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Article Title Page

Successful Secondary Principalship in Cyprus: what have 'Thucydides' and 'Plato' revealed to us?

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose This paper seeks to provide an insight into successful secondary school principals in Cyprus focusing on identifying their actions and behaviours through the adoption of a systemic view of the quality of leadership in school organizations from multiple stakeholders (i.e., self, parents, students and teachers).

Design/methodology/approach This article is the sequel to another paper on successful principals which was written about successful primary school principals in Cyprus. A multi-case study methodology was followed where data were gathered from a wide range of school stakeholders such as the principal, teachers, students and parents employing a common, semi-structured interview protocol developed specifically for the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) which was translated in Greek and adopted to the Cyprus' educational context.

Findings This paper argues that the principals exhibit behaviors and actions such as developing relationships, being committed, being visionary and promoting a collaborative learning environment which, in combination with their passion, devotion and commitment, lead to successful principals.

Originality/value The paper offers insights into the implications for principals' training by informing policies for recruitment and retention leading to the designing of more effective leadership training programs.



Keywords: Leadership, Successful principals, Case study, Secondary schools, Cyprus

Article Classification: Research paper

For internal production use only

Running Heads:

Successful Secondary Principalship in Cyprus: what have ‘Thucydides’ and ‘Plato’ revealed to us?

Background and context

The educational system in Cyprus has always been an important subsystem of the Cypriot society, expressing the society’s spiritual, economic and technological achievements through the years (Tsiakkios & Pashiardis, 2002). It is generally accepted that the Cyprus education system is highly centralized and each school has to follow the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), which is responsible for the implementation of educational laws and the preparation of new legislation. Schools are directly controlled by the Ministry through the Inspectorate and school principals, the latter having less devolved responsibility than in many other school systems. Even more so, the appointment of teachers and principals is highly centralized through the Education Service Commission appointed by the Government. Also, principals are not consulted about the appointment of personnel or the allocation of money to their schools. National standards or tests are non-existent in the Cypriot system and therefore teachers administer their own tests for assessing students.

Successful leadership practices: What does the literature suggest?

In a broader framework, current research on school improvement identified the role of principals as critical and central in promoting and sustaining change. Due to a constant and consistent worldwide effort to comprehend principals’ leadership actions and practices and how these actions and practices contribute to school improvement the role of principals and generally educational leadership should be re-examined (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Brown, Ahtaridou, and Kington, 2009). Furthermore, current trends (Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003; Begley & Johansson, 2008) are focused on how values influence school leaders’ perceptions of their leadership practices, the way they articulate their relationships with students and teachers as well as their aspirations and expectations of their school. Principally, the quality of leadership is mainly measured through evidence on school improvement over time while emphasis should be placed, according to Pashiardis (1998), on a multi-perspective examination of principal leadership, using the following three dimensions: ‘the career dimension’ (on becoming a teacher and an education leader and the apprenticeship model of advancement to educational leadership positions as well), ‘the professional dimension’ (leadership philosophy and foundations of educational leaders) and ‘the personal dimension’ (concern for students, being a risk taker). Moreover, in the context of Cyprus, some studies conducted by Pashiardis (1995; 1998) and by Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, and Angelidou (2011) have shown that successful school leaders have great love and ambition for their profession, keep to traditions and national heritage, often take risks by opposing the will of the Ministry and are good administrators and good managers of time. At an international level, more research has been conducted on the key qualities, skills and behaviours central to successful

principalship (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005). These studies indicate that successful principals possess, retain and communicate in all that they do and say, a strong sense of agency, core sets of deeply held values, moral and ethical purposes and immense amounts of emotional understandings of themselves and others. They are also able to manage a number of agendas, without themselves becoming negative. These principals are able to maintain hope and hopefulness. At this point, and based primarily on the literature review conducted, we can identify the criteria used to define successful school leaders as they were derived from both qualitative and quantitative studies. These appear in the table as follows:

