

Principalship as an Empowering Leadership Process: The Experiences of Women School Heads in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The paper explores how women principals approached leadership in schools and empowered others to improve educational outcomes. An in-depth qualitative study which falls within the phenomenological-interpretivist paradigm was adopted as the research design. The emphasis was on rich contextual detail and individuals' lived experiences. Interviews were used to generate information from participants. The findings show rich and diverse cultures of creativity in the way participants adopted strategies of negotiating and coaching, which generated the spirit of trust, respect and ownership among teachers, parents and the community. Despite the many challenges, the women primary school principals managed to excel.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore women school principals' approaches to managing schools in challenging situations. The aim is to demonstrate that given the opportunity to lead and using their stereotypical feminine qualities of being people oriented, caring and providing emotional support, women principals can succeed through empowering the learning communities and their environments. Like other developing countries, Zimbabwe is endowed with a rich diversity of cultures with political, social and economic features rooted in tradition and patriarchal values (Jayaweera 1997). Some of these values are a challenge particularly to women. For instance, Moorosi (2010) referring to the South African context observed that women's experiences tend to be compromised by cultural values which are often less favourable. Blackmore (2010) continuously raises debates on gender, culture and women in administration. Her argument focuses on the importance of women's approaches and the significance of their feminine character traits in leading which more often seem to go unnoticed. However, Madziyire and Mapolisa (2012) see women's career progression as being slowed down by traditional roles. While Zimbabwe's independence brought about many changes which sought to address imbalances of the past, Chabaya et al. (2009) argue that discrimination still exist in educational organisations. Similar trends were also noted by Lumby et al. (2010). Such challenges tend to limit the women's potentials in performing their duties in schools. The issue of gender inequality in edu-

cational settings particularly in Zimbabwe has historical roots, hence, the importance of this brief historical account, as it provides a backdrop against which the experiences of women who are in educational leadership within school settings in Zimbabwe can be understood. The introduction of the promotional policy (Public Service Circular No. 4 of 1991) in favour of women in Zimbabwe, enabled women to venture into school leadership positions in increased numbers.

The expansion of education at all levels in Zimbabwe created its own problems particularly the lack of resources both human (mostly teachers) and financial (for funding physical facilities). The lack of funds did not only affect programmes but the availability of physical facilities such as classrooms, desks and chairs, science kits, books and other stationery. This problem had a direct impact on school leaders as the schools were supposed to continue functioning despite all the hardships and limited resources. Chikomba (1988:25) acknowledged that "many new schools have had to operate *under trees* and or *under the blazing sun* with constant disturbances by torrential rains in rural areas", and this kind of school set up has been metaphorically named 'hot sitting' (or 'hot seating'). Despite the highlighted problems, the expansion of education in Zimbabwe was both inevitable and desirable. The situation required school principals with innovative skills. Consequently, it is during that time when women in Zimbabwe were appointed into headship/deputy-headship positions. This paper is part of a bigger research project done in Zimbabwe. The

findings from this study concur with Balasubramanian and Krishnan's (2012) conclusion that women's approaches are transformational. The findings drawn from this particular study indicated that women communicated with everyone within the school community, negotiated with parents and respected them despite their level of education and understanding. These interactions generated trust and in the process everyone involved felt respected and that empowered them to participate in the school's activities. The issue of empowering leadership has been emphasised by Sagnak (2012) who acknowledged that the concept derived from participative management theories. The overall challenge the women faced was similar to Aslanargun's (2012) observation that societal, geographical and even family background determines the type of barriers or challenges women school principals encounter and/or cope with.

Classification of Schools

The Education Act (1996 Chapter 619) which is still the governing Act, classified schools in Zimbabwe as either government schools or non-government schools. However, there are other instances in which the Minister responsible for overseeing implementation of the Education Act may determine how a school is classified taking into account the social and economic standards of the communities in which the schools concerned are situated. The Act established two types of committees to oversee the affairs of schools in Zimbabwe. Government schools have a school development association (SDA) while the school development committee (SDC) oversees affairs at non-government schools. These committees mobilize parents in the building of school classrooms, teachers' houses and office blocks. The committees set the levies and they see to it that the school fulfills its mandate. For instance, according to the Act the SDC is there to provide and assist in the operation and development of the non-government school. The SDC promotes the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils, teachers and parents. It is charged with control of financial affairs of the school for which it has been established. In the exercise of its functions the SDC has the power to employ, hire and/or fire the staff in order to serve the needs of the school and its power is exercised with the approval of the Min-

ister. The school development association provides the same services as that for the SDC with only small differences since the SDA represents government schools. SDA members are elected parents of the pupils enrolled at the school and the teachers employed at those schools. This body serves to promote and encourage the development and maintenance of the school, and assists in the advancement of moral, cultural and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school. These structures are important to know since they form part of the context in which women principals in this particular study worked.

