

Roles of Efficient Leadership Behavior of Principals/Leaders of School Units

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ABSTRACT

The improvement of school unit efficiency is pursued today by those who are involved in the design of educational policy at national and transnational level. Pressure towards this direction is even more imperative today because of technological developments, competitiveness, and worldwide challenges (Middlewood *et al.*, 2018). Bush *et al.* (2019) argue that learning, immediately after teaching quality, is associated at a secondary but still important level with school leadership and sociocultural context in which it is shaped. Within the context of the above, this study aims to showcase the view of primary education teachers of South Aegean about the leadership behaviors of the leaders of the school units at which they are employed. The particularity of this study lies in the approach of the subject since the above-mentioned objective is studied at two levels: a) At “implementation” level and b) At “desirable” level. The main research finding is the existence of a statistically significant differentiation of leadership behavior between the implementation and the desirable level.

Keywords: leadership, leadership roles, school leadership.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been approached in various ways over time. At the beginning, the relevant studies focused on the characteristics differentiating leaders from non-leaders. Then, research explored the behaviors adopted by leaders and more specifically on their dual nature (focus on their tasks and focus on the employees). Later, research shifted to situational factors, such as the Fiedler contingency model, Hersey’s and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) and leader-participatory model. In the recent past, studies on leadership focused on leadership forms and more specifically on transactional leaders, transformational leaders and charismatic leaders (Gordon & Alston, 2010; Robbins *et al.*, 2017). Focus was placed also on the characteristics of imaginative leadership (Raptis *et al.*, 2021) as well as on communication roles of the principals of school units (Mousena & Raptis, 2021).

In this study, in order to better understand the leadership phenomenon, leadership was approached systemically. The systemic approach is associated, according to Bourandas (2005, pp. 214-215), with the content and nature of leadership behavior. The character of leadership behavior (Bourandas, 2005) refers to what the leader does, namely the leader’s role, functions and actions. Leadership behaviors, as they are formulated by Kouzes and Posner (in Bourandas, 2015, p. 415) refer to: a) Welcoming innovation, b) Inspiring a common vision, c) Activating collaborators, d) Shaping a plan and e) Providing psychological support and encouragement.

Leadership roles lie at the heart of processes in the systemic approach of leadership. They aim to shape the

appropriate conditions to achieve organizational goals and employees’ satisfaction. According to Raptis and Grigoriadis (2017), school leaders should have a series of abilities, qualifications, and skills, such as mental strength, impartiality, justice, ability to cultivate communication and cooperation relationships with the other school community members, and in particular with the teaching staff, and ability to build relationships based on trust. In addition, guidance, linking with external environment, conflict management and problem solving are, according to Robbins *et al.* (2017, p. 409), among the main roles of efficient leadership.

Leadership roles can be further detailed into important activities and actions on the side of school principals/leaders. These actions, whose main aim is the dual interest of principals/leaders, in the results of the school organization as well as in the people of the organization, include: a) Mobilization-encouragement and motivation of their collaborators; b) Development of cooperation teams; c) Support to direct and/or indirect collaborators; d) Design and implementation of projects and programs; e) Coordination of actions; f) Personal development; g) Culture development; h) Implementation of innovation and actions for the constant improvement of the school unit and i) Development of a network of partners and supporters (Fullan, 2017; Kalantzis & Cope, 2013; Middlewood *et al.*, 2018; Papalexandri & Bourandas, 2016; Raptis & Grigoriadis, 2017).

Focusing on school leadership, namely leadership taking place in the school units, and not on the administrative structure of education, according to Harris (2020), nowadays an important change is observed: the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic made the school leadership style more cooperative and participatory. Raptis and Psaras (2015, p. 211) refer

emphatically to the cooperative nature of school leadership; in their study on Teachers' Board, the collective administrative body of the school unit, stress emphatically that its functioning should not have the characteristics of a "sum of people", but those of a team. To achieve this, the role of school leaders is a vital one.

The above context justifies administration/leadership researchers' great interest in the content of leadership behavior, which is also the subject of this study.

II. METHOD

This study investigates the views of primary education teachers in the region of Southern Aegean about the content of leadership behavior of school unit principals. More specifically, it studies the ideas of teachers about leadership roles (what a school unit principal should do). Many theoreticians (Bush, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2016; Bourandas, 2015; Raptis & Grigoriadis, 2017) have focused on the "codification" of leadership behavior since the beginning of the 21st century. To respond to an increasingly complex social, and therefore, educational environment, principals play daily a "wide range" of roles. These roles relate to staff management, management of buildings and premises, research methods, human behaviors, school communication, school development, pedagogical guidance, relationships in school community, educational administration, educational psychology, finance, initiation and implementation of change, educational assessment, and activation and encouragement of collaborators (Glanz, 2006).

