The Antecedents of Primary School Principals' Management and Leadership Behaviors

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Abstract: *This study explores the relationship between management and leadership behaviors of primary school principals from the perspective of personal and contextual variables. Although the school effectiveness literature has put much attention to school principals' behavior outcomes, however, a few studies have investigated the background of principals' behaviors. The sample of this study was consisted of 140 primary school principals, who were chosen randomly from three of the six educational districts in Israel. For the purposes of this piece of work two anonymous Likert-type questionnaires were used: the Instructional Leadership Inventory and the School Administrator Assessment Survey. Data analysis revealed that school principals' management behaviors were mostly influenced by contextual factors whereas their leadership behaviors were mainly affected by personal factors. It was also found that the principals' demographic variables had different effects upon their management and leadership behaviors. Besides it was indicated that staff and community characteristics affect both school principals' management and leadership behaviors.*

Key words: *Primary school, principals, behaviors, management, leadership*

1. Introduction

In the last decades researchers seem to pay special attention to the question about what managers can do to improve their organizations (Chapman, Mahlick & Smulder 1997; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hopkins, Ainscow & West, 1993). At schools this question has got the form of a quest for an effective school, which has also been associated with the efforts for the upgrading of students' achievements (Knoepel & Rinehart, 2008; Lezotte, 2005).

These studies have generated lists of effective administrative behaviors and activities, which can consistently be found in the effective schools (Day, Harris & Hatfield, 2001; Gaziel, 1995, 2007; Leitner, 1994). However, despite the work done on the effects of leadership and management activities, our knowledge about the antecedents of such behaviors still appears to be limited. Why do some principals act in one way and others differently?

There are a few studies related to the above question (Goldring, Huff, May & Canburn, 2006; Martinko & Gardner, 1990). In particular, Martinko & Gardner (1990) carried out a qualitative research study in an attempt to interview a few principals in depth looking for their goals and motivations in leadership.

In our study we attempted to explore the principals' antecedents from the perspective of their management and leadership behaviors. More specifically, we tried to investigate the extent to which personal and contextual factors were related to the principals' activities in different school settings.

2. Theoretical background

The school effectiveness literature has consistently highlighted the importance of the principals in providing effective leadership and supportive management at schools (Cheng, 1996; Ifanti, 2011; Jackson, 2000; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Silver, 1994). In this context, some researchers have identified a range of behaviors that characterize effective principals, whereas, in the last two decades, the research on school effectiveness has yielded a more focused list on the topic (Dimock, 2002; Gaziel, 1995; Krug, Ahadi & Scott, 1990; Murphy, 2002).

In particular, five types of leadership behaviors, i.e.: a) defining the goals or the mission of the school, b) promoting an instructional climate, c) overseeing curriculum, d) supervising teachers and e) monitoring students' progress, have been found to be related -rather consistently- to an effective school. Other activities might also be deemed important, such as seeking district or community resources support.

In this study we have focused on the aforementioned five behaviors for some specific reasons. First of all, they have been stably supported by most of the relevant studies and have dealt primarily with those administrative activities that operate within the given school system rather than the larger organizational structure. We have also taken into account similar studies conducted by Ames and Maehr (1989) as well as by Krug (1989), which presented the procedures for reliable assessment of these behaviors.

In our approach, it is important to note that these dimensions can be associated with two of the larger domains of leadership and management behaviors (see: Yukl, 1989). Leadership activities have been designed to define, change or transform organizations (Kotter, 1990), and could be directed towards changing or shaping the culture of the school, its ideology, its philosophy and its mission. On the other hand, management embraces activities designed to maintain the organization at its current position (Zalesnick, 1977). Such activities involve developing and retaining processes that can facilitate the attainment of accepted goals. Presumably, administrators are expected to be engaged in activities that appear in both realms. However, it is interesting that the aforementioned five dimensions of leadership and management behaviors reflect these two functions in a range of aspects.

In this survey, we have attempted to examine activities which define the school mission or promote an instructional climate at school under the leadership influences. Additionally, we have tried to interpret the management functions as involving the work environment (e.g.: the management of the school curriculum) as well as the social environment (e.g.: supervising teaching, monitoring students etc.).

Although there is a great research interest in the effects of administrative behaviors (i.e.: leadership and management) upon school effectiveness, however, a few studies have investigated the antecedents of these behaviors. The basic thus research question which has been raised in this study is formulated as follows: To what extent principals' involvement is found in leadership or management activities, and how much it is shaped by their personal characteristics or by the context in which they are operating?

