Multiple Leadership Approaches of Private Higher Education Administrators

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Abstract: Different theories on leadership have been introduced in studies on organizational behavior. These theories provide extensive information regarding pertinent issues of leadership such as leadership styles, effective leadership, and leadership practices. In addition, there are studies that revealed that leadership can be approached from multiple perspectives. Bolman and Deal's (1997) framework describes leadership based on structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The structural frame focuses on organizing and structuring the individuals in an organization in order to attain its objectives. The human resource frame is described as a people-centered approach to leadership where the needs of the individuals in an organization to function and develop themselves are addressed. The political frame describes the approach to handling power and potential conflict within a group or organization in order to ensure growth. The symbolic frame addresses the necessity to promote a culture that looks into enhancing the purpose and meaning of work through events such as celebrations of milestones and other forms of success. Effective leadership utilizes all four frames. However, there is limited research on multiple leadership approaches among Asian organizations. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the leadership preferences of administrators in private higher education. The Leadership Orientation Surveys for self by Bolman and Deal was administered to administrators who are in leadership positions by nature of their job descriptions. Preliminary results obtained from the self survey show that the administrators perceive themselves as focusing on people in their departments because the mean for the human resource frame was the highest at 3.98 closely followed by the structural frame with a mean of 3.93 while the political, and symbolic frames had means of 3.30 and 3.39 respectively.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Higher Education, Administrators

Introduction

Leadership is an area of research that has been widely studied. The focus of this subject is the study of individuals who are considered to be leaders, their ways of managing the people who work for them, and their abilities to successfully lead organizations. Subjects or courses such as Organizational Behavior and Management include leadership in its curriculum. Numerous books have been written about the different facets of leadership, its attributes, and about individuals who are considered to be success leaders. The interest in this area of study has increasingly become a matter of concern as the world witnessed the repercussion of bad decisions made by leaders. Many countries have suffered economically because of leaders who failed to exercise good leadership to develop their countries.

Effective leadership will always be an area of interest for researchers as the world becomes highly globalize because it is often seen as the primary contributing factor that affects the ability of a certain country to actively participate in transnational trade and services. The ability to understand the nature of globalization and its effects is fundamental for the success of future global leaders (Goldsmith, Greenberg, Robertson, & Chan, 2003). Ashby and Miles (2002) said:

Successful leadership in our interdependent world depends on the ability

to strategically find, motivate, and deploy a diverse group of qualified
people geographically – whether through specialized skill sets for specific
functions, through a process of increasing responsibility for wide-ranging
business operations, or both simultaneously – and lead through them. (p. 4)

One area of transnational development that is continuously growing is the massification and privatization of higher education in Asia. Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and China have set its goal on being a regional hub of excellence for private higher education. All these countries have off-shore programs with partner universities in Australia and the United Kingdom. In addition, branch campuses from these two countries have been set up in various Asian countries. Who are the leaders of these institutions? How do they keep their staff motivated to perform their best? Hence, it is imperative to consider leadership as a necessary component in the development of higher education to attempt to understand the degree of success educational institutions have achieved in the 21st century.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the different leadership approaches administrators in an Asian private higher education emphasize in the way they manage their work, the people they supervise, and the way they perceive themselves as leaders. The primary focus was to explore the multiple ways leaders view leadership and the practices currently in place within their own workplace. The guiding question for this study was "How is leadership perceived by private higher education administrations?" Specifically, this study aims to answer these questions:

1. Which frame was the most utilized by the administrators and what does it imply?
2. Which frame was the least used approach employed by the administrators and what does it imply?
3. What are the administrators' self-perceptions regarding their leadership approaches?
4. How many frames do the administrators consistently use?

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bolman and Deal's (1997) multi frame or multi-approach leadership paradigm that advocates different ways of understanding leadership, which they "termed" as frames. This model describes leadership approaches in terms of the Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic frames. Effective leadership is assumed to take place when particular frames are used according to the situation within the organization. The ability of the leaders to analyze the situation and apply the correct frame or frames is reflective of a multiple approach or perspective to leadership.