Table 1: Criteria used to define successful school leaders

Professionally characteristics
1. Setting high goals and expectations
2. Managing strategically financial issues and available resources
3. Organising, coordinating and evaluating the teaching and learning process and the curriculum
4. Supporting teachers' personal and professional development and growth as well as their own professional growth
5. Encouraging teachers' participation in decision-making (collegial cultures)
6. Cooperating with the parents and the community
7. Actively involved in problem solving regarding teachers' problems related to problems within the profession and students' problems related to problems within the school setting
Personal Characteristics
1. Honesty
2. Trust
3. Passion
4. Desiciveness
5. Adhesion
6. Vision
7. Beliefs
8. Risk taking

Furthermore, as part of an EU funded programme under the name "Leadership Improvement for Student Achievement" (LISA) Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2011) formulated a framework with five leadership styles that school principals are likely to employ in their work. According to the Pashiardis and Brauckmann leadership framework, five different styles may be distinguished. In particular, these five leadership styles are as follows: *Instructional style* (strong focus on the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning), *Structuring style* (aspects of providing direction and coordination to the school), *Participative style* (school leaders can organize their management activities through others in many different ways), *Entrepreneurial style* (creation of external networks and alliances in order to enhance the implementation of the school mission), and *Personnel development style* (when school leaders provide professional growth opportunities for their personnel).

In addition, quite a number of research projects has been conducted with regards to the characteristics of successful principals (Day, Parsons, Welsh & Harris, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; National College of School Leadership, 2006; Day, Leithwood & Sammons, 2008) through the lifetime of the ISSPP project. This research paper, constitutes another attempt to sketch out actions and behaviours of successful secondary school principals. In particular, this piece of research is a sequel to another paper on successful principalship which was written about successful primary school principals in Cyprus; in this paper however, we concentrate on actions and behaviours as opposed to characteristics.

Methodology

As already mentioned above, this research project seeks to identify the actions and behaviours of successful secondary school principals. It adopts a qualitative research methodology through the examination of two case studies in order to reveal the actions and behaviours of successful principals in secondary education in Cyprus. The selection of the principals and schools, which were included in the research, was based on the recommendations of a team of inspectors of secondary education. School inspectors were approached by the researchers, in order to identify two of the most successful secondary principals of Cyprus. Specifically, the selection of the cases was based on school inspectors' acknowledgement that the schools had improved during the period that these principals were in post, no matter how short this period was.

A multi-case study methodology was followed where data were gathered from a wide range of school stakeholders such as the principal, teachers, students and parents employing a common, semi-structured interview protocol developed specifically for the ISSPP, which was translated in Greek and adopted to the Cyprus' educational context. The data were collected through one – to – one interview with the principals while all of the other respondents were interviewed in focus groups. The principals were directly contacted by the researchers while all the other participants (teachers, students, parents) were mainly nominated and contacted by the principals themselves. Participation in the research was on a voluntary basis. In the case of the students, a written consent form from their parents or legal guardians was requested as a precondition to taking part in the research.

The interview protocols focused on four core leadership practices identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2003): 1) setting directions; 2) developing people; 3) redesigning the organization; and 4) managing the instructional program. Primarily, our main goal was to explore the relationship between successful leadership values, practices, broader social and school specific conditions, and student outcomes. Our specific objectives were the following: 1) to identify the major challenges of the school, since the arrival of the principal; 2) to reveal the strategies that are successfully used to address these challenges and finally 3) throughout the multi-actor perspective, to reveal the perceived qualities and contributions of the principal and management. In the next phase of the project, all interviews were fully transcribed and coded into themes and patterns according to the guidelines of the ISSPP project. The multi-perspective collection of the data proved essential in providing a rich pool of information concerning

the actions and behaviours employed by the principals as well as in cross-checking the validity and accuracy of the data derived from the interviews.

Setting the stage – PLATO and THUCYDIDES

One of the schools visited during our field research on successful leadership was the middle school “Plato”; the other school visited was the middle school “Thucydides” (the names used are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the schools). Both schools are located in an area a few kilometers away from the centre of the city of Nicosia and were built in the early 90’s. The socio-economic status of the schools’ population could be described as a working middle-class without any serious economic problems as well as some upper class. The physical environment of the school is quite pleasant and friendly.