Literature on Principals and Empowerment

School leaders who are responsible for the overall operation of a school are often called school principals or school heads. Literature shows that effective principals encourage others to participate in the decision-making processes in their schools (Samuels 2010). It is generally agreed that leadership is about power but what determines its effectiveness is the way that power is used. Fennel (2001) explored women principals' experiences with power relations in schools during times of decentralisation. Fennel examined the concept of power from the structuralist perspective which emphasises control and order and found out that power creates tensions in schools, unless the school head adopts strategies that involve others in her decisions affecting the school. Even though the importance of leadership has been emphasised in literature, empowerment of teachers, pupils, parents and the school community is seen as a key factor to successful leadership as demonstrated in the present study. Empowerment is the creation of conditions that enables teachers, parents and even students to take ownership of the task (Sagnak 2012; Moye et al. 2005). This requires good interpersonal relationships together with a flexible and adaptable management style. Empowerment is a "process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members" (Conger and Kanungo 1988). This process can be achieved by leaders whose approach to communication enhances trust in its members, shows empathy and sensitivity to subordinates and colleagues. Similar views were raised by Moolenaar et al. (2010). They argued that if a principal's leadership is empowering, it promotes and influences the generation of new ideas. Ac-

According to literature, leadership that involves others is empowering (Applebaum et al. 2003; Hoy and Tarter 2004; Jamali et al. 2006; Timberly 2005). Consequently leadership is no longer viewed as a function of just the principal. For instance, Jacobson (2008) examined the practices of principals who successfully improved student performance in high poverty elementary schools and found that their success was a result of collective efforts. Principals who are supportive to their members of staff and community do empower them through effective communication. In Rosener's (1990) study of women managers, interactive leadership meant women who "actively work to make their interactions with subordinates positive for everyone involved." Reflecting on literature concerning women's ways of leading, Kark (2004) observed that women's leadership styles can be associated with transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership Theory and How it Intersects with Gender

Kark (2004) observed that recent developments in leadership theory have shifted interest from earlier theories of charismatic leadership that viewed the leader as extraordinary and followers as dependent on the leader to neo-charismatic theories and transformational leadership theory which is concerned with the development and empowerment of followers to function independently and effectively. In exploring how various approaches in feminist thought intersect with the study of gender and transformational leadership, Kark (2004:161) argues that "feminist theories are not only concerned with women's issues but rather they offer a gamut of inclusive field of organisational studies." The emphasis on the need for school organisations to be less hierarchical and the issue of inclusiveness and follower empowerment echoed in transformational approaches augur well with women's styles of leading. Balasubramanian and Krishnan (2012) present a more clearer picture of transformational leadership theory by making use of Bass and Alvio's four factors; Charisma-vision provision, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration. This concept of approaching an organisation from a less bureaucratic view is of particular importance even to countries such as South Africa which is currently going through a process of transforma-

tion. While in practice all schools are bureaucracies, the role of principals in the new era is shifting from power as control to sharing of power. However, November et al. (2010) referring to the South African context questioned the principals' approaches to leadership, wondering whether they can transform schools. In such instances, the concept of transformational theory would be useful to adopt.

