

# Lessons for School Principals from Transformational Leadership Characteristics

Dr. Anne Wairimu Ndiritu\*

ODEl Campus University of Nairobi, P.O Box 30197-100, Nairobi, Kenya

Dr. John Mwaura Mbugua

ODEl Campus University of Nairobi, P.O Box 30197-100, Nairobi, Kenya

M/S Caroline Njoki Ndiritu

ODEl Campus University of Nairobi, P.O Xox 30197-100, Nairobi, Kenya

## Abstract

This study was carried out in selected public secondary schools in Kenya. It is on the realization that the work of the school Principal is not easy and many find themselves in leadership without proper preparation for the hard task. The school principals' work is a high-stress job especially because he or she has to do virtually everything related to students, teachers, parents, subordinate staff and the community at large. This kind of leader would require extra-ordinary characteristics to be able to be successful. Majority of principals perform decently in all the areas that spell success in secondary schools especially in discipline and academic performance. The purpose of this study was to find out how principals' transformational leadership characteristics were correlated to effective school performance. Kouzes' and Posner's leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) "self" questionnaire was used to measure Principals' transformational leadership style. LPI "others" was used to triangulate the principals' response with the teachers. The target population consisted of 72 Principals in public schools and 139 principals in private schools. There were also 1210 teachers in public secondary schools and 1500 teachers in private secondary schools in Nairobi County. The findings indicated positive correlations between the Principals' transformational leadership characteristics with effective school performance.

**Keywords:** Secondary schools, transformational leadership, modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, encouraging the heart, enabling others to act.

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of leadership cannot be disputed especially because of its link to the success of any organization. According to Schultz (2003) the success or failure of any organization depends to a large measure on the quality of its leaders. Just as societal and school demographics have changed in recent decades, so has the type of leadership needed to successfully lead the rapidly changing schools of this Century. School leadership shapes all other variables such as good curriculum quality teaching, and a strong professional culture.

Just as it is impossible to define the work of a housewife, so it is with the school principal. He or she is virtually related to everything that goes on in the school. It is indeed a high-stress job and only a well-prepared principal would manage it. The school principals have their hands on everything related to the school such as students, teachers, parents, community and the government. All the infrastructure of the school and other resources have everything to do with the school principal. Scholars have tried to establish the kind of leadership behaviour that would enhance efficiency in organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Given the multiple roles and responsibilities of today's school principal and the role the principal plays in leading school improvement, various research has been conducted on the characteristics, skills and practices of effective school principals.

One such study was done by McGregor Burns in 1978. Burns (1978) observed a number of great leaders and established that they possessed a distinct kind of leadership which he called transforming. He argued that this kind of leadership had the ability of raising human conduct and aspirations of both the leaders and the led and therefore had a revolutionary effect on both. Burns contended that transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivations and morality. Burns saw transformational leaders as possessing the following four characteristics: Charismatic/idealized influence which a situation where the leader served as the role model for the others to imitate, Inspirational motivation where the leader evoked enthusiasm and team spirit and shared vision, Intellectual stimulation which challenged all to explore options and innovative approaches and lastly Individualized stimulation which lent value to all individuals within the organization.

Advanced studies have been done to understand transformational leadership better. For instance, Kouzes and Posner (1995) More studies have shown consistent practices associated with transformational leaders. These are: model the way; inspire a shared vision; challenge the process; enable others to act; and encourage the heart.

Although they did not study school settings, there is evidence to suggest that there are similarities in transformational leadership whether it is in a school setting or a business environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). As Hargreaves and Fink (2004) note, successful and dynamic schools can quickly slide backwards with the departure of a successful leader.

The current study links transformational leadership with academic performance as one of the indicators of school efficiency. Research on effective schools emphasizes several indicators of success such as academic performance, a safe and orderly environment and respectful behaviour of students (Drvian & Butler, 2001; Dunne & Delisio, 2001).

This study is guided by the following objective:

To determine the influence of Transformational leadership on school efficiency.

### *1.1 Review on Related Literature*

It is undisputed that school leadership is the most significant factor in enhancing school performance (Dinham, 2004; Kearney, 2005; Janerrette & Sherretz, 2007; Ndiritu 2015; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). It is further agreed that although there are many factors that help make schools successful such as good curriculum, quality teaching, and a strong professional culture, all these are shaped and developed by leadership characteristics of school principals. Principals serve as key factors in the health of the school and the success of its students (Cotton, 2003; Heck, 1992; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). Therefore, the research base guiding their leadership is of importance. Different scholars have tried to establish the kind of leadership that would enhance efficiency in organizations. A recent topic of interest has been transformational leadership (Murphy, 2002).

