



The perceptions of the principal versus the perceptions of the teachers

Perceptions of
the principal and
teachers

A case study from Portugal

Petros Pashiardis

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

Jorge Adelino Costa, Antonio Neto Mendes and Alexandre Ventura

Department of Educational Sciences, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

587

Abstract

Purpose – This research, based on a case study carried out in a Portuguese public school, was undertaken with the main purpose of investigating the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their principal and his leadership style.

Design/methodology/approach – Teachers received a questionnaire which included 57 items, grouped under the following nine areas: school climate, school leadership and management, curriculum development, personnel management, administration and fiscal management, student management, professional development and in-service, relations with parents and the community, problem solving and decision making. After the questionnaires were collected, the semi-structured interview process began with the principal. The areas that were discussed were identical to those of the questionnaire in order to be able to make certain comparisons and draw some conclusions about possible discrepancies between what the teachers perceived and what the principal thought of himself. In the case presented in this study, the researchers spent a total of about two hours with this particular principal interviewing him and shadowing him on various aspects covered by the questionnaire. The results are based on the interview with this one principal and the school's teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

Findings – The underlying (and guiding) assumption for this project was that the effectiveness of a leader is (to a great extent) dependent on how others view him/her as a leader. From the overall results in this particular study, it seems that there is an overall agreement between the teachers and the principal regarding the principal's view of himself and the teachers' perceptions of him. Generally, the results indicate that the existence of a high level of collegiality in the management of Portuguese schools seems to be an important feature when explaining the large degree of agreement found between the views of the teachers and of the principal on his leadership style. Even though the results cannot be generalized from this small sample, there is the belief that in Portuguese public schools there is a certain sense of "consensual management" style, which is closer to the main interests of the teachers, rather than closer to the interests of other participants in school life.

Originality/value – The study paper sheds light on the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their principal and his leadership style. This kind of research has been, until now, clearly marked by its paucity in Portugal.

Keywords Principals, Teachers, Perception, Leadership, Public schools, Portugal

Paper type Case study



The authors would like to thank the very helpful contribution of Patricia Castanheira, as an assistant research officer, to this paper. They would also like to thank the Research Unit Development of Pedagogic Knowledge in Educational and Training Systems (FCT/MCES), located at the Department for Educational Sciences of the University of Aveiro, Portugal, for funding this project.

International Journal of Educational
Management
Vol. 19 No. 7, 2005
pp. 587-604
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited
0951-354X
DOI 10.1108/09513540510625626

Introduction

The present research, which was carried out in a Portuguese secondary school, was undertaken with three main goals in mind:

- (1) to find out about the perceptions of teachers regarding their principal and his leadership style;
- (2) to find out about the perceptions of the principal himself regarding his own leadership style; and
- (3) to compare teachers' perceptions with those of the principal and find out if there are any discrepancies between their views.

This kind of research has been, until now, clearly marked by its paucity in Portugal.

Previous general management literature suggests that the views from subordinates can be used as a development tool for the evaluation of managers and leaders. The drift to more qualitative research approaches in the 1980s considering "the leader as a manager of meaning has led to an awareness that the ways in which this process occurs requires in-depth understanding of particular cases and detailed probing among both leaders and subordinates of aims and impacts" (Bryman, 1996, pp. 287-288). Several authors describe programmes with evaluation or transformational purposes in which subordinates, or associates, give feedback about their leaders, or managers. Researchers, mainly in the fields of education and human resources have created various "forms of multisource or multirater assessment methods in organizations" (Church and Bracken, 1997, p. 149). One of the most used forms is 360-degree feedback (Church and Bracken, 1997; Manatt, 1997; Bettenhausen and Fedor, 1997; Halverson *et al.*, 2002). Multisource or 360-degree feedback is a process by which "managers receive various ratings from a variety of sources" (Luthans and Farner, 2002, p. 784). This 360-degree feedback, or team evaluation, is very well established in American business and industry, but also in other countries. The objectives of the leadership programme, at FIAT, Italy, portrayed by Auteri (1994), are to improve performance and productivity by taking a hard look at how managers are viewed by subordinates, and to redefine the role of managers. Although 360-degree feedback cannot be considered a solution for every problem, its use can help "to gain agreement on expectations, by using a broader range of information and by facilitating open discussion" (Lepsinger and Lucia, 1997, p. 66). In the past few years, the 360-degree feedback has also become attractive to schools. Moreover, one of the aspects that has increasingly been a topic of concern is the evaluation of principals (Crisci *et al.*, 1991; London *et al.*, 1997; Davis and Hensley, 1999; Thomas *et al.*, 2000), by their subordinates. While examining the research cited above as well as more recent research on these aspects of the principalship, the need to begin this project was established.

In essence, this piece of research emanated from a similar project undertaken by Pashiardis (2001). The same underlying (and guiding) assumption for this project was in mind as with the project in Cyprus: that the effectiveness of a leader is (to a great extent) dependent on how others view him/her as a leader. This effectiveness is, of course, dependent on how the principals themselves perceive their leadership style. Principals may have some ideas about themselves and the way they lead their schools. They act and perform their duties based on these ideas and also based on their perceptions of themselves as leaders. However, if their staff perceives them in different

ways, then, the staff will almost certainly behave towards the principal in the way they (the staff) perceive the principal. If the views of the principal match the views of the staff the functioning of the school is smooth; if these views, however, are divergent then there are problems and disfunctionalities in the day-to-day operations of the school due to differences emanating from the way participants perceive things. This discrepancy of views and perceptions is usually to the detriment of the school and its students since people act in different ways according to their own perceptions about the reality of what is happening in the school. It is, therefore, assumed that it is important to find out whether the teachers' views are in congruence with those of the principal regarding the principal's leadership and management of the daily affairs of the school, since all involved behave according to their own perceptions and not according to how things really are. Moreover, we would argue that what is perceived as reality is what we base our actions on. Therefore, it could be argued that perception is indeed, reality.

