

Case Study on the Situational Leadership in Addressing Ethical Challenges Encountered by Principals during School Transfer

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.804255>

Received: 12 April 2024; Accepted: 23 April 2024; Published: 23 May 2024

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examined the ethical challenges encountered by principals during school transfers, using a theory-based approach focusing on the task behavior and the relationship behavior of the school head, and the perceived readiness or maturity of the school employees. Through in-depth interviews with the five school principals from the Department of Education, Division of Davao City, which were selected through purposive sampling, we explored the coping mechanisms employed by principals to address these challenges and examined the insights gained from their experiences. Findings reveal the multifaceted challenges faced by principals, including issues such as resistance to task assignment, ethical dilemmas, managing teacher behavior, ethical minefields in interpersonal dynamics, overcoming barriers in interpersonal dynamics, and adaptation in teacher engagement. Principals employ various coping strategies, such as supportive leadership, leadership strategies, establishing fairness, relationship management, and nurturing professional growth. We recommend enhancing principals' leadership skills through professional development programs, establishing support systems, fostering emotional intelligence, and encouraging clear communication which can cultivate a positive school culture and effectively address ethical challenges encountered during school transfers, with future research benefiting from quantitative approaches to further understand and mitigate these challenges.

Keywords: Situational Leadership, ethical challenges, school transfer, task behavior, relationship behavior, readiness or maturity

INTRODUCTION

School Principals are expected to be the change agent within their educational institution, playing a vital role in ensuring the achievement of educational outcomes with the help of the teachers and other members of the stakeholders. However, in the case of principals' school transfer, this role of change agent may pose a challenge as they come to terms with the prevailing culture that exists within the school [1]. This challenge is brought by several factors such as how new school principals are sometimes forced to walk in the shadow of the departed principal during transfers. Such challenges experienced by these school leaders should be addressed as they play the biggest role related to leadership and educational management [2].

Several studies have been conducted to explore how principals' school transfers affect educational outcomes. Research involving causal effect was conducted to determine how principal attrition and replacement affect school quality [3]. Other research identified factors on why school principals leave their schools and the effectiveness of those who stay [4]. Studies delve into how principal turnover affects the rate of teacher turnover [5]. Similar studies have been conducted to explore how school leaders think and

understand their new leadership role during their early years of transition [6]. Other studies have also explored the effect of principal movement on the achievement of students [7].

Most of the literature reviewed is heavily focused on exploring the effect of principal transitions on overall school performance but the researchers have yet to encounter how challenges during their school transfers are being addressed in accordance to their perspectives. In line with this, a research gap has been identified with relevant literature, indicating that little attention is given to the challenges of these school leaders during these transitions [1]. Consequently, there is a need for tailored interventions to address these challenges [8]. In line with these gaps in the literature, this study will delve into these challenges in the context of task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness or maturity.

This study aims to fill the existing gaps in the literature on the ethical challenges of school principals during school transfer in the context of task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness or maturity. The relevance of this research is evident in the related literature reporting the need to explore the challenges faced by school principals adjusting to school culture during school transfers [1]. Furthermore, the urgency to conduct the study is anchored to the fact that reshuffling of school principals is a regular practice in the Department of Education and thus it is imperative to understand and address the specific challenges they encounter to ensure a smooth transition and effective leadership within schools.

In this Investigation, we intend to shed light on the ethical challenges faced by school principals during their school transfer. Specifically, we will explore the ethical challenges of these school leaders under the context of task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness or maturity of employees. Additionally, our study aims to understand how these school leaders cope with these ethical challenges during their school transfers. Furthermore, we will explore the valuable insights they can share with the broader academic community.

In the context of this study on the ethical challenges encountered by principals during school transfer, we used the Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), proposed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1982 [9]. This theory suggests that effective leadership is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach but rather depends on internal and external factors. SLT is based on the interplay specifically among the extent of leader directive (task behavior) [10], leader socio-emotional (relationship behavior) [11], and follower readiness or maturity for performing a certain function [9]. In addition to that, effective leadership involves assessing the situation, including the competence and commitment of the followers, and then adjusting one’s leadership approach according to the theory [12]. SLT provides us with an explanation of the appropriateness of the leader’s behavior to overcome challenges and get out of them with minimal losses [13] [14]. This theory focuses on the three variables: task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness or maturity of employees.

