An Educational Leadership Framework Based on Traditional and Contemporary Leadership Theories

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Abstract

With fundamental social changes in the knowledge economy, there is growing tension between fundamentalism and cosmopolitanism reflecting conflict between universal rules and diversity respectively. Globalization encourages diversity and a Western cultural bias for heroic leadership. In response to excessive risk-taking by heroic corporate leaders causing disturbances to financial markets, western economies use legislation while Asian economies adjust their legal infrastructures to adopt Western regulatory frameworks. However, legislation is similar to standardization and a solution to this biased corporate environment is education of business leaders on superiority of diversity over standardization and shared over heroic leadership.

Keywords: Business school, globalization, innovation, teacher leadership, transnational university

Introduction

Leadership research created a vast body of literature classified using various approaches. A plausible classification considers traditional and contemporary theories. Traditional theories comprise of early seminal studies on specific types of determinants for effective leadership while contemporary ones integrate many categories of determinants from early research. After reviewing traditional and contemporary leadership theories relevant for educational leadership, this paper selects essential features from the theories to derive a Personal Leadership Framework (PLF) applicable to university lecturers.
After next section's description of the context for this study, section 3 reviews leadership literature to identify relevant features for university academics. Section 4 applies these features in the author's school to derive the PLF before the last section concludes with recommendation.

1 Background to this study

The author was a lecturer at Monash University Sunway Campus School of Business in Malaysia, where he taught undergraduate accounting and finance units. Besides teaching, he was an assistant coordinator of the school's accounting and finance department as well as coordinator of the work placement program. He wrote this paper after studying the nature of his work and the roles of 13 faculty staff who were departmental coordinators or professors shouldering leadership responsibilities in the school's six academic departments: accounting and finance, business law and taxation, econometrics and business statistics, economics, management as well as marketing. Among the six departmental coordinators, there were five senior lecturers and one professor. Besides the professor who was accounting and finance coordinator, there were seven other associate or full professors: two in finance, one in econometrics, one in economics, two in management plus the Head of School. The Head of School and one management professor are Australian and British expatriates respectively while other academics in the sample are Asians. This predominantly Asian sample of senior academicians from the Malaysian campus of an Australian transnational university provided a case study of a Western institution of higher education in an Asian context.

2 Classification of leadership literature

With several thousand empirical studies on leadership mostly having inconsistent results (Yukl 2006), the literature review in this section is not comprehensive, but representative of major research approaches. Section 3.1 reviews the traditional trait, behavioural and situational approaches for studying leadership before section 3.2 presents contemporary transformational, strategic, educative and organizational leadership. As these approaches do not consider teacher leaders directly, section 3.3 reviews teacher leadership literature.

2.1 Traditional leadership theories

Gorton, Alston and Snowden (2007, p. 8) identified trait, behavioural and contingency as seminal research approaches relevant to educational administration.

2.1.1 Trait approach

Leadership research started around 1940s with trait studies on attributes of natural leaders focusing on their personalities, motives, values and skills, but the studies could not discover universal traits for leadership success. For a synthesis of literature during that period, Stogdill (1948) observed leaders displaying some advantageous managerial traits over non-leaders, but none of these traits were clearly superior.

2.1.2 Behavioral approach

Lack of success with the trait approach led to examination of leadership behaviour from the 1950s, which produced various two-dimensional models. Different researchers gave the dimensions various names, including consideration and initiating structure (Stogdill & Coons 1957), concern for people and concern for production (Blake & Mouton 1964), as well as employee-centric and job-centric behaviours (Bowers & Seashore 1966), leading to a task-relationship dichotomy for leadership behaviour. This dichotomy corresponded with two behavioural sets summarized by Owens (2007) in the education context: (1) administrative ones including planning, organizing and coordinating; as well as (2) human ones such as consideration for subordinates, motivation and conflict management.