With the increased demand for secondary education, there has been a public demand that schools produce high academic performance (Musungu & Nasongo, 2008). The school principal has been greatly associated with the creation of an environment in which school efficiency can be achieved. Siens and Ebmeier (1996) for instance, found that the school principal has a direct effect on students' behavioural outcomes. Effectiveness of any school may be measured by contributions it has made to the improved academic performance and students' discipline. It is therefore important to establish how the school principals can perform their job effectively. In an attempt to achieve high academic performance and discipline, school principals exhibit various leadership behaviours. In the school setting, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) contend that transformational leadership for schools requires the harnessing of social and interpersonal potential in addition to demonstrations of expert knowledge about education and schooling. The principal as an administrator influences teachers to achieve the goals and objectives of the school which is to enhance the teaching and learning process. On advocating for transformational leadership Leithwood (1994) suggests that transformational leadership positively influences schools' leadership's ability to facilitate change in school restructuring initiatives, and is best suited for coping with the demands of schools in twenty-first century.

Recent studies on transformational leadership have come up with other practices that are characteristic of transformational leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2007) conducted their research for almost 20 years and suggested that leadership is a collection of practices and behaviours. Through studies of best leadership experiences, they found a common pattern of actions and surmised that leadership is about these practices. They suggest that these practices are essential components of transformational leadership. They were developed through intensive research on current leadership practices and have been recognized by many researchers as truly representative of highly effective leadership practices (Taylor, 2002). The five common practices are "model the way", which involves clarifying values and setting the example; "inspire a shared vision", which involves envisioning the future and enlisting others; "challenge the process", which involves searching for opportunities, experimenting, and taking risks; "enable others to act", which involves fostering collaboration and strengthening others; and "encourage the heart", which involves recognizing contributions and creating a spirit of community (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). This study explores the relationship between transformational leadership of secondary school principals and the impact of this leadership style on academic performance. Most schools do not report high academic performance while others are able to do so even with lesser facilities available in the school.

#### *1.1.1 Practices of exemplary leadership*

Through studies of best leadership experiences, Kouzes and Posner (2007) found a common pattern of actions and surmised that leadership is about these practices). These practices seem to be essential components of the concept of transformational leadership. They were developed through intensive research on current leadership practices and have been recognized by many researchers as truly representative of highly effective leadership practices (Taylor, 2002). These practices include challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, 2002).

##### *1.1.1.1 Transformational leadership practice on modeling the way*

The first practice is Modeling the way. Modeling means living behaviours and values that you want individuals in your organization to emulate. Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated that leading by example is visible management. Visibility enhances accessibility and promotes the values and principles advocated by the leader. Leaders who lead

by example serve as visible models for those committed to the course of action in the organization.

Transformational leaders are open and honest, and develop trusting interactions through doing what they or say they are going to do (Knab, 2009). Effective leaders set an example and commitment through their daily acts that create progress. Through setting an example, transformational leaders demonstrate commitments to the organisation and its people. They create a program and lead the others in performing the organizational roles.

In modeling the way, the principals are expected to be good examples to their teachers. They demonstrate a commitment to the vision and goals of their schools. Such principals spend time with teachers and students, paying attention to them and responding to their needs (Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005). Such principals are also committed to spending as much time, if not more, at the school as they expect of their teachers (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Principals who display this characteristic spend time with teachers and students and pay attention to them and respond to their needs (Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005). Kouzes and Posner (2002) assert that these principals are committed to spending most of their time at their school just as they expect of their teachers. Such principals are extremely visible throughout the school building demonstrating the importance of the teaching and learning process and activities taking place under their direction (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002). They are also known to model their work ethics and expectations to their constituents. Such transformational leaders listen to others, keep their commitments and respect others.

#### 1.1.1.2 Transformational leadership practice on inspiring a shared vision

The second practice is inspiring a shared vision. Inspiring a shared vision (the image of the future that provides focus for all activities), requires the leader to communicate this vision in such a way as to motivate the followers to work toward its achievement (Leech, & Fulton, 2008). To accomplish this, successful leaders must utilize charismatic leadership strategies and communication to sell the vision to the entire organization. Kouzes and Posner (1995) asserted that although the vision was cooperatively developed with all stakeholders, the leader must articulate it and provide focus.

In developing a shared vision, effective leaders encourage constituents to examine the big picture rather than simply focus on the here and now. Effective leaders encourage others to envision where they want to be or where they want to go in their futures (Starcher (2006). Kouzes and Posner (2002) also report that best leadership experiences were realized when leaders “imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organization”. To possess such vision, leaders must have a compelling desire to make something happen, to create a new paradigm, to create something that no one else has ever created before (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Transformational leaders are committed to working with their followers to develop and foster a shared vision among all stakeholders. They believe that they can make a difference by envisioning the future and creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become.