Geijsel et al.'s (2003) notion of transformational leadership, which emphasises empowerment of followers and their ability to transform organisations, holds features associated with feminine characteristics. Transformational leadership according to Burns (1978:425) is "a reciprocal process of mobilising ... various ... resources ... in order to realise goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (cited in Geijsel et al. 2003:230). Within the transformational theory, a number of concepts such as coaching and mentoring develop in the process of dialogue. Robertson (2008) views coaching as a skill that provides leaders with a structure of how to deal with certain pressures. To a large extent the women heads of schools in some of the studies mentioned above adopted transformational strategies to leadership.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that guides this paper is transformational leadership theory. This framework is considered most suitable in that it emphasises empowerment of followers which is in line with current organisational changes and management theorising, that stress the need for organisations to become less hierarchical, more flexible and team oriented. Transformational leadership theory is a substantive departure from previous theories. As women increasingly enter leadership roles that traditionally have been occupied by men, and with the increasing diffusion of transformational leadership, there is growing interest in the relationship between gender and transformational leadership (Kark 2004:160). Since the women in this study were novice leaders, having been appointed during the times of turbulence, transformational leadership as a framework seems to be most suitable. Boehnke et al. (2003) perceived transformational leadership as a shift of focus from simply leading, to empowering followers to be leaders who are able to develop a relationship of mutual respect. Bissessar (2011)

sees such relationships as important in retaining what she refers to as human capital. This framework is useful not only in this particular study, but raises awareness and gives opportunity for research in other countries with similar situations.

METHODOLOGY

The study on which this paper is based adopted the qualitative research design. A sample of five women principals was identified using snowball sampling technique. The first participant in a snowball sample was identified purposively. Purposive sampling as defined by Polit and Beck (2004) suggests that selection of participants is based on personal judgement about the one that will be most informative within the relevant area of research. With snowball sampling the selected participant identifies the next one for inclusion in the sample and like a ball rolling, the sample grows (Patton 2002). Snowball sampling is an approach for locating those participants who have rich information about the phenomenon to be researched. Three of the women school heads are cited in this paper. Data was obtained through the use of qualitative in-depth interviews. In this study The researcher was concerned with gathering high quality and in-depth information about women principals' perceptions and experiences of leadership. A phenomenological approach helped the researcher to gain access to women's lived experiences and to understand their perceptions of leadership as principals, from their perspectives. In phenomenology, data is generated through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Van der Mescht 2004). As they expressed their views and reflected on their experiences, my objectives were also achieved. Phenomenology insists on remaining faithful to the data and hence the researcher's decision to use exact words through a few selected quotations. The participants were informed about the ethics around the study, that they were free to withdraw at anytime and that their privacy was important and hence the use of pseudonyms. It is worth to note that all the women school heads did express an interest in the study and noted that through participation in the study they had come to reflect critically on their leadership experiences and hope to do even better in their future endeavours as educational leaders.

This study is intended to create an awareness of the importance of women's leadership

role in schools and to make a difference through empowering others. This study is also intended to help fill the gap in research on women and educational leadership and gender issues in schools not only within the Zimbabwean context. It will hopefully contribute to the literature on education and gender awareness in schools, and be useful to those in leadership positions, and those who write policy and leadership development programmes within the SADC region and beyond. Its chief value may lie simply in the role it might play in drawing attention to a neglected field of study.

FINDINGS

The women principals described their experiences in different ways. For instance, one of the participants, Lonkina began by exploring her childhood experience as she felt that it influenced her perceptions of others and how she relates to them. She grew up at a mission school and this is her experience:

"Missionaries... used to give and share with the poor ... I also wanted to help". Lonkina was a head of a small school (farm school). She tried to make her interactions positive for everyone. According to her "you need to know each individual's needs, problems and interests". Lonkina believed that people come to work with their problems and this stance influenced her to take a more flexible approach: "I interact ... more often ... anyone with problems we discuss, agree and find a way forward". Her caring ethic and people centeredness is what characterised her view of leadership and is visible in her concern about catering for individual differences. The essence of Lonkina's experience of leadership is that of open channels of communication and listening to subordinates' problems. "I communicate with teachers, I use both formal and informal forms of communication, and I interact with both parents and teachers".

Lonkina's view of others is that there should be mutual respect. "With parents I make announcements at assembly for their children to pass on the message, followed up by letters to the parents". Lonkina holds parent meetings, consultation days and prize giving days: "At prize giving days we used to call responsible authorities from the ministry, these days we invite people who give us donations". Many of Lonkina's school children were orphans: "Kids come to

school hungry, they travel long distances to school and sometimes sleep during class lessons because of tiredness and hunger, we thought of a feeding scheme at the school". She introduced a feeding scheme for the poor children. The life-view of Lonkina's leadership reflects team spirit emerging even from the language she uses in her discussions. The use of the term 'we' is very regular in her speech-the term 'we' shows involvement of others and working together. Lonkina sees herself as an interactive leader who believes in people and focuses on collaborative leadership. However, Lonkina reflecting on her experiences noted that she sometimes uses authority where it is necessary. "I try to accommodate everyone and work as a team, but if a teacher is lost, you guide and counsel the teacher before you implement the regulations on circulars."