As for the case of “Plato”, the principal of the school is female and this is her 5th year as a principal and her 2nd year in this school. Furthermore, she has had an experience of 28 years in teaching and administration (including the years being in the post of the deputy principal). On the other hand, in the case of “Thucydides”, the principal of the school is also female but for her, this is her 1st year as a principal at this school and her 2nd year as a principal in general. Furthermore, she has had an experience of approximately 30 years in teaching and administration.

In both case studies, the pupils of the schools are approximately between 13 to 15 years old, as is the case with all middle schools in Cyprus. However, the “Thucydides” middle school has students from eight surrounding communities/villages while the “Plato” middle school has students from just one community. Following, we will present and discuss, separately, the two cases of “Plato” and “Thucydides” through a multi-stakeholder perspective in order to get a flavor of some of the actions and behaviours that these particular principals seem to exhibit when exercising their leadership.

The Case of Plato

Major challenges and strategies successfully used to address them (Principal’s view)

The most major problem identified since the arrival of the principal in this particular school was school culture. According to the principal, she had to deal with a toxic culture and specifically she referred to her predecessor who was very strict and excessive with students’ punishment.

“My predecessor was far too strict. I realized that she convened a student disciplinary board twenty two times within a year of her principalship. For me this is very excessive” (Principal)

Furthermore, the principal reports lack of information and support about the school's daily affairs, as her second biggest challenge. Specifically, as a newly appointed principal, she emphasized that she did not find any support or information regarding the school's daily operation from the previous principal.

"For me it was a disappointment not to find any information regarding the school's function and had no support from the principal that I have just replaced" (Principal)

In an effort to cope with these challenges and find information about her school, the principal began a search on the school's previous years operations and gathered information from the school's yearbook. Throughout her research she managed to become familiar with the school's culture and learn specific facts about her school. Another strategy employed by the principal was her multitasking role within the school boundaries. Apart from her focus to get to know the school's culture, the principal struggles to be visible all over her school in order to have an idea of what is going on.

"I am out in the yard spending time and taking my students' pulse. I talk to my teachers and when I have some spare time I spend it on talking with the administrative staff as well as the cleaners of the school" (Principal)

Further, contributing to the good school climate and culture was the fact that, according to educators, the principal speaks out to parents and tries to involve them in school matters. In previous years, parents seemed to have a different perspective of their role in the school and with the arrival of the new principal a lot of rearrangements were made.

Perceived qualities and contributions of the principal and management team

The principal perceives herself as adopting a **democratic/inclusive approach** to leadership. Moreover, she insists in transparency among teachers.

"From day one in this school I told everybody that I wanted to be fair, democratic and have transparency. Transparency is important because working as an educator in previous years I felt that some principals were not so fair with me. I informed them, that I did not want to be unfair to my colleagues and I believe until now all of them in this school are satisfied" (Principal)

Also, the educators and parents we talked with stressed the principal's emphasis on democratic leadership. Specifically, from their point of view, educators believe that their principal provides a democratic leadership model and deals with her staff in a

collegial way. Furthermore, parents believe that there is a team spirit among the principal and educators providing the best results for the school.

“Our school is very organized and we don’t feel any pressure. We work as a team” (Educator)

“There is a team spirit, you can distinguish that” (Parent)

Furthermore, the principal maintains a **good relationship with parents and the local community** and tries to cooperate with them in the best way she can. Specifically, she makes considerable efforts to involve the community and the parents in school life.

“With the local community and the parents association I try to be present whenever they need me. I try to be present to all the invitations I have from them” (Principal)

Parents, from their point of view, endorse the principal’s opinion about the good relationship and argue that the principal maintains a fine relationship with students’ parents. The following quote is characteristic:

“She is a very good human being. I had a personal problem with my daughter and she contacted me to talk and support me through this....She always has time for each of us. She is a good listener. She will listen to any problem you have” (Parent)

Apart from the above, she insists in **parents’ and students’ involvement regarding school matters**. Specifically, she involves parents in case of any disturbing behaviour of their children and also involves students in case of any unwanted behaviours which take place within her school. The following quotation justified the principal’s view on parents’ and students’ involvement.