2.1.3 Contingency approach

After the search by previous approaches for universal characteristics of leaders was inconclusive, the contingency approach around the 1970s recognized dependency of leadership effectiveness on organizational situations. This approach emphasizes contextual factors influencing leadership processes, such as characteristics of environment, subordinates and tasks (House 1971). Specific situational variables include situational control—combination of task structure, leader-member relations and leader's position power to evaluate performance of subordinates (Fiedler 1964). Other situational variables are amount of relevant information possessed, importance of decision, subordinates' acceptability of decision (Vroom & Yetton 1973) and subordinate maturity (Hersey & Blanchard 1977). Traditional leadership research focused on seeking universal qualities of leaders before examining situational factors moderating leadership effectiveness. The following section presents contemporary leadership research dating from around 1980s.

2.2 Contemporary leadership theories

Crowther et al. (2002, p. 24) considered four popular approaches to contemporary educational leadership: transformational, strategic, educative and organizational.

2.2.1 Transformational leadership

Based on personal qualities from traditional leadership research, transformational leadership grooms followers into future leaders by giving them freedom to control their behaviour, elevates followers' concerns from physical to psychological needs, inspires subordinates to consider group rather than self interests, and communicates desired outcomes to let subordinates perceive changes as worthwhile (Bass 1990, 1995, 1999; Yammarino, Spangler & Bass 1993). Emphasizing personal traits to introduce organizational change, this form of leadership demands shared decision-making, teacher empowerment as well as understanding and encouraging change, while necessitating abilities to work in teams, see the complete picture, concentrate on continuous school improvement and foster the school community's sense of ownership (Leithwood 1992). Transformational leadership is related to moral leadership, being influenced by Burns' (1978) transforming leadership, which appeals to followers' moral values to raise their consciousness on ethical issues. In the education context, more contemporary forms of transformational leadership appeared in Dantley's (2001) research on moral leadership linking transformational leadership with leaders as moral agents.

2.2.2 Strategic leadership

While transformational leadership is built on personal qualities, strategic leadership is more impersonal, being concerned with relationships between the external environment and an organization's mission as well as its

implementation (Maghroori & Rolland 1997). Strategic leaders interpret external events to focus on threats and opportunities for influencing followers' values.

2.2.3 Educative leadership

Culture building is emphasized by educative leadership (Bates 1992), which implies responsible involvement in organizational politics (Duignan & Macpherson 1992, pp. 3-4). Educative leadership requires culturally proficient leaders who respect and know about individual as well as organizational cultures to interact effectively in various cultural environments (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell 2003). Cultural proficiency is especially important in an organizational context facing fundamental changes due to globalization.

2.2.4 Organizational leadership

Besides cultural proficiency, change-oriented leadership encourages organizational innovation. Due to fundamental social changes in the knowledge economy, there is increasing tension between fundamentalism and cosmopolitanism reflecting conflict between universal rules and diversity (Giddens 2003). A case in point is the variety of cultures and nationalities present in the work force as well as universities of major cities, creating some uneasiness about distribution of job and educational opportunities among locals and foreigners. While Monash embraced globalization of opportunities by setting up transnational campuses, a subsequent disequilibrium arose between standardization of course content across campuses and customization based on regional or local contexts. Again, diversity prevailed with encouragement of chief examiners (CEs) at non-Australian campuses to customize their taught units regionally. Customization of content started with slight variation among comparable units taught in Australian and non-Australian campuses, then proceeded with elective offerings reflecting individual campuses' unique research expertise. This was evident at Sunway campus with appointment of finance lecturers as CEs and introduction of an Islamic banking elective, reflecting Malaysia's position as an Islamic banking centre in Asia.

While successful innovations usually started with simple, small and focused ideas clearly defined for implementation, Drucker (1985) commented knowledge-based innovations may be the hardest to succeed, demanding availability of all needed knowledge. While companies may not have all required expertise, universities with established research strengths can fulfill this criterion. Agreeing with Drucker (1985), Pogrow (1996) noted successful innovations being highly structured and easily monitored. Innovative courses can incorporate structure and monitoring in its design.

Emerging from education literature on organizational leadership is the notion of shared instead of traditional leadership theories' individual or positional leadership, suggesting enhancement of capability to accomplish effective work collectively (Heifetz 1994). In the education context, leadership from school principals, teachers, administrators and parents have positive effects on school performance (Pounder, Ogawa & Adams 1995, p. 567). Distribution of CEs among regional university campuses demonstrated shared leadership for a departmental discipline.

