

Comparing Management Styles of Educational Leaders: Where Do I Fit In?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the styles of leadership that doctoral students had observed in school leaders and the measure of success they observed of these leaders. The study sought to determine if there was a measurable and quantifiable relationship between observed leadership styles and leader success. A correlational study design was applied. Four major leadership styles were identified and used as a basis for comparisons in this study; Dominated, Factional, Pluralistic, and Inert. Twenty-three candidates in an educational leadership doctoral program were asked to provide perceptions of three successful and three unsuccessful educational leaders' leadership styles. A Yates Chi-Square test of independence was applied to determine any relationship between the variables, leadership style, and leadership success. Statistically significant outcomes were determined in this study.

Introduction

As educational leadership programs prepare students for leadership positions at both the district and building levels, management styles are often discussed in various courses. Management practices vary significantly among individuals and within styles. According to Gupta (2016, para. 3), "Differing educational leadership styles are what make every leader unique." Because leadership styles are diverse and individualized based to a great extent on individual personality or district culture, this affords the opportunity for contrary interaction among members of the leadership team. While leadership textbooks and various web sources indicate what leadership styles best serve school districts, the reality is that many principals and superintendents do not follow the "textbook examples" that are taught in educational leadership programs. Often, graduates of educational leadership programs enter into new job positions, not knowing the leadership styles of those who will supervise them. Conflicting leadership styles among boards of education, superintendents, and principals can lead to dysfunctional educational organizations and anguish encountered by individuals in leadership positions. It would seem essential that future educational leaders recognize basic leadership styles and their resulting management practices to develop harmonious and effective leadership teams. It is not only important for leaders to recognize their personal leadership style, but also the leadership style of those who will be supervising them.

As a result, of the preceding, professional educators planning or seeking employment in educational leadership positions might consider asking themselves: "*Am I capable of utilizing*

and thriving in a particular existing leadership style?” Furthermore, “Can I effectively function as an educational leader in a situation where my supervisor’s leadership style is so drastically different than my own?” These concerns, as well as the outcomes described in “Catherine’s Scenario” to follow, prompted the following research question: “How would a group of doctoral educational leadership students perceive the relationship between leadership style and leader success?”

Catherine’s Scenario

Catherine was a third-grade teacher who went back to college to pursue a degree in educational leadership. She taught in a building and school district where opinions and expertise were valued and encouraged. She could not have had better role models for leadership (in her opinion) than those of her principal and superintendent.

Her superintendent, Ted, was considered a very pluralistic leader. He saw strengths within the school organization and valued input from its principals. The board of education encouraged this type of leadership and supported the decision-making process. Catherine witnessed teaming at its best in order to solve problems and educate the district’s students. Witnessing the school district’s dynamic and its organizational structure had a significant impact on her decision to become a principal.

Upon receiving her degree in educational leadership, Catherine started applying for principal positions. None were available in her district of employment, but a neighboring district had an opening. She applied and was appointed to a position as an elementary principal. Like her previous district of employment, Catherine’s new district was led by a dynamic superintendent. Glenn, the superintendent, had served in that capacity for years and was revered throughout the area as managing a high-quality school district. Catherine could not wait to start her career as a building leader in her new school district. With a new degree in hand and a dynamic superintendent managing the organization, she felt she had just won the “leadership lottery” when she signed her contract and began her duties in the new district.

After a month into her new position, Catherine realized that she had made a big mistake in assuming the principal’s position in this new school district. Unlike Ted, Glenn was a micromanager. Although not unkind, his expectation of Catherine and all principals was to understand that he was the district’s decision-maker. He made all decisions at both the district and building levels. Teachers and parents alike bypassed principals on most issues and went straight to Glenn. His office was always open to these groups. He listened to them, made decisions about their issues, and informed the district’s principals of the outcomes. Teachers, parents, and community members held him in high regard. They trusted him and seldom questioned his authority. The board of education followed the same pattern. Glenn was their superintendent, and they trusted him to make the district’s decisions at all levels.

What a contrast the new district was in comparison with the one where Catherine was a third-grade teacher. There her personality and understanding of leadership had been aligned with Ted’s. She now found herself in a situation where she was being micromanaged, and all decision-making was considered her new superintendent’s function.

