

Exploring Situational Leadership in the Education System: Practices for Multicultural Societies

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Abstract

Due to a desire for higher quality public education, there is increasing interest in the quality of leadership within schools. Educational leadership refers to the vision, skills, and capabilities needed for building and maintaining local school districts, attracting talented teachers, and creating educational programs for a superior academic environment. This paper presents an analysis of educational leadership at the high-school level examining situational leadership, organizational structure, and leadership delegation. Such topics were chosen due to their importance for countries and school districts that are highly diverse. Two example cases were used (Canada and Iran), both of which were lacking (to different degrees) in how well they applied situational leadership. Both had a strong hierarchical structure. The inconsistency evident in these examples, involving both the organization and leadership, and what is needed for a more effective system, will be used to highlight the value of situational leadership in an educational context.

1. Introduction

Leadership is a topic with universal appeal; in the academic research literature and even popular press, much has been written about leadership and its role in developing knowledge in society [13]. In the context of education, leadership is important given the role that it plays in improving the quality of schools. Although leadership is sometimes equated with management, there are differences between these concepts. They are different in that management traditionally focuses on the activities of staffing, organizing, controlling, and planning, whereas leadership emphasizes the general influence process [13]. According to some researchers, management is concerned with creating order and stability [1], whereas leadership is about

adaptation and constructive change [8]. The overlap between leadership and management is centered on how both involve influencing a group of individuals in goal attainment [13].

This paper will present an analysis of leadership in the context of public high schools, particularly in three areas: 1) how school leaders use situational leadership to handle interacting with different kinds of people and solving different kinds of problems, 2) how the organizational structure of their school supports or hinders leaders in using situational leadership, and 3) how much leaders delegate decision making or include others in the decision-making process. This analysis will involve case studies of Canadian and Iranian public high schools, given the highly diverse context of those countries and the potential available for using situational leadership and including others in decision making at the local level.

2. Literature review

Education systems, schools boards, and even classes can all benefit from effective leadership to improve staff, motivate students, and keep everyone up-to-date with methods of achieving a common goal. Glickman and colleagues [6] believe successful school supervisors need certain knowledge and skills. The knowledge component includes the potential or preferred state that teachers and school could reach, the current state of the teachers and school, and how to transform the teachers and school so that the potential state can be reached. To achieve this transformation, supervisors need interpersonal skills - to effect positive change in others - and technical skills in observing, analyzing, evaluating, and planning. When framed this way, the necessary knowledge and skills can be thought of as divided into five necessary processes. These five processes are: Creating a vision for success, Building the capacity for leadership,

Raising expectations for student achievement, Instructional Leadership, and Situational Leadership.

The necessary knowledge of a supervisor is needed for the first two processes (creating a vision and building capacity), while the interpersonal and technical skills are part of the remaining three processes (raising expectations, and instructional and situational leadership).

The process for Creating a Vision for Success is important since successful leaders have the ability to articulate an explicit vision for their school system [9]. They understand where they want their school system to go, can explain this goal, and have a plan to reach that goal. When this vision is clearly shared with others in the school system, everyone will then have a common goal and can cooperate more effectively for any required changes. Successful leaders will also consider the risks involved and help others be willing to work with these risks, since risk is inherent in any kind of change.

The process for Building Capacity for Leadership is important because educational leaders have a wider responsibility for building relationships with people who are inside and outside the school [1]. In developed organizations with knowledgeable staff, top-down decision-making is not a motivational approach [10]. The true community of a system school is composed of students, parents, teachers, leaders, and other stakeholders. The fundamental duty of the educational leadership is to incorporate the community to support and achieve the visions and missions of the school. It shows why communication skills are significant for administrators [1]. An effective leader in the education system is to be able to understand the school board's opinion and work with the board to achieving the common vision [1].

The process for Raising Student Expectations is important because one of the educational leadership responsibilities needed in a school or district is the ability to realize balance between needs of different stakeholders such as parents, politicians, and other constituents [4]. Even though success of the traditional method depends on issues such as school buildings, budgets, and facilities, recent definitions of success emphasize managing the needs of their community and being able to communicate effectively [9].

2.1. Instructional leadership

Leithwood and colleagues [12] believe that in the literature an explicit definition of instructional

leadership is missing or ambiguous. They instead focus on a different point: "Instructional leadership... typically assumes that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (p.8).

