Orientations of Leadership Behaviours Required for School Transformation and Change

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Abstract

Leadership is considered as one of the most important factors in school success. Leaders from the successfully transformed schools demonstrate multiple leadership behaviours that vary according to situations. This qualitative study explored important orientations of leadership behaviours in two selected transformed schools in Malaysia. Data were collected through interviews, observations and document review. 28 participants (14 from each schools) including school leaders, administrators and teachers were selected through purposive sampling for interviews. The data collected were consolidated, reduced and interpreted. The four leadership behaviour orientations, which included task-oriented, relation-oriented, change-oriented and ethical-oriented leadership behaviour, came out as main orientations of leadership behaviours required for school transformation. The study offers important implications for school leaders, policy makers, educationists and researchers in Malaysia and elsewhere with similar contexts.

Keywords: *Leadership behaviour orientations, School leaders, School transformation*

1. Introduction

School transformation has been a topic of significant interest for researchers and academicians (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008). School leadership has been identified as one of the most significant factors in school transformation besides school facilities, working environments, school, parents and community partnerships, curriculum, and capacity development opportunities (Aziah & Abdul Ghani, 2012; McGee, 2009). Leadership behaviour has been consistently categorised. Yukl (2004) argues that due to uncertainty, diverse roles and rapid

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changes in organisations, leaders need to have change-oriented leadership behaviour along with task and relation-oriented leadership behaviours. Task-oriented leadership behaviour primarily focuses on the attainment of goals by establishing goals, defining roles, assigning tasks and monitoring the process of task completion and giving directions (Holloway, 2012). Relation-oriented leadership behaviour aims at developing close interpersonal relationships, giving support and helping employees feel comfortable (Holloway, 2012; Yukl, 2010; Yukl et al., 2002). Change-oriented leadership behaviour has been associated with sharing plans, taking risks, discussing new ideas, implementing programmes and making quick decisions (Yukl, 2004).

In addition to these behaviour orientations, Michel et al. (2010) suggests a full range of leadership behaviours model that consist of task-oriented, relations-oriented, and change-oriented leadership behaviours as well as ethical-oriented leadership behaviour. Yukl (2012) also recommends leadership behaviour that encourages ethical practices. The four dimensions of leadership behaviour collectively give a comprehensive view of leadership behaviour (Michel et al., 2010). These behaviour orientations are observable and assessable (Yukl, 2004).

1.1 Research Objective

The current paper intends to explore how different orientations of leadership behaviour are perceived by the school members in selected transformed schools in Selangor, Malaysia. The paper also debates how the different leadership behaviour orientations collectively give a comprehensive elucidation for understanding school leadership with respect to school transformation.

1.2 Research Question

The research question of this study is:
How do the participants in selected transformed schools in Selangor perceive different orientations of leadership behaviour?

1.3 Delimitations of Study

This study was delimited to only qualitative case study design using interview, document review, and observations as data collection tools. The study was also restricted to two transformed schools of Selangor.

2. Literature Review

Successful school leaders demonstrate a number of characteristics and behaviours to transform their schools. Such leaders demonstrate clarity of vision,

roles and expectations (Leithwood et al., 2008). Motivating and supporting teachers and monitoring their performance are key instructional practices for successful school leaders (McGee, 2009; Mulford et al., 2008). They develop and maintain positive relationship with teacher, parents and community (Aziah & Abdul Ghani, 2012; McGee, 2009). They often emphasise on continuous professional development for teachers and staff (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). According to Holloway (2012), such leaders develop a pleasant working culture in their organisation which helps them to reduce turnover and unethical behaviours, achieve their targeted vision and goals.

Moreover, without understanding the importance of ethics, an organization cannot succeed. In educational reform context, it is leader who makes his/her school an ethically appropriate organization through justice, fairness and equality (Kanokorn et al., 2013). Such leasers minimise conflicts with parents and teachers and often make adjustment in line with changes happening around (Rahimah & Ghavifekr, 2014).

