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Factors affecting teacher trust in principal: testing the effect of transformational leadership and procedural justice

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Abstract

Using structural equation modeling this study investigates casual relationship between transformational leadership, procedural justice and teacher trust in principal in two different models. A sample including 652 teachers were selected and data were collected through three questionnaires. Results demonstrate that a model which hypothesizes direct and indirect effect of transformational leadership on trust in principal has better fit to data and explains .66 variance of trust in principal. Also procedural justice has partial mediating role between transformational leadership and teacher trust in principal. The results were discussed in the final section of the article.

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Keywords: Transformational leadership, procedural justice, trust in principal, teacher.

1. Introduction

In the literature related to school reform, the term "Trust" has been repeated constantly and has always been named as one of the essential element of reform in schools. Regardless of importance of trust, there is relatively little systematic research on trust in educational settings especially in public schools. The results of previous studies indicate that trust across school lubricates much of a school's day-to-day functioning and is a critical resource as principals embark on ambitious improvement plans and in general trust is one of the distinctive factors separating the effective schools from non effective ones (Tarter, Sabo & Hoy, 1995; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

The review of the existing literature on trust identified a numerous and different definitions. Despite of agreement on the importance of trust, there is equally widespread lack of agreement on a suitable definition of the construct. Researchers in organizational behavior generally conceptualize trust as faith in and loyalty to the leader (Ngodo, 2008). Also trust has been conceptualized as having three elements including trustworthiness of the other party, faith in the leader and loyalty to the leader (Marlowe & Nyhan, 1997). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) believe that Trust "is an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open". They indicate that this definition contain multiple facets including benevolence (confidence that one's well being will be protected by

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trusted party), reliability (the extent to which one can count on another person or group), competency (the extent to which the trusted party has knowledge and skill), honesty (the character, integrity, and authenticity of the trusted party) and openness (the extent to which there is no withholding of information from others). This definition has been frequently used as a basis for studying trust in educational settings.

According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) one can divide trust in school into four aspects including trust in colleagues, principal, student and parent. Amongst these aspects, Teacher's trust in principal is essential and is named as the marking point and basis of trust in schools (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) believe that teachers trust in principal is built upon their willingness to depend on principal, since he/she is perceived as reliable, kind, honest and trustworthy. Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, and Hoy (1994) define trust in the principal as, "the teacher (having) confidence that the principal will keep his or her word and act in the best interest of the teachers" (p. 486). Tarter et al., (1995) further define trust as the "generalized expectancy held by teachers that the word, action, and written or oral statement of principal can be relied upon" (p. 42).

Different factors are directly influential in teacher/follower trust in principal/leader in which transformational leadership is sensitive and noticeable (Tschannen-moran, 2003; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999; Jung & Avolio, 2000; Gillespie & Mann, 2004; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership idea was first developed by Burns (1978) and later extended by Bass (1985) as well as others. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership can be seen when leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral, motivation, ethics, consciousness, and alliance with the goals of the organization. Transformational leaders are able to motivate followers to change expectations, perceptions and motivations to work towards common goals. According to the Bass (1985) transformational leaders motivate followers to perform beyond expectations. In his point of view such a transformation could be achieved by raising the awareness of the value of designated outcomes, getting followers to go beyond their own lower level and short term self-interests, or expanding follower's needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Bass (1985) also suggested that there were four different components of transformational leadership:

1. Intellectual stimulation: leader challenges the status quo, encourages creativity, and encourages followers to look at new ways of doing things and new learning opportunities
2. Individualized consideration: leader offers support and encouragement to individual followers. He/she aware of each individual's ability, talents and potential, thus create new opportunity for them
3. Inspirational motivation: leader has a clear vision and goals that he/she is able to articulate to followers. He/she is also able to help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfill these goals. He/she could inspire and motivate followers to accomplish goals perceived to be difficult to attain
4. Idealized influence: leader serves as a role model for followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they follow the leader and internalize his or her ideals.

Transformational leadership can also affect trust in leader indirectly through mediating role of deferent variables. One of the most important mediators is procedural justice. According to Greenberg (1990), procedural justice is one of the facets of organizational justice and refers to the idea of fairness in the processes that determine and allocate resources. Greenberg (1990) believe that procedural justice reflects a person's judgments about the fairness of the process of making outcome allocations decisions. Studies (e.g., Pillai et al., 1999; Erturk, 2007; Korsgaard, Schweiger, & Sapienza, 1995) have demonstrated that procedural justice plays an important mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and trust in leader.