The capacity to provide instructional leadership is an important characteristic of effective leadership. Academic success is one important commitment of instructional leaders for all students' especially those who have difficulty learning. Furthermore, principals should have the dignity to provide feedback that encourages both students and teachers. A principal who is a successful administrator should ensure the whole school is continually aware of two critical messages: the responsibility of a good teacher and the expected quality of students' work [2]. In this type of education system, success is often considered in terms of student outcomes. Finally, instructional leadership is more than simply communicating expectations: time should also be spent observing, participating in, and leading classrooms to provide practical examples of those expectations [12].

2.2. Situational leadership

The situational leadership theory is a resource to explain why one leader is effective under certain situation but not others. Additionally, it is important that a person who has a very charismatic personality and trusts his charisma does not simply use his or her preferred leadership style in a new situation [5]. To determine the best approach to some situation, it might seem reasonable to just look at the approach taken by other successful and unsuccessful leaders in a similar situation. However, differences in organizational complexity between situations will often make this impossible. Hence, leaders need to be able to adapt to the situation instead of just copying other supposedly successful strategies.

It is true that a style of leadership does not work in all situations, hence a successful leader should work with diverse styles of leadership based on "the appropriate" time and place. In other words, effective leaders in all parts of organizations are able to "master" all leadership styles, and recognize where and when should be used [5]. Using Goleman's emotional intelligence model, six situational leadership styles can be identified [11]:

Visionary or Authoritative (see Table 1), who is an expert with enough knowledge, experience, and knows how to achieve objective results that he can help organizations improve themselves based on market needs. When leaders encounter with a

workgroup who is inexperienced; the authoritative leadership style is the most effective one.

Coaching (see Table 2), in which the tasks and roles of followers have been defined clearly. Two-way communication is the fundamental part of effective coaching style leadership when followers have enough experience and accept what needs to be done.

Affiliative (see Table 3), in which the responsibility for team building when followers' morale is low is crucial. The affiliative leader can act toward promoting harmony and help to get real data about problems to assist in trying to solve them.

Democratic (see Table 4), which is required when followers are knowledgeable. This style of leadership has a democratic approach and gives their followers equal opportunity for decision making.

Pacesetter (see Table 5), which is best when followers of an organization are skilled and their motivation is high. The pacesetter leader is suggested because the pacesetter leaders have high work standard for themselves and for subordinates.

Commanding/Coercive (see Table 6), which is contrary to the democratic one. Leaders using this style prefer getting results by non-democratic and bullying means. In organizations that require a fast turnaround, the coercive leaders are successful at least in the short term. In the long term this style can damage the subordinates' morale.

One of the strengths of situational leadership theory is the test of time in the marketplace. Situational leadership is meant for training leaders within organizations [7]. To be practical is the second strength of situational leadership, and it is easy to intuitively understand, and apply in a diversity of settings. Some leadership approaches purvey sophisticated ways and are complex for assessing administrators own leadership behavior, such as the decision-making approach suggested by Vroom and Yetton [19], unlike situational leadership. A third strength of situational leadership is its prescriptive value. Even though some leadership theories are descriptive in their nature, situational leadership is a prescriptive one. A fourth strength of situational leadership emphasizes leader flexibility in different situations [20]. Leaders prefer and need to find out their subordinates' needs then their leadership model can be matched with them [20]. Finally, situational leadership reminds us to select diverse style of treatments based on the subordinates' task, responsibility, and new skills which help them to become more confident in their work [20].

One of the criticisms of situational leadership is the number of research studies about it. Only a few studies have been carried out to justify the

propositions and assumptions [18]. The vague conceptualization of the subordinates' development levels can be the second criticism of this approach. The authors in this field do not talk clearly about how competence is incorporated with commitment to form six distinct levels of development [20]. According to Northouse [13], this theory does not illustrate the theoretical foundation for changes between each of the development levels. Finally, typical questionnaires analyze diverse job situations and try to determine the perfect leadership style for each by just asking respondents [20]. This is not an effective means of determining the appropriate leadership style.

