University of Botswana and the researcher was able to distribute questionnaires to SMTs in all schools. A total of 65 school heads, 65 deputy heads and 282 heads of department and senior teachers (which in total comprise 412 SMTs). The purposive sampling was used to select information rich SMTs who were the target of the study and was a composition of school heads, deputy heads, heads of departments and senior teachers. Saunders et al. (2007:608) describes purposive sampling procedure as depending on researcher to select the cases that make up the sample.

Instrumentation and trustworthiness

The study used 'self assessment' questionnaires adopted from the leadership style questionnaires <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark> Section C consisted of open ended questions. The questionnaires were modified to suit the population demographic data (such as location, work position and qualification). The questionnaires were piloted in two schools to find out as to whether all questions asked were clear and addressing what the researcher wanted to find out.

Negotiating access

Permission to carry out this research was requested from and

granted by the director of primary education in the ministry of education. Letters were written to relevant officers to negotiate access into individual schools and about the detailed modalities of conducting the research such as the dates and times of visits to various sites.

Data collection procedure

The researcher distributed and collected all the questionnaires. It took five weeks to distribute and collect questionnaires from schools. SMTs supported the exercise by meeting set appointments.

Data analysis

Questionnaires were pre-coded and the remaining questions were coded after data collection. Data was analyzed through the use of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Where necessary, cross tabulations was done to establish whether or not there are relationships between the number of years in the management and the leadership styles as well as whether there was any relationships between leadership styles and qualifications and leadership style and experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented following the chronological pattern of the four research questions which guided the study. The four research questions were as follows:

- (1) What do senior management teams perceive as their dominant leadership styles in primary schools?
- (2) What factors contribute to the senior management team's dominant leadership style in primary schools?
- (3) How do senior management teams value the power that the leadership holds over their position?
- (4) Do senior management teams feel teachers must be directed or threatened with punishment in order to achieve the organizational objectives?

To determine what the SMTs consider to be their dominant leadership style, the respondents were asked questions from which the researcher was able to deduce the kind of leadership styles they use. As far as decision making was concerned, the SMTs was engaged in democratic leadership style whereby they included teachers in major decisions (67%), they requested ideas and inputs from teachers on upcoming plans and project (86%), they voted to reach consensus on unresolved issues (69%) and that each individual teacher participated in major decisions (82%). Bennis et al. (1994: 30) states that a democratic leader obtains the consensus of majority. There is a collective and participatory decision making; stakeholders who take initiatives and responsibilities are delegated among members instead of being concentrated on one or two individuals. Hoy and Miskel (2008:23) contends that there is a positive environment in which the school is generalised by freedom and trans-

parency, discussions are encouraged and everyone's point of view are heard therefore, a positive self image is built. Leaders persuades staff to improve the decision making tapping the expertise of individuals, which lowers resistance and increase the enthusiasm because they have a stake in the outcome (Hoy and Miskel, 2008: 369).

However, even though SMTs use the democratic style of leadership, it does not lead to the abdication of their accountability as leaders. Leaders are to make justification and reason for what ever goes on in their schools and therefore are accountable for decisions, action and communication taken. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004: 256) "stresses that authentic leaders accepts responsibility for their action as well as those of their subordinates" because of the legitimate power vested on them.

In finding out factors contributing to SMTs dominant leadership styles, the findings showed teachers maturity level (82%). Among the factors mentioned, SMTs indicated teachers' ownership of the plans and projects at hand (54%); teachers' determination of their needs and how to address them (82%); teachers' participation in resolving differences (98.2%) and that each individual teacher is responsible for defining his/her job (76%). In analysing factors contributing to the dominant leadership style, the researcher noticed that SMTs distribute their leadership which embraces leadership by teams. The approach challenges the common assumption that one person has to be in charge to make change happen instead, multiple individuals share the leadership responsibility that have traditionally been attributed to a single individual (Heller and Firestone, 1995: 438). Gronn (2002) in Hoy and Miskel adds that in using such an approach, the school rely on multiple sources of leadership across the school to guide and complete numerous tasks that vary in size. Distributed leadership is necessary because school organizations are so complex and the tasks so wide-ranging that no single person has the energy and skills to handle all of the leadership functions (Hoy and Miskel, 2008: 439). Distributed leadership is based on democratic values (Leithwood, 1992:45). The fact that SMTs mentioned maturity of teachers as influencing factor for their dominant leadership style choice shows their understanding of teachers' education, experience and competency as important for schools. One observation, however which seem to be drawn from the findings is that there is an overwhelming believe that to be democratic, one should give the way. Leaders should however be aware of the fact that some people do not want to be left alone probably because of variations of maturity levels, their ability to perform tasks and their willingness to do so. Other styles of leadership can be used depending on the behaviour, maturity level and competency of staff members (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2004: 170).