The Portuguese education system

In order to gain a better understanding of the context in which this piece of research was carried out, it is probably useful to briefly describe the education system of Portugal. In spite of some progress in the last decades towards greater school autonomy (Barroso, 2003), the public education system is centralized. Even though there are regional administrative structures, the main principles for educational policy are defined at the Ministry of Education, in Lisbon, which is responsible for national education policies, the curricula and programmes, among other aspects. The administrative structure of the Ministry of Education consists, in addition to other departments, of central departments with the task of formulating policy in the pedagogic arena. Basic Law 46, dated 14 October 1986, governs the Portuguese education system and ensures that education is universal, compulsory and free of charge for nine years, for all children. Compulsory education is offered from six to 15 years of age, covering the three cycles of basic education (see Figure 1).

Secondary education – public and private – is optional and consists of a three-year cycle, which begins after the three cycles of basic education. Access is gained through the Certificate of Basic Education. As can be seen, the term “secondary education”, in Portugal, corresponds to what in Europe is currently called “upper secondary education”. This level of education is structured in different ways to cater for general courses aimed at those wanting to continue on to higher education and technological courses and vocational courses aimed at those seeking to enter the labour market. Permeability between the three programmes of study is guaranteed. Each of these courses lasts three years, corresponding to the 10th, 11th and 12th year of schooling (Portuguese Ministry of Education, 2003a).

The teaching and practice of technical, technological or artistic courses are provided by vocational schools and special schools for education in the Arts. A Secondary Education Diploma is awarded to students who complete secondary schooling. The diploma specifies the course that has been finished and the final mark obtained, and allows the student to apply for a place in higher education. In addition to this diploma, the technological courses taught as part of regular education and artistic education, vocational courses, technical and technological courses for adults also lead to a level 3 vocational qualification certificate, that allows students to enter the job market as

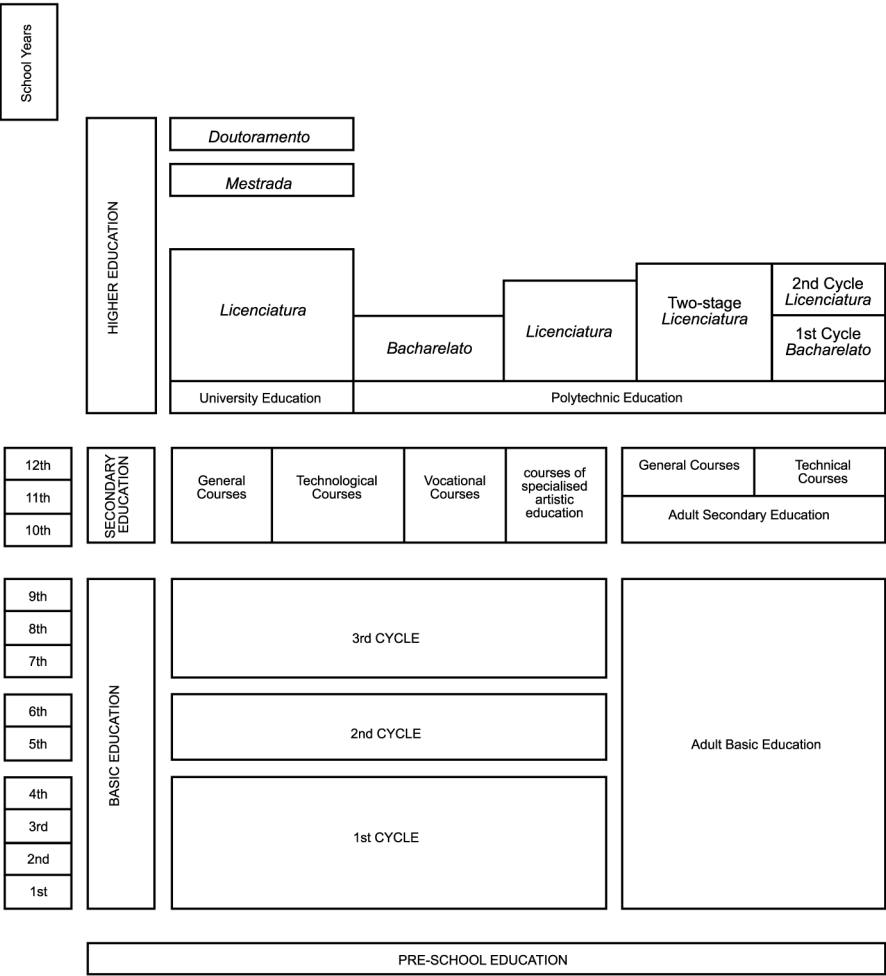


Figure 1.
Portuguese education
system

Source: Portugal (2003a). www.des.min-edu.pt/estia/diagindex.html

middle technical staff. For a better understanding of the structure described in the preceding paragraphs, see Figure 1.

To facilitate the understanding of the shape of the Portuguese educational system we will also provide some data about some of the major characteristics, excluding higher education, for the continental part of the country in the school year of 2003-2004. There are 15,129 schools for different levels of education in Portugal. The public education level has 12,701 schools with 145,057 teachers and the private education level has 2,428 schools with 26,683 teachers. The ratio students/teacher at the public education level is 14.7 for pre-school, 9.3 for basic education, 8.2 for secondary education and 5.7 for vocational education (Portuguese Ministry of Education, 2003b, p. 44).