Leadership Styles

To follow is a brief review of leadership styles and a presentation of the defining parameters of the four basic leadership styles that served as a basis for this study. Leadership has been defined in many different ways. Lindle (2005) defines a leader as one who is knowledgeable and understanding of fostering a collaborative environment and culture within an organization. Others define leadership as a group approach where team members must be ready to assume a pivotal role when called upon by specific individuals (Chen & Rybak, 2004). To further describe and define effective leadership. According to MODOONO (2017), a leader is an individual who must create an environment of trust and collaboration in the organizational setting. “Trust is the most important factor in building a collaborative and positive school culture” (MODOONO, para. 3),

Irrespective of a formal definition, for one to be a successful leader in today’s public schools, an individual must be proficient in multiple skillsets while simultaneously exhibiting the ability to function as a positive role model and one who can maintain a positive climate among employees (Curry & Wolf, 2017). The climate in school districts primarily focuses on employee morale and student achievement. One, without the other, often leads to the demise of a school leader (Webner et al., 2017).

As individuals prepare for careers in educational leadership, it is essential that they determine the importance of identifying their personnel leadership styles and determining if their platform is consistent with the needs and personality of the organization they are seeking to serve. All too often, the match between an educational leader and the school district to be served is incompatible, resulting in either a voluntary termination (Grissom & Anderson, 2012) or an involuntary exit from the leadership position (Tekniepe, 2015).

Multiple leadership styles are explored and discussed in educational leadership programs. Each carries its strengths and weaknesses. While no one style is universally accepted as the gold standard of leadership, multiple traits exist among individuals who are tasked with leading educational organizations.

Often used but seldom admitted to is Autocratic Leadership. According to Johannsen (2019), this leadership style demands strict compliance with the leader’s wishes. This style’s strength lies in an organization’s need when there is uncertainty and the group members are struggling with the decision-making process. This leadership style’s weakness lies in decision-making controlled by one or more individuals whose ideas allow no room for discussion or debate (Johannsen, 2019).

Facilitative leadership reflects collaboration and participation. Group members within an organization collaborate and reach a consensus before making a final decision (Cherry, 2019). Unlike Autocratic Leadership, the Facilitator seeks organizational members’ strengths that are often called upon to offer expertise in discussions that lead to significant decisions (Johannsen, 2019).

Bureaucratic leadership, described by Johannsen (2019), indicates that defined functions of a management team exist, and a ‘chain of command’ is in place with the expectation that it be strictly followed. The person or individuals in leadership roles are rule followers and use them as the basis for decision-making.

Leadership Styles as Basis for this Study

A landmark study conducted by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) looked at organizational structures and matched them with the subsequent leadership styles required to manage each. In this study, it was determined that organizations and leaders fell into four broad categories:

1. Pluralistic Organizations/Leadership,
2. Inert Organizations/Leadership,
3. Factional Organizations/Leadership, and
4. Dominated Organizations/Leadership.

The leadership aspect of each of these is defined as follows:

- Dominated – The leader shares the beliefs of the dominant organizational group. Decisions, actions, and policies reflect the beliefs and desires of the dominant organizational power structure (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).
- Factional – The leader views that votes by the organization are more important than the discussion of the issues. Votes are along factional lines. Decisions are hotly contested. The control of the organization may shift from election to election or appointment to appointment of leaders (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).
- Pluralistic – Leadership does not represent any one faction or interest group. Discussion of the issues prior to the vote is seen as very important, and consensus is a goal before moving forward (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).
- Inert – The leader has no philosophical direction from the community; it is relatively inactive and tends to give decision-making power to the administration and approves his/her recommendations (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

Purpose of the Study

It was the purpose of this study to determine the styles of leadership that doctoral students had observed in school leaders and the measure of success they observed of these leaders. From that information, the study sought to determine if there was a measurable and quantifiable relationship between their observed leadership styles and the leaders' success.