“We try to involve parents in any disciplinary actions. I, personally contact them in order to involve them and find a solution. I call the parents and they come to school asking for my help and cooperation...if we deal with delinquent behavior, parents and students as well as the student’s primary educator are invited in my office and listen to the student’s views. We try to make a commitment with the students and set up some goals for their lives, in front of all of us” (Principal)

In conjunction with the above qualities provided by the principal, another perceived quality is her **experience which she gained from her previous years**. For example, the principal refers to the influence she had from the years working with other principals as a deputy principal or as an educator. Their passion and their commitment to the school helped her understand how to run her own school more efficiently. With

this, she indicated that she is a strong proponent of the apprenticeship model of learning about the principalship.

“...Some of the principals I worked with, as a deputy or as an educator, used to be inefficient thus, I try not to repeat the same mistakes. On the contrary, some principals whom I considered efficient I try to imitate them...Working as a deputy principal I had the opportunity to co-operate with two principals that taught me a lot. This worked as a motivation in order to apply for the post of principal. I felt that I knew how to run a school...” (Principal)

In addition, the principal **maintained and established a continuous commitment to the school**. This is very important because it reveals her passion and commitment to the school's success and also her continuously inspirational vision of the school even if her retirement is coming during the very next year.

“I work from the very first minute I come to school, some days I'm under pressure. I found out that when I go home I feel so tired and I just relax in order to be efficient and vibrant the very next day...I did not stop to be committed even though it's my retirement this year. Some people thanked me because even though I will retire this year I promote European projects, school contests and other activities concerning the future of the school and my successor. I have the same desire and love to work with my staff in this school just like the first day I came here. I don't feel I can let go” (Principal)

Finally, the principal's sense of commitment in this particular school is also supported by the educators. Characteristically, all educators strongly believe that the principal made a commitment to the school and gave the ultimate effort in order to create a good reputation for the school. Additionally, educators pointed their sense of commitment on the school and refer to the principal as an important element to that success. On top of that, parents mention that this is a very organized school and the principal's commitment plays a major role on that.

“Unfortunately this is her last year...but I think she gave the ultimate to this school....Seeing your principal in that way, makes you want to offer the best you can inside your class and try to keep up this positive climate” (Educator)

“It's a well organized school and my daughter comes with a smile in her face” (Parent)

The Case of Thucydides

Major challenges and strategies successfully used to address them (Principal's view)

To start with, the major problem identified by the school principal upon her arrival in this particular school was that of time management. Time management within the school context was defined by the principal herself in three different aspects: (a) the time needed to organise and manage all school paperwork and school events and activities; (b) the time needed to deal with disobedient students and, (c) the time needed to communicate and have an everyday contact with the students in general.

“I have an everyday contact with 2-3 students who are under my observation and guidance in parallel with the school councillor/psychologist... I spend a lot of time communicating with the students, making a lot of visits in the classrooms and making walks in the schoolyard during breaks” (Principal)

Furthermore, the principal reports difficulties in managing communication issues with parents and the parents' association pointing to the need for a consensus approach. In order to deal with the above challenges, the principal is aided in her managing and leading tasks by the assistant principals and the rest of the teaching staff. In fact, all assistant principals have been at this school the previous years and thus contributed to the easier socialization of the principal into the school environment since it is not only her first year as a principal but also her first year at this particular school. From the interview with the principal, it seems that distributed leadership is to a large extent based on others' experiences and knowledge in the school.

Furthermore, the principal considers it very crucial to gain the support of the parents and the support of the wider community taking into consideration all stakeholders opinions' in school life. She feels that she belongs to the local community herself and she is really interested in educating parents through lectures; the following quote is characteristic of the principal's everyday practices:

“We do lectures for parents because apart from support they want education on how to handle their children...we have visited (me and the school counsellor) all the 8 primary schools which feed our school with students and talked to parents there and we actually informed them about what we want from their children when they come to middle school” (Principal)

Apart from the everyday practices mentioned above, the principal developed a vision for raising standards in the domain of language and for improving the behavior of the students. As for the former part of the vision, she believes that she can achieve her purpose by demonstrating instructional leadership, such as presentating the vision and instructional strategies for its implementation during staff meetings, praising best practices performed by them through mentoring or through the professional development of teachers or encouraging the teaching of sample lessons and mentoring.