The first of the four frames, structural, is described as an outline that is familiar to many organizations. This includes the way the organization is set up and managed based on the policies outlined and the procedures to be followed. Conversely, the human resource frame focuses solely on the needs of the individuals in the organization as they are considered to be the asset of the organization (Turley, 2004). The political frame describes the way power is utilized to attain the goals of the organization because of scarce resources. Lastly, the symbolic frame describes the way organizational events and activities are organized to describe the different ways experiences are interpreted.

The four frames underpin the core of the multiple perspectives identified in this conceptual framework. The ability to function successfully within an organization is dependent on the timeliness of using these frames. Leaders who have a good working knowledge of these frames and can use them when needed are expected to be successful in leading and managing their respective organizations.

Although this study could provide invaluable information for the study of educational leadership, it is at this point a pilot study with only a sample size of 36 participants from one single institution. Consequently, the findings of this study can only be informative in nature. In addition, the survey instrument utilized is a self-administered survey. This self-reporting exercise may be biased as the perspectives of participants regarding their own leadership approaches were the only source of information.

Related Literature and Research

Leadership has been defined and theorized in multiple ways. The types and styles of leadership are widely documented. The effects of significant individuals in organizations are frequently cited as leadership case studies. Daft (2005) said, "Leadership involves influence, it occurs among people, those people intentionally desire significant changes, and the changes reflect purposes shared by leaders and followers" (p.5). The ability of people in positions of authority to get others to willingly follow any path of development or change because of who they are as compared to their referent power can be considered as leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). The focus on getting people to voluntarily change because of the ability of others seems to be the primary attribute of leadership.

Different leadership theories have been identified and documented. Trait, behavioral, and contingency theories are often cited as the basic theories of leadership. Some of these theories have been researched since the 1930s and various theories have evolved through continuous research in the area of leadership studies.

Trait Theories

Trait theories focus on the personal abilities and characteristics of leaders such as personality, social, physical, and intellectual attributes have been researched since the 1930s (Robbins, 2005). Leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Nelson Mandela are often described as leaders with personal attributes such as courage and charisma that made them leaders of the world.

Behavioral Theories

The specific behaviors of leaders became an area of interest for researchers in the 1950s. This is the outcome of the inability of researchers to specifically categorize the attributes of effective leadership based on personal traits. The appropriate behaviors are identified to determine the styles of leaders and the way they manage the people within an organization. Autocratic versus democratic leadership styles were categorized based on the approaches leaders utilize their authority or power. The former depicts a leader who holds tightly to his or her reigns of power. Conversely, the latter leader prefers to share the power through delegation and participative decision making.

Contingency Theories

Contingency theories evolved because effective leadership could not be attributed to the aforementioned theories. Leaders who practice this particular style determine their approach according to the current and emerging situation of the organization and the people they have to manage. The approach to completing a task or project is usually dependent on the leader, situation and the followers (Daft, 2005). Different approaches of leadership may be required to tackle different tasks. There isn't a particular way of leadership for all situations.

Leadership studies continue to focus on the need for key individuals to manage their staff differently as individual and organizational needs may vary depending on the situation or context. Additionally, management styles may have to depend on the situation of the organization and its workers' abilities. This ability to lead and manage differently in relation to the condition of an organization and its workers has become increasingly important within a global context that values diversity.

Thus, Bolman and Deal (1997) advocated for the usage of multiple frames where leadership effectiveness is dependent on the ability to utilize the correct frame when it is needed. The details of the framework are described.

The Structural Frame

The distinctive features of this frame include the necessary components that frame the structure of an organization in order for it to succeed. Clear lines of authority, the roles each employer has to assume, the policies that guide the management, and goals the organization hopes to achieve are the primary attributes of this frame. Additionally, it includes the ability of the organization to handle the external situations.

The Human Resource Frame

Conversely, this frame focuses on the people of an organization. The commonly described attributes include the ability to support and motivate the workers to perform their best in their respective jobs. This perspective relies heavily on the commitment and loyalty of the workers to attain the goals of the organization.

The Political Frame

Limited resources may create conflict among the workers within a working environment. A leader who is cognizant of this factor realizes that groups of people will protect their own interest. This may be the outcome of individual and group differences. The leader utilizes his or her power judiciously to ensure that the organization will not suffer any major setbacks.

The Symbolic Frame

Organizations have established ways of celebrating significant developments such as company dinners and awards of excellence that serve as ceremonies and rituals expected by its workers. Leaders who utilize this frame understand the value of rewarding employees for their commitment to their jobs as well as the importance of outstanding and good performance.