Harris et al. (2017) state, "at present, principals in Malaysia are at the heart of the drive for the school transformation and improvement" (p. 210). Over the last 15 years, school leadership in Malaysia has gone through significant transformation in terms of roles and functions of school leaders and in terms of expectations from them (Aminah, 2012). School leaders are expected to possess strong professional values and commitments; have the required knowledge; and the ability to perform multiple roles, responsibilities and tasks (Rosnarizah et al., 2009). Leaders who are successful to transform their schools are given opportunities for faster career progression, greater autonomy, and other monetary and non-monetary incentives. Struggling leaders are given extra support and coaching but if they still fail to transform their schools, they are redeployed on teaching positions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Hussein (2014) argues that the requirements of the current and future school leadership in Malaysia are demanding and the education system needs to develop 'super-leaders' who are competent and have professional integrity. Harris et al. (2017) found that leaders in Malaysian schools are change and task focused. Aziah and Abdul Ghani (2012) found that a visionary, innovative and committed school head with the ability to involve parents and community was the secret formula behind the achievements of an award-winning jungle school in Sarawak, Malaysia. Waheed, Hussin, Khan, Ghavifekr and Bahadur (2018) concluded that Malaysian ethical leaders motivate school members intrinsically for change.

3.   Research Methodology

3.1   Research Design

Qualitative case study research design was adopted. A qualitative case study is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2009). The main criteria for selection of case schools was any extensive, significant and systematic change in current practices and school operations (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008) during the last five years.

3.2   Selection of Case Schools

Selection of the case schools was done after a thorough scrutiny through a communication with school heads and in line with the advice of educationists. After selecting the schools fulfilling the criteria, permission was obtained from relevant bodies (i.e. Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education (MoE), State Department of Education and school heads) before data collection.

School 1 (S1) was a sub-urban secondary school with a large population of students from different ethnic backgrounds (Chinese, Malay Muslims, Indians and others). Before appointment of the current head, the school was well known in the vicinity due to various disciplinary issues like gangsterism, bullying, vandalism and teacher harassment by students. The school was also one of the low performing schools in as well. Principal after joining the school not only minimised disciplinary issues but also improved the curricular and co-curricular performance of the school. She was rewarded New Deal (an award) for her achievement in terms of school improvement and for minimising discipline related problems. She was also recognised as an excellent principal (Super-leader) by State Department of Education.

School 2 (S2) was a primary school situated in an urban area. A majority of the students were from single ethnicity (Malay Muslims). Like S1, it was also serving a large number of students. The headmistress joined S2 as head in 2012. After joining the school, she established international collaborations with two schools in Thailand and Australia as partner schools. The school succeeded to get the status of cluster school (the top position of innovation and excellence in niche areas) in 2013 with science and chess game as niche areas. The same year it was also recognised as a high-performing school (HPS).

3.3   Sample & Sampling Technique

For selecting participants for interviews, purposive sampling was used that is regarded as an important and most relevant sampling technique for case

studies (Yin, 2009). 28 participants (14 from each schools) including school leaders (1+1=2), administrators (3+3= 6) and teachers (10+10= 20) were selected through purposive sampling for interviews.

3.4 Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were adopted as the main tool for data collection, however, background contextual knowledge of the cases was obtained through observations and document analysis (Merriam, 2009).

3.5 Data Collection

For the S1, a total of nineteen observation sessions were done for almost hundred and thirty two hours while for S2, a total of fifteen observation sessions, for almost hundred and eighteen hours. Plans, notices and minutes of the meeting, school magazines, prospectus and other relevant documents were considered as important documents for better contextual understanding and for assisting in the process of data collection and analysis through interviews (Merriam, 2009).

3.6 Data Analysis

Hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was used in this study for data analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In this process, firstly based on Michel and colleagues' study the four main themes as change-oriented, relation-oriented, task-oriented and ethical-oriented leadership behaviours were taken as a priori main themes (Michel et al., 2010). Then, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to allow emergence of sub-themes indicatively from the raw data. ATLAS.ti 7 software was used for data analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

A consensus in the data was that the school leaders used multiple leadership behaviour orientations depending on time and situation. Findings revealed that leaders practiced a combination of change-oriented, task-oriented, relation-oriented and ethical-oriented leadership behaviours. However, a majority of the participants reported the school heads were more focused on change and tasks rather than relations and ethics.