“When a teacher asked me if she could make a presentation at the next staff meeting regarding the waste of paper in our school and how this could be prevented, I encouraged her to organize a sample lesson for all teachers so that they could gain knowledge that would be also used in their classrooms while, in parallel, it would be a nice lesson for all the pupils and a nice attempt of mentoring in our school” (Principal)

Perceived qualities and contributions of the principal and management team

The principalship was not something which was deliberately pursued by the principal of Thucydides school. It was just a consequence of her choice to become a teacher and her passion for learning and teaching. In any case, she seems to be very satisfied and very keen on doing this job. She is **passionate with school life**, motivated by love for children and generally human contact, also adopting a humanistic approach to leadership. More specifically, she reports the following:

“It may sound common but I love my work, I love children, I love teaching ... I am passionate with my work, I am not in the wrong place” (Principal)

Therefore, although the principal did not plan a career in a leading post she finally fit into this job in a very nice manner. She feels confident in performing this role and the messages received from her surroundings are very positive on this. At this point, it should be mentioned that **the principal discerns leadership from management** in a very interesting way. As she said,

“Management is the situation of managing the implementation of guidelines and policy objectives which can also mean planning with a good result at the end, either by repetition or prevention especially through pre-planning. Leadership is something different, you need what we call the gift or the vision. You must be able to inspire others, to share with them all your desires and to give school a special character. You should be able to give intrinsic motivation, since external motives such as payments and rewards do not exist in our system. What is needed is a positive atmosphere at school, a participatory process in which all work together and effectively because they love what they do and I think everything emanates from the principal” (Principal)

This perception of the principal has led her to the **individual consideration of all stakeholders** in school life. She is very approachable and friendly and she keeps an open door for everyone who wishes to discuss any issue with her. This holds both for

internal stakeholders, such as teachers and students, as well as for external agents such as the parents and the community. Moreover, the principal herself attributes the school's success to the strong culture created by her and the teachers.

She always tries to have a good relationship with all internal stakeholders, avoid or resolve conflicts and unite them all towards the achievement of the school's educational goals. In addition, the principal invites her colleagues to participate in decision making, supporting her teachers and acting as a buffer zone in cases where teachers have a conflict or a problem with parents.

"If something happens with a teacher, I evaluate the incident, but my priority is to support my colleague even if he/she did something wrong. I will talk to him/her at a later point in person and discuss with him/her and give my advise" (Principal)

This supportive culture is also stressed by the teachers. They agree that decisions are made collectively by the majority of the school staff while the more serious decisions are made by all stakeholders in a cooperative manner. What is also important to mention at this point, is the fact that teachers feel comfortable at the school as a working place because they are fully supported by their principal, since she places no stress on them making the school a nice place to work. The following is representative for all teachers:

"I feel nice at this school, I am not stressed and I want to wake up in the morning and come to school" (Educator)

Apart from the above, during the interview with the principal, it became obvious that she strongly desires to become a member of the local community in an attempt to support all children not only as students but also as human beings responding to their individual needs over and above the fixed curriculum, in order to further raise their academic achievements. This is what she said in this regard:

"I have to listen to what pupils are saying and respond to their needs; I must organise a football tournament because it is something they are asking for a long time now and I don't want to be inconsistent because this will discourage them" (Principal)

This ascertainment is also shared by the parents themselves and the students of the school. Specifically, the parents report their close co-operation in the case of school events or in the case of a child's behaviour problem as follows:

"The school organised a lot of events and parents-teachers meetings, as well as discussions with a psychologist or the school's councillor to resolve problems or give us advice" (Parent)

Lastly, the principal has also established a positive climate at school. She tries hard to keep school staff and students unified in an effort to achieve to the maximum the school's educational objectives and goals. **She feels proud about her teachers** because they truly care about their students. According to the principal herself:

“When I walk in the schoolyard I see quite a lot of my colleagues walking and discussing with their pupils; they give me the impression that they don't just do their duty and be in the schoolyard, they really care about their pupils” (Principal)