Currently, Portuguese public schools are run under law 115-A of 4 May 1998. According to this law, there are four management bodies in a school: the School's Assembly, the Executive Council or Director (the schools can choose between a collegial body and a single person body), the Pedagogical Council and the Administrative Council. The School's Assembly is a representative body of the whole education community and it formulates the guidelines for the whole school's operations. The Executive Council, or the Director, is the body or person which is responsible for the administration and management of the school in the pedagogical, cultural, administrative and fiscal areas on a daily basis. The Pedagogical Council is the body that coordinates and governs the pedagogical and didactical issues of the school. The Administrative Council is responsible for the administrative and fiscal matters.

In Portugal, the principal of a public school is a teacher of the school with at least five years of teaching experience, and with specialized training in school administration (or, as an alternative, with previous experience in school management). The principal is elected by the school's election board (which is composed of all the teachers and staff and of some representatives of the parents and students). Therefore, the principal is not a management professional, but a teacher who is elected for a three-year period at the end of which he/she will return to teaching (unless he/she runs for the position and is elected again).

Methodology and procedures

The methodology used in this research was a mixed one combining qualitative and quantitative methods. More specifically, the questionnaire used in the Pashiardis (2001) project was utilized in Portugal after changing it slightly for local conditions in the country and taking into consideration the specific circumstances of secondary principals in Portugal. The questionnaire included 57 items which were grouped under the following nine areas: school climate, school leadership and management, curriculum development, personnel management, administration and fiscal management, student management, professional development and in-service, relations with parents and the community, problem solving and decision making. The complete questionnaire can be seen in its entirety in the Appendix. The questionnaire is considered to be very reliable since its reliability coefficient is: $r = 0.94$ (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$). To help ensure face validity, a panel of eight experts was convened to examine items on the questionnaire. The scale used is an interval, Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, where 4 indicates that the principal "always" behaves in the way described by a certain questionnaire item, 3 indicates "often", 2 indicates "sometimes", and 1 indicates "never". An option was given to respondents for a "no opinion" response with number 5 (this number was, of course, excluded from the calculations). For the statistical analysis of the collected data the "SPSS for Windows 12.0" was used. Statistical analyses were conducted using primarily descriptive statistics such as means, medians, standard deviations and frequencies.

The questionnaire was placed inside a stamped envelope, together with a smaller envelope, with the return address already printed on it. These sets of envelopes were provided to the school principal in order to be distributed to the teachers. The principal, then, gave the sets to the front desk receptionist so that the questionnaires could be provided to the teachers as they came in to the school. The distribution process was

monitored by using a checklist with the teachers' names. Thus, we were assured that all the teachers had received the questionnaire. Due to the sensitivity of the issue (asking teachers for information about their principal is not an everyday thing in Portugal, even if it is done anonymously), and bearing in mind the specific Portuguese school tradition and culture, we chose a distribution methodology which guarantees the delivery, but not necessarily the return of the questionnaires. Therefore, we could only rely on the goodwill of the teachers that they would think highly of our research effort and thus, respond accordingly.

The response rate was about 30 per cent, which is relatively low and in any case not as high as we had expected. However, the response rate was considered sufficient to be able to make some useful and representative observations with regard to the views of the teachers versus the views of the principal. We believe that the low response rate was due to three main reasons. First and foremost, it was due to the low levels of enthusiasm that teachers usually exhibit in Portugal when asked to respond to questionnaires. Actually, this is the most commonly used way that everybody employs in order to gather information from the schools and it is understandable that teachers may feel overwhelmed when asked to respond to (yet) another questionnaire. Besides, and perhaps most importantly, we were dealing with a very sensitive issue. Even though we had taken every precaution to ensure strict anonymity, people still feel a little uneasy with a theme that necessarily approaches personal beliefs and that demands the evaluation of the performance of the highest-ranking official within the school, that is their principal. The potential respondents were probably afraid of being identified. This might further explain the fact as to why some teachers declined to give out personal data, which might, eventually, reveal their identification. Last but not least, from 144 teachers working in this school, around 30 are teaching here for the first time which results in a reduced acquaintance with the leader's performance.

Also, in this study, the ethnographic approach to leadership was used (Gronn and Ribbins, 1996), by observing, shadowing and interviewing the principals. A multiperspective approach was used following Argyris' (1982) distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use in order to find out whether what the principals say they do is what is actually perceived as what it is they do. After the questionnaires were collected, the semi-structured interview process began with the principal. This digitally recorded interview with the principal occurred in a relatively informal, relaxed style. For this purpose we used a protocol based on the questionnaire (see Appendix). The areas that were discussed were identical to those of the questionnaire in order to be able to make certain comparisons and draw some conclusions about possible discrepancies between what the teachers perceived and what the principal thought of himself/herself.

Further, following Seddon's (1993) distinction of context between categorical, interpretive, and relational, we would argue that this piece of research tries to construe meanings within the interpretive or constructivist approach of context, i.e. based on the premise that it is indeed important to find out what organizational members' conceptions of reality are, because, as Bassey (1999, p. 43) suggests, people in a particular situation can perceive the (same) world slightly differently, that "there can be different understandings of what is real" (Pashiardis and Baker, 1992; Pashiardis, 1995). Therefore, it is hoped that through comparison and contrast of all the available evidence, we should be able to reach more objective accounts on the principalship. In

the case presented in this study, the researchers spent a total of about two hours with this particular principal interviewing him and shadowing him on various aspects covered by the questionnaire. The results are based on the interview with this one principal and the school's teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

The school and the principal

This school situated at the centre of Portugal in an urban area was founded in the late nineteenth century as a response to the needs of the ceramic industry in the area. Throughout its history the school has been operating in several buildings within the town. The premises where it operates now were inaugurated in 1956. By the end of the 1980s the school had approximately 2.200 students. Today it has 899 students. There are 144 teachers and 50 non-teaching staff members.