Studies in such direction seem to be of two sorts: On the one hand, there are those which have focused on the personality aspects of school leadership, such as cognitive abilities and personality characteristics (e.g.: extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and social appraisal skills) (Zaccaro, Kemp & Bader, 2004). In this context, researchers have been particularly interested in examining the ways that leaders use charisma as a source of authority (Conger, 1999; Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Shamir & Howell, 1999). Charismatic authority seems to be rather "salient" in schools, because administrators seem to exercise little explicit power to influence instructional operations (Peterson, 1988). It has also been indicated that, in loosely coupled organizations, personal characteristics have been found to be strongly related to principals' involvement in activities aiming to develop a shared sense of purpose for the school (Glatter, 1997).

On the other hand, some studies based on the contingency theories have stressed the important role the context plays on determining the success of a leader. These studies have documented that principals are the main actors within a social setting responding to situational and contextual characteristics (Fiedler, 1993).

Nevertheless, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) have stated that "skills and attributes may not be enough to guarantee the leader effectiveness" (p. 149).

In this respect, the situational leadership framework has provided that leaders are more effective when they adapt their behavior to their environment (Miller & Miller, 2001; Yukl, 1989). The structure of the school, i.e.: its size (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), as well as the social context of the district regarding the beliefs and attitudes (Dwyer, 1984) also determine the appropriate types of principals' behaviors at school.

The present research study combines two perspectives, i.e.: leadership and management, and provides the hypothesis that personal and contextual characteristics may have different impact upon principals' relevant behaviors. While management behaviors seem to be attached to the contextual factors, the leadership behaviors could be related to personal factors. Furthermore, we aim to examine how differences occur within the larger division of administration in terms of educational leadership and school management. Taking into account that these two roles operate under different circumstances and serve different functions within the school organization, we suggest that they may be shaped by different factors.

3. Materials and Method

The sample of this research study includes 200 primary school principals chosen randomly from three of the six educational districts in Israel. One hundred and forty (140) out of 200 primary school principals responded to our request (response rate: 70%), and this is considered as a high percentage of response in the Israeli context.

Regarding the measures employed in this study, two questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire included principals' reports on their instructional leadership behavior as well as their perceptions about the characteristics of their staff, the school and the community. The second questionnaire assessed principals' personal characteristics, including their self-reliance, self-esteem and personal incentives as well as their perceptions of the goals put ahead by the school district. The two questionnaires are presented below in a more detail.

3.1 *The Instructional Leadership Inventory Scales (ILI)*

The ILI was adopted from Hallinger's and Murphy's (1985) rating scale which had been developed for principals and other school leaders. It includes eight (8) scales. The first five (5) scales of it represent specific dimensions of administrative behaviors (i.e.: a) it defines mission, b) it manages curriculum, c) it supervises teachers, d) it monitors students' progress and e) it promotes instructional climate). On the basis of these scales, administrators are asked to respond how frequently they perform these issues that fall into the corresponding behavioral dimensions. A five Likert-type scale provides a range from "Almost Never" to "Almost Always". The remaining three (3) scales assess the principals' perceptions about certain aspects of the work environment including the characteristics of their staff, the school, and their community. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency for all scales (total number: 8) was ranged from .75 to .85.

3.2. *The School Administrator Assessment Survey Scales (SAAS)*

Regarding principals' personal characteristics, the job, and the work environment, the School Administrator Assessment Survey (SAAS) was employed. The SAAS is a multidimensional instrument designed to simultaneously assess the person, the job and the environment where somebody works (Krug, 1989).

In this study, four (4) scales were used to measure the personal incentives that administrators consider important and worthwhile in their work, i.e.: *accomplishment, recognition, affiliation, power*. Similar scales were used to assess the administrators' perceptions in their school district. Additionally, two self-concept factors, i.e.: *self -reliance and self-esteem*, were closely related to the personal incentive scales. Alpha

coefficient reliability was ranged from .60 (*power* dimension) to .85 (*recognition* dimension). SAAS scales also assessed administrators' personal characteristics, i.e.: gender, age and experience (administrative and teaching experience).

4. Data Analysis

Further to the scales measuring principals' responses on leadership behavior and the sample items presented in table 1, as well as the descriptive statistics (e.g.: means and standard deviations) provided in table 2, we have also used multivariate regression procedures to explore the relationship between principals' personal and contextual characteristics and their leadership behaviors.