While the literature in none educational settings are expansive, there are few documented accounts of any casual relationship in educational settings and this gap is still unidentified in schools. A direct and indirect impact of transformational leadership on trust has been consistently reported by studies conducted in non school organizations. But, there weren't any research about the direct and indirect effect of transformational leadership on teacher trust in principal through mediating role of procedural justice. Majority of literature surrounding organizational behavior suggests that human related variables are context specific that is varying from one type of organization to another. So the nature of transformational leadership and procedural justice impact on teacher trust in principal maybe is different from those obtained in non school organization. Despite of the dominant view in the literature which supports direct influence of transformational leadership on trust in leader, there weren't strong agreement about indirect effect through mediation of procedural justice. Also there weren't agreement about partial or full mediation role of procedural justice. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the casual relation through testing and comparing 2 models. Using structural equation modeling in model 1, indirect effect of transformational leadership

on trust in principal will be studied (fully mediating role of procedural justice) and in model 2 along with direct effect, indirect effect of transformational leadership on trust in principal will be studied (partially mediating role of procedural justice).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of public elementary school teachers. Using cluster sampling, 652 teachers (352 female and 300 male) from north, south, east, west and central educational districts of Tehran were selected.

2.2. Instruments

Three questionnaires were used in this study. Teachers were respondents to the questionnaires. They were asked to describe the extent to which they agree with items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Transformational leadership was measured with the twenty items of Multifactor leadership Questionnaire (5X – 5hort) developed by Bass and Avolio (2000). These items measures four components of transformational leadership including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Omnibus T-Scale developed by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) was used to measure the level of trust between the teachers and the principals. Eight of the entire items specifically measure trust in principal. Procedural justice was measured using the organizational justice questionnaire developed by Colquitt (2001). Only the seven procedural justice items selected from the complete questionnaire. The coefficient alphas for transformational leadership, trust in principal and procedural justice were .94, .94, and .82 respectively.

2.3. Procedure

All of items were presented in Persian. To make sure meaning uniformity across the two cultures all of items were translated from English into Persian and then back translated into English. Two education professors fluent in Persian and English language have evaluated the two translations and best items were selected for Pilot surveys. Pilot surveys were administrated to a sample of primary school teachers in Tehran. Results demonstrate that translated items were appropriate. After developing final version, data were collected at regularly planned teachers meetings. In each school, researchers explained the general purpose of the study and assured the confidentiality of all responses.

2.4. Data analysis

Structural equation modeling (using LISREL, version 8.72; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), was used to test and compare standard effects and fit indexes of both models along with measurement models. According to Hall, Snell, and Foust (1999), item parcels were used for procedural justice and trust in principal to control for measurement errors and improve the psychometric properties. A fit index exceeding .90 and higher suggested by AGFI, GFI and CFI and less than .05 suggested by RMSEA and less than 2 suggested by χ^2/df are considered as an adequate to good model fit.

