

A Study On Principals' Decision Making Style

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ABSTRACT

Decision-making is one of the most important elements in the administration of any organization. In higher education, college is an institution, in which the principal is a prime person who makes decision. This article investigates the perception of college principal towards his decision Making style. Numerous studies in the area of Management and Leadership indicate that one's decision making style (DMS) is reflective of one's leadership style. Using the Decision Making Styles Inventory (DMSI) developed by Rowe and Boulgarides (1992), this paper attempts to explore and report the managerial DMS among 130 college principals in Kanyakumari District. The scores derived from Decision making inventory were categorized into four decision styles namely: Directive, Behavioral, Analytical and Conceptual. Results revealed that a majority of principals adopted at least one very dominant or dominant DMS intensity level for Behavioral DMS along with one or two back-up decision styles. These findings indicate that most of the principals possessed more than one style category implying that they have considerable flexibility in their managerial DMS. These findings have implications for leadership training.

Keywords: *Analytical, Behavioral, College Principals, Conceptual, Directive, Decision Making style.*

INTRODUCTION

The external changes which take place in the real world have somehow affected the academic landscape of institutions of higher education all around the globe (Wolverton et al., 2001). This situation has brought a great impact on the roles and responsibilities of managers cum leaders at all levels in Institutions of Higher Education including principals. Initially, principals were much regarded as decision makers of academic institutions and their duties

focused mainly on the administration of teachers as well as students. However, with the impact of modernization, the roles and responsibilities of principals are far more challenging as they are regarded to act as both managers and leaders of change. Hence, a synergy between these two roles: as a manager and a leader, requires principals to make numerous decisions in the effort to build effective academic organization.

BACKGROUND

The college principal is in the place to take numerous decisions being a Leader of the institution. The effectiveness of leadership is always being measured. Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) affirm that there is a need to measure decision making styles since “individual’s decision styles form the backbone of effective decision making”. Leonard, Scholl and Kowalski (1999) agree that decision making serves as the fundamental function in any organizations. This is because the quality of decisions made would influence the effectiveness of the managers and consequently, this affects the success of the whole organization. Likewise, Hammond (1999) advocates that the success in all the roles orchestrated by a manager in an organization reflects decisions that he or she made. Above all, Rue and Byars (2000) state that a manager must first be a good decision maker before he or she could be a good planner, organizer, staffer, leader, and controller (regardless of any organization).

In measuring one’s leadership, Boulgarides and Cohen (2001) have applied the leaders’ managerial decision making styles inventory (DMSI) as a tool to measure and reflect leadership style. They indicated that leadership style is “a consistent pattern of behavior displayed by a leader over time”. Thus, based on past empirical research, both scholars disclosed that “a leader’s style is reflected in his style of decision making”. In the same vein, Jones (2005) emphasizes that decision making is one of the important competency components in leadership. He noted that both decision and decision-making processes are explicitly “fundamental to all leadership and management processes”. In relation to leadership (Harrison, 1999) stated that what determines an effective organization will always fall back to an effective leader who is also an effective decision-maker.

The theorists stated that DMS can be measured using an instrument called the decision making style inventory (DMSI) which probes the psychological structures of one’s mind. This model is divided into four styles namely: Directive, Analytical, Conceptual and Behavioral styles.

1. **Directive Style** - is characterized by autocratic and internal orientation. Individuals with this style have low tolerance for ambiguity and low cognitive complexity. The focus is on technical decisions which involve a need for speed, efficiency and limited alternatives.
2. **Analytical Style** - is characterized by an autocratic bent. Individuals with this style have a much greater tolerance for ambiguity and more cognitive complex personality. They always need more information and consideration for alternatives since they focus on technical decisions.
3. **Conceptual Style** - is characterized by high cognitive complexity and people orientation. Typically, individuals under this category are thinkers rather than doers. Hence, there is trust and

openness in relations. They share goals with subordinates, tend to be idealists, and emphasize more on ethics and values.

4. Behavioral Style – is characterized by supportive and friendly orientation (concerned with subordinates' well being and are people-oriented). Individuals with this style have a low cognitive complexity scale but they receptive to suggestions, communicate easily, portray warmth, empathetic, persuasive, compromising and accept loose control.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To date there has been scant empirical research concerning Principals Leadership style in India. Among the studies conducted, various studies revealed that both Principals and vice Principals along with heads of departments, ranked decision-making skills as the highest management competency required by Principals. This is followed by other management skills such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, public relation skills, negotiation skills and lastly ICT skills (Parmjit et al., 2009). In addition, number of studies carried out among school principals at school levels globally but very little has been conducted in the college level setting particularly among Principals. Considering the fact that principal's decision making could affect the effectiveness of an organization, the researchers embarked on the current study with the aim to explore and identify Decision Making Style of College principals in Kanyakumari District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following are the objectives of the present study:

