The Study of Whether Leadership Styles of School Directors Influence Foreign English Teachers Willingness of Staying in English Cram Schools in Northern Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether leadership styles of school directors influence foreign English teachers willingness of staying in English cram schools in Northern Taiwan. Three leadership styles named transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire are introduced in this study. A qualitative analysis, face-to-face interviews, is conducted in this study to look into the reasons lead to these correlations between leadership styles and job satisfaction. Interviews show that a good teaching environment and easy-going coworkers are important factors that produce satisfaction among foreign English teachers.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Job Satisfaction, English Cram School.

INTRODUCTION

The need to learn speaking English has become essential in business and for travel. English is everywhere. Millions of people are learning it. Almost half of the world’s population will be more or less proficient in it within the next 50 years. Language schools in Taiwan, commonly known as “English cram schools,” are an essential part of life of the nation. Besides students, many adults, from business people to factory workers, attend English cram schools to improve their listening and speaking skills. Moreover, instructors from English-speaking countries are preferred because people attend English cram schools believe these native speakers by definition will be good at teaching English.

With thousands of jobs being advertised each month for English instructors, teaching English in Taiwan presents an inviting opportunity for many young Western college graduates in their early 20s and 30s. Teaching English abroad has numerous rewards for foreign English teachers: they can learn more about other cultures and attitudes, they have the chance for extensive foreign travel, and they are exposed to interesting lifestyles. Most of these English teachers are from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. They come in substantial numbers, but it is difficult to get them to commit long term to teach in cram schools. In fact, many leave before completing their contract agreement, mostly because they are not satisfied with their working environment. This has become a major problem for many cram schools. Yet there are some foreign teachers who stay at one school for a long time. These foreign English teachers are willing to commit themselves to one school because they like their relationship with the school director, they enjoy their working environment, and they are satisfied with their jobs.

As mentioned above, the success or failure of an organization is determined by human beings. Leadership style has become an important topic of study in the management field and many researchers consider leadership style as an important variable in influencing an organization’s functions in recent years. Leadership style can influence followers’ job performance and job satisfaction (Robbins, 2001). The main leadership styles used here are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. These three styles are known as the new leadership theories and are used by most academics who study organization leaders (Bogler, 2001, 2002; Heller, 1993; McKee, 1991; Timothy and Ronald, 2004).

A transformational leader typically inspires followers to do more than originally expected. Transformational leadership involves the process of engaging the commitment of the employees in the context of shared values and shared vision. Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in the context of managing change. It involves relationships of mutual trust between the leaders and the followers. On the other hand, a transactional leader is more
likely to offer some form of need satisfaction in return for something valued by the employer. This could be increased salary, improved job satisfaction, or recognition. The leader sets clear goals, is adept at understanding the needs of employees, and selects appropriate, motivating rewards. As for a laissez-faire manager, exercising little control over the group and leaving employees to sort out their role and tackle their work without participating in the process are their main management characteristics. Once a director is confident with his (her) team and deems the team capable, he (she) will step back and let the employees get on with the task without direct supervision.

Job satisfaction is related to the feelings of employees and can be influenced by factors such as the quality of their relationship with their supervisor or employer, the quality of the physical environment in which they work, or the degree of fulfillment in their work. Thus, it influences employees’ willingness to stay or not both directly and indirectly. Job satisfaction is not the same as job motivation; rather, job satisfaction provides an indication of an employee’s well-being induced by the job (Michaelowa, 2002). Although abundant research has been carried out on the relationships between school leaders’ leadership styles and teachers’ job satisfaction in elementary schools, colleges, and universities, but little research has been carried out on cram schools. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate whether the leadership styles of school directors influence foreign English teachers’ willingness of staying in one school in Northern Taiwan. The results of this study may give a chance to school directors understand what foreign teachers need more clearly and whether their job satisfaction is related to the school directors’ leadership style. Furthermore, school leaders may improve their foreign teachers’ commitment to the school by referring to the results of this study.

A qualitative analysis, face-to-face interviews, is involved in this research because it provides a more complete, detailed description.