2.3. Organizational structure

The organizational structure of a school, and the wider education system as a whole, can be described in terms of how vertical (i.e., hierarchical) or horizontal (i.e., flat) it is. This refers to the relationships between members of the organization and their roles in that structure. For example, 'student' and 'teacher' are roles that members of the school have and these roles define certain relationships (expectations, goals, behavioral limits, etc.) between them. When the organization is more vertical in nature, the roles form a pyramid or ladder shaped structure in which there are multiple layers and each layer has a supervisory role in relation to the layer(s) beneath [3]. The number of layers in the hierarchy, and the relative sizes of each level, gives a sense of the shape of the organization: a pyramid has multiple layers that decrease in size as they go up, while a tower has many layers each of which could be quite small. Although a vertical structure has benefits, such as clearly defining authority and responsibility and using promotion to a higher layer as a means of motivating employees, there are also potential problems if individuals become too devoted to their particular layer [3]. A vertical structure can also restrict the flow of information and the middle layers can often be resistant to change from above or below. Such problems tend to occur more frequently when the middle layers are large or when the organization has many layers.

An organizational can also be horizontal in structure, in which there are as few layers as possible. As such, the organization may have only one or two layers and most members of the organization are on the same level [3]. As such, supervision and decision-making processes tend to be distributed. In other words, people may not have a direct supervisor but are instead part of a team with a rotating center of authority or have responsibility to the team itself. This shape can result in greater

coordination and communication, as well as easier and more inclusive decision-making. However, since people lack a direct supervisor there is a risk of confusion, power struggles, inappropriate authority given to individuals with strongly domineering attitudes, and burnout from excessive responsibility [3]. Moving from a vertical to a horizontal structure can be done, but long-term growth of an organization after such a change is difficult and returning to a more vertical structure can cause even more problems.

2.4. Leadership and decision-making delegation

Regardless of the structure of an organization, leaders can still choose how much authority and control they have over decision-making processes. The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Leadership Continuum is a simple model to describe the degree of authority delegated to the team by the leader for the purposes of making decisions [16]. This delegation can be modeled as an inverse relationship between freedom given to a team and authority that the leader retains. When more freedom is given, the leader is delegating more authority and personally exercising less of it. However, since the leader made the decision to delegate his or her authority, the leader is still responsible for the outcome.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt's model has seven levels, from level one with no delegation to level seven with the most delegation. Since the model only measures the current degree of delegation, the level may change in an organization over time.

In level one, leaders perform no delegation and retain full authority over their decisions. They identify the problem, consider possible solutions, choose one, and then tell everyone else which solution they are going to follow. Although they may consider the opinions of others, often they do not.

In level two, leaders operate the same as in level one but try to persuade others in the organization that their decision is a good one. This differs from level one, where the leader simply requires others to accept it and level two leaders realize that others on their team will act on the decision more readily if they agree with it.

In level three, leaders make decisions in the same way as level one but also create opportunities for the team members to examine and discuss the solution chosen. This is different from level two because leaders not directly trying to persuade others in the team but engage with them in discussion about the solution. This can also provide

more information for leaders about the situation, which could improve their decisions in the future.

In level four, leaders still identify the problem, consider possible solutions and choose one of them, but then have discussions with the team about the solution. Unlike in level three, the purpose of this discussion to have team input and discussion about whether this solution is acceptable. Level four represents an opportunity for team members to be more directly involved in the decision making process even if they are not choosing solutions.

In level five, leaders identify the problems but not the solutions. Instead, they oversee discussions with the team to debate what solutions are possible for this problem. Other team members can share ideas, information, and opinions on what choices are available and which one would be best. Although leaders still ultimately make the decision and choose one of the discussed solutions, everyone on the team is involved in debating the possibilities and presenting evidence for which solution is best.

In level six, leaders act as they did in level five except that the team makes the decision. After discussing the possible solutions, leaders work with the group to decide which solution is chosen such that at least a majority of the group chose that solution. Leaders may or may not be involved in the actual decision, but accept whatever the group decides.

In level seven, leaders only define the boundaries of acceptable solutions and leave the team to discuss and debate the rest. Thus, the team (which may or may not include their leader) identifies problems, debates possible solutions, and then chooses which solution is best. Leaders in this level only help to define what solutions can actually be implemented in the organization, and that is all.