Effective leaders encourage others to envision where they want to be or where they want to go in their futures. These leaders are able to inspire their followers with a positive and a hopeful outlook. They also generate enthusiasm and excitement for the common vision from others through genuineness and skillful use of positive language, symbols and personal energy (Kouze & Posner, 2002). Effective leaders also recognize that they cannot accomplish much without the involvement of all members of the organization. They therefore communicate the need for team effort in accomplishing a shared vision. These leaders listen to their followers, encourage them to commit to the organizational work and help them feel satisfied as contributing members of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

In school settings, it is important for all the stakeholders to share a vision. This shared vision should be developed in such a way that all the stakeholders know the direction that the school systems take in pursuit of school improvement (Jarnagin, 2004 & Kent, 2004). Hall and Hord (2006) agrees that all stakeholders should examine the goals of the school, the data which support the need for improvement and the results expected as a result of the improvement initiative. This vision should then be communicated to all stakeholders of the school. Jerald (2005) suggest that this communication of the school’s vision is paramount to school improvement. Transformational leaders should seek all avenues of communication to show that the school is entrenched in an improvement initiative and requests commitments to the challenge. The leaders should also seek the removal of barriers to implementation of the improvement initiative (Hall & Hord, 2006, Jerald, 2005). Some of the strategies for improvement should be staff development initiatives as the teachers play a major role in school improvement (Jerald, 2005).

When stakeholders are involved in the improvement initiatives they develop a sense of ownership and commitment (Jarnagin, 2004). Leaders should therefore strive to ensure that all stakeholders are provided an opportunity to develop ownership of the initiative thereby fostering personal commitment (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 2005). Balcerek (1999) asserts that leaders must utilize their leadership skill and practice to inspire others to commit to the vision and goals of the school.

#### 1.1.1.3 Transformational leadership practice on challenging the Process

Kouzes and Posner identified challenging the process as another practice of exemplary leaders. Leaders who

challenge the process are continuously searching for opportunities to improve and innovate, with little fear of experimenting and taking risks. Leaders are the problem identifiers. They look for difficult situations and try to find new ways of doing things. Exercise courage and take risks and know that incremental change is challenging (Knab, 2009). Such leaders are proactive and unwilling to settle for the status quo (Starcher, 2006). Effective leaders are open to new ideas and innovations, yearning to “make something happen” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). As people inevitably make mistakes, leaders help pick them up and move forward. By either creating new ideas or recognizing and supporting new ideas, leaders show willingness to challenge the system in order to turn these ideas into actions and to get new products, processes, and services adopted (2009). They experiment and take risks with new approach. Learning, for them, is a lifelong behavior. In order to succeed, leaders must be prepared to make mistakes because every false step opens the door to a new opportunity.

Effective leaders help people learn from their mistakes, continuing towards success. As leaders and their constituents stumble along the path to excellence, they must not blame themselves but examine the initiative and determine if it needs modified in order to accomplish the ultimate goal. Ultimately, leaders must build a commitment to the challenge of reaching new heights, supporting constituents along the way (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Effective leaders create opportunities for various interactions so that individuals can network with one another, sharing their experiences and expertise as well as celebrating their accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

In challenging the process, the leader is encouraged to be a risk-taker, by identifying ineffective policies and procedures and experimenting with new and improved ones. Those who challenge the process are open to new ideas and realize that a key to success is the ability to recognize good ideas from others or external sources. Taking risks means that leaders must be able to deal with failure (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

#### 1.1.1.4 Transformational leadership practice on enabling others to act

In enabling others to act as a practice of transformational leaders involve others in planning and give them freedom of choice in decision-making. Leaders in Kouzes and Posner’s study realized that goals cannot be achieved without team effort. Exemplary leaders did not feel vulnerable by giving away power, but understood the importance of doing so. By empowering others, leaders were able to enable others to use information and in producing outstanding results (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Encouraging others to do a job is not enough. They must also feel that they are able to act and are able to put their own ideas into place with the support of the leader (Knab, 2009). These leaders foster collaboration among all the stakeholders. Kouzes and Posner note that collaboration is essential for achieving and sustaining high performance. In their dealings with their followers, transformational leaders must trust others and utilize their expertise and experiences to influence the work of the organization. They make their followers feel capable and powerful. Effective leaders recognize the importance of establishing a culture of interdependence which indicates that all people rely on one another to accomplish the shared goals of the organization. These leaders also create opportunities for various interactions so that individuals can network with one another sharing their experiences and expertise as well as celebrating their accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Enabling others to act, engenders the development of cooperative goals through empowerment and trust building. Organizational structures should be constructed to encourage group action, which requires the sharing of information, resources, and ideas (Leech, & Fulton, 2008).