Table 1: Summary of variables

I. Scales measuring principals' responses on leadership behavior (sample items)

To define school mission (Alpha = .85)
* Discuss school goals and mission with staff
* Communicate school goals to staff members
* Focus on school goals in curriculum development

To manage curriculum (Alpha = .80)
* Make detailed staff improvement plans
* Coordinate curriculum across grade levels
* Provide support for curriculum development

To supervise teachers' work (Alpha = .78)
* Spend time working on teaching skills with teachers
* Join the class
* Check whether staff is working efficiently

To promote instructional climate (Alpha = .84)
* Encourage staff training
* Join an informal discussion with staff members
* Staff members participate in the decision making
* Open to listen staff members' problems

To monitor students' progress (Alpha = .80)
* Review students' performance with teachers
* Discuss assessment results with faculty
* Make regular contact with teachers to evaluate students' progress

II. Scales measuring perceptions of staff, school and community (sample items)

Staff characteristics (Alpha = .86)
* Cohesive
* Motivated
* Capable
* Skillful

School characteristics (Alpha = .75)
* It has poor facilities
* It has high student turn over
* It is clean, orderly and safe

Community characteristics (Alpha = .75)
* Highly involved in school
* Multicultural aspects
* Encourages educational innovations

III. Scales measuring principals' perceptions of educational district culture (sample items)

Accomplishment (Alpha = .79)
* The school district stresses excellence
* The school district cares about every person
* The school district respects each individual

Recognition (Alpha = .84)
* This school district re-compensates hard working teachers
* The school district allows initiatives
* The school district regularly sends reports regarding the school's effectiveness

Power (Alpha = .64)
* In this school district competition among work groups is encouraged
* In this district it is attempted to discover those in powerful positions

IV. Scale measuring principals' personal characteristics (sample items)

Self-reliance (Alpha = .82)
* I enjoy completing many easy tasks rather than just a few difficult ones
* I get anxious when I don't know how well I am doing
* I would rather do something in which I feel confident than something challenging and difficult.

Self-esteem
* I can succeed in anything I wish to do
* I am relaxed when I am going to undertake a difficult job

V. Scales Measuring Principals' Personal Incentives (sample items)

Accomplishment (Alpha = .78)
* I always consider how I can improve things
* I enjoy trying to solve problems that others consider impossible
* I work hard to improve my skills

Recognition (Alpha = .85)
* I want recognition of what I do
* It is important for me to hear from other people that I did well
* I feel great when my work is recognised

Power (Alpha = .80)
* Winning is important for me
* Successful people are competitive
* I need to be at the top whatever I do

Affiliation (Alpha = .85)
* I enjoy helping others
* I do my best to be friendly
* I trust people

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
School / Community Characteristics		
staff characteristics	44.5	5.04
school characteristics	45.1	6.07
community characteristics	25.4	7.00
District Climate		
affiliation	31.7	5.70
accomplishment	30.4	5.00
power	11.4	2.90
recognition	28.7	5.97
Personal Characteristics		
gender	49% female	
age	2.4	.50
experience as principal	1.9	1.45
Self-Concept		
Self-reliance	24.6	3.77
Self-esteem	27.9	3.52
Personal Incentives		
affiliation	53.4	4.40
accomplishment	73.7	6.20
power	44.9	3.85
recognition	58.7	6.10
Principals' Leadership Behaviors (They...)		
define mission	20.5	5.10
manage curriculum	21.4	4.50
supervise teaching	23.9	5.00
monitor students' progress	24.4	5.50
promote an instructional climate	28.0	6.00

Data analysis was carried out through three steps: Firstly, the relationships between personal characteristics and the five leadership and management behaviors were examined by applying the same model for each outcome. In this context we took into account the personal characteristics of our sample, i.e.: gender, age, experience, self-concept and personal incentives.

Secondly, we examined the relationships between school, community and district context -on the one hand- and principals' leadership and management behaviors -on the other-, using again the same model for each outcome. At this phase of our analysis, we included staff, school and community characteristics as well as the principals' perceptions about the district's environment.

Thirdly, we used both sets of variables in order to construct a model for each outcome separately. We thus started with the full set of variables and then reduced the model so as to include only the significant predictors of principals' administrative behaviors.

The three-step analysis facilitated us to find out those characteristics that provide a "best-fit" model for each type of leadership and management behavior.

5. Results

At the first step of our analysis we considered the effects of principals' gender, age, experience, self-concept, and personal incentives on the five administrative behaviors (table 3).