The study is structured as follows. The next section gives the leadership theories and job satisfaction theories based on the opinions of prior literatures. The following section shows the findings of the face-to-face interviews. The subsequent section concludes and the final section includes the research limitation and some directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership style is an important factor that influences job satisfaction (Lashbrook, 1997). Any organization requires management, and management, in turn, requires a certain degree of leadership ability. School supervisors, for example, direct daily work through some sort of leadership behaviors and their leadership influences the teachers in a direct way. For English cram schools, the relationship between directors and teachers proves to be much more direct than that of other schools. Obviously, different leadership styles will engender different working atmospheres and directly influence the job satisfaction of teachers (Bogler, 2001, 2002; Heller, 1993; McKee, 1991; Timothy and Ronald, 2004). In addition to tracing the literature in leadership theories and instructors’ job satisfaction, this review also probed the relationships between job satisfaction and leadership style. The development of leadership theories across 100 years: the Trait Era, from the late 1800s until the mid-1940s, when scholars studied individual traits of efficient leaders; the Behavior Era, from mid-1940s and early 1970s, when researchers studied the influences of leaders’ work styles and behaviors on efficiency of leadership in order to provide bases for training leaders; the Contingency Era, from early 1960s till present, when scholars formulated theories that paid close attention to the interaction between behaviors and environments of leaders and followers and the environmental conditions suitable for various styles of leaderships; and the New Leadership Approach, from early 1980s till present, when new theories were proposed to classify leadership into transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles.

Traditional leadership theory regards relationships between leaders and employees as between the active and the passive. Contingency theory insists that leaders design proper behaviors in accordance with situational factors and employees accept such behaviors only passively. New leadership theory holds that leaders gain trust and respect from employees; thus, leadership is a kind of continuously adjusted process in which a leader’s behavior changes according to feedback from employees. Meanwhile, new leadership theory emphasizes employees’ working skills and capabilities to solve problems, encouraging employees to query current systems and situations to solve problems in rational and
creative way. Furthermore, it combines leaders’ behaviors with construction of organizational cultures. New leadership theory often imbues employees with organizational values; thus, employees can well identify themselves with organizational goals and organizational cultures, thereby improving organizational performances as a whole.

New leadership approaches classify leadership styles as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Transformational leadership is described as a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values in prior literature (Burns, 1978). It is also said that the dynamics of transformational leadership involve strong personal identification with the leader, joining in a shared vision of future, or going beyond the self-exchange of rewards for compliance (Hater and Bass, 1988). Transformational leadership is thought as a key in organizations’ continuing success because of the importance of team cohesion, organizational commitment, and higher levels of job satisfaction (Avolio and Bass 1999). Meanwhile, transformational leaders are said to be elevate, motivate, define values, offer vision, and creatively produce reform in various circumstances and challenges (Burns, 1978), and they also integrate creative insight, persistence, energy, intuition, and sensitivity to the needs of others (Bass and Avolio, 1993).

On the other hand, a transactional leader clarifies the performance criteria or articulates what is expected from the employee and what employees will receive in return. Transactional leadership involves an exchange between leaders and followers (Burns, 1978) and hence it is often contrasted to transformational leadership (Hartog and Van Muijen, 1997). Transactional leadership is described as a reward-driven behavior in which the follower behaves in such a manner as to elicit rewards or support from the leader in prior literatures (Field and Herold, 1997). Transactional leaders are characterized by the use of contingent reward and management-by-exception (Bass and Avolio, 1993). It’s said that transactional leaders use rewards as their primary source of power and that followers comply with the leaders when the reward meets their needs (Flood et al., 2000). Finally, laissez-faire leadership is extremely passive as compared to transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1999; Flood et al., 2000). Laissez-faire leaders avoid decision-making and supervisory responsibility. Such leaders are not sufficiently motivated or adequately skilled to perform supervisory duties (Bass, 1998; Hartog and Van Muijen, 1997).