The above reasoning led to the design, implementation and analysis of this empirical study aiming at the investigation, description and interpretation of the view of primary education teachers in the region of Southern Aegean about the content of leadership/management behavior at two levels: a) "Implementation level" (what currently applies-real level regarding the management behavior) and b) "Desirable level" (what they deem as ideal). In addition to the main objective, an important additional objective of the study, which also shapes the main research question, is the following:

- 1) Do teachers' views about the leadership behavior content differ at the two levels, meaning implementation and desirable (ideal) level?

The data collection tool used for this study was the online questionnaire, following a carefully designed pilot, both in printed and digital form (Gray, 2018, p. 322). The respondents of the survey received an invitation, which led them to fill in the questionnaire. More specifically, the research tool was created through Google Forms and was distributed as an internet link through the school unit principals, who sent it by email to the school unit teachers of the sample (Bryman, 2017, pp. 267-269). The questions of the survey tool were shaped following relevant literature review, especially following the review of Bourandas's studies (2005, pp. 216-228). Special care was taken to align the questions with the survey objective setting. Research data collected using the internet were first inserted in an Excel file and then in SPSS software (v.24) to perform descriptive and inductive statistical analysis (Roussos & Tsaousis, 2020, p. 43).

The reference population of this study were the primary education teachers in the region of Southern Aegean. Through stratified random sampling, 40 primary education school units were selected (selection of 25 school units of the Prefecture of Dodecanese and 15 school units of the Prefecture of Cyclades); the electronic invitation was then distributed to the personal emails of 725 teachers through the principals of the respective school units. The teachers who responded to the above research process are 482 and provide the sample of the survey.

The research tool, individual questionnaire, consists of one introduction and two parts. In the introduction, the main objective of the study is clearly formulated, and privacy protection is stressed. The first part of the questionnaire contains questions for demographic data collection, and more specifically: gender, prior professional experience, work relationship of teachers, age, gender of the principal and qualifications of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire, which is the main part, contains the 28 statements of the questionnaire, which related to the content of the efficient leadership behavior, namely roles of principals (what the leader/principal does) at two levels: "implementation" level and "desirable" level. For both levels, a five-point scale is used; for the desirable level, it is as follows:

- 1) Very much=5.
- 2) A lot=4.
- 3) Moderately=3.
- 4) A little=2.
- 5) Not at all=1.

Whereas for the implementation level, the scale is as follows:

- 1) Always=5.
- 2) Often=4.
- 3) Sometimes=3.
- 4) Rarely=2.
- 5) Never=1.

A. Description of the Sample

The survey sample consists of 482 primary education teachers in the region of Southern Aegean. The below tables present the composition of the sample, according to the demographic questions of the questionnaire.

Table I shows that 482 individuals participated in the survey, of whom 139 are men (28.8%) and 343 are women (71.2%). It is observed that female teachers outnumber male teachers.

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE TEACHERS' ANSWERS BASED ON GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Men	139	28.8	28.4
Women	343	71.2	100.0
Total	482	100.0	

Table II shows that 111 teachers (23%) have up to 5 years of work experience, 56 teachers (11.6%) have from 6 to 10 years of work experience, 97 teachers (20.1%) have from 11 to 15 years of work experience, 98 teachers (20.3%) have from 16 to 20 years of work experience and 120 teachers (24.9%) have more than 20 years of work experience. It is concluded that half of the teachers (47.9%) are distributed

between the following two categories: “up to 5 years” and “more than 20 years”.

TABLE II: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE TEACHERS' ANSWERS BASED ON PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE

Work Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
From 1 to 5 years	111	23.0	23.0
From 6 to 10 years	56	11.6	34.6
From 11 to 15 years	97	20.1	54.8
From 16 to 20 years	98	20.3	75.1
21 years or mor	120	24.9	100.0
Total	482	100.0	

Data of Table III shows that 270 teachers (56%) are supply teachers and 212 teachers (50%) have a permanent work relationship.

TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE TEACHERS' ANSWERS BASED ON WORK RELATIONSHIP

Work Relationship	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Permanent	270	56.0	56.0
Supply teachers	212	44.0	100.0
Total	482	100.0	

From the data of Table IV, it is concluded that 60 teachers (12.4%) are up to 29 years old, 136 teachers (28.2%) are from 30 to 39 years old, 174 teachers (36.1%) are from 40 to 49 years old, and 112 teachers (23.2%) are 50 years old or more.

TABLE IV: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE TEACHERS' ANSWERS BASED ON AGE

Work Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Up to 29 years old	60	12.4	12.4
From 30 to 39 years old	136	28.2	40.7
From 40 to 49 years old	174	36.1	76.8
50 years old and above	112	23.2	100.0
Total	482	100.0	

From the data of Table V, it is concluded that 246 individuals (51%) serve in a school managed by men and 236 individuals (49%) in a school managed by women.