As school principals seek to enable others to be involved in school improvement, they need to concentrate on capacity building. This often requires staff development to provide people with skills, knowledge, materials and additional resources necessary for implementation of strategies that improve learning (Lambert, 2003). There is also need to sustain staff development initiative as this can serve to solve problems (Atkinson, 2002; Duke, 2004; Jerald, 2005). School principals should also seek to build up leaders among their followers by providing staff development. They should therefore seek to instill leadership capacity in others (Childs-Bowen, 2005). Enabling others to be involved in school improvement is a result of a culture supportive to change. In a study carried out by Kelley, Thornton and Dauherty (2005) on the relationship between leadership practices and school climate, it was found that principals’ leadership practices played an important part in creating a positive school climate as well as one supportive of improvement. School principals should also envision the needs of their teachers, empower them to share the vision and enable them to create an effective learning environment (Kelley et. al, 2005). Christabel (2006) notes that transformational leaders encourage and prompt others to be innovative and think of alternatives by questioning, rethinking problems, and examining their work in new and different ways. When people engage in creative problem solving, their ideas and mistakes are not criticized, and they are encouraged to try their ideas.

#### 1.1.1.5 Transformational leadership practice on encouraging the heart

The last practice found among exemplary leaders is encouraging the heart. This involves the recognition of contributions and the celebrations of victories (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). People need encouragement and motivation to achieve the goals set by the organization. Leaders need to recognize achievements to motivate their followers. By influencing employee motivation, leaders attach rewards and recognition to job performance. As the most prominent personalities in the organization, effective leaders celebrate individual and group achievements. Such celebrations build a sense of community, make lasting memories of success and reinforce the goals of the



organization. Effective leaders must listen and show they care by recognizing the contributions of others. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002)

Transformational leaders play a special role in the celebrating of individual or group achievements because they are the most prominent personality in the organization and serve as a role model (Abdullah et al., 2008). By celebrating achievements together, leaders let people feel that they are part of the group and part of something significant. It also increases the sense of belonging. When leaders encourage their employees through recognition and celebration, they inspire them to perform better (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Recognizing contributions involves focusing on the organization's shared vision and goals, expecting the best of others in their efforts to meet the established goals, paying attention to the work of others by listening to them and showing you care, and recognizing their efforts through thoughtful and creative ways. In addition to recognizing the contributions of others, effective leaders celebrate the victories of the organization (Starcher 2006). Such celebrations build a sense of community, make lasting memories of success, reinforce the goals of the organization, and demonstrate that the leader is aware of the contributions of her/his constituents (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Effective leaders "know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002: p. 20).

Kouzes and Posner's (1995) fifth practice, encouraging the heart, highlights the importance of leaders' individual and group contributions to the organization's accomplishments. Encouragement through the celebration of successes, big and small, motivates people to continue to take risks and remain committed to the organization's goals. Such genuine care provides people with the spirit to overcome insurmountable obstacles (Leech, and Fulton, 2008). As the principal continues to recognize the contributions of the stakeholders to the success of the school, he/she encourages them to continue working hard in their pursuit of the school's goals. Individuals enjoy the praises for the work they do and recognition for their accomplishment although this may take a long period of time (Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006). This therefore calls for the commitments of the effective school principals to recognize the few accomplishments as they happen along the way.

Transformational leaders motivate and inspire others by providing a challenge and meaning to their work (Maritz, 2003). Team morale, enthusiasm, and positive outlook are enhanced and evident. The leader involves others in thinking about attractive future outcomes. Leaders have the capacity to work with others in the school community to formulate a vision for the school. The vision is communicated in a way that ensures commitment among staff, students, parents and others in the community. According to Maritz (2003), to be able to change, schools need visionary and inspirational managers, who will lead their followers (deputy school manager, educators, learners, parents and the local community) to participate willingly in improving the school.

In challenging the process, school principals should lead the teachers in looking for ways to improve the school (Fullan, Bertain & Auinn, 2004). Teachers' innovative moves in areas such as new ideas on the curriculum, new instructional methods and assessments need to be supported by the school principals (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Jones and George (2003) concur that transformational leaders openly share information with their followers so that they are aware of challenges and the need for change. Leaders cause followers to view challenges in their groups and throughout the organization from a different perspective, consistent with the organization's vision. Leaders engage and empower followers to take personal responsibility for helping solve problems. The transformational leader's intellectual stimulation leads followers to view problems as challenges that they can and will meet and conquer.