Another participant, Linda describes how she relates with her subordinates and believed in both leading and learning. Linda observed that learning is a lifelong experience for school leaders. She believed that by accepting "criticism" one is able to learn. By taking this position Linda believed she was leading by example.

What is reflected in my findings shows that the women school heads' approach had influenced positive thinking in subordinates about themselves and their school environments. Through active involvement of all stakeholders, empathy and mutual respect as well as an ethic of care, effective and efficient management of schools became the norm of the schools headed by the study's sample of women heads.

Linda perceives her world as shaped by the environment and she approaches it with a nurturing and caring mind. She feels that heading a school is more challenging than she had expected. Her school is located in a farm: "most children have no parents and they are always absent from school". She struggles with guardians and tries to educate them about the importance of pupils' education but to no avail: "if you call parents...some...don't even turn up". These challenges have taught Linda to be less authoritarian and more flexible in her approach: "you cannot impose strict rules ...you remain with no one and they will not turn up". Linda learnt that without co-operation with the community, there is no progress. Linda also believes in following and using policy in her leadership. In this way her leadership is shaped by both the immediate and wider environmental influences, such as national and provincial policy.

Linda does not use power over her community. What characterises her view of leadership is how she intervenes in the issue of the poor pupils and parents. She looks for ways to improve the situation as she presents her story: "we ask for assistance from organisations such as the Red Cross ...I do not ask for money. I take my problem to different organisations ... I invite them to school on prize giving days."

Linda's concern about the children's social well-being, the functioning of the school and how she responds to community problems is a reflection of a caring leader committed to improving the well-being of people in her environment. How she agonises with parents over lack of resources and her ability to move beyond nurturance and go an extra mile to assist the children is the essence of her experience and view of leadership.

Her belief in leading by example is exhibited in her approach to discussions and the decision-making process. In her approach Linda regards herself as both a leader and a learner. She believes that learning involves accepting criticisms. "You have to accept criticisms if you are to learn". This articulates well with her notion of sharing, where ideas are initiated, discussed, analysed and then accepted or criticised.

The way Linda interacts with her community strengthens her point of leading by example. She feels that communication is twofold: "We interact, I delegate...we work as a team". She believes that working inclusively with others promotes progress. Within teams she believes that everyone should work on an area that he/she "is more comfortable at". She believes that with this approach teachers perform better. Part of her strength in leading comes from reciprocity and interaction with teachers. She feels that when she involves staff she builds in them a sense of ownership. Linda feels that she is a role model and was born clever. Her thinking stems from her childhood experience. She had been in her own words:

a class monitor ... a prefect... a leader at girl guides and at church. I am a role model for my relatives in the family ... they look at me as a big aunt with leadership skills. I was just born clever and I have always wanted to be a leader.

Linda believes that her family has played a significant role in her development as a leader though she often refers to her professional experience. Her father groomed her to be responsi-

ble at an early age. She has learnt to work with brothers and sisters. She has since adopted the spirit of togetherness and caring.

Linda perceives herself as both people and goal-oriented. "I plan together with my deputy and senior teacher". She observes, "The pass rate is good because of close monitoring". She feels happy about her progress as a school head. She finds peace in teamwork, which is a result of sharing of duties. Her belief in communication as twofold is seen in her use of reciprocal approach when leading the school. Linda's approach to dealing with challenges symbolises her use of power not as command and control, but rather as capacity and efficacy.

Shelly is another school head in the sample. She feels she has an important role which needs commitment:

It needs patience ...sometimes...to be calm ...when I was given a letter of rejection from the S.D.C. I held my anger down ... I discovered that the role needs transparency and talking to people. The more people understand what is going on, the more they become supportive.

Shelly believes that sometimes teachers do not open directly to the head: "we ask senior teachers to listen to their concerns". Working with senior teachers makes communication easy (networking). She sees openness and frankness as important aspects that contribute to her progress in heading the schools: "Even the teachers adopted that frankness". When Shelly makes proposals for projects, she involves teachers in the contributions and suggestions. She incorporates their ideas and learns from them. Teachers feel free to discuss personal problems with her. Shelly had this to say:

I listen to pupils' problems as a mother. Sometimes teachers come and close the door to discuss their personal problems. Mothers come in and sit down and tell me what exactly the problem she is encountering. Sometimes I feel that the respect I get is due to the motherly role that I offer, even with the pupils. We fight, but calm down and talk as a mother and child. I do mentoring and counselling.