METHODS

We have chosen a descriptive case study as the research design for this research. A case study involves an in-depth examination of an individual to derive generalizable insights across multiple units. We used a single case study design for this research. This method entails a thorough investigation that gathers detailed data on various variables about one group, person, or event [15]. Applying this definition under the context of this study, the case involved in this research is the ethical challenges encountered by school principals during school transfers which include task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness or maturity of their employees. Furthermore, this research thoroughly investigated how these school leaders cope with these challenges and insights that they can share with those school leaders with similar problems.

This case study involves five school principals from the selected schools within Davao City as our key interviewees. The sampling technique that was used in this study was the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique’s main purpose is to choose participants who are expected to provide pertinent and valuable information, serving as a method to identify and select cases that make efficient use

of limited research resources [16]. Furthermore, the basis for this number of participants is following the guidelines of Campbell (2015) stating that in case study research, the case number is often less than 12 and may even be a single case [17]. Using this definition in the context of our study, this technique is best suited as it will employ selection criteria to ensure that only those specified participants that can contribute to the objectives of this study can participate. Selection criteria for the purposive sampling technique include must be a school principal and must have undergone more than one school transfer during their career as a school leader.

We conducted this study through an online interview in the Department of Education, Division of Davao City. The division of Davao City is a highly urbanized City among the other provinces in Region XI namely, Davao de Oro, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur, and Davao Occidental. As of 2022, the division of Davao City is comprised of 430 schools in total.

We followed a systematic data-gathering procedure to ensure the accuracy, rigor, and validity of the collected qualitative data. We first secured permission from the Dean of the graduate school for this research publication to ensure that all necessary protocols are followed, aligning with the ethical principles in ensuring the establishment of trust and credibility [18]. We administered the informed consent form to all participants, emphasizing the significance of qualitative research ethics [19]. This research interview selected five school principals as key informants, following the principle of Schoch (2020) that the sample size for the case study is small and only those who are qualified and significantly contribute to the objectives of the study are included [20]. The in-depth interview was then conducted with these participants and was audio-recorded with their permission which will be then transcribed for analysis, this is a principle that ensures that all details for the interview are captured [21]. After the collection of data analysis, a member-checking certificate was obtained from the participants to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and maintain validity [22]. Furthermore, the member checking certificate ensures that there are no misinterpretations of data and that all participants agree with the result of the study.

The validated semi-structured interview guide served as the backbone of our case study. We carefully designed the interview guide, taking into consideration the insights gained from theory-based research. An interview guide in qualitative research is a list of open-ended questions that the interviewer uses to guide the interview. It is a flexible tool that can be adapted to the individual participant and the flow of the conversation [23]. A well-constructed semi-structured interview guide can serve as a reliable and valid source of data collection. The development of a well-constructed semi-structured interview guide is crucial to ensure that the data collected is authentic and trustworthy [24]. To ensure that the questions were relevant and effective, we used the three variables of the SLT as our anchor points while formulating the questions. Collective studies centering on the SLT provide task behavior [10], relationship behavior [11], and maturity or readiness of the followers as core variables [9].

To analyze the data, we employed a thematic data analysis. It involves immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the data transcripts, coding, and searching for themes [25]. Thematic analysis emerges as an appropriate method for analyzing our data, as it allows us to accurately reflect the data collected from school principals during interviews. This method helps in unveiling patterns and meanings that are crucial to understanding the experiences, opinions, or behaviors of school principals related to the three core variables of the SLT during their school transfer. Therefore, our instrument and method are both reliable and rich. These qualities allow us to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the case studies, taking into account all relevant information from the interview.