As for job satisfaction, there are lots of definitions about it in prior literatures. Job satisfaction is the difference between the amount of reward, monetary or otherwise, workers receive and the amount they believe they should receive (Robbins, 2001). Traditional job satisfaction theory holds that work-related variables contribute to worker satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Waters and Waters, 1969). Job satisfaction is sometimes defined as a general attitude of individuals toward their jobs in prior literatures (Mason, 1997). Job satisfaction is thought as the degree to which people like their job or a general attitude toward the job (Rocca and Kostanski, 2001). It is also noted that one’s internal values and work environment are the keys to job satisfaction (Tan and Quek, 2001).

There are many factors influencing teachers’ job satisfaction. Studies about the relationship between school leader’s leadership style and faculty job satisfaction can be found for many educational settings. Results of these studies have supported the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction (Bogler, 2001 and 2002; Heller, 1993; McKee, 1991; Timothy and Ronald, 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2005; Yan, 1989). Employees tend to be more satisfied when their managers are good leaders. Considerable research has shown that leader behavior can have profound and consistent influence on several facets of employee satisfaction. Bass (1998) showed that transformational leadership can have a significantly greater effect than transactional leadership in predicting employee satisfaction with the leader. Also, according to Koh et al. (1995), a transformational leadership style strengthens employees’ sense of belongingness and meets employees’ needs for self-actualization; therefore, production rate increases while turnover rate decreases.

**METHODOLOGY AND DATA**

**Methodology**

This study investigates foreign teachers’ job satisfaction in 20 randomly selected English cram schools in Northern Taiwan.

A qualitative analysis, deep interview, is introduced in this research. 30 foreign English teachers were chosen to do the interview. Prior to the interview, the research of this study had explained three kinds of leadership styles to those foreign English teachers, and made sure they categorize their school director into correct leadership style. The main questions in the interviews are:
1. What do you think about your school director’s leadership style? Do you like it or dislike it?
2. Do you think that his or her leadership style is helpful to you and your coworkers?
3. Do you feel satisfied with your present job? Which among the six facets of your job satisfaction—People on Your Present Job, Job in General, Work on Present Job, Opportunities for Promotion, Pay, and Supervision—wins your highest satisfaction?
4. If there is anything with which you do not feel satisfied about your present job, what is it?
5. Is there anything in your opinion that should be improved by your school director?

Survey candidates are encouraged to express their viewpoints and feelings in the face-to-face interviews. Then the relationship between the three leadership styles and job satisfaction will be studied from the deep interview records to get conclusions.

Data Collection

This research randomly selects 20 English language schools in Northern Taiwan as survey subjects, in a random cluster design. From these schools, 30 foreign English teachers were chosen to do the interview.

Qualitative Analysis

Deep interview is one of the methods available for doing this research. This research study rely mainly on respondents’ answers to the surveys, thus analysis may have been limited.

The interviews involved having a short, face-to-face conversation with every foreign English teacher. There were five questions discussed:
1. What do you think about your school director’s leadership style? Do you like it or dislike it?
2. Do you think that his or her leadership style is helpful to you and your coworkers?
3. Do you feel satisfied with your present job? Which among the six facets of your job satisfaction—People on Your Present Job, Job in General, Work on Present Job, Opportunities for Promotion, Pay, and Supervision—wins your highest satisfaction?
4. If there is anything with which you do not feel satisfied about your present job, what is it?
5. Is there anything in your opinion that should be improved by your school director?

The answers and discussions of the foreign English teachers are summarized as following. First, most of the 30 teachers show their satisfaction toward their school director. Four give negative evaluations, and only two tends to think that the school director is a laissez-faire leader. The interviews, among the 30 foreign English teachers, nearly half of them think their school director displays transformational leadership. Six others tend to categorize the leadership of their school director as a composite of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Moreover, four foreign English teachers classify their school director as a transactional leader, and two as a laissez-faire leader. The interviews also provide information regarding the satisfaction of the 30 teachers. Generally speaking, these teachers felt satisfied with their job. Most of them think that the teaching environment of the cram school is good, and many of the 30 teachers liked their coworkers. It is clear that good teaching environment and easy-going colleagues are two important factors for the job satisfaction of foreign English teachers in this cram school.