The school principal is a man in his 50's who has a total of 11 years of experience in various headship positions, two years of experience as an official in regional educational administration and about 20 years of classroom experience as a teacher. At present, he dedicates all his time to the headship of the school. He has a degree in Law and he is a postgraduate in Educational Sciences majoring in Educational Administration. He is also a postgraduate in the Law of Communication.

Milestones in the principal's career

The significant events in the principal's career are outlined below:

- (1) 1976-77: he started working as an assistant principal.
- (2) 1977-78: one of the members of the Executive Office (which is the body that administers the school on a daily basis) of the school he was working at took a leave of absence and another member of the Executive Office changed schools. In spite of only having one year of experience in school administration, he had to manage the school on his own for five months at a crucial time – the beginning of a school year. He had to learn fast and he was presented with many difficulties, but he definitely fell in love with school administration.
- (3) 1986-87: he was appointed as a principal of a School of Arts. He had to adjust his management skills to deal with artists who require a special kind of flexibility.
- (4) 1990-91: he worked in the District's Office of Education as an assistant officer. He learned more about school management from a different perspective, as he had to deal with the difficulties of hundreds of schools of the whole region.

Presentation of results and discussion

School climate

In the area of "School climate", the principal received the highest marks in item 7 (mean = 3.75), where it is stated that the principal promotes open communication and flexibility in relations with the staff as opposed to strict adherence to bureaucratic hierarchy. Based on the teachers' written responses, it seems that they actually enjoy this kind of openness in communication to a great extent.

This is very similar to what the principal stated during the interview, since he did not hesitate in saying that he sees himself as a flexible person, someone with whom people can easily talk. This principal believes that, as a flexible and easy-to-deal-with person, he must try to promote communication and harmony between people, and

therefore, he sees it as his duty. During our visit to this school we could observe that there was an excellent school climate. This was clearly visible in the promptness and kindness that the staff showed towards us and in the orderly, pleasant way the students were moving on the school grounds. One could easily get the feeling that the school was a place where people felt at ease, safe and almost at home.

The item which received the lowest marks in the area of "School climate" is the one regarding whether the principal "provides recognition for excellence and achievement" (item 3, mean = 3.32). However, even this score is not really low for this particular area since 3 on the scale used stands for "often".

Again, this view of the teachers is, to a great extent, in agreement with what the principal stated during the interview. In the Portuguese school system there are no institutional ways of recognizing excellence and achievement for both teachers and school staff. The principal mentioned this during the interview stating that the main way to recognize excellence and achievement for teachers would be the students' results and the pride that the teachers feel in seeing that their students achieved good results. Nevertheless, the principal received a good score in this item mainly due to the effort the school has taken over these last years in recognizing students' achievement, through the offering of some awards to the best students. These awards, in the form of diplomas and other small prizes, are donated by a foundation from the city in which the school is situated and by the school itself. Until recently, this school had no name. Now it holds the name of a patron and it is proud of its patron. This pride can be seen in the naming of the awards after the patron and on the safe-keeping of the patron's personal library in one of the best rooms of the school. In general, all eight items in this category received an overall mean of 3.56 (on a scale from 1 to 4) which means that the principal "often" exhibits the behaviours described in these items in his leadership style, as perceived by his staff.

School leadership and management

In this area of the questionnaire, the principal received the highest marks in item 15 (mean = 3.74), which refers to the extent to which he closely cooperates and contributes to the work of the Portuguese Ministry of Education.

This view is again in accordance with how the principal sees himself since he really showed a clear knowledge and understanding of the laws governing the schools, as was evident during our conversation. To closely cooperate and contribute to the work of the Ministry of Education it means to know the legalities of the bureaucracy involved and adhering to all laws and regulations in a religious fashion. This principal mentioned that he feels quite at ease with the interpretation of the laws and regulations. He also stated that it would be very hard to escape the embracing force of the Portuguese education laws, since the education system is highly centralized and bureaucratic. Curiously enough (why include this phrase if it is not qualified?) the principal mentioned that it is his belief that the teachers of his school do not realize the amount of work he does in this area since this type of work is something that happens mostly in the background, and is of no direct concern to them as long as the school operates smoothly.

The principal received the lowest marks in item 11 (mean = 2.88), which refers to the presentation of the principal's vision for school improvement to all educators in the school. Again, this is not a surprising result since, in Portugal, the principal is not the

sole shaper of a common vision for school improvement. This common vision is usually created by the school itself as a community. The issue of school improvement is widely discussed at various school bodies and it is, to a great extent, embedded in the plans that these bodies approve, thus, facilitating the teachers in order to work under the guidance of that common vision. Under these circumstances, the principal has no sole or direct responsibility both in the creation and in the sharing of a common vision for school improvement. This principal has, nevertheless, the perception that others in the school see him as an effective leader because of his extensive experience in school administration (the fact that he is perceived as an effective leader is also further corroborated by the answers given by the teachers to the questionnaire). According to the principal, the fact that he is perceived as an experienced administrator may help him even further in the execution of his duties as the school principal, since people see him as someone who knows his job and whom they can trust.