3. Research Study

A small qualitative study was conducted to explore the style of leadership used in schools in Canada and Iran. These countries were chosen because both are diverse (they are multicultural, multinational, multilingual, and multi-religious countries) but still very different cultures. In particular, three main questions were investigated:

1. What is the participant's definition of effective leadership?
2. How does the participant help others achieve their organizational objectives?
3. How does the participant define success for educational leaders?

Data were collected using formal interviews, a common research technique for qualitative research. Most of the interview questions were open ended,

since that provided greater depth in the replies. Questions were asked to help determine the interviewees' opinion and understanding of the leadership style used in their school. For example, to determine the level of leadership, one of the questions asked could be "what kind of leadership do you prefer to utilize in your school?" Interviews were conducted in English, Turkish, and Persian, audio-recorded and transcribed, and then translated into English (for the Iranian principal).

The questions were used to provide a sense of how well the participants used situational leadership (i.e., what approaches they used, why, and whether those approaches changed with different circumstances), what kind of organizational structure existed in the school, and how much they delegated decision-making (i.e., what level they typically acted according to the Tannenbaum and Schmidt leadership continuum).

3.1. Participants

Two public high school administrators were chosen from Canada and Iran. Both administrators were men, had at least a Bachelor's degree for education, and had more than 10 years of work experience.

3.2. Limitations of the study

This work is a case study of two schools. Hence, the results should be interpreted like any other case study though it is more limited than case studies of a similar nature that would have examined more than two schools or interviewed more than two administrators. However, three other limitations arise due to the nature of this study. First, the researchers' background may cause the interviewee to provide better information but it may also bias his responses. Second, since the language of the interview was translated into English there may be biases present in the interpretation of the participant's answers and in the translation itself. Third, the analysis is largely based on self-report comments from participants and not from external measures of behavior. Although this does not provide an 'objective' measure of the state of the schools, it does provide an accurate picture of how the participants see their own actions and their professed reasons for behaving a certain way. This on its own is enough to identify potential areas of difficulties with situational leadership, though more external measures could be done in future work.

4. Results

Both principals were asked the same set of questions, their answers to which are listed here. Their responses are given numbered identifiers, to help reference them later in this paper. A quote identified as CP2 would be the 2nd quote from the Canadian principal, while IP5 would be the 5th quote from the Iranian principal.

4.1. Effective leadership

When asked "What is your definition of effective leadership?" the principals replied:

"Effective leaders are not determined by what they want to do or what they know. This group of leaders has some strong characteristics such as trustworthiness, integrity, ethics, and honesty. I read in one of my textbooks that an 'Effective Leader' acts in line with how s/he speaks and earns the right to be responsible for his/her employees' success in his/her organization. Effective leaders have clear and strong communication skills, and they inspire goodwill and loyalty in others. In all schools, especially in high schools we need this kind of educational leadership." (CP1)

"In my opinion, effective leadership means a person who is able to increase motivation between subordinates and give opportunities for them to show their ability. In terms of my employees, I invite them to a meeting (we have at least one meeting each month) where I explain our school goals. They can see all of the school boards' comments, except items that are confidential. Additionally, we have a meeting with parents every three months. Of course, these relationships are defined by the school boards, and if a student has a problem or he becomes a problem to others, we get their parents involved in an urgent meeting." (IP1)

4.2. Supporting others in organization

When asked "How well do you accept new approaches?" the participants replied:

"Of course, I'm open and interested in hearing about new approaches. ... I want to hear the opinions of others and learn from them." (CP2)

"I like to hear new ideas from our students and teachers, but we have to follow the rules and guidelines from the school board [since] decision making is centralized." (IP2)

When asked "How does your school approach teamwork? Does your school have boundaries between teams?" the participants responded:

“We don’t have boundaries between these groups. All of us can work together, talk to each other, and share our opinions.” (CP3)

“Teamwork between students would be good, since it’s a more active learning approach as you previously mentioned, but the quality and effectiveness of this strategy depends on the teachers. Team activities can be hard sometimes for Iranians, especially Iranian students, but I believe we have to improve this and create a better relationship between students and teachers.” (IP3)

When asked “How well does information from students travel up to the principal? To higher levels of administration in the district?” the participants replied:

“My office door is open for all students and staff. I’m happy to hear from them, it’s an important part of my responsibility.” (CP4)