3. Results

Table 1 presents mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix

Variables	M	S.D	1	2	3
1. Transformational Leadership (TL)	4	.76			

2. Trust in principal (TIP)	4	.98	.72**	
3. Procedural justice (PJ)	3.85	.75	.42**	.47**

**p<.001

As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), at first, measurement models of latent variables were analyzed using confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). The resulting measurement models provided an adequate fit to the data for transformational leadership ($df/X^2 = 1.78$; CFI= 1; GFI= .99; AGFI= .97; RMSEA= .050) and trust in principal ($df/X^2 = .86$; CFI=1 GFI=1 AGFI= .99 RMSEA: .000) and complete fit for procedural justice. Chi-squared value was not statistically for all variables. After analyzing measurement model and prior to analyzing two structural models, data screening was performed to ensure deviation from normality. In the stage of structural model analysis two models were tested separately. Result showed that in model 1 transformational leadership has significant direct effect on procedural justice ($B = .58, p < 0.05$) and has significant indirect effect on trust in principal ($B = .33, p < 0.05$). Also procedural justice has significant direct effect on trust in principal ($B = .57, p < 0.05$). In model 2 transformational leadership has significant direct effect on procedural justice ($B = .50, p < 0.05$) and trust in principal ($B = .75, p < 0.05$) and has significant indirect effect on trust in principal ($B = .06, p < 0.05$). Also procedural justice has significant direct effect on trust in principal ($B = .11, p < 0.05$). Comparing fit indexes of model 1 ($df/X^2 = 7.18$; CFI= .95; GFI= .88; AGFI= .82; RMSEA= .122) and model 2 ($df/X^2 = 1.92$; CFI= .99; GFI= .97; AGFI= .93; RMSEA= .041) indicates that chi-squared value was statistically significant for both models and model 2 is better for predicting trust in principal than model 1. This model explains .66 of variance of trust in principal. Also with regard to the mediating role, this study revealed that procedural justice makes mediating role partially. Figure 1 illustrates model 2 as final model of study.

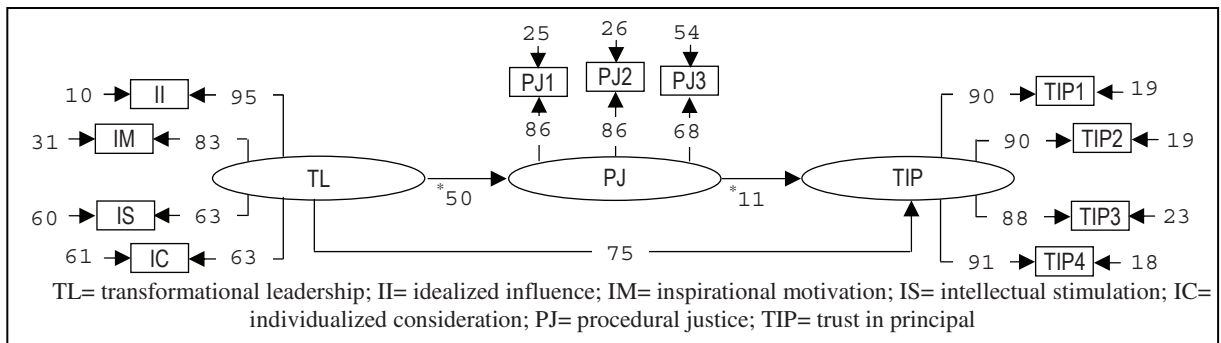


Figure. 1. Final model

4. Discussion

The result of this study based on the significant direct effect of transformational leadership on trust in principal is similar to the Podsakoff et al., (1990) and Pillai et al., (1999). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), trust in leader is one of the most essential variables in the process of influencing followers. Ngodo (2008) believe that transformational leaders are very successful in gaining the trust of their followers. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders motivate the followers to a high level of commitment and loyalty to the visions of the leader. So it is difficult for a principal who is not trusted by teachers to have high committed teachers. Also in order to challenge the status quo and encourage teachers to look at new ways of doing things principals would need to win the trust of teachers. Other result of study based on the significant direct effect of procedural justice on trust in principal is similar to the Pillai et al., (1999), Erturk (2007) and Korsgaard et al., (1995). This result would be expected because outcome of positive perception of procedural justice is trust. Also the use of fair procedures in the relationship between principals and teachers would normally lead to high teacher trust in principal. The final result based on the significant indirect effect of transformational leadership on trust in principal through partial mediating role of procedural justice is most congruent with Pillai et al., (1999). This study has demonstrated that procedural justice plays crucial roles in the functions of transformational leaders. According to Ngodo (2008) transformational leadership essentially involves empowerment of followers by leaders. Empowerment implies allowing followers a voice in the decision-making process. The important outcome of this decision-making process is trust. In other

words transformational leaders could gain the trust of followers via creating positive perception of procedural justice. In general principals which have transformational leadership characteristics not only affect teacher trust directly but also can have more trusted teachers through affecting their perception of fairness in school procedures.

The results of this study have several implications. First, principals are instrumental in creating trust in teachers. They should equip themselves with transformational leadership qualities and they should acknowledge empowerment and cooperation of the teachers in decision making process in school. This study also has implications for future research. Testing final model in other schools, with regard to the gender of teachers and principals is important to know more about model invariance.

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