For changes beyond unit offerings, Dantley (2001) expounded principled leadership reflecting on issues of justice, democracy and fairness before questioning efficacy of implementing administrative decisions; pragmatic leadership to promote acquisition of skills for academic achievement as well as introducing social, educational, political and economic changes; and purposive leadership for innovative changes in schools.

Summarizing existing literature on suitability of transformational, strategic, educative and organizational leadership approaches for teaching, these approaches considered principals but did not explore teacher leaders' roles (Crowther et al. 2002, p. 27) significantly, as explained in the next section.

2.3 Teacher leadership

Transformational leadership is an effective leadership approach for school administrators (Day 2000; Leithwood 1994) but may be less appropriate for teaching staff engaging in narrower contexts than administrators. While Caldwell (1992) recommended the strategic approach for principals of self-managing schools, there was little research on this approach for teaching staff. Similar to strategic leadership, school principals can exercise educative leadership (Rizvi 1992), but there was little research on this approach applied to teachers' work. However, emphasis on culture and shared responsibility in the educative and organizational approaches hinted on teaching leadership, as the Monash case demonstrated in the previous section. Given emphasis on organizational rather than individual level of conceptualization, Yukl (2006, pp. 456-7) presented essential functions for organizational leadership:

- aligning tasks with objectives and strategies;
- building commitment, optimism, trust and cooperation;
- developing and empowering subordinates;

- encouraging and facilitating collective learning;
- interpreting complex events;
- organizing and coordinating activities;
- promoting social justice and morality;
- securing necessary resources and support; and
- strengthening collective identity.

However, these features are too generic for a teacher leader. Teacher leadership emphasizes facilitation of principled action to achieve success for the school by applying teaching to shape students' perception and enhance their community life for the long term (Crowther et al. 2002, p. 10). Crowther et al. (2002, pp. 4-5) presented an idealized Teachers as Leaders (TL) framework comprising of six elements representing the work of teacher leaders:

1. preparing students for better future;
2. achieving authenticity in teaching, learning and assessment practices;
3. facilitating communities of learning;
4. confronting barriers in cultures and structures of schools;
5. translating ideas into sustainable actions; and
6. nurturing success culture.

These features are used in the next section to develop the PLF. Literature on teacher leadership revealed three themes: (1) individual teacher leader roles; (2) teacher leader's on-the-job learning; and (3) conceptualization of teacher leadership being central to building professional communities and renewing school cultures (Lieberman & Miller 2004). By developing a PLF for university lecturers, this paper exhibits the third theme to position teaching as a leading profession of the post-industrial knowledge economy.

3 Derivation of a personal leadership framework

Review of leadership literature in the previous section counters a possibly Western cultural bias attributing organizational performance to individual heroic leadership (Yukl 2006, p. 449) with shared leadership. Corporate mismanagement of such bias includes justification by the board of directors of large salary and performance bonus for their chief executive officer (CEO) after announcing much better than expected financial results encouraging shareholders to have unrealistically high expectation for subsequent years. Pressure to satisfy shareholders' expectation caused instances of fraudulent accounting and excessive risk-taking to exaggerate profits, resulting in disturbances to financial markets upon disclosure of substantial losses by perceived star performers. Examples of market disturbances are accounting scandals at Enron and WorldCom in the early 2000s to losses by global banks exposed to the sub-prime crisis in the United States of America during the late 2000s. Following disclosure of devastating results, the CEO must satisfy shareholders' expectation by resignation, being attributed full responsibility for corporate failure as easily as previous successes.

In response to lapses in corporate governance, governments in developed economies rely on laws and regulatory frameworks, including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act for corporate reporting and the Basel Accord capital adequacy requirements for banking supervision. However, corporate history demonstrated inadequacy of laws and regulations to prevent frauds. While Asian governments tweak their legal infrastructures to implement these Western regulatory frameworks, history can repeat if corporate leaders do not learn their lessons. Legislation has a similar theme as fundamentalism's standardization and imposition of one best answer.