Curriculum development

The item in which the principal received the highest marks in this area is item 18 (mean = 3.52), which refers to the extent that the principal provides instructional resources and materials to support the teaching staff in accomplishing their instructional goals. The teachers seem to see this as one of the principal's greater strengths, as indicated by their answers to the questionnaire ("always" on the scale used). The teachers' views are in accordance with the principal's perceptions on this particular issue. The principal exhibited a remarkable sense of certainty when asked whether he provided the instructional resources and materials in order to support his teaching staff. According to the principal, the teachers only had to ask for a specific resource or material and they would get it. The principal further mentioned that each room in the school had dictionaries, a television set and a VCR. He also mentioned that there are many computers with internet connection.

The principal received the lowest score in item 17 (mean = 3.12), which refers to the extent that he strives for the constant renewal of programs in order to respond to students' needs. However, in a centralized system, such as the Portuguese, this score is considered satisfactory. This is very important because it indicates that the principal tries his best to ensure that academic programme offerings are renewed in order to respond to students' needs. The principal's views on this subject are also extremely close to those of the teachers, as indicated in their answers on the questionnaire. During the interview, the principal stated that he strives to adjust the curriculum to the needs of his students whenever this is possible. According to him, the area in which he can adjust to his students' needs with relatively less effort is for programs which concern students with special needs. The school has a working group of professionals that tries, (in close collaboration with other schools in the same geographical area), to adapt the curriculum in response to these students' demands. Again, the principal indicated that the pressure from the centralized education system is probably the biggest obstacle for curriculum renewal. As he explained, in Portugal, the curriculum is centrally defined; there is one national curriculum to be followed by every school in the country. There are control mechanisms – such as reports, national exams at the end of the 12th year, school inspections and other evaluation programmes (Ventura and Costa, 2002) – in order to pin down to what extent was the curriculum actually implemented in the schools. There is not much room for major deviations from this. Overall, the principal

received a mean score of 3.30 (again on the scale from 1 to 4) in the area of “Curriculum development” which is a very good score.

Personnel management

In this area, the principal received the highest score (but not that high, generally speaking) in item 24 (mean = 2.50), which refers to the extent to which his expectations with regard to personnel performance in terms of teaching strategies, classroom management and communication with the public, are clearly defined for the teachers. This is the principal’s weakest area, according to the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire. This clearly constitutes no surprise since the expectations with regards to personnel performance in terms of teaching strategies, classroom management and communication with the public are conveyed by the state’s laws and regulations in Portugal with not much room to deviate from the mainstream. The teachers’ answers to this question cannot be interpreted as criticisms since they know that the principal does not have any room for deviations at this level. The school’s assembly may define such expectations but only to a very limited extent and as long as they do not really deviate from mainstream practice. During the interview, the principal recognized this fact both by the amount of time he devoted to responding to this question and by the hesitation he indicated when answering it. According to the principal, this is something that is of no direct concern of his. The definition of clear expectations for staff performance is a matter specified by law and regulations.

The principal received the lowest score in item 21 (mean = 1.18), which refers to the extent that he uses developmental evaluation effectively and comprehensively with all staff by systematically observing instruction, recording observations, and regularly conducting formative and summative evaluation conferences. Again, this comes as no surprise, since in Portugal teachers’ evaluation is actually an administrative process left to external inspectors. The principal has no direct interference in this matter. Overall, the mean score for the category “Personnel management” is 2.11, which is an indication that the principal exhibits the behaviors described in the items under this category to “some extent”.

Administration and fiscal management

The principal received very high marks in item 26 (mean = 3.97) in this area. Indeed, this item received the highest score of all 57 items in the questionnaire. The item deals with the extent to which the principal complies with Ministry of Education policies as well as with school regulations in trying to fulfill the school’s objectives. Of course, this comes as a natural response from teachers since the educational system in Portugal is centralized and therefore, compliance with the Ministry of Education’s directives is crucial, indeed vital, for the school’s effective management.

The principal received a score of mean = 3.59 in item 29, which deals with the monitoring of the use, care and replacement of capital equipment. This is the area (administration and fiscal management) where the principal received the highest scores. For instance, he was awarded the highest scores (among all 57 items) in items 25, 26, 28, and 31, which all belong in this area and deal with such issues as making sure that all reports to the Ministry of Education are timely and accurate; preparing the school budget based on proven needs-according to the Ministry of Education’s directives; and keeping proper accounts, books and receipts; and displaying respect for

other people's time by being punctual to meetings. Apparently, this is his strongest of all nine areas in the questionnaire (overall mean = 3.81).

This is not unexpected since the principal so unequivocally stated his vast experience in the field of administration (both from the state's point of view and from the teacher's perspective) as the main milestones in his career.

Student management

The principal received the highest score in item 35 (mean = 3.85), which is the item dealing with protecting learning time and teachers from outside and unnecessary interruptions. Again the principal's perceptions are in accordance with those of the teachers'. During our conversation, the principal informed us that the only interruption the executive office of the school would allow was the last day of the school year in which the students' association liked to throw a party. However, even on that special day, the students of the 12th grade would have to come to classes (since their term is longer than for the other students). In this particular area, the principal also received high marks in item 33 (mean = 3.72), which refers to the extent that the principal insures that school rules are uniformly observed and that the consequences of misconduct are applied equitably to all students. This is clearly the result of the principal's experience in running a school and it was a point that the principal clearly stated during our conversation.