“Students are free to visit. My office is always open for them.” (IP4)

When asked the question “How actively do your superiors support you and other staff members in continual learning and personal growth?” the participants replied:

“I believe all principals have to help their staff and teachers learn, and sometimes the students too. Some principals prefer to be formal about this, using a specific way of learning. I try to be both formal and informal.” (CP5)

“Self-improvement is a good method and necessary for education, but in Iran the teachers and other staff have many economical problems. For them, the first step is to handle their cost of living. ... In the education system we have to improve our knowledge. Actually, students are so fast with learning new things that we have to keep up sometimes. Students have many sources for learning information, such as the Internet, computers, satellites, friends, and so on. These sources are also available for teachers and principals though.” (IP5)

When asked “What do you think of brainstorming or consulting with other staff members?” the participants said:

“I use brainstorming in decision making, since it is an excellent model. I like it when people are free to suggest and explain their opinions as well as I use methods like teamwork and brainstorming in my work.” (CP6)

“I like it when I hear that someone has done brainstorming, but it’s not a regular method in our education system.” (IP6)

When asked “Does your school have a clear vision?” the participants said:

“Yes, our vision is clear. I regularly ask for and collect my teachers’ and staff’s opinions

about the vision and state of things and send that information to the school board too.” (CP7)

“Yes, there is a vision for this school. It is helpful for the teachers, staff, and students so that they can work together to achieve the objectives and goals of this school, and help them to learn better than yesterday. It is a way of measuring our progress.” (IP7)

When asked “Is this vision publicly available within the school? How do teachers and students know it?” the participants replied:

“You can see our school’s vision statement in many areas. ... People have seen that statement, I know that the teachers and staff here know what our vision is.” (CP8)

“It’s available in my office here, but also the office of the [vice principal]. ... No [we don’t need to promote it], I think all of the staff and teachers already know the vision for our schools [, and] it is the teachers’ responsibility to give that information to the students.” (IP8)

When asked “How can you change or comment on the vision?” the participants said:

“Well, we of course receive this vision from the school board. However, we can send our comments, questions, and suggestions to them. So, in this case we have both a top-down and bottom-up system.” (CP9)

“Decision making is centralized [the vision comes from the school board]. Although my relationship with new ideas is good, it depends on our school’s vision of course. It has to align with it since we cannot change the vision of our school.” (IP9)

4.3. Success in an organization

When asked “How many levels of management does your school have? What about in the whole school district?” the participants replied:

“We have five levels: principal, vice principal, department head [DH], teachers, and students. I don’t think all these levels are necessary though.” (CP10)

“There are four levels for our school: principal, his assistants, teachers, and students. All these levels are necessary for a school.” (IP10)

When asked “What kind of authority is delegated by administrators? How much, if any, authority is delegated?” the participants replied:

“I like delegating some decisions and authority to others. If I have to make a decision in a new area, I prefer making that decision in a group.” (CP11)

“I am responsible, so I prefer to make major decisions, but I collect suggestions from others. So, I make the decisions but I use my knowledge and the

knowledge of my colleagues [when making those decisions]. ... [I don't delegate to my assistants,] I like to do that kind of work myself. I've defined the job for my assistants very clearly, and I monitor them regularly to make sure things are going well. ... I trust my colleagues, but since I'm the one who is responsible I have to consider all the sides of a decision." (IP11)

When asked "How do you define success for educational leaders?" the participants replied:

"As a leader, I think self-actualization is very important. I would like to encourage people to become self-motivated, but of course I welcome other people to motivate me. I think using both methods will be perfect [self-motivation and other-motivation], but I believe money is not a good reason for motivation. Some people would like to be a leader because they like power, the title, money, and so on. But I believe these are not the primary reason. ...I motivate myself and others for higher quality teaching because I believe the world, and our society, has changed; we cannot follow a traditional model, and role models are the best model to follow. In other words, as an administrator, principal, and leader of this school I would like to be a positive role model." (CP12)

"In Iranian schools, the quality of a school depends on the number of students who are able to pass the Konkour examinations [state-university entrance exams]. Parents are very concerned about this issue. Since our students are often successful with the exams, our school is considered a successful school." (IP12)

5. Discussion

5.1. Organizational structure

The organizational structure for both schools was vertical, with four levels: the principal, vice-principal, teachers and staff, and the students (see IP10 and CP10). Although the Canadian principal mentioned a teacher who is the department head, this was later explained to be a more optional role and not consistent across departments.