She feels she is someone who is caring, and able

to create an environment that is welcoming, I need to understand the people whom I work with ...to know how to handle their problems ... work together... apply flexible approaches to my work...encourage others to participate

freely in ... school activities . I should facilitate a sense of ownership in their work, and share power. I also feel I am a role model.

She discusses with teachers the advantages and disadvantages of adult learning and encourages them to apply for promotion. In this way she feels she interacts with them freely. She encourages teachers to wear their academic gowns on prize giving days to motivate others. She feels that one of her biggest challenges has been to work with no clue of the previous records of the school.

DISCUSSION

Individual Principals' Lived Experiences

The women's lived experiences as educational leaders suggest that leadership is a challenging process that requires reciprocal action. One of the women, Linda, discovered that most of the children who came to school had no parents. They stayed with either a guardian or grandparents. Most of the time these children were absent from school and were either baby sitting or working in the farm fields. Another participant, Shelly, also heading a farm school, experienced that involving the community is the only way she could address some of the challenges within the school. These women indicated that imposing rules was not a solution to the problems they were facing as nobody cared. The women therefore implemented what Brinia (2012) and Rosenner (1990) see as characteristic for women, employing power through and not over others. From the women's description, it shows that the community, parents as well as pupils themselves needed the type of empowerment defined by Sagnak (2012) and Moye et al. (2005) discussed in the review. They had to identify the problems first and then look for ways to involve the key stakeholders in this case caregivers, teachers and pupils. It is clear that the women had a vision of taking their schools forward. Their efforts to identify the problem meant that the women wanted to ensure the best approach has been utilised in order to create conditions that would motivate and enable all stakeholders to take responsibility. Women school principals embraced leadership approaches that enabled them to untangle the mess they had encountered within their school environments (Robinson 2011). It is through a deliberate move to involve the com-

munity, parents and the learners that the women principals managed to help the different stakeholders to see the need to take responsibility for their own school and children's learning. Empowering others is about the creation of conditions that facilitates and embraces change. Leadership that involves others is empowering (Applebaum et al. 2003; Hoy and Tarter 2004; Jamali et al. 2006; Timberly 2005). The women primary school principals entered into new roles of being counselors, trainers and consultants (Gunter 2008).

Negotiating the Terrain of Power

All the women heads in the study acknowledged that creating an environment with an atmosphere conducive to learning is not an easy task. However they managed to bring the community together using the Bass and Alvio's four factor elements of transformational leadership cited by Balasubramanian and Krishnan (2012). The issue of intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration is of great importance if one is to share power in order to gain more power. Although the community in which the women worked were faced with many problems, instead of using authority to make the schools function, the women heads shared ideas through interaction and by so doing they gained respect from the people. Rosener (1990) believed that information is a source of power. However, the way the women used this resource is that of negotiating and in the process empowered their communities. This is in line with Moolenaar et al.'s (2010) concept of effective communication. Sheard and Avis (2011:87) talk of giving a voice to the disadvantaged communities and necessitating "power" to "devolve" "downwards to empower practitioners and other stakeholder". The school heads communicated with their teachers when they were trying to identify problems in their schools. After the problems were identified, the women worked towards improving the situation by involving teachers for instance, in the investigation of learners' historical backgrounds, so that they could assist them accordingly. Thus, when they discovered that most pupils were orphans, staying with grandparents, they teamed together with teachers to look for donors to sponsor their schools. This information paved the way into the type of approach the women were to take in order to resolve problems such as absenteeism, financial issues and other related challenges. Thus reflecting on the framework for this

paper, the transformational leadership theory plays a major role in informing us how women succeeded. The issue of synergy that comes with transformational leadership and a total commitment to pull together is one of the major credits to be awarded to the women school heads for this particular study (Agezo 2010).