#### 1.1.2 Research methodology

This study was carried out to establish how transformational leadership behaviour contributes to academic performance. It employed the correlational research design. Stratified sampling process was used to ensure that schools from both the public and private schools in Nairobi were captured in the study. This process also ensured that both male and female teachers were represented equally. The target population consisted of 72 Principals in public schools and 139 principals in private schools. There were also 1210 teachers in public secondary schools and 1500 teachers in private secondary schools in Nairobi County. The researcher studied 30 randomly selected public schools and a total of 13 private schools. A total of 384 teachers were also studied. The main research instruments were the questionnaire which were adopted from Kouzes and Posner (2003) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) used for measuring transformational leadership behaviours. Leadership Practices Inventory-Self was used for the principals while Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer was used for the teachers for triangulation purposes.

The researcher used documents showing KCSE performance of the selected schools from the Kenya National Examinations Council to ensure that the information was the same as that given by the principals.

Pearson correlations were generated for the independent variable (transformational leadership behaviour) and dependent variable (mainly performance in KCSE). Using the SPSS software, Pearson correlation tests were computed on the data, with an alpha level of .05. ANOVAs were also run to determine if a relationship existed between selected demographic variables and the interaction of leadership practices of principals and student

achievement in KCSE. Data was analysed using Pearson's moment correlation and Analysis of Variance

### 1.1.3 Findings

Pearson correlations indicated statistical significance between total LPI scores and students' academic performance. A further analysis of the leadership domains showed there was a positive correlation between three transformational characteristics (Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the process and Encouraging the Heart) and Students' academic performance. There was however a weak and not statistically significant correlation between transformational leadership in two characteristics (Modeling the way and Enabling Others to Act) and students' academic performance. The principals whose schools obtained the minimum university entry mark (Above C+) scored higher in LPI scores than the principals whose schools obtained less than the university entry marks (Below C+)

These findings support a study conducted by Kelly et al (2005) and Starcher (2006) that principals' leadership practices affected school climate positively and thereby supporting improvement. Creation of a positive school climate is likely to enhance the environment in which teachers and students strive for increased student learning and achievement in examination. These findings concur with Ross and Gray's (2006) who indicated a positive correlation of transformational leadership and academic performance.

Other researchers who had similar findings include: Klinginsmith (2007), Leithwood (1993) and Rutledge (2009). However there was found no significant relationship between transformational leadership to students learning by Layton (2003) and Griffith (2004). Lastly the study sought to establish if there was any significant difference between how the principals (self) rated themselves in the LPI and what the teachers (others) indicated. There was a significance difference between the principals' ratings of themselves and the teachers' ratings of their principals. This study also supported Ndiritu's findings (1999) where a relationship was established between administrative support and academic performance in selected secondary schools in Central Province and Nairobi Province.

### 1.1.4 Conclusions(Lessons learned)

Principals must work with every stakeholder in the community. They should be skilled listeners who value feedback and use it to make recognizable changes. Principals should be on the front lines, working with the stakeholders to improve both their community and school. The principal should never forget to acknowledge those teachers who are doing an extraordinary job. They should also recognize those students who excel in the areas of academics or in leadership

Education is ever-evolving. There is always something bigger and better available. This calls for inspiration of a shared vision. School principals should make all effort to improve their school as a way of challenging the process. Each individual component is a working part of the larger framework of the school and each of those components needs to be oiled once in a while. You may have to replace a part that is not working.

Successful principals realize there is value in delegating. This is the by enabling others to act which is a characteristic of transformational leadership. Principals should strategically make individuals responsible for projects that fit their strengths.. This helps in building the teachers' confidence and enables the principal to concentrate on other projects. Delegating also reduces one's overall workload, which in turn keeps stress level at a minimum.

In enabling others to act, the principal, should also learn to work with all different types of people. Each person has their unique personality, and one must learn to work effectively with each type. Principals must also work with every stakeholder in the community. Other attributes that have been attributed to effective principals include: In modeling the way the school principal should main accessibility at all times. Principals should also be a source of information which acts as a motivation for all the stakeholders and in line with encouraging the heart. In encouraging the heart, the principal should be good listeners and be able to push the followers to higher level of performance. Effective Principals are also expected to be fair and consistent and able to build strong relationships at the work place. Principals should be able to not only adapt to changes but also seek positive changes. They should also encourage others to learn from their mistakes rather using the mistakes to reprimand and put the followers down.

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