Although Iran is a diverse country, the government operates through a top-down approach even in educational policy development. Even though leadership and decision making normally uses a top-down approach, decisions are far more centralized and vertically structured in Iran [14]. Almost all people with a different background, such as speaking a language other than Persian or having a religion other than the state religion, have to follow policies and use educational materials provided by the capital of Iran [15].

The Canadian educational system is also vertical, like in Iran, and uses a top-down approach for policy development. Unlike in Iran though, where the curriculum is determined at the national level, the Canadian curriculum is typically determined at the provincial level and the information hierarchy is smaller (i.e., information does not have to travel up to the federal government, only the provincial level). However, the schools are still required to follow the given curriculum, so the Canadian teachers are not completely free to determine how best to educate their students.

This difference in organizational structure, and how it affected leadership and decision making, can be seen in the comments from the participants. The Iranian principal indicated his school's vision came from the school board and believed that no one in their school could contribute to or comment on that vision (IP9). Such comments imply a strongly centralized and rigidly vertical structure, with limited opportunities for external input. Furthermore, he was perpetuating that behavior by keeping the vision within the offices of the highest levels in the school (IP8). At least he suggested that teachers should be engaging the students with it, and not him (IP8).

In contrast, the Canadian principal believed that people in his school (not only himself) could comment on the vision for their school, that such comments could change the vision (CP9), and that he tried to organize opportunities to share the vision and gather comments about it (CP7). In other words, despite the Canadian school's vision also being determined at the school-board level (CP9) the structure was not as rigid or centralized due to opportunities for external input.

5.2. Effective leaders

In the Iranian situation, the top-down approach continues in school boards and schools and can be seen in the responses from the Iranian principal (see quotes IP2 and IP11). His concern over the need to follow the school board's recommendations and rules, and the need to monitor others for compliance, suggests this is a serious issue for him. Even in his description of effective leadership (see quote IP1) there is the idea of a hierarchy and the need to maintain that structure in the operation of the school.

In the Canadian situation, the principal seems more interested in supporting the people within his school. There was little mention of the school board, he talked about the importance of teamwork and self-actualization (see quotes CP6 and CP12), and defined effective leadership in terms closer to their character and behavior instead of compliance with a

hierarchy (see quote CP1). As much as the Canadian principal wants to support his teachers and students though, he is still going to face some limitations if the curriculum does not match with the needs of students.

5.3. Sustained effectiveness

Historically, there have been many people that were extremely successful leaders at one time in their country but, for some reason, had trouble sustaining their effectiveness. This could suggest a person can lose their desire to be successful, but often it is the case that the person got involved with a different set of circumstances and then failed. Although these people were successful, they were no longer effective when their work environment changed. How does this look for the two interviewed participants?

Again, it is difficult for leaders because the Ministry of Education, in both Canada and Iran, uses a top-down management style and this has been consistent for several decades [14]. In this situation, sustaining effectiveness is tricky as changes to behavior with new circumstances cannot easily or quickly occur in a top-down hierarchy. One example of this in Iran is that school materials are designed so that students have to learn in Persian [15]. An administrator of a school in a province where the majority of students' native language is not Persian cannot suggest that the material be taught in a different language. This is especially a problem in the elementary levels, where students have problems with fundamental concepts due to language barriers [15]. Changing with the circumstances might be easier for the Canadian principal, given his interest in supporting others and working as a team, but he said little about whether the teachers themselves are well motivated to change. As much as he may want to follow a new course, there may be unwillingness from others to do the same.

In Iran, the teachers do not have high motivation since the poor economic climate has put them in a critical situation. To have enough income to live, they frequently need to find part-time jobs outside of school which may have nothing to do with their supposedly primary job of teaching. Using the existing top-down management approach, and given a set amount of time for working at school, teachers in different levels are just motivated to teach students; teachers are not able to help students or solve other problems students may have within or out of class [15]. The principal confirmed this was a problem, and that motivation for teachers was

difficult to address at the school-level (see quote IP5).