Thus women's approaches to handling school challenges largely reflect a gender dimension of motherly care. Women principals display a motherly care approach when dealing with pupil behavioural problems, something also noted by Ikoya's (2009) research in Nigeria. The application of preventive discipline measures were mostly used by women more than men and this included the creation of a warm school climate that facilitated adequate social interaction between student, staff and the administration. Principalship is not only about rules but empowerment of not only teachers but also parents and pupils. It is about being sensitive to issues surrounding the school community as a whole. From the women's descriptions, parents would come to their offices to discuss a problem and as leaders they could accommodate it. Teachers also felt free to discuss with the women principals their problems meaning that there was an element of trust. This approach empowered the community to want to work together. Boenke et al.'s (2003) view of transformational leadership, augurs well with the women's approach to school leadership and is seen as a shift of focus from simply leading to encouraging all to participate.

Creativity

Since pupils were not paying fees and their schools experiencing poor performance due to absenteeism, as highlighted above, the women designed ways of sourcing funds such as approaching different organizations seeking for donations. They introduced feeding schemes at their schools after receiving assistance from donors such as the Red Cross. As a form of intervention, the Red Cross organization also supplied these schools with uniforms for the poor children. Both the children and the parents within the surrounding communities were attracted to this scheme which was a move towards improving the school. There was an increase in class attendance and improvement in school performance. The women within the school community became involved in the preparation of their children's food that was supplied by the donors. Thus in this way the community was

empowered as well. Linda's approach is associated with transformational leadership in that she believed: "everyone is an expert at something and everyone is a learner and a leader" as expressed by Barth, (cited in Diron 1994:6). Whatever activities were done at school, the heads discussed with their colleagues. In Linda's approach, Jamali et al.'s (2006:1) view of schools as organisations also features very well with people continually expanding their capacity and forming "new patterns of thinking and nurturing them. To be able to influence others or to motivate subordinates bringing them together to work towards improving the school situation can also be done in the form of coaching of teams of teachers, pupils and parents.

Coaching and Empowering Others

Going back to the phenomenon under study, Sergiovanni (1987:116) argued that: "leadership reality for all groups is the reality they create for themselves". As already indicated in preceding discussions, differences in leadership approach and communication patterns contribute to variations in school culture. Ryan (2006) talks of inclusive leadership which is something that is needed to nurture school communities and create collaborative culture within the school. What is reflected in my findings shows that the women's approach had influenced positive thinking in subordinates' feeling about themselves and their school environments through coaching and mentoring. The concept of coaching is elaborated by Robertson (2008) showing how it improves professional communication and develop special relationships with colleagues. People who came with their problems had the opportunity to pour out their feelings and in the process, got involved in coaching conversations. Coaching is about having someone improve their performance often by pushing their own barriers to success through the assistance of somebody sympathetic to their cause. Starr (2004:10) suggested:

When I learned the principles of coaching conversations, I naturally gained an increased level of self-awareness. That is great for me, and also for people around me. For an example, to coach people, I must give up my tendency to control conversations, or to try to 'fix' other people . . . So my team meetings become more about me facilitating conversations and when my partner comes with a problem, I do not jump all over him or her with unwarranted instruc-

tions or solutions. In this way, coaching skills becomes life skills.

Starr's approach to coaching and the women principals' descriptions of how they exercised their leadership reflects a strong empowering process of a committed mentor. Mentoring involves listening and offering non-judgemental support. The process of mentoring is in itself empowering. The women in this study perceived leadership as an empowering process and from their descriptions of dealing with challenges they interacted, shared information, and facilitated the rehearsal of ideas, plans and strategies of successfully moving forward.

CONCLUSION

The varied experiences of the women school heads discussed in this paper lead to the conclusion that under certain circumstances leadership can be an empowering process to both school heads and all the other stakeholders in the school system. Leadership in educational settings can be a win-win situation for all involved, teachers, parents, pupils and school heads and the respective communities. When participants in this study were describing their lived experiences for instance Linda on how she handled the challenges in her community, Lonkina also about management challenges in her school and Shelly on the ethics of care and negotiating challenges in her school all reflect their perspective of leadership. From the findings it is clear that being a principal is more than just controlling events and it is also not about individualism. Principalship is about working with others as a team. Empowerment is a result of supportive environment, in which ideas are shared both formally and informally for a common purpose. The school heads were able to influence others, motivate, empathise, and be sensitive to community situations. A network of influence and flexible approaches as the findings reflect empowered everyone including the learners to reach a higher level of improved performance.

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