Common features of leadership actions and behaviours: the four domains

These particular case studies of principalship in the two middle schools of “Plato” and “Thucydides” have revealed a broad array of insights into what a successful secondary school leader looks like in the context of Cyprus. Overall, these case studies provide us with an initial idea about what these particular principals do when exercising their leadership in Cyprus. The findings have a lot in common, with those examined in other similar pieces of research (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000; Leithwood et al, 2006; Kythreotis & Pashiardis, 2006; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Pashiardis, 1995; 1998; Pashiardis et al, 2011). Building on these data, the following groups of common features of leadership actions and behaviours became evident and provided us with **the main domains** within which successful principals in Cyprus behave and act while leading their schools. The *main domains* are as follows:

1. Successful principals develop external relations

To begin with, it became increasingly evident that both principals gave great attention to the creation of a strong relationship between themselves and all external stakeholders. Specifically, they have established close contacts and communication and managed to maintain good relationships with both parents associations, the school board and the local community. Moreover, both principals maintained their visibility in the school and made it a point in which the need for support from parents and the local community is an essential component of their leading style, thus, exhibiting a strong Entrepreneurial leadership style (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). This establishment of networks with the parents and the wider community seems to form an important element of successful principalship not only in Cyprus but also internationally as well (Day et al., 2000).

Furthermore, the once deteriorating relationship between parents and principal of “Plato's” school was fully restored due to the presence of this new principal. In addition, the principal involves students on finding a solution in case of any unwanted and disciplinary behaviors which take place within her jurisdiction. On the other hand, the “Thucydides” principal tries to involve parents into school life by educating them through

lectures and seminars in an effort to gain their support. Also, the principal shows great understanding, support and tolerance for her students. Apart from that, the principal of the “Thucydides” school encourages teachers to take their own initiatives with external stakeholders. From the above, we can distinguish that both principals possess strong relationships between themselves and all the external stakeholders of the school. Both principals proved to be able to communicate with everybody who may affect the school, as well as cooperate with personnel, students and their parents. Mutual respect and cooperation of the principal with all the internal stakeholders of the schools was also central and in accordance with previous research on successful leadership in the context of Cyprus (Kythreotis et al., 2010).

*2. Successful principals **have a clear vision***

The principals’ vision was one of the personal characteristics that were identified as the criteria used to define successful school leaders and were derived from previous studies already mentioned in the literature review. In both case studies, the principals’ vision concerning their school was present and led to successful school outcomes. Both principals tried to build their vision after conducting some “internal scanning and needs assessment” in order to recognize the status quo. Then, they began creating their own vision for the next two to three years (even when they would not be there).

Specifically, when the “Plato” principal began her tenure, she found out that her predecessor was far too strict with students and upon her arrival at the school she confronted these challenging circumstances with creative strategies in a dynamic and constructive manner. We can distinguish her inspirational vision for the school even if her retirement is in the very next year. This may be explained partly by her love and her devotion towards her profession and the inspiration of her previous colleagues and principals who worked with her when she was an educator or a deputy principal.

Apart from the above, the “Thucydides” principal, despite her strong focus on building human relations and social networks, she is committed to improving students’ learning outcomes and behaviour. As a result, she has developed and communicated a clear vision towards all internal and external stakeholders as well as clear rules and regulations that should be adhered to by all (Brauckmann and Pashiardis, 2011).

*3. Successful principals **create a collaborative learning and instructional environment***

Moreover, the principals’ instructional leadership actions, such as advising teachers after going over their lesson planning, praising them for something positive they have done, making them feel committed to their work by always keeping the balance or by encouraging their initiatives, form another strategy for enhancing teachers’ capacity. The creation of a positive learning environment not only for students but also for teachers is also supported by previous research (Gurr, Drysdale, Di Natale, Ford, Hardy & Swann, 2003; Jacobson et al, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011).

In particular, the “Plato’s” principal promotes the creation of a collaborative learning organisation by equally distributing of powers and responsibilities regarding all school matters as well as by promoting team spirit among not only the teachers and the pupils but also the secretaries and the support staff. In the case of the “Thucydides” principal, the promotion of a collaborative learning environment at the school is enhanced and established through consensus in decision-making, encouragement of teachers’ initiatives and respect for all internal stakeholders’ opinions with regards to the teaching and learning processes within the school.