The principal received lower marks in item 36 (mean = 3.31), which refers to the implementation of such teaching methods where "higher order form of learning" is facilitated. Again, this was confirmed during our conversation with the principal. According to him, it is very hard to escape from the fixed, national curriculum (especially at the secondary school level) both because the central administration has strict mechanisms of control and because the teachers do not want to sway away from the national curriculum. According to this principal: "Teachers do not want to leave the national curriculum behind. If we ask them to do this or that which is a bit out of what the national curriculum asks, they will immediately say that they have to follow the national curriculum, that the national curriculum exists to be followed and respected". Nevertheless, the principal mentioned some initiatives, taken at the school level, that facilitate "higher order forms of learning" such as field trips and student clubs ("Animal's Rights League", "Writing", "Reading", "Photography") among others. These initiatives have a greater impact on lower secondary schools students, probably due to the workload of secondary school students who are in essence being prepared for entry into the universities.

The overall mean score for the principal in this area was 3.51 which is a very good view of the principal on the scale from 1 to 4, implying that the principal is perceived as a good leader with regards to student matters for most of the time. This is in accordance with the principal's views about his work in this area, albeit he recognizes that the highly centralized and strict curriculum in Portugal prevents him from taking more initiatives that could alter the general picture with regards to student management.

Professional development and in-service

The principal received the highest score in item 43 (mean = 3.50) in this area, which refers to the extent that the principal uses information he received during his staff-development or in-service sessions for his own self-improvement. The perception

of the staff is that he does use his own in-service in order to make improvements in his actual work environment. The principal did not give any clear indication as to whether this is actually the case, however, when asked and prompted, he indicated that sometimes he will attend in-service sessions depending on how much free time he has and also depending on how interesting the sessions are for him.

In this area, he received lowest marks in item 44 (mean = 3.34), which deals with the extent to which he disseminates information and materials and introduces new ideas to other colleagues in order to solve common problems. The principal agreed with the perception of the staff that he does not disseminate ideas and information to other professionals to a great extent. He justified this mainly by saying that he supports other people who want to promote in-service at the school level (by giving the necessary logistical support), but does not promote this himself in a formal fashion. This principal sees himself mainly as someone who facilitates the processes rather than as someone who initiates them. In any case, in-service training in Portugal is developed in a concerted fashion at the In-Service Centres, which are situated around the main towns in the country. These centres, which have executive, administrative and fiscal structures of their own, are constituted by school and kindergarten associations. These associations, thus, ensure the in-service training of their teachers, kindergarten teachers and non-teaching staff. In unison with the school, the In-Service Centre develops an annual in-service training plan that is supported by state and European Union funds. The In-Service Centre also deals with the more bureaucratic issues of hiring the in-service teaching staff, in-service trainees' enrolment, in-service teaching, self and external evaluation processes and the issuing of in-service training certificates. In order to move upwards in their career, the teachers must attend in-service sessions during various time intervals. It is up to them to choose the in-service training sessions. The principal has no legal responsibilities at this level. The overall mean score for this area was 3.42, which indicates that the principal is often willing to use in-service for his own improvement or to help his staff.

Relations with parents and the community

The principal received the highest score in item 51 (mean = 3.80) in this area, where there is a clear indication of an effort to project a positive image to the community. The staff's perception is in accordance with the principal's perceptions. He believes that the school has a much better image in the community now than it had some years ago, even though the school never had a bad image anyway. Again, he mentioned that this used to be a technical school and that people used to look upon it as an inferior school when compared to the other schools (the old lyceums) in the area. Today, this is changing – especially after the school was named after a patron – and there are some students enrolled in the school who come from the higher socio-economic status members of the local society.

The principal received the lowest marks (but not really low) in item 49 (mean = 3.23) in this area, which indicates that he often uses appropriate techniques for further encouragement and development of the relations between the community, the parents and the school. The principal seems to agree with these results since during our conversation he mentioned that it was very hard to bring parents to school. In Portugal, people still tend to think that if a parent has to come to school, then their child is having some problems. This is something that this principal somewhat regretted. He

mentioned the efforts that have been made in order to create a parents' association, but it never worked properly since parents tend to claim they are too busy to attend the meetings and the initiatives for parent involvement in school life. This was especially the response of secondary students' parents who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

On the other hand, the school has signed some protocols and understandings with local companies in order to help the students who are enrolled in the technical courses to gain some working experience in their areas of expertise, especially during the students' probation year. This is something that this principal takes great pride in, as we could observe from the visit that we paid to the workshops where the technical courses are taught. The overall mean score for this category (3.48) indicates that his staff indeed perceived this to be one of the areas in which there was still work that needed to be developed, albeit not to a great extent, as this score still tends to be quite high on the scale used (1 to 4).

Problem solving and decision making

The principal received the highest score in item 55 (mean = 3.76) in this area, which deals with the extent to which he is open to different approaches and solutions and does not insist on any one way of solving problems.

This was his assessment of himself as well. The principal stated that he rarely decides on his own and that he likes to listen to a number of different ideas first and then decide according to what he thinks is the best option for the school. The principal even added that when there is a situation that can easily be solved by the staff, he lets them resolve it. He says: "When the situation has to do with the teachers I always listen to their ideas first. When it is up to them to decide, I do not interfere, I try not to interfere. When I have to decide, I usually listen to people who are somehow involved in the situation and from the number of ideas that come along I choose one, the one I believe to be the best for the situation we are dealing with." Of course the principal also mentioned that this is not always possible and that sometimes he has to decide for himself, but as a standard practice he tries to avoid this.

The principal also received the lowest marks in item 52 (mean = 3.23, which is still a very good mark, "often" in the scale used) in this area, meaning that he sometimes presents discussion and searches for solutions as commonly accepted practices within the school. This perception of the principal by the teaching staff, comes in contrast to what the principal believes about himself, i.e. that he always promotes the discussion of the issues and the searching for a shared solution. This is an interesting result since the principal received an average mean of 3.49 in this category, which indicates that he often acts democratically instead of autocratically. In essence, what we are seeing here is that the principal perceives himself as being more democratic and using discussion and searching for solutions always. On the contrary, the teaching staff thinks that he often uses these widely accepted democratic principles, but not always.