We ensure that this study complies with all the variables of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study [26]. According to Connelly (2016), researchers should establish the protocols and procedures necessary for a study to be considered worthy of consideration by readers, or trustworthiness [27]. In

connection, we abided by the rules of qualitative research and ethical considerations. We did not let our biases affect the data analysis of this study. We made sure that the findings of this study are useful to other persons or school heads in other settings, which is in line with transferability. We focused on the participants and their story without saying this is everyone's story. To ensure dependability and confirmability, we used a clear and transparent data analysis process that would allow other researchers and experts to audit our data analysis and repeat the same process.

As researchers, we have a responsibility to protect the participants in our studies and to ensure that this research does not harm them in any way. Ethical conduct is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of research participants [28]. Adhering to ethical norms during research is of utmost importance to uphold the integrity and credibility of a study. We made sure that this study aligns with the guidelines set forth by DOST-PHREB, which aims to uphold the universal ethical values that safeguard and promote the dignity of people involved in health research. We also informed the participants of their rights under the Data Privacy Act of 2012. We asked for their full consent and voluntary participation in this study through a formal letter and verbal confirmation. We used and assigned pseudonyms for the participants for privacy and anonymity. We took into consideration the economic and academic risk of our study which is why we assured our participants that they would receive a considerable amount of token and reimbursement of their losses during the course of the interview. Our utmost priority has always been to protect the rights, safety, and overall well-being of all participants involved.

RESULTS

There were three problems identified in this study. What are the ethical challenges on task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness/maturity encountered by the principals during school transfer? What are the coping mechanisms used by the principals to address the ethical challenges on task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness/maturity during school transfer? What are the insights gained by the school principals from the ethical challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms used to address the said challenges during school transfer? There were a total of 14 themes emerged after performing a thematic analysis. Below are the themes that answer the three questions of this research.

Problem 1: What are the ethical challenges on task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness/maturity encountered by the principals during school transfer?

Theme 1: Resistance of Teachers in Task Engagement during Principal Transitions

One of the ethical challenges that school principals face during their school transfers is how teachers are resistant to task engagement. Based on the analysis of data, this theme is characterized by how teachers resist changes in the new practices under the leadership of the new principal as they are already used to an existing work culture. Similarly, the school principal explained that they also struggle with how these teachers exhibit poor inertia in completing their assigned tasks and sometimes exhibit dormancy with their assigned ancillaries. The response of Participant No. 1 underscores this prevalent core idea of resistance and inertia among teachers regarding task engagement.

"I feel that there are teachers that are not willing because of the additional work. Especially those who are used to a comfortable life such as those who do not want to leave their comfort zone" – IDI-P1

This resistance of teachers in task engagement during school transitions poses a significant hurdle in maintaining task behavior during the school transfers of principals. Addressing these ethical challenges requires fostering a supportive environment that encourages adaptation, clear communication, and proactive engagement to ensure a smooth transition process.

Theme 2: Ethical Dilemmas

Based on the thematic analysis, ethical dilemmas are other challenges commonly encountered by school principals during their school transfers. This theme is characterized by the challenges of the school leaders in fostering proper procedures and protocols of school operations when dealing misbehavior of teachers but still maintaining good relationships at the same time. Furthermore, principals are also confronted with the challenge of upholding professional norms while dealing with issues such as lateness, delayed submissions, and errors in tasks by teachers, managing the intricate equilibrium between responsibility and assistance. As participant 3 mentioned:

“There are teachers who make mistakes in the tasks I assign to them. Sometimes, this makes me angry, but I manage to prevent myself from showing it.” – IDI-P3

Theme 3: Challenges on Ethical Leadership in Managing Teacher Behavior

Another challenge encountered by school principals during their school transfer is concerned with their challenges on ethical leadership in managing teacher behavior. This theme is characterized by core ideas such as challenges when confronting teachers who exhibit negative task behaviors such as errors in assigned tasks and tardiness. Furthermore, these school leaders also face other challenges when exhibiting ethical leadership upon making changes to assigned ancillaries. In such situations, these require the school leaders to navigate the delicate line between addressing issues firmly and maintaining a supportive environment for growth. As participant no. 5 mentioned:

“I have a lot of challenges concerning the coordinatorship of my teachers. During my transfer, I changed the coordinatorship assigned to them because some holding too many ancillaries” – IDI-P5

Principals are confronted with teachers exhibiting various forms of on-task behavior as some of the teachers immediately want to be replaced with their current ancillaries. A few of the complaints of the teachers regarding this theme is the unfair designation of ancillaries as some of them are holding too many positions while others are only holding a few.