Table 3: The relationship between principals' leadership behaviors and personal characteristics

	He/She defines missions	He/She manages curriculum	He/She supervises teaching	He/She monitors students' progress	He/She promotes instructional climate
Sex	.02	.04	.04	.01	.06
Age	-.03	.02	.06	.08	.22x
Experience as principal	.03	.01	.03	.11	-.16
Self-reliance	-.04	.08	-.02	-.15	-.00
Self-esteem	.06	-.5	.19x	.08	.07
Affiliation	.24xx	-.21x	.25xx	.27xx	.25xx
Accomplishment	.20x	.10	.15	.13	.15
Power	-.06	-.08	-.04	-.03	-.13
Recognition	-.05	-.02	-.07	-.05	-.02
R^2	.15x	0.8	.18xx	.19xx	.18xx
Adj. R^2	.22x	.12x	.24xx	.26xx	.25xx

Note: All regression coefficients are given as standardized beta-weights. Adjusted R^2 represents the portion of variance available to be explained given the reliability of the outcome variable. It is generated by dividing the unadjusted R^2 by the square of Alpha.

x = p < .05
xx = p < .01
xxx = p < .001

Table 3 indicates that principals' personal characteristics account for an average of 14% of the variance in administrative behaviors. Demographic differences between principals (e.g.: age, gender and experience) were significantly related to only one of these behaviors, i.e: *promoting instructional climate*. Age was positively related to the aforementioned issues (beta=.22 p<.05), whereas experience was negatively related (beta=-.16, p= n.s) to principals' responses about their engagement in activities that could promote the instructional environment in the school. In other words, while older principals appeared to spend more time aiming to promote the instructional context, those who were acting as principals for longer tended to spend less time in this activity. Personal self-esteem, was positively related to supervising teaching (beta=.19, p<.05). Principals with higher self-esteem were found to spend more time in supervisory activities. However, self-esteem was not related to any other types of administrative behaviors.

In the personal incentive scales, only those measuring affiliation incentives were positively related to all five administrative behaviors (beta weight average= .24, p<.01). Principals who perceived *affiliation* as a personal incentive were more likely to be engaged in both leadership and management activities. *Accomplishment* was significantly related only to *defining school mission* (beta=.20, p<.05). *Power* and *recognition* issues were unrelated to the administrative behaviors.

As regards contextual characteristics, we used multivariate regression analysis in an attempt to investigate the relationship between staff, school, community and district characteristics, on the one hand, and each of the five administrative behaviors on the other. The results of this analysis are given in table 4.

Table 4: Regression coefficients for leadership behavior and contextual characteristics

Contextual Characteristics	He/She defines missions	He/She manages curriculum	He/She supervises teaching	He/She monitors students' progress	He/She promotes instructional climate
Staff characteristics	.23	.22	.25xx	.33xxx	.24x
School characteristics	-.07	.01	.03	.03	-.02
Community characteristics	-.06	.02	.03	.02	.15
District culture					
Affiliation	-.08	-.26	-.12	-.09	-.11
Accomplishment	-.05	-.34x	.22	.16	.15
Power	.16	.18	.20x	.32xxx	.14
Recognition	.17	.02	.-13	-.10	-.14
R2	.12xx	.15xxx	.14xx	.24xxx	.13xx
Adj. R2	.19xx	.21xxx	.19xx	.36xxx	.18xx

Note: All regression coefficients are given as standardized beta-weights. Adjusted R^2 represents the portion of variance available to be explained given the reliability of the outcome variable. It is generated by dividing the unadjusted R^2 by the square of Alpha.

x = $p < .05$
xx = $p < .01$
xxx = $p < .001$

In table 4, it is indicated that school district and community characteristics account for 15% in the variance of the administrative behaviors. Principals' ratings of their staff are related to all five administrative behaviors (average beta=.25), whereas its strongest relationship with the activities is found to be referred to the *monitoring students' progress.* After adjusting to staff characteristics, however, neither school nor community characteristics were appeared to be significantly related to principals' administrative behaviors.

In the district context, the emphasis on *power* was positively related to all three management behaviors (average beta weight =.23). There was also a marginally significant relationship between a district orientation towards *power* and the activities concerned with the *school mission* (beta= .16, p<.08); however, there was no significant relationship with the activity "*promoting instructional climate*".

The issue *"accomplishment"* was found to be positively related to *managing curriculum* (beta=.24, p<.05) and *supervising teaching* (beta=.22, p<.05). Interestingly, after taking into account the other district, school and staff characteristics, a district climate emphasizing on *affiliation* was somewhat negatively related to *managing curriculum* (beta= -26, p<.05).

At the third step of analysis, both personal and contextual predictors of administrative behaviors were included in a regression analysis. No significant predictors were revealed until those variables with a significant relationship to the behavior under consideration were left. The reduced model accounts for an average of 20% of the variance in administrative behaviors. The strongest model is for *monitoring students' progress* (29% of the variance), and the weakest is concerned with the *managing curriculum* (15% of the variance). Clearly, this analysis did not identify all the factors which predict these behaviors. However, the relationships which were found in this survey provided explanation for an important aspect of the overall principals' administrative behavior.