In assessing how SMTs value the power that their leadership position holds over their position, 60% of the

respondents expressed that they like the power their leadership position holds over their subordinates and 80% said they use such power to help their subordinates grow professionally. They further noted that they like to share such power with their subordinates, hence the subordinates grow. Even though SMTs value the power vested upon them as leaders, they are mindful of the fact that schools depend on the expertise, commitment and service of teachers as professionals. Senior management teams and teachers are both committed to a set of goals and have to compliment each other to achieve them. Positional power is important in schools but it is likely to be challenged or ignored if it's not used wisely (Dean, 1993:7). Position allows SMTs to do certain things but trust and confidence of teachers must be won in order to do others.

In their response to how they feel, teachers must be directed or threatened with punishment. In order for them to achieve organisational objectives, 83.3% disagreed with this statement. Only 12.7% agreed with the statement. A great proportion of the SMT believed that teachers should be self directed to achieve the organisational objectives. SMTs believed that teachers must have commitment towards these objectives and it is not necessarily punishment which would make them to achieve objectives. This was expressed by 88.5% of the respondents. Besides they noted that teachers have a right to determine their own organisational objectives (80.4%) and to be provided with security in that respect (66.1%). The premise behind this thinking of self directedness and the right to determine own objectives is that teachers know how to use creativity and ingenuity to solve organisational problems. The SMTs (75.3%) saw teachers as capable of leading themselves in the same way that they are led by their super-ordinates. SMTs recognize that subordinates are not necessarily people who do not know, who therefore must be led. Teachers are professionals who are creative, who can make a difference in an organisation if they are allowed to be self directed (Heller and Firestone, 1995: 413). Leaders should use developmental approaches such as "supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting and negotiating the differences" (Wubbolding, 2007: 254).

Conclusion

From the empirical findings of this study, conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it was revealed that SMTs dominant leadership style was democratic which reflected on their decision making processes at the school level. Secondly, SMTs used this kind of leadership style because it has potential to contribute to teachers' professional development especially for those teachers who show maturity to take authority and responsibilities in their work. Thirdly, they have the realisation that teachers can be creative

and innovative and therefore can self direct some of the school activities without being coerced or directed by leaders.

REFERENCES

- Ballantine JH (2001). *The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Bell J (1993). *Doing Your Research Project*. Buckingham: Oxford University Press.
- Bennas GA, Ontiende JE, Bousvert R (1994). *Theory and Practice in Education*. Nairobi: East Educational Publishers.
- Buchanan D, Huczynski A (1997). *Organizational Behavior*. Glasgow: Prentice-Hall.
- Carnoy M, Samof J (1990). *Education and Social Transitions in the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Dambe M (1996). *School Organization*. In C.O. Abosi and Kandjii-Murangi (Eds.), *Education in Botswana: A Reading Text*. Gaborone: Macmillan, pp.123-138).
- Dean J (1993). *Managing the Secondary School*. London: Routledge.
- Handy C, Aitkin R (1990). *Understanding Schools as Organizations*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hanson EM (2003). *Educational Administration and Organizational Behavior*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Harber C (1991). International contexts for political education. *Educ. Rev.*, 43(3): 245-256.
- Harber C (1997). *Education, Democracy and Political Development in Africa*. Brighton: Sussex: Academic Press.
- Heller MF, Firestone WA (1995). Who's in charge here? Sources of Leadership for change in eight schools. *Element. Sch. J.* 96(1): 65-86.
- Hoy WK, Miskel CG (1996, 2008). *Educational Administration: Theory, Research and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Leithwood K (1992). The move towards Transformational Leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 49 (5):
- Lunenburg FC, Ornstein AC (2004). *Educational Administration: Concepts and Practices*. Spain: Thomson.
- McBurney D (1990). *Research Methods*. Belmont: Wasworth.
- Ministry of Education (2000). *Primary School Management Development Project: Baseline on Education*, Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Monyatsi PP (2005). Transforming schools into democratic organizations: The case of the secondary schools management development project in Botswana. *Int. Ed. J.* 2005, 6(3): 354-366. (<http://iej.cjb.net>)
- Monyatsi PP (2006). *The Secondary Schools Management Development Project (1993 – 1997) and the Primary Schools Management Development Project (1999 – 2002) in Botswana: The globalization of the management structures in the two levels of the education system*.
- Republic of Botswana (1977). *Education for Kagisano: Report of the National Commission on Education of 1977*. Gaborone: Government Printers.
- Republic of Botswana (1994). *Revised National Policy on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printers.
- Republic of Botswana (1997). *National Development Plan 8, 1997/98 - 2002/03*. Gaborone: Government Printers.
- Saunders M, Lewis P, Thornhill A (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Sergiovanni T J, Starratt R J (1995). *Supervision: A Re definition*. New York: McGRAW-HILL, INC.
- Wubbolding RE (2007). *Glaser Quality School. Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 11(4): 253-261, <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/survstyl.html>.