Theme 4: Ethical Minefields in Interpersonal Dynamics

This theme highlights the ethical dilemmas of school principals in managing interpersonal relationships between teachers and conflict resolution. Specifically, this theme is composed of core ideas such as how these school leaders address conflicts between teachers and the struggle in navigating with the existing school culture during their transition. In line with this, Participant No. 1 explained:

“I have a challenging experience when it comes to this school involving quarreling teachers. Although I am not directly part of the issue, it still concerns me as I am the school head.” -IDI-P1

Other participants explained that there are teachers who would file legal cases against each other due to these conflicts. In the cases of school principals transferred to big schools, dealing with issues involving teacher factions seems to be a common occurrence.

Theme 5: Overcoming Perceived Barriers in Interpersonal Dynamics

This theme highlights the challenges of the school principal dealing with perceived barriers in their interpersonal relationship with their teachers during school transfer. Furthermore, this theme also includes the core ideas such as how these school leaders deal with the perceptions of teachers during the principal transition and the challenges in building rapport with them.

“For example, I am younger compared to other teachers here in our school and I came from a rural school. So, I feel that they might not take me seriously as a principal.” -IDI-P5

There are instances of perceived barriers such as how principal number 5 explained that he felt that there are times when the teachers may not take him seriously as he came from a far-flung school. In line with this, this perceived barrier can serve as a mother hurdle in maintaining good interpersonal dynamics.

Theme 6: Adaptation in Teacher Engagement

Another challenge that the school principals face during their school transfers is how they need to adapt to their engagement with the teachers involving tasks behaviors. The participants explained that they sometimes encounter teachers who are resistant to changes brought by the new administration during principal transitions. These school leaders also added that they also sometimes encounter problems with how they should deal with teachers who cannot immediately follow the instructions given to them. This theme can be underscored by the response of participant number 2.

“the first time around, if they cannot do the tasks, aah... I try to understand them, ah... I dig deeper on what’s the cause, what are the factors why he\she did not follow the instruction that was given to him\her.”
IDI-P2

In this response, for example, the school principal has to deal with demonstrating empathy and understanding toward their staff’s struggles. They take the time to delve deeper into the root causes of issues rather than immediately placing blame.

Problem 2: What are the coping mechanisms used by the principals to address the ethical challenges on task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness/maturity during school transfer?

Theme 7. Supportive Leadership

One of the coping mechanisms used by school principals to address their ethical challenges is to demonstrate supportive leadership toward their teachers. These school leaders cope with the challenges by demonstrating supportive guidance to these struggling teachers, demonstrating empathy, and having accountability toward them. As participant 1 shared:

“I give them encouragement every time that they have little trials. I also give them appreciation in the group chat or I congratulate them via Facebook posts for being the first one to submit.” -IDI-P1

These principals demonstrate empathetic understanding by fostering an environment where teachers feel valued and understood. Moreover, principals emphasize the importance of self-reflection and emotional regulation, acknowledging their frustrations while maintaining professionalism and engaging in constructive dialogue with their staff.

Theme 8: Leadership Strategies

Another coping mechanism that these school principals have demonstrated is through leadership strategies to address these encountered ethical challenges. The school leaders explained that this can be done through strategic communication and empowering teachers.