4. *Successful principals **have a sense of shared ownership and passionate commitment***

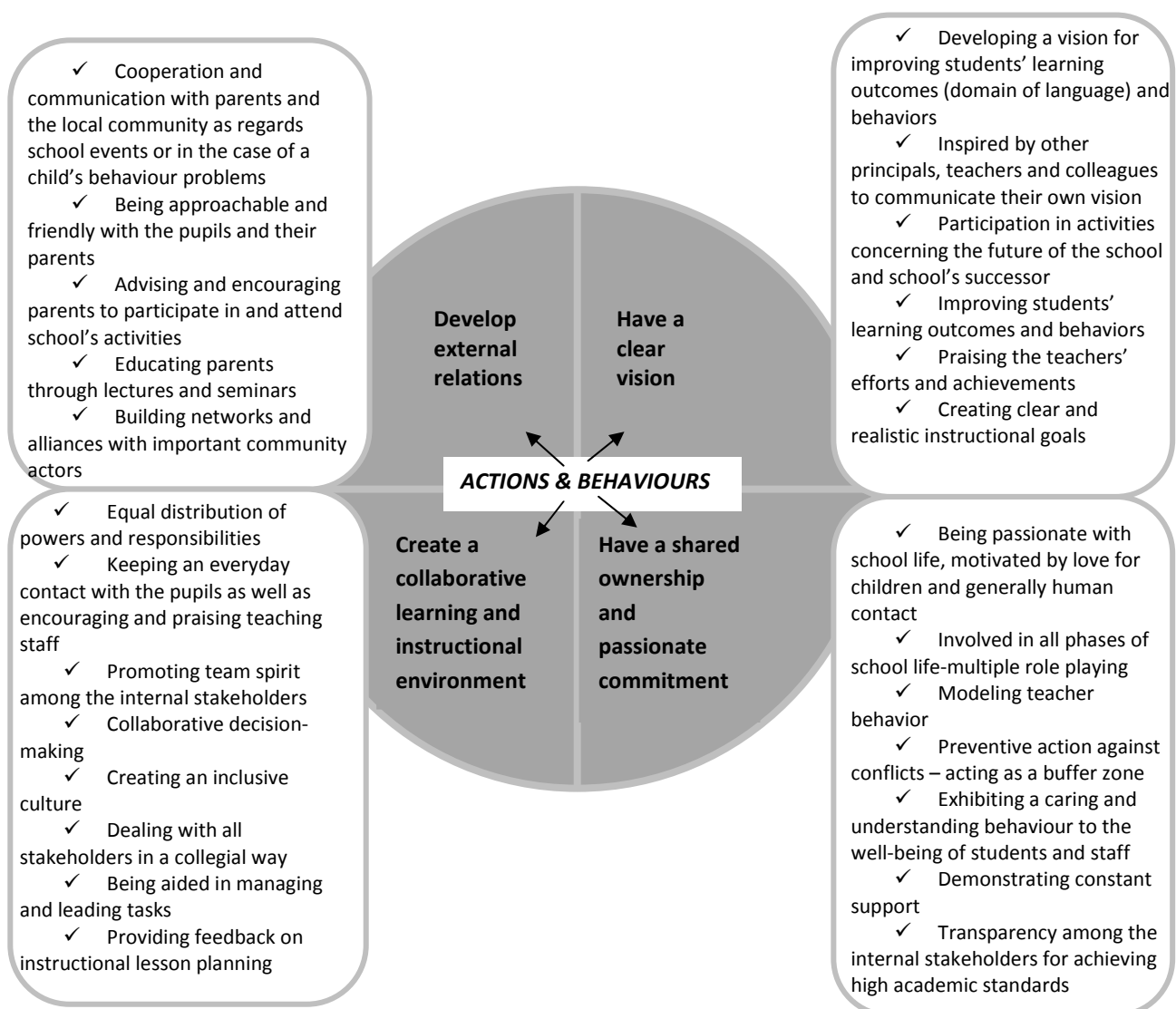
Both “Plato” and “Thucydides” principals exhibit democratic characteristics providing a sense of shared ownership into their schools. On the one hand, “Plato” principal’s democratic way of leadership was combined with high transparency. The specific behaviour was introduced by the principal among her internal stakeholders in order to set high standards of satisfaction and trust between herself and members of the school community. This can be linked with the 10th strong claim about successful school leadership, as it was mentioned in a recent report of the National College of School Leadership (2010), and made reference to the establishment of trust as one of the most important elements that successful distribution of leadership depends on. On the other hand, “Thucydides” principal, upon her arrival at school, “invested” in demonstrating her constant support to all, showing a high sense of ownership and commitment and involving everyone in all phases of school life through a multiple role-playing technique. Moreover, she manages to avoid serious conflicts among her colleagues, acting as a buffer zone when needed, and promoting co-operations and collaboration among colleagues.