Instead of educating future business executives to excel in a biased corporate environment, this section proposes a personal leadership framework that is not individualistic but based on shared leadership. Diversity leading standardization parallels replacement of universal theories on personal leadership with contingency theories of organizational leadership, as well as superiority of shared over heroic leadership. Diversity is again celebrated when various teaching approaches are effective in different circumstances (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin 1983, p. 393).

Without unrealistic expectation for an individual to take full responsibility for organizational failure, shared leadership with subordinate empowerment can be more effective than heroic leadership (Bradford & Cohen 1984). Flawed processes are probably more responsible than individual failures for not satisfying expectation when nurturing success culture in schools (Crowther et al. 2002, p. 15). With this emerging perspective of shared leadership, leadership research should be conducted in specific organizational context (Dachler 1984; Drath 2001; Gronn 2002).

Studying departmental coordinators and professors at the business school revealed skills and capabilities of academic leaders. Besides exhibiting a broad range of university teaching experiences (evident from their academic profiles on the university website) before assuming leadership roles at Monash, these 13 senior academicians from

six business disciplines demonstrated effective interpersonal skills during class, administrative communication and staff meetings, while possessing impressive academic credentials (all doctorates except the law and taxation coordinator who was pursuing one). With their teaching experiences, they were knowledgeable about the curriculum and gave credibility to the PLF developed in the school's context. Table 1 shows the PLF developed for university academics. This framework extended the TL framework in section 3.3 across three dimensions: teaching, research and administration.

[Insert Table 1 Personal leadership framework for university academics near here]

While the ordering of dimensions followed the title of the Pro Vice-Chancellor's (PVC) awards for excellence at Monash Sunway, their relative importance is dependent on seniority of academic staff. While all academics conduct research, professors represent research strengths of the school as they conduct little or no teaching. Lecturers are responsible for most of the taught units, with administrative duties shared among professors, lecturers and administrative staff.

Derivation of this framework followed some current developments in the school, presented in the same order as elements in the TL framework:

1. author engaging accounting firms and banks with internships to better prepare students for jobs in those industries;
2. Education Office initiating peer review of teaching instead of relying solely on students for teaching feedback, as recommended by Lieberman and Miller (1992; 1999);
3. Banking and Finance research unit organizing annual Islamic Banking and Finance conferences to link practitioners with academic research;
4. meetings among administrative and academic staff to iron operational problems;
5. academics initiating research collaboration among departments, schools and universities;
6. PVC nurturing success culture by introducing excellence awards for application by academics in separate categories of teaching, research and administration.

Extending the TL framework across teaching, research and administration dimensions resulted in a PLF suited for university academics.

4 Conclusion and recommendation

Large volume of leadership research with inconsistent findings had led to difficulty in pinpointing essential leadership features. Identifying essential leadership features for university academics requires extension of existing teaching leadership framework for a specific institution. Failure to do so will produce features too generic to be useful. Future research can extend the activities under each PLF dimension and integrate features of various research approaches for a specific context using qualitative and quantitative methods.

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Table 1 Personal leadership framework for university academics

University academic leadership	*Teaching*	*Research*	*Administration*
1. Convey convictions for better world	Preparation of students for better job prospects	Industry-relevant research outcomes feeding into teaching	Maintenance of industrial linkages to understand their skill & knowledge requirements
2. Achieve authenticity	Coverage of industry-relevant knowledge	Conducting of educational research to gain deeper understanding of teaching & learning processes	Support from Education Office in conducting peer teaching reviews, student transitions & unit evaluations
3. Facilitate communities of learning	Dissemination of good teaching practices at education seminars	Dissemination of new ideas at conferences & seminars	Engagement of industries with internship
4. Confront barriers	Discussion with fellow academics on teaching practices	Engagement of departmental professors for advice	Engagement of school manager for administrative support
5. Translate ideas into action	Adoption of various teaching approaches	Intra/inter-departmental & inter-university collaboration	Quality committee implementing ideas from academics to improve school's operation
6. Nurture success culture	Award for teaching excellence	Award for research excellence; celebrating success in winning research grants & publication of top-tier journal articles	Award for administration excellence

Source: derived from Crowther et al. (2002)