“So what I do is I lay down to them the DEDP. What do we mean by the DEDP? It is the Division and Education Development plan wherein the target is the objective of the division office and I explain to them that each one of them is a contributing factor to the achievement of the DADP of the division”

-IDI-P4

As Participant No. 4 explained, principals employ effective communication techniques to promote understanding among teachers, reinforce organizational objectives such as Division and Education Development Plans (DADP), and provide hands-on support when needed. They aim to create an equitable environment where tasks are distributed fairly, regardless of tenure, and offer assistance to teachers facing challenges. These strategies facilitate ethical decision-making, foster positive relationships, and cultivate teacher readiness during school transitions.

Theme 9. Establishing Fairness

The theme of promoting fairness and establishing effective channels of communication in managing employee relations is prominently evident in the qualitative data analysis. Principals in educational institutions utilize diverse tactics to ensure equal treatment and cultivate favorable interactions within the school environment when undergoing changes. They stress the significance of avoiding partiality among educators and actively assessing and adjusting to the prevailing school ethos upon their arrival.

“...And then I also showed that I did not have, ah, ‘favoritism’ among my teachers.”-IDI-P1

Informant 1 also added,

“I am that, if I am assigned to one school, whatever their culture is, I am observing it first. Reading the atmosphere. That’s what they say ‘reading the atmosphere’.

Maintaining regular communication with the staff is a key priority for principals, showcasing sincere endeavors to foster connections and address issues. Personalized assistance is offered through individual meetings, particularly in managing personal situations. Equitable treatment and affirmation are underscored as crucial principles in addressing grievances or complaints, with an emphasis on verifying details and involving only the accused party in explanatory discussions to uphold confidentiality. Establishing clear boundaries and fostering mutual comprehension through transparent communication in initial interactions aids in setting expectations. In essence, these approaches play a significant role in fostering a positive and supportive work atmosphere amid staff transitions.

Theme 10. Relationship Management

The main theme that emerges from the qualitative data analysis of coping mechanisms utilized by school principals to address challenges in relationship behavior with employees during school transfer revolves around effective leadership and relationship management. Principals employ a range of strategies to navigate interpersonal complexities, emphasizing fairness, adaptability to school culture, and transparent communication. As Participant 2 shared:

“As a school head, you should let them know, you should model it first or teach them how to do it.” -IDI-P2

Leading by example, they demonstrate integrity in handling complaints and conflicts, ensuring all parties are heard and validated. By setting clear expectations and boundaries early on, principals foster mutual respect and understanding among staff members. Ultimately, this theme underscores the pivotal role of effective leadership in cultivating a supportive and collaborative school environment, which is essential for the success and well-being of both teachers and students.

Theme 11. Nurturing Professional Growth

The theme of Nurturing Professional Growth encapsulates the holistic approach adopted by school

principals to address challenges concerning the readiness and maturity of employees during school transfers. Principals are depicted as stewards of professional development, fostering an environment where staff members feel supported and empowered to navigate transitions effectively. Through strategies like acknowledgment, encouragement, and modeling of leadership behaviors, principals cultivate a culture of confidence and motivation among their team.

“...Embrace the change as a part of, you know, opportunity. Always think positively about it as an opportunity to grow and to share your expertise as a person.” -IDI-P3

Additionally, the theme emphasizes the importance of recognizing individual differences and providing tailored support to meet the diverse needs of employees. By prioritizing the nurturing of professional growth and resilience, principals aim to not only overcome immediate challenges but also instill a sense of adaptability and continuous learning within the school community. This approach ultimately contributes to the overall success and well-being of both staff members and the institution as a whole.

Problem 3: What are the insights gained by the school principals from the ethical challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms used to address the said challenges during school transfer?

Theme 12. Effective Leadership in Managing Ethical Challenges

The main theme that emerges from the participant's responses is Effective Leadership in Managing Ethical Challenges. This theme encapsulates the various aspects discussed by the participant, including emotional intelligence, adaptation and adjustment, conflict resolution, communication, motivation, patience, and understanding. The participant's reflections revolve around the challenges faced as a leader, particularly in a new school environment, and the strategies employed to navigate these challenges ethically and effectively.