4.1 Change-oriented Leadership Behaviour

Schools that experienced change usually had leaders who envisioned change. Figure 1 below presents the themes that emerged from the data as change-oriented leadership behaviours in selected transformed schools.
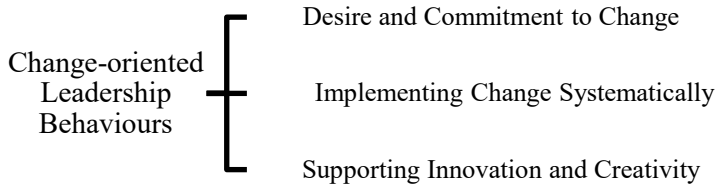
Change-oriented Leadership Behaviours
- Desire and Commitment to Change
- Implementing Change Systematically
- Supporting Innovation and Creativity

Figure 1. Change-oriented leadership behaviours in selected transformed schools

Leaders in both schools seemed to have a strong desire to bring change in their respective schools. A majority of the participants from both schools regarded their leaders playing instrumental role in the success of the schools. A teacher from S1 considered their leader as the 'brain' of the school. The leader from S1 shared her vision saying, "I want that this school, as years go by, it would become better and better, and one day maybe my school will be like among the top 5 schools in Gombak". Moreover, A Head of the Department from S2 claimed, "She [the leader] actually lifted our school to be a HPS…She came and pushed us to a place that we were among the top HPS schools..."

Importantly, leaders in both schools planned for strategic changes that were stepwise, one following the other. A teacher from S1 highlighted, "…Actually, she has a strategy where she focuses on different things one by one. Now her focus is on students and then after achieving this she will move to next thing that she wants". The leader in S2 identified the hidden abilities and potentials of the schoolteachers and staff. As she reflected:

> First, I wanted to test them. In school holidays, when the teachers were going back to their villages, I asked them to go to a school in their area and write a report on what are their best practices…I got over a hundred reports…I studied those [reports] what I need to do more, what are the things that I should have when the officers from the Ministry come and check...

Besides, the leaders encouraged, supported and facilitated innovation and creativity among the school members as well as remained updated them about the current trends and practices. They appreciated the teachers who used new ideas and methodologies in the teaching-learning process. For example, a teacher said, "… She [the leader] is the one having different ideas. She also discusses it with teachers and listens to their ideas as well". Teachers from S2 shared that once one of the teachers went abroad and attended a workshop. When he came back

and shared his ideas and plans to implement the same new and innovative techniques in school, the leader not only appreciated him but also organised a meeting where all the teachers were informed and the programme was implemented in the school.

4.2   Task-oriented Leadership Behaviour

Findings revealed that both leaders possessed a set of task-oriented leadership behaviours. The task-oriented leadership behaviours evident in the data are presented in the subsequent sections.
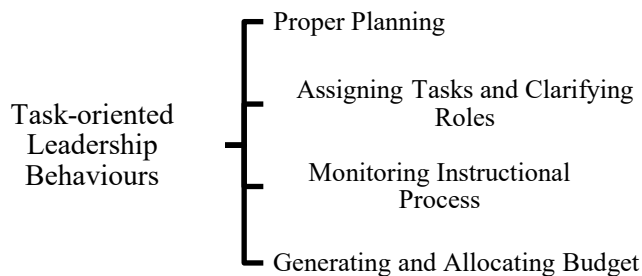

Figure 2. Task-oriented leadership behaviours in selected transformed schools

The leaders in both schools gave substantial importance to proper planning and setting targets and goals. Devising strategies, tactical and operational plans while maintaining a proper and systematic documentation were among their most preferred tasks. A teacher from S2 argued that their leader had several plans to achieve her goals. If plan A failed, she would commence plan B. The leader from S1 came up with new and innovative plans to minimise problems. The interview excerpt below shows how she developed such plans:

> I discussed it [the plan] with my management team and as usual, there were one or two who felt that it is almost the exam time; we do not have the time. Then I said no let us have a strategy and plan it. … after that, my management team and I planned, then only I publicly announced in school ….

