

PARADIGMS OF LEADERSHIP – RESEARCH ON WAYS OF THINKING BY HEAD TEACHERS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN POLAND

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Abstract

Background. The leadership concept seems to be one of the most promising for attempting to understand and develop the nature of management in the public sector and especially in the sphere of educational organizations such as schools. It is also gradually becoming one of the important issues in recent reforms of educational systems. The problem is that there are different paradigms of thinking about leadership and that they lead to quite different practical applications. In that context it is essential to develop knowledge about ways of thinking and understanding of leadership concepts among those involved in educational management as this can be a crucial factor contributing to the effectiveness of reforms introduced into that domain of the public sector.

Research aims. The main aim of the presented research was to identify ways Polish school head teachers think about leadership and compare it with the results of a different study carried out on an international group of students involved in special courses on educational leadership especially designed to develop a new understanding of leadership.

Method. Research was based on Avery's (2004) typology of four types of leadership: (a) classical, (b) transactional, (c) visionary and (d) organic. Author used a questionnaire designed using descriptions of four types of leadership that consisted of 15 questions concerning different aspects of leadership in schools as organizations. The research group consisted of 120 randomly selected groups of school head teachers from different types of Polish schools located all over the country.

Key findings. Analysis of the collected data shows that the classical paradigm of thinking about leadership is the most frequently practiced among Polish school head teachers and the organic paradigm the least frequent. A comparison of the Polish group results with the international study shows the opposite results. It was also interesting that quite a big group of participants of the Polish study answered in such a complex way that their thinking was classified as "mixed paradigm".

Keywords: Educational management, Leadership, Paradigms of thinking

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Nowadays, leadership plays a more and more crucial role in both theoretical thinking and practical activities in the public sector. It is especially visible in the educational field where, since early nineties, one can observe a growing interest in leadership theories and numerous attempts to transfer ideas and concepts of leadership from the general management theory to educational management trying to find ways of thinking that can best suit the needs of schools as organizations, such as, for example, the

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paradigm of transformational leadership (Precey & Rodriguez Entrena, 2011). Many authors argue that it is necessary to define educational leadership according to the specific needs of the educational domain finding its educationally specific meaning (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010; Dorczak, 2012). Some, like for example Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood and Brown (2010) are conceptualising school leadership to try to give very practical descriptions of what precisely school leaders should do, listing different practical responsibilities of leaders in schools. Regardless of these numerous attempts it is quite clear that there is no common understanding of educational leadership among academics as well as it is among people in schools who are playing different leadership roles.

Firstly, an important aim of this paper is to propose an understanding of leadership that is educationally adequate or at least point out its main and most important elements. Secondly, the aim can be described as an attempt to investigate ways of thinking by existing school head teachers in order to compare it with theoretical paradigms of leadership and specifically understood educational leadership which has been proposed.

Paradigms of School (Educational) Leadership Transferred from Other Fields

There has been numerous attempts to define educational leadership but one must say that they are usually using concepts transferred from the general management theory. Most attempts and theories (as it is in the general management theory) try to build understanding of school leadership linking it with personal qualities of people who are taking formal leadership roles in schools. They look for unique personal features that constitute a perfect leader underlying different qualities, such as honesty, trust, bravery, forward-looking, creativity, ability to influence people and inspire them, strong and charismatic personality etc. (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Some approaches stress a much stronger personality and charisma connected with the ability to influence people and 'lead' them according to the leader's will. Such leaders use the power of their personalities but also the power of their formal positions in the organization to execute their leadership role and force people to act using formal regulations with sanctions. Avery calls it the classical paradigm of leadership and argues that, regardless of the fact that it is no longer productive, it can still be frequently found in many contemporary organizations all over the world (Avery, 2004).

Another type of theory stresses interpersonal qualities of a leader such as communication and negotiation skills that allows them to influence individuals and groups and make them work according to the leader's needs and plans. They are usually connected with paying special attention to the interactive character of a leadership process with a central role of com-



munication between different actors of that process (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2007). They also value the ability of a leader to understand and influence group processes as a core element of the leadership role (Gorton & Alston, 2012). Such a paradigm of thinking about leadership can be called transactional leadership (Avery, 2004) and it appears to be very popular in the educational field or at least its elements are an important dimension of thinking about educationally specific leadership as group processes, which are the core aspect of educational processes.

The third type of paradigm is described using such words as visionary, charismatic, inspirational or transformational (Avery, 2004). It is built on a leader's ability to influence and inspire people in an organization through clear, creative, challenging and inspirational vision proposed by an extraordinary person who becomes sort of an organizational hero and leads his/her followers through unstable and uncertain periods into a better or even an ideal future. It appears especially attractive for educational purposes when combined with the values important for educational processes such as social change, inclusion, equality etc. or when a school faces a crisis or at least uncertainty (Precey & Jackson, 2009).