“The insight is that when you transfer to a new school, we really need to do a SWOT ANALYSIS on our current school, right? Or, we should really do a SWOT analysis.” -IDI-P3

Theme 13. Building Relationships for Ethical School Transitions

The main theme emerging from the qualitative data is the critical interplay between embracing change and building relationships during school transitions. As Participant 2 shared:

“Ahh... Yes, as a school head, you really need to be there always. You should embrace the new environment. You should embrace the kind of teachers you should be dealing with. It's really necessary to embrace them. You need to, ah, you need to look into the consideration. You need to consider. You need to know all your teachers so you can understand why they display that kind of attitude.” -IDI-P2

It underscores the necessity of adopting a positive attitude towards new environments, while also acknowledging and understanding the attitudes of colleagues. Participants stress the importance of conducting strategic analyses, such as SWOT assessments, to facilitate smoother transitions and mitigate potential challenges. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on nurturing personal connections beyond professional realms, including understanding the familial backgrounds of colleagues. Active listening and incorporating teachers' concerns into decision-making processes are highlighted as ethical imperatives, fostering a culture of empathy and collaboration. This overarching theme encapsulates the ethical principles of adaptability and relationship-building as foundational to navigating the complexities of school transfers with integrity and respect.

Theme 14. Fostering Collaborative Leadership

The main theme that emerges from the responses of Participant No. 4 and Participant No. 5 is the imperative

of fostering collaborative and supportive leadership within the school environment.

“The only thing needed is open communication. If you delegate a task to a teacher, it should be done openly, with both parties being open. We should also be open to others. (To know) what happened to the task that was assigned.” -IDI-P5

This overarching theme emphasizes the necessity of open communication, understanding and respecting the existing school culture, balancing flexibility and firmness in leadership approaches, providing support and empathy to teachers, and actively seeking external advice for continuous improvement. It underscores the significance of creating a collaborative and supportive atmosphere where administrators and teachers collaborate effectively towards shared objectives, ultimately ensuring the success and well-being of both students and staff.

DISCUSSION

The theme of Resistance of Teachers in Task Engagement during Principal Transitions encapsulates the reluctance of teachers to embrace new ideas or changes introduced by the school head participants in this study. Especially when teachers are holding specific positions for a long time, they may resist relinquishing roles or taking on new tasks. They are hesitant to assume new responsibilities or relinquish longstanding roles. This reluctance to change roles is due to various factors that influence their perceptions and experiences [29].

Participants grapple with the challenge of dealing with ethical dilemmas surrounding teacher behavior, such as volunteering for assignments without permission, submitting reports late, and displaying unruly behavior. They express concerns about the need for adherence to protocols and correct procedures in school operations. However, the interviewed school principals also emphasized the importance of understanding the situation of the teachers. These teachers are sometimes assigned tasks with abrupt deadlines resulting in the late submission of reports [30].

During the school transfers, the school principal explained that they have to deal with challenges in the delegation of ancillary tasks of teachers as these teachers wanted to be immediately replaced with their current position as the coordinator. These teachers argue that they have been holding several ancillaries in comparison to those who are holding a few positions. This serves as a challenge on how to equally delegate these ancillaries with little knowledge of the school environment as they are newly transferred. This is also in conjunction with the research of the study of [31] Diomampo and Quines (2023), as it is common for teachers to demand equal and proper delegation of tasks to avoid being overwhelmed by too many ancillaries.

The theme of dealing with ethical minefields in interpersonal dynamics is another challenge encountered by school principals. In line with this, dealing with interpersonal conflicts among teachers seems to be pretty occurrence to principals during school transfers. Interpersonal conflicts among employees are a common problem such as in an educational institution. Organizations that do not engage in conflict are either in denial, apathetic, or do not genuinely care about other people [32]. In line with this, there is a need for school principals to be equipped with conflict resolution skills and strategies to manage interpersonal dynamics effectively.

Another challenge that the school principal faces during their school transfers is building rapport with the teachers. One of the interviewed participants explained his concern regarding the teachers who might not take him seriously as a school principal. Another school principal explained that there are also teachers who are always against her no matter what decision they make. Perceived barriers such as this should be addressed by school leaders during their transfer as this could lead to poor communication which could lead

to failures in the education process [33].

