

Chapter 39

Relationships Between Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Style, and School Culture

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ABSTRACT

Research regarding the association between emotional intelligence, leadership style and organizational culture has been inconclusive. The purpose of this study was to explore these relationships in elementary school settings. A non-experimental ex post facto research design was utilized to investigate four research hypotheses. Fifty-seven principals and 850 teachers within a large urban school district in southeast Florida were surveyed. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed positive associations between school culture and both transformational and transactional leadership, and negative associations between school culture and passive-avoidant leadership. Significant positive associations were found also between school culture and the principals' emotional intelligence after controlling for leadership style. The hierarchical linear regressions revealed significant associations between leadership style and school culture after controlling for school grade as well. The results suggest that emotional intelligence merits consideration in the development of leadership theory. Practical implications include suggestions that principals employ both transformational and transactional leadership strategies, and focus on developing their level of emotional intelligence. The associations between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, contingent reward and school culture found in this study validate the role of the principal as the leader of school reform.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the principal in school settings and the principal's perceived effect on student achievement have frequently been considered vital factors in school reform and the quest for improved student performance (Fullan, 2002; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Internationally, principals are being held accountable for the success or failure of their students (Witziers et al., 2003). Researchers have recognized that principals indirectly affect student achievement through their influence on school culture, and have espoused the importance of building positive school cultures (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2008). The relationship between leadership style and school culture is well supported in the literature (Kelley, Thornton & Daugherty, 2005; Rud & Garrison, 2010), resulting in the relatively recent call for school leaders to focus in particular on transformational leadership strategies (Hallinger, 2003).

The relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership merits further research (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Butler & Chinowsky, 2006; Weinberger, 2009), as emotional intelligence has been suggested to be an antecedent of transformational leadership (Brown & Moshavi, 2005). Given that emotional intelligence has been considered to be a learned ability (Nelson & Low, 2003), if emotional intelligence is found to be an antecedent of transformational leadership, measures of emotional intelligence could identify and augment efforts to develop transformational leaders. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between emotional intelligence, leadership style and organizational culture in school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ample debate is evident in the literature vis-à-vis the conceptualization of emotional intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). The ability-based perspective of emotional intelligence was first posited by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and was defined as the ability to perceive emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, understand emotion, and regulate emotions to achieve goals (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Their work was rooted in the theories of social intelligence first described as early as 1920 (Thorndike, 1920), and in the subsequent theories of multiple intelligences developed by Gardner (1983).

The trait-based conceptualization was introduced by Reuven Bar-On and is defined as a cluster of non-cognitive skills or competencies that affect one's ability to successfully deal with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 1997). This conceptualization was further developed by others, and is perceived as a learned ability that can be developed (Nelson, Low & Ellis, 2007; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence overlap, regardless of whether the construct is conceptualized strictly as an ability-based intelligence or as an array of traits and attributes (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). The distinction between the conceptualization of the construct is significant in conducting empirical research because various measurement methods have been developed, and research results are impacted by the manner in which the construct is conceptualized and operationalized (Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2007).

Debate is also evident in the literature regarding the distinction between leadership practices that involve transactional and transformational leadership behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978). The prevailing thought is that leaders who exemplify transformational practices, also at times utilize transactional strategies, as appropriate; and, moreover, that a transformational approach is the most effective and appropriate style in school leadership (Barth, 2002; Fullan, 2002; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood,

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