Specific Understandings of School (Educational) Leadership

All three paradigms described above, regardless of differences in valuing certain personal qualities, treat leadership as connected with the personality of a leader, usually understood as the formal role in an organization. It can be argued that such approaches can no longer be accepted because of two important reasons. The first one is connected with the growing number of responsibilities and tasks of a school leader that results in an overload of work and for many reasons is counterproductive (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). The second comes from the increasing complexity of contexts of contemporary educational organizations that make it impossible to achieve good results in building leadership based on the potential of a few members of the organization only, even if they take formal positions or are masters of creativity (Mazurkiewicz, 2012).

The most recent approaches have developed such ideas and underline that educational leadership is not necessarily connected with the formal position and authority of a single person being a head teacher but it is rather a distributed quality of different actors of school life empowered and engaged in different aspects of leading educational processes (Bennet, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003). Building deeper educational understanding of such leadership strategies must take into account important educational values that constitute specificity of schools as organizations. Looking for such a set of basic educational values some authors put the value of learning as central and describe educational leadership as learning centered leadership that has to be focused on creating the best conditions in



schools for learning (and teaching) to happen (McBeath & Dempster, 2009; Mazurkiewicz, 2011). Some others point out that the value of learning without putting it into a more broader context of the individual human development of a learner can lead to technocratic limitations of educational hierarchy of values and propose such approaches as person-centered leadership focusing on the educational needs of all students (Fielding, 2006) or developmental leadership that is focused on creating the best conditions for the individual human development of every participant of educational processes including students, teachers and others taking part in educational processes organized in schools or by schools (Dorczak, 2012). It seems for some authors that one more value should be added to that list – the value of inclusion that allows for the support of development and learning of everybody regardless her/his personal abilities and educational needs (Ryan, 2006; MacRuairc, Ottesen & Precey, 2013).

This kind of understanding of educational leadership is inspired by such concepts of leadership coming from the general management theory like distributed, dissolved, shared, participative or collegial leadership. To describe such approaches to understanding the leadership concept Avery (2004) uses the term organic leadership, which is especially attractive when applied to the understanding of educational leadership because of its developmental and procedural connotations.

Four different approaches to understanding leadership, as presented by Avery, can be summarized showing their main key elements as it is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Four Paradigms of Leadership by G. Avery

Paradigm name	Key elements of paradigm
Classical paradigm	Strong personality of a leader and power of formal role; Charismatic personality influencing people; Force used to submit people; Strength of organization built on potentials of one person (leader)
Transactional paradigm	Interpersonal competencies of a leader; Communication and negotiation skills; Influencing people using interpersonal skills; Building team work and management of team processes by a leader; Success of interpersonal processes built on talents of one person (leader)
Visionary paradigm	Creativity of a leader valued; Vision, inspiration, ability to perceive and face challenges; Talents to create, organize and perform successful organizational changes as crucial qualities of a leader; Success of organizational change based on potentials of one person (leader)
Organic paradigm	all members of organization perceived as potential leaders in their areas of competence; Distribution of responsibilities and participative style of leadership; Success of organization dependent on potentials of all people involved in different activities (all are leaders)

Source: own elaboration based on Avery (2004).



Research on Understanding of School Leadership

Most studies on the understanding of educational leadership concentrate on conditions of good leadership and influence the different contextual and practical factors of successful school leadership. Results of such a research show that the most important factors that influence effective school leadership are: (a) school level, (b) school size, (c) staffing of a school, (d) socio-economic background of students, (d) level of parental involvement, (e) educational policy of a country or local educational authorities. These issues contribute significantly to what is perceived as good or bad leadership and decide which choices and values of specific qualities should be made by school leadership (Bush & Glover, 2003).

It is important to stress that results of different studies show that particular contexts are the most important factors in the perception and the assessment of leadership practices and behaviours contributing to school effectiveness and students achievements (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010).

There are, unfortunately, still few examples of research on the ways of thinking about leadership especially among active educational leaders. In recent researches on ways of thinking by Polish educational leaders, with use of the Avery model of four paradigms and by using an interview method, it was found that most head teachers asked to define their understanding of the main behaviours needed from school leaders and they answered using elements typical for classical, transactional and visionary paradigms, usually mixing them with dominant elements of classical types of leadership understanding, underlying the importance of a strong personality in a leader and his/her formal position and force that helps to play the role of leader. The organic type of leadership, as a single element of thinking or as a dominant part of understanding, was identified in less than 10% of the analyzed answers of school head teachers asked. Such results show that theoretically a good understanding of leadership doesn't exist in the school reality (Mazurkiewicz, 2012).