In addition, socio-cultural pressures on the population have the same effect as top-down management. For instance, in families of a low socio-economic background there are cultural pressures for men to work. If a young boy suddenly finds his family in a poor financial state, he will be pressured to leave school to find a job and help his family [14].

5.4. Leadership delegation

Some comments from the Canadian principal (see quotes CP3, CP4, and CP11) suggest that he was highly open to input from lower levels of the hierarchy and regularly tried to include others in decision making. His comments suggest behavior closer to level five on the Tannenbaum and Schmidt continuum. This is quite significant, and would support situational leadership well as it provides many opportunities for the principal to identify when to change his style and get feedback about the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of a current style.

In contrast, it seems that the Iranian principal was open to ideas (see quote IP4) but was against engaging others in decision making or delegating decision making to others (see quotes IP2 and IP11). These comments suggest behavior closer to level three on the Tannenbaum and Schmidt continuum. This is problematic for situational leadership, since limited feedback is available for the principal to identify when to change style. However, it does not seem that the principal is against moving to a higher level on the continuum in theory but believes that doing so is against the requirements of the organizational structure (i.e., he cannot change until his superiors allow such change).

5.5. Situational vs. behavioral leadership

The Iranian principal discussed decision making being centralized, both in terms of being made at the board and government levels and him not delegating decision making to others in the school. Such centralized decision-making suggests problems experienced by schools outside of the capital could be ignored, since those problems would need to be investigated by individuals within the central administration. As well, individuals who do not hold decision-making power, as may be the case for many non-Persian individuals, could have little or no say in the decision-making process. Widespread inequality exists among various urban groups, separated by a number of factors, and this same inequality is just as noticeable in the education

system [17]. Under such circumstances, a situational leadership approach is very difficult to perform. Without a diversity of input, and being able to recognize how one decision may not be effective in all contexts, a leader cannot be sufficiently flexible to follow the situational leadership approach.

In Canada though, the principal suggested that he involved others in the decision-making process and preferred that approach (see quotes CP2 and CP11), and this was supported by his comments that he encouraged brainstorming (see quote CP6) and was skeptical of the current hierarchical structure of the education system (see quote CP10). His skepticism of the hierarchy is consistent with his desire to encourage others and listen to the concerns of students (see quotes CP5 and CP4).

A related important aspect though is teamwork. For diverse countries, it is useful to have strategies that enable teamwork between different parts of society as one way of helping to create a shared vision. The topic of teamwork was explicitly mentioned by the Iranian principal as a serious problem (see quote IP3). Although this contrasts with his desire to centralize decision making, the principal clearly understands the importance of teamwork and the need for team exercises like brainstorming (see quote IP6) even if such things rarely occur. The Canadian principal was interested in promoting teamwork too, but believed that the members of his school were engaging in teamwork and team exercises like brainstorming (see quotes CP6 and CP3). Thus, although both the principals like teamwork and claim that they promote it, the Canadian principal seems more successful in this area and likely has an organizational structure more conducive to teamwork.

Looking only at the situation of the two studied schools, it is possible to see which of the situational leadership styles are used and the difficulties with choosing alternatives. In the Iranian school, the commanding/coercive style seems to be used at the central governmental level and, consciously or unconsciously, is pushed onto others. This can be seen in the Iranian principal's attitude that he needs to use the commanding style, consistent with a strongly vertical structure. In the case of Iran, it appears that this structure is not motivating teachers because they have more serious economic concerns that cannot be reasonably solved by moving up the hierarchy. In Canadian school, the principal's comments suggest he alternates between the democratic and coaching styles. These do not appear to be the styles used by individuals above him in the educational system, which suggests that whatever style is used in the higher levels of the educational

hierarchy is not pushed further down or that this particular principal has ignored them.

6. Conclusion

Based on advantages and disadvantages of the situational leadership, this model of leadership is a prescriptive approach to leadership. Situational leadership suggests how leaders in many different types of situations and organizations can become effective. This approach is a model which indicates to leaders how they should handle organizations and subordinates in a particular situation. In countries such as Iran which is multicultural, multilingual, and multinational and that her provinces which do not have the same demographic, economic, and educational situation, this style of leadership can provide a practical and successful structure to feature effective leaders.