Furthermore, in relation to the personal characteristics, *affiliation* was found to be positively related to each behavior. *Accomplishment* was positively related to principals' engagement in activities that define the *school mission* (beta=.16; p<.05) The principals' administrative experience was positively related to *monitoring students' progress* (beta=.12; p= n.s), although it was negatively related to *promoting an instructional climate* (beta= -.19; p<.05). Self–esteem was only related to *supervising teaching* (beta=.19; p<.05)). Age was positively related to *promoting an instructional climate* (beta=.14; p=n.s), whereas the principals' teaching experience was appeared to have a negative relationship with this behavior (beta= -.19; p<.05).

In relation to the contextual measures, staff characteristics were significantly related to each outcome with the exception of *promoting an instructional climate*. District environment was only related to management behaviors. At the district level, an emphasis on *power* was positively related to all three management behaviors: beta= .17; p<.05 for *managing curriculum*, beta =.27; p<.001 for *monitoring students* and for *supervising teaching*. In addition, a district emphasis on *accomplishment* was positively related to *managing curriculum* (beta=.23; p<.01), whereas an emphasis put on *affiliation* was again negatively related to *managing curriculum* (beta= -.18; p<.05).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study we tried to explore the antecedents of the school principals' behaviors in the Israeli case. More specifically, we investigated the personal and contextual factors influencing school principals' managerial behavior versus influencing their leadership behavior. Overall our results do suggest that both personal and contextual factors contribute to school principals' actions and attitudes (see also: Glatter, 1997). Nevertheless, although both personal and contextual difference variables contribute to explain principals' leadership and managerial behaviors, they appear to contribute in different ways. In our research, based on a few previous studies conducted in that direction, we suggested that management behaviors might be influenced more by contextual factors, whereas leadership behaviors might accept greater impact from the personal characteristics.

Two significant predictors were revealed in our study, which were related to personal characteristics: 1) managing the curriculum, which is a contextual variable related to a management behavior aspect, 2) promoting an instructional climate, which is concerned with a leadership behavior issue. Other management behaviors (e.g.: defining mission) and leadership behaviors (e.g.: supervising teaching) were found to be influenced by personal and contextual factors.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that personal characteristics such as gender (contrary to Bossert et al., 1982), age and self-esteem were appeared to be unrelated to both management and leadership behaviors. A positive relationship was found between age and promoting instructional climate, on the one hand, and self-esteem and supervising teachers' work, on the other. In another collaborative study on school principals carried out in Singapore, leadership was found to be affected by a personal commitment of the principals to help others, work with others and trust others (Lin, 1994).

Moreover, principals' experience (i.e.: administrative and teaching) was revealed to be a positive predictor for their management function (e.g.: *monitoring students' progress*), but a negative one for their leadership (e.g.: *promoting an instructional climate*). The age variable also appeared to be positively related to promoting an instructional climate. Given the leadership - management distinction, we could suggest that experience might strengthen management rather than leadership attitudes. So, as time lapses, why are the principals less likely to play their leadership role? To investigate this issue further research studies are expected to be conducted on this topic.

In relation to contextual variables, they were found to influence only management behaviors. While the educational district administrators focus on the school principals' efficiency, principals -from their own part- respond by exercising stronger control over teachers, closer supervision on the school matters, and attaining

a more effective management. Besides, some leadership functions (e.g.: promoting the instructional context) were found to be less important for the district officials.

Furthermore, community characteristics (e.g.: parents) were positively related to both management and leadership behaviors. This attitude could be explained by the emergence of the school based management practices in the Israeli educational system, which –in turn- reflect the increasing roles that the members of the community play in the everyday school management (see: Friedman, Brama & Torn, 1998).

Finally, school staff characteristics were also found to be associated with the four out of five leadership and management behavior characteristics of the principals provided in this research study. In particular, those principals who regarded teachers as hard workers and committed to their profession showed both management and leadership behaviors.

Summing up, the results of this study have indicated that the school principals' behaviors are affected by personal and contextual factors. It is interesting to note that the varying principals' activities are not equally related to the two contextual factors: i.e.: district and staff. The district can affect principals' management activities, whereas the staff can affect both principals' management and leadership behaviors. From a practical point of view, principals should be experienced in what ways they have to adapt their behaviors to school staff, on the one hand, and to district officials on the other.

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