Similar research on ways of thinking by an international group of students (six European countries such as England, Ireland, Norway, Turkey, Spain and Poland from university courses on educational management and education in general that took part in special course built to develop understanding of educational management) shows that in this specific group results were completely different. To identify ways of thinking in that group a questionnaire based on Avery's concept was designed. Most students (more than 60%) when asked to define educational leadership used key elements of the organic paradigm and the classical way of thinking was not present in their attempts to define educational leadership at all (Dorczak, 2013). The results of that study was the inspiration behind carrying out the presented research.



METHOD

The described research was carried out with the participation of 120 randomly selected group of active head teachers from Polish schools of different types from all parts of Poland (a database of the Polish School Inspection System was used to find and reach the research group). The author applied a questionnaire built with the use of description of leadership paradigms given by Gayle Avery. It consisted of two main parts.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 15 different multiple choice questions about all aspects of school life and leadership practices and behaviours connected with this. Answers were predefined using detailed descriptions of four paradigms presented by Gayle Avery. Questions dealt with such broader aspects as:

1. Kind of personal qualities needed from a leader;
2. Main roles of a leader;
3. Main duties and responsibilities of a leader;
4. Methods of division of work;
5. Methods of setting goals and planning of school work;
6. Ways of building teams and involvement of people in this process;
7. Methods of work valued;
8. Source and kind of authority;
9. Power division and decision making;
10. Methods of conflict management and solving;
11. Methods of fighting difficulties and crisis management;
12. Implementation of changes;
13. Methods of information management;
14. Cooperation with the outside world;
15. Methods of assessment and/or evaluation.

Certain choices of predefined answers were counted to calculate what kind of thinking is dominant in the answers of a subject.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of open questions asking the group to describe in as few words as possible what the core elements of leadership are for the subject.

Results of the second part were also analyzed trying to find elements of four paradigms given by Gayle Avery in her work on paradigms (2004).

RESULTS

Leadership at School – the Perspective of Polish Head Teachers

In order to classify the ways of thinking by the head teachers taking part in the study two sources of information were used: a questionnaire was built out of 15 predefined questions and open questions asking to describe



and define the subject's understanding of leadership. All the subjects taking part in the study were assessed using those two sources of information.

The results of the first part of the study (the questionnaire with predefined questions and open questions) show that the subjects most frequently answered in such a way that is characteristic for the classical understanding of leadership. 48 subjects were classified as using that mode of thinking and this constituted 40 % of the group. Less frequent was the understanding of leadership known as organic – only slightly more than 4% of the group answered using options classified as typical for an organic paradigm when thinking about leadership. Results of the questionnaire confirmed the findings of Mazurkiewicz (2012) in his research on practicing school heads with the use of the interview method presented above but were similarly different from the research done with the participation of students taking part in special university courses focused on specificity of educational leadership.

One can notice that an interesting element of the results received was that quite a big proportion of the answers were so diverse that it was not possible to classify them clearly to one of the four ways of thinking. Head teachers answering in such a way were simply mixing elements of leadership by applying different ways of thinking to different aspects of leadership roles, behaviours and practices. Such results show that probably thinking about leadership can incorporate different elements in order to understand complex context and the reality of school leadership.

It is worth noticing that this result is similar to results of a different study on school culture carried out with the participation of a bigger group of school heads and teachers from the same schools (the database of the School Inspection System was used to select the research group) that shows the existence of “mixed school organizational cultures” characterized by co-existing elements of different types of culture (Dorczak, 2012). Full results of that part of the study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Research on Ways of Thinking About Leadership Among Polish Head Teachers

Paradigm name	Number of answers	Percentage
Classical paradigm	48	40,00%
Transactional paradigm	18	15,00%
Visionary paradigm	24	20,00%
Organic paradigm	5	4,17%
Mixed paradigm	25	20,83%
TOTAL	120	100%

Source: own research.