Effective leaders in this approach are those who are able to change their own style based on the task requirements and the subordinates' needs. Given that all aspects of the Iranian education system, even including the wider social culture, uses a top-down approach, a situational leadership approach is badly needed. To improve leaders' effectiveness in the Iranian educational system, so that it can have a more practical model based on a global approach, all provinces must have an equal opportunity to research, review, and re-establish issues such as: engagement in curriculum and assessment development, career development and leadership, and developing school leaders.

Even within universities, the structure remains much the same. With an ever-increasing number of highly educated individuals, circulation of information between these people and between administrations would greatly improve their effectiveness. Without applying situational leadership, and without being willing to work together as teams, this circulation may not be effective.

In any organization, a leader who is following a situational leadership approach should adjust his style to match the circumstances of those he is leading. In Iran, the dominant approach taken is a commanding/coercive one. However, much of the population is skilled and motivated, so a pace-setting approach should be taken. Hence, even if leaders did not adopt a situational leadership approach but simply changed their style to be pace-setting this would already create some improvements. Once the situation changed though, they would still be using an inadequate approach. Additionally, the vision of the organization should be clearly incorporated into the style of leadership.

Since, the vision should match the current or desired circumstances the style of leadership needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Even the case for Canada had room for improvement though. The principal was using a high level of leadership delegation and was trying two different styles depending on the circumstance, but the organizational structure is still vertical and there are still restrictions on teacher behavior and how much the principal can support various new methods. It is also unclear whether the behavior of the principal was a result of his own interests or is promoted and supported by the school board. This is different from the Iranian case, where it was clear that the principal's behavior was attributed to requirements from the school board (and possibly higher levels in the administration). As well, as much as the Iranian principal wanted to improve things he also believed that significant change (e.g., change in organizational structure or leadership delegation) could not occur without the higher administration initiating and approving it.

For future work, additional research is needed that increases the number of participants and uses different kinds of participants (teachers and students as well as principals) to create triangulation of the data. Furthermore, since the educational circumstances of schools in the future may change as the world becomes more interconnected and interdependent, the organizational structure and style of leadership of the schools also need to be analyzed in terms of how well they would support this future state. Based on the current results, the Canadian school requires less improvement than the Iranian school but both require some change so that principals and teachers can use situational leadership with greater effectiveness and the organizational structure can support such activities.

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8. Appendix

Table 1. Summary of the Visionary/Authoritative style [from 11]

Nickname	The Visionary
Impact on organization	Extremely Positive
Phrase used	Come with me
Characteristics	Inspirational empathetic, open, sharing
Emotional intelligence competencies	Self-confidence, empathy, change, catalyst
When appropriate	New direction is required or goals require clarification

Table 2. Summary of the Coaching style [from 11]

Nickname	The Nurturer
Impact on organization	Very positive
Phrase used	Try this
Characteristics	Listens, counsels, encourage
Emotional intelligence competencies	Developing others, empathy, self-awareness
When appropriate	Improving people's strengths, building future leaders

Table 3. Summary of the Affiliative style [from 11]

Nickname	The people person
Impact on organization	Positive
Phrase used	People come first
Characteristics	Collaborative creates harmony
Emotional intelligence competencies	Empathy, building, relationships, communication
When appropriate	Creating teams and healing dysfunctional relationships

Table 4. Summary of the Democratic style [from 11]

Nickname	The listener
Impact on organization	Positive
Phrase used	What do you think
Characteristics	Collaborative, influencer, team-player
Emotional intelligence competencies	Collaboration, team leadership, communication
When appropriate	Seeking to involve a group of people in the decision-making

Table 5. Summary of the Pacesetter style [from 11]

Nickname	The superman / superwoman
Impact on organization	Often very negative
Phrase used	Do as I do
Characteristics	Hands-on, impatient, data-driver
Emotional intelligence competencies	Conscientiousness, drive to achieve, initiative
When appropriate	Raising the standard when a competent & motivated team is working well

Table 6. Summary of the Coercive style [from 11]

Nickname	The dictator
Impact on organization	Negative when not in crisis
Phrase used	Do what I tell you
Characteristics	Threatening demanding controlling
Emotional intelligence competencies	Drive to achieve, initiative, self-control
When appropriate	Emergencies occur, time is short, severe situations have set in