The second task-oriented leadership behaviour was assigning, communicating and clarifying the tasks, roles and duties as well as making the decision to ensure the accomplishment of the designated tasks. Firstly, the leaders assigned the tasks and duties according to the teachers' capabilities and strengths. "She [the head] brings in the right teacher for the right position and then guides them to

achieve it," claimed a Head of the Department from S2. A teacher from S1 commented, "My principal knows who can do what … She puts the right person to fit in the right shoe".

The data analysis revealed that different methods were being used to supervise and monitor school process and operations. A teacher from S2 mentioned that their leader had a very different style of monitoring. She kept an eye on everything that was going on in the school. During her school rounds, she used to make notes with many comments to show and say something. Although the government is the main source of funding for both the schools, the leaders in both schools considered funding not enough for school functioning. Therefore, they generated funds through different methods and programmes with the assistance of the Parent-teacher Association chairperson. A teacher from S1 said, "She is using budget allocated for the school for students and sometimes if we have a shortage of funds, she herself, tries to get funds from somewhere". In S2, the head with the collaboration of the teachers, management staff, and the Parent-teacher Association chairperson utilised the funds to transform the school into a high-performing school by providing different in-service pieces of training to teachers and different activities for the students.

4.3   Relation-oriented Leadership Behaviour

Leaders from both S1 and S2 focused on building and maintaining a strong interrelationship with school members, parents and other stakeholders. The relation-oriented leadership behaviours identified in this study are presented in the Figure 3 below and are discussed in the following paragraphs.
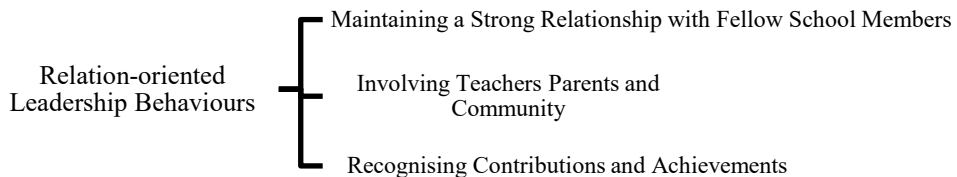

Figure 3.   Relation-oriented leadership behaviours in selected transformed schools

Leaders from both schools developed and maintained a healthy relationship with and among school members. Both leaders emphasised teamwork, collaboration

and cooperation among teachers and staffs. The leader from S1 reported, "When I joined this school, the first thing I tried to change was the teachers' behaviour. I made them understand that they cannot work in isolation". A teacher from the S2, appreciated their leader for being very good at interpersonal relationships and for the ability to unite all school members to work together. Most of the teachers in S1 reported that the leader was very kind and helpful. She was ready to listen to their personal and work-related problems and issues and supported them through guidance, suggestions, reliefs and assistance whenever they needed.

Moreover, the leaders consulted the teachers and management team while planning and making a decision. For example, a teacher from S1, stated, "Before taking any decision, she [the leader] discusses it with all of us…She will not take a decision by herself." The leader from S2 argued that she preferred the decision to come from every school member. A teacher explained, "We always have meetings and the best decision on which everybody agrees is followed."

Leaders also developed and maintained a strong relationship with parents by involving them in school activities. The leaders considered parents, especially Parent-teacher Association members, as main supporters for school transformation. The S2 head said, "For Parent-teacher Association, first we must make them [parents] friends. We as teachers cannot be rude. My first Parent-teacher Association chairperson was a lawyer … we became very close friends. So we worked together".