The second part of the analysis of collected materials was focused on answers to open questions about the understanding of leadership. The subjects were asked to define what is leadership according to their way of thinking and what does it mean to be a leader in school. Key elements of the answers for such questions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The Understanding of Leadership Among Polish Head Teachers

Paradigm name	Key elements identified in answers of headteachers
Classical paradigm	Leader (head teacher) must have legal power to act; He/She must be strong and act according to regulations; He/She must be treated with respect; He/She has to know how to force people to work; He/She has to be feared
Transactional paradigm	He/She has to know the team; He/She must communicate and negotiate what is necessary; He/She has to use talents to influence and manipulate people; He/She must be interpersonally competent
Visionary paradigm	He/She has to be creative, open minded, inspirational; He/She must to know how to implement changes; He/She has to possess ability to predict; He/She must have charisma and appeal to attract people and convince them; He/She must be brave
Organic paradigm	Different people are leaders; Leadership is a space for everyone with his/her talents; Leadership means personal growth; All are leaders in different places and roles: headteacher, teachers, students; Leadership means building support for everybody

Source: own research.

It is worth noticing that subjects answering open questions and describing what it means to be a leader (regardless of gender difference) all used he, describing a male leader. It was reflected in the Table above where all the points start with the word he.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that the way of thinking about leadership among the majority of Polish head teachers actively involved in practical educational management and leadership is far from the common understanding of leadership that is described in literature as educationally valuable. They understand leadership as being connected with a formal role and formal power and that the head teacher has a central role in school forcing other members of the organization to act accordingly to the centrally designed



and controlled vision of the school as an organization and all the processes within.

Such results or the reality behind them, creates a very big challenge to all attempts to develop the educational system and schools as creative organizations able to address different problems of the contemporary world properly. Potential educational reforms should take this into account and try to redefine the way of thinking of people involved in school management and leadership, if we expect school to be a better environment for learning and development.

Another interesting result and recommendation is connected with the fact that quite a big group of subjects in the study represent the so called "mixed paradigm" of thinking about leadership. It can be used as inspiration for developing a new understanding of educational leadership or even leadership in general that incorporates different aspects described in different paradigms. They were very often seen as different types that are not connected or sometimes even contradictory. It seems that such approaches were losing an important aspect of the nature of contemporary leadership that has to incorporate and combine different elements, even those that are contradictory. Only leadership that can be built on such complexity can be effective in challenging the complex reality of the contemporary world.

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PARADYGMATY PRZYWÓDZTWA – BADANIE MYŚLENIA DYREKTORÓW SZKÓŁ PUBLICZNYCH W POLSCE

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Koncepcje przywództwa wydają się być jednymi z najbardziej obiecujących dla dobrego opisanego wyzwań zarządzania w sferze publicznej a w sferze edukacji w szczególności. Widać to choćby w częstym przywoływaniu kwestii przywództwa w próbach reform edukacyjnych. Ważnym problemem staje się w tym kontekście wielość paradygmatów myślenia o przywództwie, które w praktycznym zastosowaniu prowadzą do skrajnie odmiennych działań. W takim świetle kluczowym wydaje się dobre poznanie sposobów rozumienia przywództwa edukacyjnego wśród tych, którzy reformy te wprowadzają i decydują o ich powodzeniu. Poznanie tych sposobów myślenia oraz podjęcie działań uwzględniających płynące z nich konsekwencje jest warunkiem koniecznym powodzenia wszelkich edukacyjnych reform.

Cele badań. Główny cel prezentowanych badań to zidentyfikowanie sposobów myślenia dyrektorów szkół polskich na temat przywództwa oraz skonfrontowanie ich z innymi podobnymi badaniami prowadzonymi z udziałem międzynarodowej grupy studentów biorących udział w specjalnym cyklu edukacyjnym mającym na celu rozwijanie zrozumienia specyfiki przywództwa edukacyjnego.

Metodyka. Badanie skonstruowane zostało w oparciu o typologię paradygmatów przywództwa zaprezentowaną przez Gayle Avery. Autor badań skonstruował kwestionariusz do badania myślenia o przywództwie w oparciu o opisy czterech typów przywództwa opisywanych przez Avery. Kwestionariusz składał się z 15 pytań dotyczących różnych aspektów przywództwa w szkole. Badaniem objęto grupę 120 losowo dobranych dyrektorów szkół polskich różnego typu w całym kraju.



Kluczowe wnioski. Analiza zgromadzonego materiału pozwoliła na stwierdzenie, że głównym sposobem myślenia o przywództwie reprezentowanym w grupie badanych jest paradygmat klasyczny a najmniej obecny jest paradygmat organiczny. W porównaniu z wynikami badań w grupie międzynarodowej są one dokładnie przeciwne. Interesującym elementem wyłaniającym się z badań jest dość duża grupa odpowiedzi, które zaklasyfikowano jako „paradygmat mieszany”, gdzie badani łączą w swym myśleniu elementy różnych innych paradygmatów.

Keywords: zarządzanie edukacyjne, przywództwo, paradygmaty w myśleniu