Related Research

Different studies have been conducted using this framework to examine leadership practices in educational administration. The following are two related research which were conducted using the leadership survey created based on the four-frame conceptual framework.

Johns (2002) studied the leadership approaches of 126 elementary and secondary public school principals. The sample consisted of 85 elementary principals, 21 middle school principals, 2 junior high school principals, 2 identified themselves as k-12 principals and 16 were high school principals. There were 59 male and 67 female participants. The primary purpose of the study was to determine if the principals utilized multiple leadership approaches as they led their respective schools. Additionally, the study sought to determine the areas of competency and weakness in their leadership approaches. The human resource frame was the most frequently used frame as it had the highest mean with a total score of 4.29 out of a highest score of 5.0. The second frequently used frame was the structural frame with a mean of 3.91. The symbolic frame emerged as the third highest frame utilized with a mean of 3.82. The political frame is the least used with a mean of 3.74.

The elementary school principals showed a similar trend in the usage of the four different frames when compared to the remaining participants. Similarly, the middle school principals had similar means for all four frames as the other participants. The human resource and structural frames were more frequently used by the high principals. However, this group listed a higher mean for its political frame as it was ranked third as compared to the elementary, junior high, and middle school principals.

The ability to use multiple frames for effective leadership is important. Approximately 23 of the participants were reported as not using the frames in a consistent and collaborative way. The participants who used a single frame approach consisted of 30 of the sample group. The two framed approached was used by 17 of the participants while the remainder 51 were reported to be using three or four frames.

Turley's (2004) study sought to examine the extent to which the radiation therapy program directors utilized the different four frames and their respective levels of usage. A survey, the Leadership Orientations for self, was mailed to 69 radiation therapy program directors and 59 returned the completed surveys. More than 80% of the participants have more than 5 years experience as a radio therapist. The participants were chosen from different institutions such as hospitals, community colleges, and 4-year institutions with radiation therapy programs that have been accredited.

The results indicated that 73% of the directors used the human resource frame more consistently than the other frames. The structural frame was the second most commonly used frame with 70% of the participants consistently utilizing it. The symbolic frame was ranked third with 41% saying that they used it consistently while the political frame was the least used with 32% rate of consistent usage.

More of the participants were categorized as multi-frame users with 44% of them using three or four frames, 22% using two frames, 18.6% using one frame, and 15.3% not using any frame consistently. The author concluded that the directors could benefit from leadership programs

that enable them to utilize a multi-frame approach to the way they handle events and situations within the organization.

The study of leadership has evolved over the decades. The increasing transnational mergers of trade among countries, which include higher education will benefit from past, current, and future studies on leadership studies.

Method

The Leadership Orientation survey (self) was used with permission by the author for this study (see Appendix A for details). This instrument consists of four sections. The first section includes 32 items that are scored by the participants on a Likert Scale of 1 to 5. The scoring is done based on perceived behaviors displayed that fall into the categories of "never" (1), "occasionally" (2), "sometimes" (3), "often" (4), and "always" (5). Each frame was represented by 8 of the 32 items respectively. The second section required responses on a scale of 1 to 4. There were six items that required mandatory answers of forced choices where the same scale cannot be repeated. Each of the four items in this section corresponds to one frame. For example, all "a" items represent the structural frame. The third is a self reporting section with two items that requires the participants to rate themselves as effective leaders and managers. The final section requires the participants to provide information regarding the number of years spent in their current job and their managerial experience.

The survey was given to 36 participants from a single private higher institution in Malaysia. The sample was chosen based on the convenience of contacting them. There were 18 male and 18 female participants. The participants were chosen based on their executive positions in the organization and their assumed job responsibility where they supervise others. An email with the instrument attached was sent to the participants. Also, the permission to utilize the survey instrument was enclosed. The data was analyzed using the SPSS software. The consistency of the usage of frames was defined as "often" or "always" in the Likert scale of scores. The percentage and the mean of the usage of each of the four frames were calculated to determine the frame least and most utilized.

Results

Thirty-six participants returned the completed surveys. These participants are broadly divided into two major groups, which are academic and non-academic personnel. The years of experience vary from newly recruits to those with more than 27 years of working experience. The demographic profiles of the participants are listed in Table 1. The results will be discussed based on the research questions. The details of the answers to questions one and 2 are described in Table 2 while Table 3 documents the answers to question 3.