- To analyse the Demographic profile of the College principals in Kanyakumari District.
- To analyse the Decision Making style of College principals in Kanyakumari District.
- To provide suggestions based on the findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this study was to investigate the decision making styles of 130 college principals in Kanyakumari District. A survey using the questionnaire of managerial Decision Making Styles Inventory (developed by Rowe and Mason, 1987) was used to measure and identify Principals' managerial decision styles. 130 sets of questionnaires were sent to all 130 College principals in Kanyakumari District using Drop-off and Mail-survey method. The population sample consisted of Arts & Sciences (n=24), Engineering Colleges (n=31), Polytechnic Colleges (n=21), Nursing College (n=20), and Education Colleges (n=34) college principals. The whole colleges under the target group had been selected as the population of the study as a Census survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table.1.Demographic profile of the College principal (Frequency and percentage)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	39.2
	Female	79	60.8
Age Group	Below 40	10	7.7
	41-45	17	13.1
	46-50	32	24.6
	51-55	47	36.2
	56 & Above	24	18.5
Type of College	Arts & Science	24	18.5
	Engineering	31	23.8
	Polytechnic	21	16.2
	Nursing	20	15.4
	Education	34	26.2
Teaching Experience Group	Less than 10	5	3.8
	Between 10-15	8	6.2
	Between 16-20	19	14.6
	Between 21-25	32	24.6
	Between 26-30	44	33.8
Administrative Experience Group	Above 30	22	16.9
	Less than 2	13	10.0
	Between 2-3	17	13.1
	Between 4-5	34	26.2
	Between 6-7	27	20.8
	Above 8	39	30.0

Source : Primary data

Frequency and percentage analysis of the college principals demographic profile viz., Age, Teaching experience, Administrative experience Type of College and Gender reveals that most respondents were in the age range of 51-55, followed by the age range of 46-50, 33.8% of the respondents were having teaching experience between 26-30 years followed by 24.6 % of respondent who has teaching experience between 21-25 years, 30.0% of the respondents have above 8 years of administrative experience followed by 26.2 % of the respondent who have administrative experience between 4-5 years, most respondents were from education n=34 (26.2%) followed by engineering colleges n= 31(23.8%) and the data showed that out of 130 valid responses, 51 Principals were male and 79 Principals were female. (See Table. 1)

Table 2: DMS of the College principal Principals (frequency and percentage)

DECISION MAKING STYLE	LEAST PREFERRED	BACKUP	DOMINANT	VERY DOMINANT	TOTAL
DIRECTIVE	n 25 19.20%	n 50 38.50%	n 32 24.60%	n 23 17.70%	130 100%
ANALYTICAL	n 27 20.80%	n 31 23.80%	n 50 38.50%	n 22 16.90%	130 100%
CONCEPTUAL	n 33 25.40%	n 37 28.50%	n 32 24.60%	n 28 21.50%	130 100%
BEHAVIOURAL	n 45 34.60%	n 10 7.70%	n 24 18.50%	n 51 39.20%	130 100%

Source : Primary data

Table 2 indicates findings on Principals' Decision Making Styles Intensity (DMSI) levels Profile. It is apparent that among all the four decision making styles, (39.2%) (n=51) of the Principals scored within the *very dominant* and (18.5%) (n=24) scored within the *dominant* DMSI levels of Behavioral decision style. When these results were combined, they form the biggest percentage and number of Principals (57.7%, n=75) hence suggesting that more than half of the college Principals in Kanyakumari District perceived themselves as Behavioral decision makers. The findings also revealed that 38.5% (n=50) and 28.5% (n=37) of the Principals are more likely to employ Directive and Conceptual decision styles as their *back-up*. In addition, 34.6% (n=45) and 25.4%, (n=33) of the Principals indicated that their *least preferred* decision making styles would be Behavioural and Conceptual styles.

These findings suggest that nearly half of the principals were very dominantly and dominantly Behavioral decision-makers. However, it is also important to note that many of them are able to switch to Directive decision styles as their *back-up*. And also most of them do not embark on Behavioural decision styles as it is recorded as the *least preferred* decision style. Overall, these findings imply that many of the principals are flexible decision-makers who do not confine themselves to only one style (which reflects rigid decision-makers).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings on Principals' DMSI levels revealed that most of the Principals rated themselves within the *very dominant* Behavioral, *Dominant Analytical*, and *Backup* Directive DMS levels. Concurrently, findings also indicated that many Principals perceived themselves as flexible decision-makers when they occasionally rated few other styles as their dominant and *back-up* DMS. A few implications can be derived from the findings. First, the exploration and identification of managerial DMS of Principals are essential since findings help to illuminate the current leadership practices of college Principals in Kanyakumari District cum the educational management setting. It is also important to note that the majority of Principals can be said to be

rather flexible in their decision styles as they are able to change and suit their decision styles from one particular situation to another with little difficulty since majority of them rated one or two *very dominant* or *dominant* DM levels along with one or two *back-up* DM levels. Second, the findings are valuable since they help researchers to chart a strategic leadership course among Principals towards academic effectiveness.

Rowe and Boulgarides, (1992) highlight that an effective manager is the one who has a combination of Behavioral and strong *back-up* Directive DMS. The combination of both styles will lead to an *action-oriented* manager. Nevertheless, findings from this study indicated that most of the Principals possessed the *very dominant* Behavioral DMS and again least preferred as behavioural DMS. Hence, these findings cannot be used as a benchmark for the training of novice Principals in Kanyakumari District. what can be recommended is training be provided to expose Principals to the various decision styles and strategies on how these styles could shape them to be not only effective managers but leaders in the academic management setting. Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) disclose that for researchers the exploration and identification of managerial DMS reflect ones' leadership which helps to form and strengthen relationship of a principal-to-a-group (Teachers and Students). Thus, training in principals DMS is relevant and highly recommended.

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