Another distinguished behavior that both principals seemed to exhibit was their commitment to their schools, therefore, revealing a transformational leadership style that fosters capacity development and brings higher levels of personal commitment amongst “followers” to organizational objectives. This greater commitment and capacity in order to lead to additional effort and greater productivity was revealed in previous research (Barbutto, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Characteristically, “Plato”’s principal demonstrated her commitment to the school through her experience which was gained from her previous years, working as an educator or deputy principal and tries to be consistently a hard worker, even if her retirement is in the very next year.

Furthermore, the “Thucydides” principal exhibits a caring and understanding behaviour as well as her commitment to the well being of all school members. She motivates her staff by having an increased sense of responsibility through modelling

teacher behaviour, keeping in this way her staff united and enabling them to perform activities beyond their duties. At this point, we have to note that her engagement and commitment in the support of her school staff is not independent of her commitment to improving the teaching and learning processes at the school. The four domains as mentioned above are presented in summary form in the following figure:

Figure 1: Common features of leadership actions and behaviours: the *four domains*



Conclusion

Drawing on the findings from our two case studies, it can be inferred that both principals exhibit a continuously humane approach all over the school and cooperate with all school's stakeholders. Moreover, they exhibit a passion and commitment which is corroborated by previous research findings (Pashiardis 1995;1998; Day, 2007). This further indicates the principals' capacity in utilizing not only the internal but also the external human resources for the benefit of the school and reveals that they do not perceive the school as an isolated unit, thus reinforcing the Participatory leadership style with the Entrepreneurial leadership style as mentioned in the Pashiardis-Brauckmann Holistic Leadership Framework (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011).

Furthermore, it seems that both principals match some of the criteria used to define successful school leaders as they were already presented in *Table 1*. These criteria refer to the "cooperation with parents and the community" as well as to the "actively involved in problem solving regarding teachers' problems related to problems within the profession and students' problems related to problems within the school setting".

In conclusion, the principals of "Plato's" and "Thucydides" schools exhibit behaviours and actions which, in combination with their passion, devotion and love, lead to a successful and democratic principal. Also, the principals' successful actions and behaviours within the Cyprus context, can be measured in terms of building relationships among external stakeholders such as parents and the local community as well as the increased levels of students' achievement. Also, although both principals did not plan a career for the principalship, they finally fit into this job in a very nice way. They feel confident in performing this role and the messages received from their environment are very positive. Additionally, being in a leading position at this school, the principals seem to be very satisfied and very keen on doing this job. Furthermore, we can distinguish that the principals dealt with the challenges of their schools through the combination of their own personal strengths, actions and behaviours as well as by building on the experiences they gained throughout their rich prior career, through a custom-made "apprenticeship scheme".

Drawing upon our results, the conceptualisation of the *four domains* reveals the need for an emerging paradigm that shifts emphasis not only to specific principals' actions and behaviours but also to multi-dimensional leadership practices within the wider context of educational leadership as well as the active involvement of policy makers by giving direct information to all principals and teachers-practitioners themselves. Finally, we feel that future research needs to focus on principals' beliefs, attitudes, and values. Until now, research primarily in Cyprus and in general, have focused their attention on successful principals' practices and characteristics without giving the necessary attention towards principals' values. Therefore, the personal and professional values espoused by principals in their schools which influence their leadership practices as well as determine how to exercise leadership on important

issues, appear to be critical necessities to be further explored. As a final comment, it should be noted that the research orientation of the ISSPP project within the next three years (2012-2014), will also be on principals' values, history and identity.

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