Research Question 1: Which frame was the most utilized by the administrators and what does it imply?

The results showed that the human resource frame was used most frequently as indicated by 80% of the participants. The mean was 3.98 (SD = .7273). There were eight items in the leadership survey that obtained means higher than 4.0. Four of these items are in the human resource frame and the other four in the structural frame. The items in the human resource frame with high means included "Give personal recognition for work," "Show high levels of support

and concern for others," "Build trust through open and collaborative relationships," and "Am consistently helpful and responsive to others" with scores 4.17, 4.08, 4.05, and 4.02 respectively.

The high means show the administrators pay close attention to the individuals in the organization, especially in providing reward for good work. In addition, providing support, concern for others, developing trust, and being consistently helpful appeared to be the priorities of the administrators.

Research Question 2: Which frame was the least employed by the administrators and what does it imply?

The political frame was the least used with a 66% usage and a mean of 3.30 (SD = .7387). The item with the lowest mean was "I am a skillful and shrewd negotiator" that obtained a score of 2.80. Another low item in this frame is "I am very effective in getting support from people with influence and power" with a mean of 3.11. These low means indicate that the political frame is sometimes or seldom used. In addition, the management of conflict and the handling of perceived power may be issues the administrators are not comfortable with.

Research Question 3: What are the administrator's self-perceptions regarding their leadership approaches?

The results from Section Two of the survey revealed the highest mean in the structural frame with the highest mean of 3.89 in the "Analytic skills" component. The means for this frame ranged from 2.69 to 3.89. The second highest frame is the human resource frame with a highest mean of 3.17. The means for this frame ranged from 2.61 to 3.17. The third most used frame is symbolic with a low mean of 1.97 to 2.38. The least used frame is political where the lowest means are listed, which ranged from 1.13 to 2.16. The participants' tendency towards a high usage of the structural frame imply that there is a consensus regarding the importance of making good decisions with strong analytical skills and focus on details of their responsibilities. The least used frame, political, again implies that the issue of conflict and power within the organization is an area that most would avoid.

Research Question 4: How many frames do the administrators consistently use?

The frames that were consistently used by the administrators vary from zero to all four frames. There were 10 who indicated no consistent usage of any frame (27.78%). The utility of one frame is the highest with 12 of the administrators who favored either the structural or human resource frame. There were 7 administrators who reported using three frames as compared to 5 using two frames. Only 2 of the administrators have consistently utilized four frames.

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics of administrators*

Demographic profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	18	50.0
Female	18	50.0

Years in Current Position

Less than 1 year	6	16.7
1-5 years	14	38.9
6-10 years	8	22.2
10-15 years	8	22.2

Years in Administration

Less than 1 year	0	
1-5 years	12	33.3
6-10 years	15	41.7
11-15 years	7	19.4
16-20 years	1	2.8
21 years or more	1	2.8

Discussion, Implications, Recommendations

The highly utilized human resource frame with a marginal difference from the structural frame in utility is consistent with the study conducted by Turley (2004). The preference of the human resource frame is a surprise considering the participants are all Asians. However, the context of work within an educational institution that is student-centered with a mission of educating youths to be future leaders may have shaped the way these administrators approach their thoughts about their mandated job requirements. The

Table 2: *Results based on Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges for Section 1*

Frame/Item No.	Mean	SD
Structural Frame Total Mean	3.93	
1. Think clearly and logically	4.19	.5248
5. Emphasize careful planning and timeliness	3.94	.9241
9. Logical analysis and careful thinking	4.11	.5745
13. Implement clear logical policies and procedures	3.86	.6393
17. Approach problems with facts and logic	3.69	.9202
21. Set specific measurable goals and hold people accountable	3.58	.8742
25. Extraordinary attention to detail	4.06	.8926
29. Clear structure and chain of command	4.00	.7171
Human Resource Frame Total Mean	3.98	
2. Show support and concern for others	4.08	.7670
6. Build trust through open and collaborative relationships	4.05	.6299
10. Show sensitivity and concern for others' needs and feelings	3.92	.7319
14. Foster participation and involvement in decisions	3.86	.7617
18. Helpful and responsive to others	4.03	.8101
22. Listen and receptive to others' ideas and input	3.78	.7215
26. Give recognition for work well done	4.17	.6969
30. Highly participative manager	3.97	.6963
Political Frame Total Mean	3.30	