Sample and Methodology

This study was a fundamental quantitative correlational study designed to determine if there existed a relationship between leadership style and educational leaders' success. Twenty-three candidates in an educational leadership doctoral program were asked to provide perceptions of the leadership styles of three successful educational leaders and three unsuccessful educational leaders. In this project, the leaders assessed were individuals who had managed an organization where the candidates had been or were currently employed. Candidates in two separate doctoral cohorts participated in the study over a two-year period. The Leadership Styles observed were: Pluralistic, Inert, Factional, and Dominated (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Perceptions of Leadership Styles of Successful School Leaders

Leadership Style	Pluralistic	Inert	Dominated	Factional
Number Associated with Each Style	35	31	1	2

Note. $N=69$.

Table 2

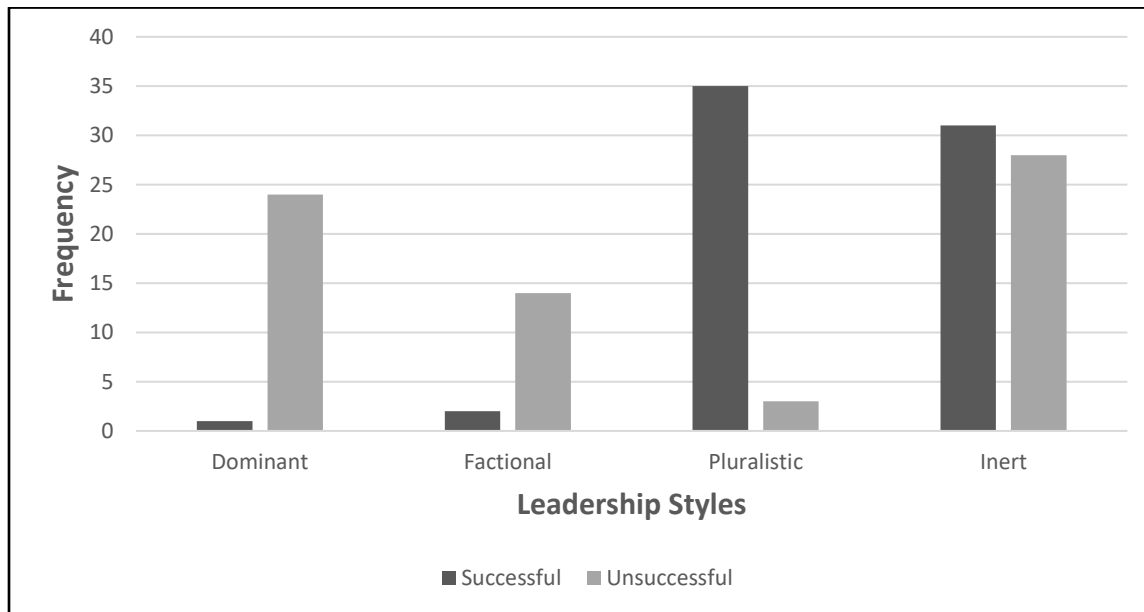
Perceptions of Leadership Styles of Unsuccessful School Leaders

Leadership Style	Pluralistic	Inert	Dominated	Factional
Number Associated with Each Style	3	28	24	14

Note. $N=69$.

Figure 1 provides a representation of the data in Tables 1 and 2. The bar graph displays a strong indication for the leadership success of pluralistic and inert leaders.

Figure 1

Frequency of Success per Leadership Style

Analysis and Results of the Statistical Analysis

It was the purpose of this analysis to determine if a statistically significant valid relationship existed for four leadership styles and the successful or unsuccessful leadership of school administrators respective of their administrative tasks. Was the success of school administrators of this sample dependent upon their leadership style? First observations of the data gave the appearance this was true. In other words, school leaders were observed by 23 graduate students as to their management and leadership style and identified as either kind of charts in a chi-square among Dominated, Factional, Pluralistic, or Inert leaders. Then they were judged as to their level of success as a leader, either successful or unsuccessful. From the observations and resulting data, an analysis was applied to determine any relationship between the variables, leadership style, and leadership success.

The null hypothesis was directed at the difference in the distribution of responses to the outcome across comparison groups. The null hypothesis for this study was: H_0 . The success of educational leaders observed in this study was independent of their leadership styles. The method of analysis chosen was a Chi-Square test of independence. The researcher tested to determine if successful and unsuccessful educational leaders differed significantly in leadership style. Twenty-three graduate students judged successful and unsuccessful leaders as to their leadership style and the success or non-success of their leadership efforts. Tables 1 and 2 provide the raw data for outcomes. Tables 3 and 4 provide the data in a more processed format, comparing the actual results to statistically expected results and percentages.