TABLE V: DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE TEACHERS' ANSWERS BASED ON PRINCIPAL'S GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Men	246	51.0	51.0
Women	236	49.0	100.0
Total	482	100.0	

Regarding qualifications, from the respondents' statements it is concluded that 177 individuals (36.7%) have a master's degree and 23 individuals (4.8%) have a PhD. It is worth noting that 51 individuals (10.6%) have a second master's degree.

III. RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, the subjects of the survey answer at two different levels, the “desirable” and the “implementation” level, and we are interested in the relation of the replies between the two levels. Therefore, according to Roussos and Tsaousis (2020, p. 294), these are dependent samples. The statements are made in pairs (paired samples t-test) consisting of measurements of the same variable in different circumstances/conditions (levels in this specific

case). The indicated criterion is a parametric paired-samples t-test for dependent samples (Zafeiropoulos & Mylonas, 2018, p. 250).

The presentation of the results follows the formulation of the question. More specifically, for the research question, table 7 shows for all sample teachers the means and standard deviations of the degree of “desire” and degree of “implementation” for all 28 statements regarding the content of leadership behavior. The same table also shows the results of the statistical significance test of the differences of means (t-pair).

Regarding the statistical significance test, according to the presentation standards of the manual of publications of the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th edition) for each of the twenty-seven statements, it is as follows:

1st statement: [$t(481) = 15.87, p < 0.05$]

2nd statement: [$t(481) = 14.91, p < 0.05$]

3rd statement: [$t(481) = 15.09, p < 0.05$]

4th statement: [$t(481) = 10.23, p < 0.05$]

5th statement: [$t(481) = 6.47, p < 0.05$]

6th statement: [$t(481) = 6.06, p < 0.05$]

7th statement: [$t(481) = 9.83, p < 0.05$]

8th statement: [$t(481) = 11.55, p < 0.05$]

9th statement: [$t(481) = 8.25, p < 0.05$]

10th statement: [$t(481) = 2.32, p > 0.05$]

11th statement: [$t(481) = 4.33, p < 0.05$]

12th statement: [$t(481) = 8.63, p < 0.05$]

13th statement: [$t(481) = 9.86, p < 0.05$]

14th statement: [$t(481) = 5.24, p < 0.05$]

15th statement: [$t(481) = 3.82, p < 0.05$]

16th statement: [$t(481) = 11.69, p < 0.05$]

17th statement: [$t(481) = 10.90, p < 0.05$]

18th statement: [$t(481) = 7.30, p < 0.05$]

19th statement: [$t(481) = 7.99, p < 0.05$]

20th statement: [$t(481) = 7.27, p < 0.05$]

22nd statement: [$t(481) = 8.91, p < 0.05$]

23rd statement: [$t(481) = 7.64, p < 0.05$]

24th statement: [$t(481) = 8.36, p < 0.05$]

25th statement: [$t(481) = 9.02, p < 0.05$]

26th statement: [$t(481) = 5.94, p < 0.05$]

27th statement: [$t(481) = 9.46, p < 0.05$]

28th statement: [$t(481) = 9.28, p < 0.05$]

The only statement in which no statistically significant difference was observed is the 21st one, which is about the image and reputation of the school unit he/she manages. In this case, the null hypothesis applies, where there was no statistically significant difference in the means of the two examined levels/conditions [$t(481) = 0.88, p > 0.05$].

The below Table VII shows, for all sample teachers, the means, and standard deviations as well as the degree of significance of the deviations of the degree of “desire” and the degree of “implementation” (what applies in practice) for all 28 statements regarding the leadership behavior content.

TABLE VII: PRESENTATION OF MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF THE DEGREE OF “SIGNIFICANCE” AND “IMPLEMENTATION”, FOR THE 28 STATEMENTS REGARDING THE CONTENT OF THE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR AND DIFFERENCES OF PARTICIPANTS’ VIEWS AT THE TWO LEVELS, NAMELY SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