3. Mobilize people and resources	3.55	.7346
7. Skillful and shrewd negotiator	2.80	.7099
11.Usually persuasive and influential	3.47	.7362
15. Deal adroitly with organizational conflict	3.27	.7014
19. Effective in getting support from people with influence/power	3.11	.7474
23. Politically sensitive and skillful	3.27	.8489
27. Develop alliances to build a strong base of support	3.38	.8710
31. Succeed in the face of conflict and opposition	3.52	.5599
Symbolic Frame Total Mean	3.39	
4. Inspire others to do their best	3.67	.8281
8. Highly charismatic	2.89	.9495
12. Able to be an inspiration to others	3.25	.7670
16. Highly imaginative and creative	3.30	.8218
20. Communicate a strong/challenging sense of vision	3.36	.8333
24. Generate exciting new opportunities	3.81	.6684
28. Generate loyalty and enthusiasm	3.81	.6684
32. Serve as a model of organizational aspirations and values	3.50	.9710

Table 3: *Results based on Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges for Section 2*

Frame/Item No.	Mean	SD
1. My strongest skills are:		
a) Analytic skills	3.38	.7281
b) Interpersonal skills	3.08	.7319
c) Political skills	1.13	.4244
d) Ability to excite and motivate	2.38	.9032
2. The best way to describe me is:		
a) Technical expert	2.77	1.173
b) Good listener	3.16	.8783
c) Skilled negotiator	1.91	.9063
d) Inspirational leader	2.13	1.073
3. What has helped me the most to be successful is my ability to:		
a) Make good decisions	3.36	.7983
b) Coach and develop people	2.61	.9644
c) Build strong alliances and a power base	1.75	1.130
d) Energize and inspire others	2.27	.9444
4. What people are most likely to notice about me is my way:		
a) Attention to detail	2.69	1.064
b) Concern for people	3.16	.9710
c) Ability to succeed in the face of conflict and opposition	2.16	.9102
d) Charisma	1.97	1.158

5. My most important leadership trait is:
    a) Clear, logical thinking   3.38   .7281
    b) Caring and support for others   3.05   .9241
    c) Toughness and aggressiveness   1.41   .7319
    d) Imagination and creativity   2.13   .8669

6. I am best described as:
    a) An analyst   3.38   .7663
    b) A humanist   3.16   .6969
    c) A politician   1.19   .4013
    d) A visionary   2.25   .9063

mean for the structural frame was the second highest with a slight difference from the human resource frame. This shows that management is an important part of the administrators' job functions. Close attention to procedures, details of decision making situations, follow up on projects, and reporting to supervisors based on clear reporting lines that are expected for one to perform well on the job may have contributed to this high mean.

Table 4: *Consistency of frames used*

Frames Used	Frequency	Percentage
0	10	27.78
1	12	33.33
2	5	13.89
3	7	19.44
4	2	5.56

The least used frame, political, by 66% of the administrators indicate that many may not be comfortable with "power" or conflict issues within the organization that is usually linked with misuse and abuse of authority in the arena of micro-politics. The symbolic frame was utilized by 68% of the participants. This may indicate attempts by the administrators to ensure that the development of colleagues supervised by the former is a focused and conscientious effort.

The frames-approach of leadership suggests that effective leadership is present when the four frames are used. The low number of two of the administrators using all four frames consistently indicate that effective leadership is not necessarily present as compared to effective management as many one-frame users falling in the structural frame category. The focus on procedures, attention to details, and strong analytical skills reflect the administrators' perceptions regarding the importance of a well managed department as a strong structure within the organization. The administrators may benefit from designed programs to provide the knowledge and skills related to the existence and utilization of all the frames or a related approach perspective to leadership.

Conclusion

The study of leadership has increasingly become more important through the decades as the world becomes more globalized. Private higher education in Malaysia has open doors to different locally designed, franchise, and moderated programs. Consequently, the focus on the ability to think differently with multiple perspectives may become a necessary tool to become successful and effective leaders for administrators in educational institutions.

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