Conclusion

The main goal of our study was to actually find out the degree of agreement and disagreement between the teachers and the principal regarding the principal's view of himself and the teachers' perceptions of him with regards to the principal's perceived effectiveness. The results we found indicate that there is a high level of agreement

between the principal's views and the teachers' views. We can actually state that there is only a small number of areas where there is some disagreement on the views the teachers have of the principal's leadership and the principal's view of himself. This general agreement of views between the teachers and the principal leads us to some explanations.

First, we have the highly democratic and consensus type of leadership profile of the principal. In this regard, the principal gets to know his staff well and at the same time they get to know him too, when trying to reach solutions using a consensus process, which means that everybody gets the chance to be included and to know what others think.

Then, there is the principal's ample and diversified experience with administration matters which give him a holistic perspective and approach to leadership. This, coupled with the fact that he has specialized training for leadership positions in school administration gives him an added perspective on how to run his school in a democratic way.

Third, we must admit that this principal is very self-conscious and very objective in his views with regard to his leadership style. He is also very cognizant of what teachers think of him as a principal.

Fourth, this principal, with around 20 years of teaching experience, knows the teachers' culture and the intrinsic characteristics of teachers' work (Mendes, 1999) extremely well and this opens the way to a better relationship with them.

Finally, we should not forget the way that the public school principals are chosen in Portugal. This particular principal is a teacher of this school who was elected, for the second consecutive time (in the first election he won with around 86 per cent of the votes, on the second election he won with around 75 per cent of the votes) by his colleagues. He was not assigned to this post by any administrative structure outside the school and he faced no opposition in running for the principal's position.

Therefore, the existence of a high level of collegiality in the management of Portuguese schools (Costa, 1996) seems to be an important feature when we try to explain the large degree of agreement we found in the views of the teachers and of the principal on his leadership style. Even though we cannot generalize from this small sample, we believe that in Portuguese public schools there is a certain sense of "consensual management" style, which is closer to the main interests of the teachers, rather than closer to the interests of other participants in school life. The principal is always seen as a peer by the teachers. This mixed profile tends to generate positive perceptions of the principal by the teachers and vice-versa. Consequently, sometimes we come across some softer leadership styles which are developed as a part of the collegial context of teaching and which do not interfere with some of the more sensitive areas such as teachers' performance (especially in what regards their scientific, pedagogical and didactical abilities). In a centralized administrative structure such as the Portuguese education system, school principals have a tendency to display a performance profile which is closer to that of a manager who takes care of the day-to-day management of the school's operations. Moreover, school principals in Portugal give the impression that they mainly follow instructions given from the macro structural level (i.e. the Portuguese Ministry of Education), rather than being proactive and innovative leaders at the school unit level.

References

- Argyris, C. (1982), *Reasoning, Learning, and Action: Individual and Organizational*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Auteri, E. (1994), "Upwards feedback leads to cultural change", *HRMagazine*, Vol. 39 No. 6, pp. 78-84.
- Barroso, J. (2003), "Organização e Regulação dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário em Portugal: Sentidos de uma evolução", *Educação e Sociedade*, Vol. 24 No. 82, pp. 63-92.
- Bassey, M. (1999), *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Bettenhausen, K.L. and Fedor, D.B. (1997), "Peer and upward appraisals. a comparison of their benefits and problems", *Group and Organization Management*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 236-63.
- Bryman, A. (1996), "Leadership in organizations", in Clegg, S.R., Hardy, C. and Nord, W.R. (Eds), *Handbook of Organizational Studies*, Sage, London, pp. 276-92.
- Costa, J.A. (1996), *Imagens Organizacionais da Escola*, ASA, Porto.
- Church, A.H. and Bracken, D.W. (1997), "Advancing the state of the art of 360-degree feedback", *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 149-61.
- Crisci, P.E., March, J.K. and Peters, K.H. (1991), "Empowerment with accountability: teachers evaluating teachers", *Government Union Review*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Davis, S.H. and Hensley, P.A. (1999), "The politics of principal evaluation", *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 383-403.
- Gronn, P. and Ribbins, P. (1996), "Leaders in context: postpositivist approaches to understanding educational leadership", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 452-73.
- Halverson, S.K., Tonidandel, S., Barlow, C. and Diboie, R.L. (2002), "Self-other agreement on a 360-degree leadership evaluation", paper presented at the 17th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Toronto, April.
- Lepsinger, R. and Lucia, A.D. (1997), "360-degree feedback and performance appraisal", *Training*, Vol. 34 No. 9, pp. 62-70.
- London, M., Smither, J.W. and Adsit, D.J. (1997), "Accountability: the Achilles' heel of multisource feedback", *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 162-84.
- Luthans, K.W. and Farner, S. (2002), "Expatriate development: the use of 360-degree feedback", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 21 No. 10, pp. 780-93.
- Manatt, R.P. (1997), "Feedback from 360 degrees. Client-driven evaluation of school personnel", The School Administrator Web Edition. available at: www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1997_03/manatt.htm (accessed 20 July 2004).
- Mendes, A.N. (1999), "O Trabalho dos Professores e a Organização da Escola Secundária", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Aveiro, Aveiro.
- Pashiardis, P. (1995), "Problem and dilemma identification and formulation as the most critical element of the decision-making process: behavioral biases and characteristics", *International Journal of Educational Reform*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 36-46.
- Pashiardis, P. (2001), "Secondary principals in Cyprus: the views of the principal versus the views of the teachers – a case study", *International Studies in Educational Administration*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 11-27.
- Pashiardis, P. and Baker, G. (1992), "Effects of decision motive and organizational performance level on strategic decision processes", *Community and Junior College Quarterly of Research and Practice*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 15-33.
- Portuguese Ministry of Education (2003a), Web site of the Portuguese Ministry of Education. available at: www.des.min-edu.pt/estia/edu/diagindex.html