School principals also need to deal with the challenges of how they adapt to their engagement with the new teachers during their school transfers. These adaptations are brought by the need to navigate with the existing school culture of the institution where they will be transferred. Based on the result, this ranges from several requests of teachers to change their ancillaries to their attitude concerning task management as some of these teachers are hesitant to change their current school practices. This result is actually supported by relevant literature stating that principals need to adapt to the existing schoolwork culture as the teachers may be resistant to changes which is linked to the previous principal's school management [34].

One of the means for the school principal to cope with the challenges of school principals during school transfers is by demonstrating supportive leadership for the teachers who are having problems with task management. The principals explained that instead of being emotionally upset or reprimanding the teacher for uncompleted tasks, they offer supportive guidance, demonstrating empathic understanding and accountability. This supportive leadership is important in maintaining harmonious relationships within the institution. Furthermore, understanding the situation of the teacher such as their working condition is a good sign of effective leadership which in turn improves their performance [35].

Another coping mechanism employed by school principals to address the challenges they face during school transfer is demonstrating different leadership styles. They use several strategies to address the problem, which is the main component of Situational Leadership Theory as the theory of this study. Based on the responses of the participants, both the principal and the teachers are self-aware of the key areas related to their job that need improvement which in turn allows the school principal to provide appropriate intervention. Such awareness of weakness and strengths allows both the principal and the teachers to be amendable to leader directiveness and supportiveness [36].

Establishing fairness in school when one becomes a school head is seen as one of the qualities of an effective principal. Proof of this is the account of one of the school head participants advising against favoritism. Favoritism involves displaying more kindness, indulgence, or preference to certain individuals, often at the expense of fairness, justice, or impartiality [37]. We understand that conflicts in school can be challenging, especially when ethical issues like favoritism and partiality come into play. It is important to find ways to address these challenges with empathy and understanding. The accounts of informants 1 and 5 expressed that school heads can rely on the guidance of their master teachers and trusted colleagues to navigate these complex situations and find fair and just solutions. As exemplified, accordingly, the informants showed fairness and neutrality in conflict resolution to become effective in resolving conflicts. This justifies that when a principal is fair and consistent in handling situations, it enhances their credibility and prevents disputes or challenges to their decisions [46].

In the first few weeks after a reassignment, all the school heads concurred that observation and integration into the school's atmosphere and practices are imperative processes. "Reading the atmosphere" as aptly called by one of the informants is observing the processes, affairs, interpersonal relationships, and mechanisms in the school beforehand. This process is not abrupt but gradual. This further prevents the ethical challenges of outright rejection of the school heads' task assignments to their subordinate teachers and indifference among the school members. Familiarity with the school's atmosphere is one of the key emotional intelligences of school leaders. That is why by being attuned to the school's atmosphere, principals can identify emotions, concerns, and dynamics among teachers, enabling them to respond appropriately and empathetically to individual needs and challenges [38].

Constant communication and conducting conferences are also seen as solutions to ethical challenges of task behavior and relationship behavior by the informants and the perceived maturity of the school members. Communication through conferences is a mechanism to channel grievances and pave in-person interaction

between the conflicting parties. Conferences offer a structured platform for discussing concerns, sharing feedback, and reinforcing ethical behavior within the school community [39]. The school head participants gave way to open communication by calling the aggrieved school members and asking queries through conversation. In this way, principals can establish a culture of transparency, trust, and accountability, which are essential for addressing and preventing ethical challenges effectively.

All the school head participants concurred that acknowledgment and recognition of their subordinate teachers' work and participation are important for sustained effort. The ethical challenge of the reluctance of teachers to do the assigned task is countered by the school head participants through assurance and supportive words. This is attested by when informants 1 and 5 assured their subordinate teachers that they were always there for them for assistance. Several works of literature support the idea that principals who provide support and guidance to teachers help create a conducive environment where educators feel motivated, valued, and equipped to excel in their roles [40] [41]. Modeling is also seen by the informants as a key to resolving issues related to ethical challenges during the first few weeks after a school transfer. Informant 2 emphasized modeling when assigning tasks. Modeling is a good leadership trait that is essential for principals because it sets a positive example for teachers, students, and parents, demonstrating the standards and expectations that the principal has set. A principal should lead by example and be a good role model for school members as supported by various literature about good leadership traits [42] [43].