	Statements	Degree of significance		Degree of implementation		Statistical significance test	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-pair	P
1	Inspires, motivates colleagues towards a common goal and prospect	4.69	0.69	3.90	0.98	15.87	0
2	Creates climate of trust in teachers’ board	4.82	0.54	4.05	1.06	14.91	0
3	Cultivates team spirit and cooperation among colleagues	4.76	0.59	3.95	1.10	15.09	0
4	Ensures freedom of initiatives from colleagues	4.51	0.71	3.99	1.01	10.23	0
5	Implements objective-setting, planning and design of educational projects on a daily basis	4.12	0.88	3.77	1.08	6.47	0
6	Monitors and controls the implementation of educational projects	4.11	0.85	3.78	1.12	6.06	0
7	Utilizes available human resources	4.49	0.72	3.96	1.05	9.83	0
8	Makes good use of the different abilities of available human resources	4.53	0.71	3.91	1.05	11.55	0
9	Makes sure there is cooperation and coordination of the school unit with other school units	4.04	0.90	3.57	1.20	8.25	0
10	Understands and implements educational policies and decisions	4.21	0.88	4.09	0.94	2.32	0.010
11	Shows real interest in serving-informing parents	4.42	0.75	4.22	0.92	4.33	0
12	Tries to make a positive difference in students’ lives	4.41	0.77	3.95	1.04	8.63	0
13	Contributes to teachers’ professional development within the school unit	4.15	0.89	3.57	1.23	9.86	0
14	Is a reference person for teaching issues	3.82	0.99	3.52	1.26	5.24	0
15	Show interest in collaborators’ work-life balance	3.79	1.08	3.57	1.22	3.81	0
16	Is a role model – example for collaborators	4.43	0.82	3.73	1.26	11.69	0
17	Practices what he/she teaches	4.60	0.75	4.01	1.08	10.90	0
18	Adopts collaborators’ innovations	4.22	0.84	3.82	1.12	7.30	0
19	Takes reasonable risk in an effort to constantly improve educational efficiency	4.14	0.81	3.68	1.16	7.99	0
20	Seeks for new ideas and solutions	4.30	0.80	3.89	1.10	7.27	0
21	Shows interest in the image and reputation of the school unit he/she manages	4.27	0.85	4.22	0.99	0.88	0.190
22	Makes collaborators feel comfortable when speaking with him/her	4.68	0.61	4.24	0.99	8.90	0
23	Sincerely cares for collaborators’ problems	4.53	0.72	4.11	1.10	7.64	0
24	Shows real interest in collaborators’ work satisfaction and commitment	4.44	0.74	3.98	1.12	8.38	0
25	Praises collaborators at individual and team level	4.45	0.75	3.93	1.13	9.02	0
26	Shows interest in discipline in school unit	4.35	0.82	4.05	1.01	5.94	0
27	His/her everyday practice shows that discipline and sensitivity can coexist	4.46	0.76	3.95	1.10	9.46	0
28	Shows decisiveness in emerging issues	4.61	0.68	4.11	1.09	9.28	0

At descriptive statistics level, from the results of Table VII, the following can be concluded:

- 1) The means of the answers of the sample teachers in the five-point scale for the “desirable” level range from 3.79 (in the 15th statement) to 4.82 (in the 2nd statement). It becomes obvious that teachers consider to a great extent that it is very important to have these specific behavior patterns (roles) in school unit managers. As a conclusion, the means place the teachers in the category between “a lot” and “very much”.
- 2) Respectively, the means of the answers of the sample teachers in the five-point scale for the implementation level range from 3.52 (in the 14th statement) to 4.24 (in the 22nd statement). It becomes obvious that teachers, according to their statements, consider to a great extent that these behavior patterns are implemented daily by the school unit managers. In this specific case, the means place the teachers in the category between “often” and “always”.

- 3) From the examination of the means of the two levels, the most important conclusion that can be reached is that the degree of implementation of all twenty-eight statements seems to be significantly lower than the significance degree, which underlines the deviation between the “desirable” level (what should be taking place) and the real level (what actually takes place). This means that, although the teachers recognize that they experience a sufficiently good leadership behavior (implementation level), at desirable level (significance level) they express a higher degree in all their statements, which means that they would like to see even better behavior pattern in school unit managers.

At inductive level, regarding the research question, meaning whether this differentiation is statistically significant, it is ascertained (using t-pair test for dependent samples), that in the twenty-seven out of the twenty-eight statements there is a statistically significant difference in the means of the two conditions (significance and

implementation). In all these cases of statistical significance test (in the twenty-seven statements), its value was 0, except for the 10th statement, where it is 0.010. This means that for all examined statements but for one the means of expectation (desirable level) were significantly higher than the respective means of the real behavior; in other words, for the twenty-seven statements, the teachers believe that leadership behavior patterns should improve in practice to match the desirable/ideal ones.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

According to the systemic approach, the principals' leadership role, which is crucial to the school unit efficiency, is a complex one. It is a synthesis of several individual leadership roles regarding the school unit. The principals' leaders should fulfill these roles in the best possible way. The teachers' views about whether they do fulfill this role are particularly important. In this study, it is concluded that the teachers consider that the principals play their individual leadership roles with relatively great success. However, they consider that there is some distance between the real and the desirable/ideal behavior.

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