Table 3 provides the population numbers for observed successful and unsuccessful outcomes categorized among the respective leadership styles. In addition to the actual values, “expected values” are also provided. Although the expected values are informative, they were also needed when making chi-square calculations for post-hoc statistical analyses.

Table 3

Successful and Unsuccessful Outcomes for Decision Making per Leadership Style

Grouping Variables	Group Outcomes				Row Totals
	Dominant	Factional	Pluralistic	Inert	
Successful Outcomes	1	2	35	31	69
Expected Values	12.5	8.0	19.0	29.5	69
Unsuccessful Outcomes	24	14	3	28	69
Expected Values	12.5	8.0	19.0	29.5	69
Column Totals	25	16	38	59	138
Expected Column Values	25	16	38	59	138

From an observation of the raw data, it appears there was a difference between successful and unsuccessful leaders for leadership style. Pluralistic and Inert leaders were seen as more successful than dominated and factional leaders. The overarching question was as to whether or not these observations were statistically accurate.

Table 4 provides a percentage of the group for each perceived leadership style for successful and unsuccessful decision outcomes, indicating the percentages expected for each cell. These values were also needed for post-hoc analyses.

Table 4

Percentage, Successful and Unsuccessful Outcomes for Decision Making per Leadership Style

Grouping Variables	Group Outcomes				Row Totals
	Dominant	Factional	Pluralistic	Inert	
Successful Outcomes	1.4%	2.9%	50.7%	44.9%	100%
Unsuccessful Outcomes	34.8%	20.3%	4.3%	40.6%	
Expected in each cell	18.1%	11.6%	27.5%	42.8%	

The percentages in Table 4 indicate that 95.6% of successful leaders had either pluralistic or inert leadership styles. Sixty-four and four-tenths percent of the unsuccessful leaders were observed as dominated or factional leaders.

A Yates' Chi-Square test for independence was calculated comparing the frequency of leadership styles for successful and unsuccessful school leaders. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (3) = 52.28, p < .05$). The success of school leaders was significantly related to leadership style. Post-hoc individual χ^2 's were calculated. It was determined that each of the leadership styles of *dominant*, *factional*, and *pluralistic* were statistically significant for success with $p < .05$. The *dominated leadership style* was significantly less successful (1) than successful (24), ($\chi^2 (1) = 19.36, p < .05$). The *factional leadership style* was significantly less successful (2) than successful (14), ($\chi^2 (1) = 7.56, p < .05$). The *pluralistic leadership style* was significantly more successful (35) than non-successful (3), ($\chi^2 (1) = 25.29, p < .05$). *Inert leaders* were found not to be significantly more successful (31) than non-successful (28), ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.068, p > .05$).

Conclusion

It was the purpose of this study to determine if a significant and statistically valid relationship existed between four leadership styles and the successful or unsuccessful leadership of school administrators. First observations of the data indicated that such a relationship existed. Upon further analyses, valid statistical evidence supports success or non-success as an educational leader is related to one's leadership style, as indicated by the sample data presented in this study. The success of school leaders was found to have been statistically significantly related to leadership style for *dominated*, *factional*, and *pluralistic* leaders. A statistically

significant relationship for *inert* leadership was not established for successful or unsuccessful leadership.

While Catherine's story did not indicate that the leader who supervised her was unsuccessful, it certainly implied that she felt as if her leadership capabilities had been compromised due to their relationship. She was a pluralistic leader who was now being supervised by a dominating leader. In effect, she had become dominated by the leader and was effectively taken out of her new school district's decision-making process.

As educational leadership programs prepare future principals and superintendents, it is vitally important they candidates are not only taught to self-evaluate their management styles but also to have some observable method to evaluate those who will be supervising them. To enter into a relationship where leadership styles are not compatible leads to a breakdown in organizations and results in competent individuals leaving the profession. The result of this study suggests that before entering a leadership position, individuals need to determine the management styles and philosophy of their superiors to have a more successful experience as an educational leader.

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