In the interviews, only a few of the foreign English teachers talk about their satisfaction about pay. This situation is probably caused by the tax issues in Taiwan, with many refusing to talk about salary details. As to the comments about supervision, there is a huge gap between the positive and negative comments. Some of the 30 teachers approve of the supervision provided by the school director while others showed their disapproval.

18 foreign English teachers classified their school director as a transformational leader and give higher satisfaction scores in every area of their present job compared with other teachers, especially in Supervision. On average, six teachers classify their school director’s leadership style as a combination of transformational and transactional leadership and feel more satisfied with the opportunities for promotion than the other teachers. Six teachers think their school director is a transactional leader or a laissez-faire leader and give a high satisfaction score to their jobs in general but feel dissatisfied with their salary. The results of the interviews are quite interesting and provided information that differed from the data. Clearly, it would be helpful if all cram schools in the research could be
interviewed. However, due to the difficulties of contacting every foreign English teacher and getting the permission of every school director to interview all foreign English teachers, it is almost impossible at this moment to get all the information about the connections between leadership styles of cram school directors and foreign English teachers’ job satisfaction. This may be a very interesting issue for future research.

CONCLUSION

As for academic contributions, this research has combined management and organizational behavior concepts in order to research and analyze the organizational behavior of foreign teachers in Northern Taiwan. This research is the first study to discuss the whether the school leaders’ leadership styles influence the job satisfactions of foreign English teachers in language cram schools. Furthermore, this research uses a method of deep interviews that would be helpful in providing researchers and cram school directors more information whether leadership styles of the school director influence the job satisfaction of foreign teachers. Moreover, the deep interviews provide some observations that would be helpful for cram school directors to learn about the job satisfaction of foreign English teachers.

The results of interviews provide information shows that a good teaching environment and easy-going coworkers are important factors in producing satisfaction among foreign English teachers in cram schools. There are many foreign English teachers, however, who think there were few opportunities for promotion, and some think the school director provided them with good opportunities for promotion. On the other hand, only a few of the teachers express their satisfaction with pay. This situation is probably caused by the tax system in Taiwan and people not wanting to talk about salary details. As for comments about supervision, there is a huge gap between the positive comments and negative criticisms. On average, foreign English teachers who classify their school director’s leadership style as a combination of transformational and transactional leadership feel more satisfied with the opportunities for promotion than the others. On the other hand, foreign English teachers who classify their school director as a transactional or laissez-faire director express higher satisfaction toward their jobs in general but feel more dissatisfied with their salary.

RESEARCH LIMITATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This research is limited to 20 randomly selected English cram schools in Northern Taiwan. The population of this research consists of 30 foreign English teachers in the same 20 randomly selected English cram schools. However, many problems arise in the process of collecting data. For example, some cram school directors decline to participate in the research because they feel some questions were too closely connected with their operating strategies. Similarly, some English teachers refuse to be interviewed because they thought the results may reveal their feelings about their school directors and have a negative influence on their relationships with the director. These problems have some impact on the data collection and reduced the sample size. The results of deep interviews are interesting and provide information that differs from the data. Clearly, it will be helpful if all cram schools agree to deep interviews. However, due to the logistical difficulties of contacting every foreign English teacher and getting the permission of every school director to interview all foreign English teachers, it is impossible to get more information about the connections between the leadership styles of all the cram school directors and all foreign English teachers’ job satisfaction. Expanding this research may yield new interesting results. The reliability of the survey instruments presents another limitation. This research relies mainly on English teachers’ recognition, willingness, and explanations to answer the questionnaire in 20 English cram schools. The results may not be suitable for other kinds of private enterprises or organizations.

Based on above limitations, future researchers should refer to the managerial characteristics of the transformational leadership style proposed by Popper, Mayseless, and Castelnovo (2000). Even though many research endeavors have shown that the “secure style” characteristic is related to transformational leadership style, it does not indicate that a person with a secure style will be a transformational leader or that a transformational leader will be secure. If there would be more schools participate in the future research, including schools in South part of Taiwan. The researcher of this study believes that English cram schools in Taiwan would find out more reasons for those Foreign English teachers to commit to one school longer.
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