Recognition of the school members through appreciation and reward for their achievements and contributions was another relation-oriented leadership behaviour found in the data. A teacher from S1 said, "Previously we were not really appreciated in this way. She has taken a very drastic step and this would make an impact". The leader from S2 reported that she gave certificates to those who came to school with full commitment and to those who showed good progress in their performance.

4.4   Ethical-oriented Leadership Behaviour

The ethical-oriented leadership behaviour is associated with the leaders' emphasis on ethically appropriate values and practices in the school. The ethical-oriented leadership behaviours identified in this study are presented in the Figure 4 below and are discussed in the following paragraphs.
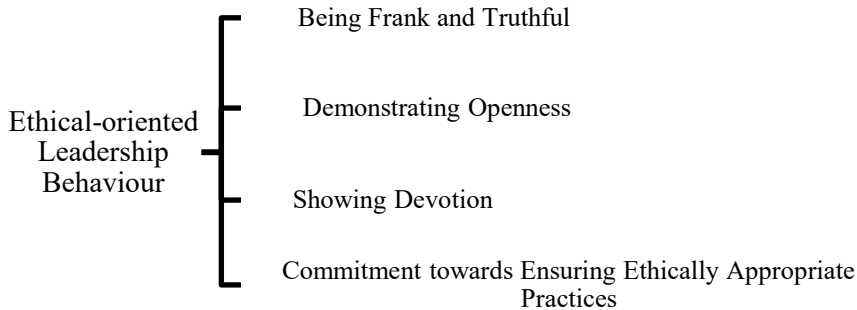
Ethical-oriented Leadership Behaviour

- Being Frank and Truthful
- Demonstrating Openness
- Showing Devotion
- Commitment towards Ensuring Ethically Appropriate Practices

Figure 4. Ethical-oriented leadership behaviours in selected transformed schools

The data analysis showed that both leaders were very frank and truthful with all school members. Both were found to greet nicely to every member of school. A schoolteacher from S1 praised her leader and said, "She is very fair... the principal from my previous school was very biased towards Chinese teachers and gave lot of work to them." Teachers from S2 shared that the leader belonged to a well-off family, but she was quite humble towards school members and parents.

Another important ethical-oriented behaviour found in the data was leaders' openness. Teachers also shared that they were quite relaxed to share their issues and problems with their leaders due to their openness and readiness to listen their problems and help them out. A teacher claimed, "If I have a problem I talk to her she will give me advice." During observations sessions the both leaders were found to shaking hands and greeting all school members.

Moreover, the leaders in both schools were found to be fully devoted towards their schools progression and professions. They were punctual as well could be seen in school until late times. They were committed to bringing out the best in the teachers, the staff and students through empowering, sharing, problem-solving and giving feedbacks.

Leaders put a strong emphasis on advancing moral behaviours and practices in school and counteracting dishonest behaviours. With an objective to make school culture favourable for ethical practices and discouraging and averting for unethical practices, they utilized prizes to acknowledge morally fitting behaviours and punishments to dishonest behaviours. A teacher from S1 said, "She [the leader] usually will call you in the office and will not scold you but give you some advice," .While, a coordinator from S2 said, "The head will call her/him to come in her office and discuss with his/her …"

5. Discussion

This study explored leadership behaviour orientations in two selected Malaysian transformed schools. Three important findings emerged. First, leaders in transformed schools demonstrated a variety of distinct and strongly interrelated leadership behaviour orientations. Although their practices varied, (Barrasa, 2003; Michel et al., 2010; Yukl, 2004, 2012), leadership behaviours could be categorised as task-oriented, change-oriented, relation-oriented and ethical-oriented leadership behaviours. These orientations contributed to the transformation of the schools. One implication is that leaders as facilitators for school change need to exhibit multiple-oriented leadership behaviours because change is a complex process which requires multiple practices and behaviours from leaders to succeed (Mulford, 2008). In Malaysian context, the study of Aziah and Abdul Ghani (2012) also signposted the same results that a head of school can achieve exemplary success through multiple behaviours by involving parents and community, by giving respect and showing devotion and focusing on tasks with innovation.