The insights of all school head participants generated the core ideas of empathy, adaptation, and adjustment. They recognized the importance of adaptation and collaboration in navigating transitions and promoting a positive school culture. Working together and consulting with their master teachers and school teachers is often seen as a productive solution to the challenges encountered by the school heads. As the most recurring insight of the school head participants, they acknowledged the necessity of embracing the new school environment. The process of adaptation and adjustment involved being open to change, accepting new challenges in the school, and adapting to the unique characteristics and dynamics of the school community where they were assigned. The informants also valued adaptability as a critical leadership trait. Adapting allows principals to familiarize themselves with the school's core values, mission, and vision, enabling them to align their leadership with the school's goals and expectations [44].

The process of establishing personal connections beyond work-related interactions is also emphasized by the informants. In a world of labor and money, sometimes we forget that our employees, staff, or subordinate teachers in this case are also humans whose physical and emotional needs should be recognized, too. This insight serves as a reminder that our teachers are not machines solely designed for productivity but individuals with feelings, rights, and a need for social interaction. Interpersonal relationships of teachers matter [45]. This core idea calls for empathy, understanding, and respect towards teachers, acknowledging their complexities, challenges, and the significance of their well-being beyond their professional duties.

IMPLICATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of this research highlight the intricate ethical challenges faced by school principals during school transfers, particularly concerning task behavior, relationship behavior, and readiness/maturity. These challenges, such as late submission of school reports by teachers, interpersonal conflicts among teachers, and difficulty in building rapport and trust, present significant hurdles for effective school leadership. Principals cope with these challenges by assuming the unfinished tasks of teachers, fostering neutrality in conflict resolution, and prioritizing proper communication and clarification. While these coping mechanisms demonstrate proactive problem-solving, they also raise concerns about workload and potential burnout among principals. Overall, the insights gained underscore the importance of proactive leadership strategies, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills in creating a supportive and productive school environment conducive to student success.

The following recommendations are proposed by the researchers based on the findings of the study:

1. School principals should be flexible in leadership styles. Utilizing different leadership styles allows principals to address diverse challenges effectively, most especially during school transfers. Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses enables school principals to provide appropriate interventions and support to teachers after a few weeks of transfer.
2. School districts and clusters should provide professional development programs for principals to enhance their leadership skills, particularly in areas related to workload management of teachers. These programs can equip principals with the necessary tools and strategies to effectively address ethical challenges related to task management of teachers and to cope with the demands of school transfers related to task behavior.
3. There is a need to establish support systems for principals, such as mentorship programs or peer support groups, to provide them with guidance and assistance in dealing with ethical challenges related to the relationship behaviors of their teachers. These support systems can help principals navigate complex situations involving conflicts among teachers encountered during school transfers. These can be organized by the school divisions and districts by the national government.
4. School principals should understand the school culture of their assigned schools. Principals should prioritize integrating into the school culture, reading the atmosphere, and being attuned to the emotions and concerns of teachers. These are the common problems in every school. Thus, this emotional intelligence facilitates empathetic responses to individual needs and challenges.
5. Educational leaders must be equipped with emotional intelligence, clear communication skills, and the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships sensitively. School heads can create a positive school culture conducive to collaboration, growth, and success for both staff and students through modeling these essential leadership qualities and strategies.
6. Future researchers can perform a quantitative approach, such as surveys or structured interviews with a larger sample size that could explore the frequency and impact of these challenges, aiding in the development of targeted interventions and providing a broader understanding of the topic.
7. Future researchers can perform a multiple case study design to address other underlying variables to the ethical challenges encountered by school principals with other cases during school transfers.

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