- Portuguese Ministry of Education (2003b), *Schools Annual Census 2003/2004 – Preliminary Survey*, Portuguese Ministry of Education/Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Planning, Lisbon.
- Seddon, T. (1993), *Context and Beyond: Reframing the Theory and Practice of Education*, Falmer, London.
- Thomas, D.W., Holdaway, E.A. and Ward, K.L. (2000), "Policies and practices involved in the evaluation of school principals", *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 215-40.
- Ventura, A. and Costa, J.A. (2002), "External evaluation and the organizational development of schools in Portugal: new challenges for general inspectorate of education", *The International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 169-75.

Appendix. Questionnaire

(1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always, 5 = No opinion.)

I. School climate

1. Clearly states the school's objectives.
2. Communicates and promotes high expectation levels for staff and student performance in an enabling, supportive way.
3. Provides recognition for excellence and achievement.
4. Leaves enough autonomy to teachers in order to organize and programme their teaching.
5. Offers opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between groups, classes and lessons.
6. Mediates and facilitates effective resolution of conflicts in a timely fashion.
7. Promotes open communication and flexibility in relations with the staff as opposed to strict adherence to bureaucratic hierarchy.
8. Promotes an environment which facilitates learning and which is orderly and coherent with the school's goals.

II. School leadership and management

9. Cooperates with the staff's in creating a common vision for school improvement.
10. Encourages staff to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of this vision.
11. Presents his/her vision for the school to all educators in the school.
12. His/her values and vision are evident through the things he does, the way the principal spends his/her time and what he/she considers important.
13. Encourages a culture of innovation and experimentation.
14. His/her authority is presented through his/her knowledge and abilities instead of his/her position authority.
15. Closely cooperates and contributes to the work of the Ministry of Education.
16. Applies research findings to facilitate school improvement.

III. Curriculum development

17. Develops actions for the adaptation of the curriculum to students' needs.
18. Provides instructional resources and materials to support teaching staff in accomplishing instructional goals.

19. Monitors systematically instructional processes to ensure that teaching activities are related to the expected outcomes.
20. Effectively administers and integrates all curricula taught in the school with the national curriculum.

IV. Personnel management

21. Uses class observation to help the teachers' professional growth.
22. Confers with subordinates regarding their professional growth; works jointly with them to develop and accomplish improvement goals.
23. Uses a specific teacher observation instrument and ensures that evaluations clearly and accurately represent staff performance.
24. Clearly defines expectations for staff performance regarding instructional strategies, classroom management and communication with the public.

V. Administration and fiscal management

25. Makes sure that different reports to the Ministry of Education are accurate and are timely submitted.
26. Complies with educational policies, as well as laws and regulations.
27. Is effective in scheduling activities and the use of resources needed to accomplish determined goals.
28. Develops budgets based upon documented programme needs, fiscal needs, personnel costs and operates within the given budget.
29. Monitors the use, care and replacement of capital equipment.
30. Manages all school facilities effectively; efficiently supervises their maintenance to ensure clean, orderly and safe buildings and grounds.
31. Is punctual to meetings and gives attention to the discussion of the various issues raised in the meetings.

VI. Student management

32. Effectively communicates to students, staff and parents school guidelines for student conduct.
33. Insures that school rules are uniformly observed and that consequences of misconduct are applied equitably to all students.
34. Effectively conducts conferences with parents, students and teachers concerning school and student issues, conveying both the positive aspects of student behaviour as well as problem areas.
35. Protects learning time from outside and unnecessary interruptions.
36. Tries to implement such teaching methods where "higher order form of learning" is facilitated.
37. Promotes the use of knowledge in a variety of forms.
38. Promotes the interconnection of learning experiences in the school with practices which are followed outside the school.
39. Encourages and he/she is a good example of life-long learning using new ideas as well as successes and failures as examples.
40. Maintains and updates student folders.

VII. Professional development and in-service

41. Uses information which accrues from school inspections and other teacher appraisal in order to improve personnel.
42. Strives to improve leadership skills through self-initiated professional development activities.
43. Utilizes information and insights gained in professional development programmes for self-improvement.
44. Disseminates ideas and information to other professionals; provides leadership in addressing the challenges facing the profession.

VIII. Relations with parents and the community

45. Encourages relations between the school on one hand and the community and parents on the other.
46. Promotes cooperation with other organizations and businesses from the community so that students' needs are addressed.
47. Creates such relations with the community and parents so that they are encouraged to participate in decision making within the school.
48. Demonstrates awareness of school/community needs and initiates activities to meet those identified needs.
49. Demonstrates the use of appropriate and effective techniques for community and parent involvement.
50. Emphasizes and nurtures two-way communication between the school and community.
51. Projects a positive image to the community.

IX. Problem solving and decision making

52. Presents discussion and searching for solutions as commonly accepted practices within the school.
53. Shares information and facilitates decision making among all personnel.
54. Solves problems in a cooperative way with teachers.
55. Is open to different approaches and solutions and does not insist in any one way of solving problems.
56. Tries to listen to many views and ideas before solving important problems.
57. Implements decision-making processes which are participative as opposed to autocratic.