To transform schools, leaders need to remain ambitious and proactive to inspire, motivate and innovate school members. This study indicates that leaders in transformed schools not only maintain their status quo, but they also plan for the future through creativity and innovation. Leaders with such behaviours are not only creative and innovative in visualising and planning for future but also help teachers to think out of the box (Wilcox & Angelis, 2011). Chua et al. (2014) found that leaders in Malaysian schools take initiatives and use analytical thinking. The results are also compatible with Harris et al. (2017) that Malaysian school leaders demonstrate various change-oriented characteristics.

As task-oriented leaders, they have to ensure proper and efficient use of schools' human and financial resources and instructional time for the accomplishment of school vision and targets (Yukl, 2012). Moreover, they need to define roles, responsibilities and expectations, set time, allocate and distribute tasks and monitor and evaluate the practices and process to ensure the school vision and goals are being achieved (Holloway, 2012). Chan and Gurnam Kaur (2009) in their study found that some Malaysian school leaders are more result and task focused before getting their school transformed. After achieving their set vision and objectives, they mainly focus on relations and adopt more practices that are democratic. Thus, as relation-oriented leaders, school leaders need to establish positive and strong relationship with all school members, parents and communities in order to transform their schools. They collaborate with school

members as well outside with other schools and organisations. As mentioned by Zmuda et al. (2004), genuine change often comes from within, so leaders in transformed schools motivate all stakeholders for change through psychological tactics which involve care, love, appreciation, reward, involvement and support.
As ethical-oriented leaders, they influence behaviours, practices and commitment of schoolteachers, students, and other stakeholders by showing trust, kindness, openness, honesty and fairness and affection (Crum & Sherman, 2008). Resultantly, leaders' such behaviours help school to get transformed (Kanokorn et al., 2013). Ethical-oriented leadership is also an important leadership behaviour orientation along with change-oriented, relation-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviours as suggested by Michel et al. (2010). Waheed et al. (2019) while exploring the role of ethical-oriented leadership in school transformation found that ethical-oriented behaviours of school leaders contributed to the school transformation of Malaysian selected transformed schools.

The findings support the extended version of the leadership behaviour orientation through the emergence of ethical-oriented leadership behaviour to give a more in-depth and extensive leadership behaviour theory (Michel et al., 2010; Yukl, 2012). Thus, this study strongly supports Michel et al. (2010) that to consider leadership behviour modle by Yukl et al. (2002) and Yukl (2004) as a 'Full-Range Model of Leadership' ethical-oriented leadership behviours should be added. Leaders' friendly behviour, opennes to others, professional dedication and devotions, leading by example, and ensuring well positioned ethical behviours can be considered as dimensions of ethcial-oriented behviours which are also supported by Waheed et al. (2019).

6. Conclusion

The school leaders selected for this study had played a strong role in bringing constructive changes in their schools. These leaders could think out of the box to curtail the challenging situations. For instance, due to change, task, relation and ethical-oriented leadership behaviours the leader in S1 was able to put a stop to disciplinary issues and get higher ranks and the leader from S2 was able to establish international linkages along with getting higher ranks.
In conclusion, school leaders in Malaysian transformed schools are highly inclined to change, relations, ethics and tasks. They have a strong vision to compete with other schools both nationally and internationally. The leaders due to their multiple behaviours are capable to fulfil the needs of 21st-century education and leadership.

7. Recommendations

This study contributes to the current literature. It also reveals that leaders need to demonstrate multiple leadership behaviours for transforming schools. Recommendations regarding school transformation and leadership are:

1. The policy makers should consider the role of multiple-oriented leadership in planning for school transformation.
2. The MoE and National Institute for Educational Leadership and Management should consider ethical-oriented, relation oriented along with change and task-oriented leadership behaviours important in their courses and programs.
3. Pre-service and in-service leadership training programmes should promote the development of task, change, relation and ethical oriented leadership behaviours.
4. The current school leaders, who are struggling in transforming their schools, should adopt multiple-oriented behaviours.

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