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Direction**

**Assignment Title:**

A critical evaluation of the leadership of a Subject  
Leader in an Early Childhood Education Centre

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## **1. Introduction**

Leadership plays a significant role in enhancing performance within any organisation. A good leader supports the attainment of the stated mission and goals of an organisation and manages the day to day activities that are necessary for said attainment. A leader should also be committed to their followers and garner the support of their followers while moving an organisation forward.

The report will provide a critical evaluation of the leadership of a subject leader in an Early Childhood Education Centre in a rural community. It will highlight the background of the leader and chosen organization, as well as what constitutes a 21st century leader. The report will draw attention to selected methods used to obtain the data employed in the evaluation and provides relevant research to support the leadership styles identified through the data collected. Referencing observations gained at two centre activities, the leader was evaluated and the author connected the behavior observed, to the leadership theories will also be highlighted. Recommendations are offered which suggested the use of additional leadership theories to enhance and improve the performance of both the leader and the followers involved within the scenarios presented.

### **1.2 Background of the Business**

In early 1991, the St. Thomas Early Childhood Centre (ECC) was created under the management of the St. Thomas Roman Catholic Church board and by extension members of the community of Matura. The centre is now fully established and operated

by a board of directors and members of staff. The centre is situated in the North-Eastern rural part of Trinidad and Tobago and caters to children from low-income homes. At present the centre serves approximately thirty-eight students from the ages of three to five years of age.

St. Thomas ECC is well-regarded and respected as one of the premiere early education centres in the community. The staff is focused and grounded in providing a safe and stimulating environment for the development of each child.

At present the team which consists of staff, teachers, students and board members report to Mrs. Victoria Paul, the subject leader of this report. Mrs. Paul has been teaching for 30 years, 15 of which have been as the head teacher of the selected ECC centre.

Holverson et al (2004) posit that the question “of what makes a successful leader is an issue that has been debated since years ago”. Kotter (1999) states that “leadership in the 21st century has become even more important due to the noticeable decline of enduring successful leaders in the business world”. Sood (2015) states that “there are five attributes that influences the decision making of a 21st century leader. These attributes are: the leader should be a good initiator; have the ability to manage crisis efficiently; possess effective communication skills; be able to use the art of intuition and should develop the ability to inspire followers”.

## **2. Methodologies**

The major method used to collect data for this report included visual observation of the chosen leadership subject during various activities conducted at the ECC center. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with both the leader and the followers within the observed activities. Assumptions and conclusions were drawn by the author based on the traits displayed during the selected activities which matched those found in researched leadership theories. The centre activities selected for observation included a centre staff meeting and a Parent-Teacher Network (PTN) meeting.

## **3. Concepts and Theories of Leadership**

As previously stated, the definition of leadership is many and varied, so too are its researched theories and concepts. The term leadership has been used to refer to the actions of various persons and within various situations over the years. Researchers often view leadership as an innate part of human endeavors, whereby an emergent leader attempts to lead their followers within every aspect of the gamut of human experience. Be it commerce, politics, education, or general social forums, leadership has played a critical role in the shaping of human existence.

Based on the data collected during the visual observation and informal interviews conducted by the author, transactional, transformational and situational leadership theories have been selected to guide the evaluation of the subject leader, Mrs. Paul.

### **3.1. Transactional Leadership Theory**

Burns et al (1978) stated that “transactional leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others, for the purpose of an exchange of valued things”. This leadership style is often viewed as the power given to leaders to evaluate, correct and train the followers when performance needs to be improved and rewarded (Couto 2007). Transactional theory mainly focuses on a leader’s actions to motivate followers. Positive reinforcement is offered for desired actions by a follower through rewards, while negative actions are met with some form of disciplinary action or punishment.

### **3.2. Transformational Leadership theory**

Burns et al (1978) further stated that “transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Steven Covey (2007) posits that “transformational leadership has evolved from and contains elements of preceding leadership types, such as trait and behavior theories, charismatic, situational and transactional leadership”. In transformational leadership the leader produces and employs mechanisms of charisma, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on higher order essential needs.

Transformational leaders raise the bar by appealing to the higher ideals and values of followers. In doing so, they sometimes model the values themselves and use charismatic methods to attract people to the values and by extension to the leader.

### **3.3. Situational Leadership theory**

According to Xiaoxia et al (2006) “a good situational leader is one who can quickly change leadership styles as the situation changes”. Situational leadership evolves within an organisation, whereby the leader learns to demonstrate abilities in leading the team as “situations” arise. Situational leaders are able to adjust their leadership style, respond in the situation and manage the setting. The situational leader is also able to recognize that there is a situation and is able to influence the followers by interacting with them in manner they will understand and accept.

### **4. Description of Leadership Activities**

The professional title of the subject leader within the St. Thomas ECC centre is that of Head Teacher. To successfully fulfill this role Mrs. Paul is required to demonstrate and execute the following:

#### **Parents**

- Ability to motivate, communicate and promote healthy relationship with parents.
- Provide feedback to the parents on the development of their child in the centre.

- Encourage parent support of and participation in school activities

### **School/Centre**

- Plan, supervise and ensure that centre policies are being achieved
- Be committed to the health, safety and well-being of the children in the centre
- Report and give feedback to the board on school activities and stated goals

### **Staff**

- Plan school activities, term curriculums and execute necessary team delegation
- Ensure that each teacher has an even work balance
- Assess and provide feedback to each staff member

#### **4.1. Centre Activity #1: Parent-Teacher Network Meeting**

The main purpose of the PTN meeting was to discuss the school Christmas fundraising activity. Mrs. Paul adopted an authoritative role during the course of the meeting, leading both the staff and parents throughout the discussion. It was noted by the author that because of her previous knowledge, experience and the trust gained through her interactions with the followers, Mrs. Paul was easily able to take the lead during the proceedings.

She exhibited a very straightforward attitude when it came to sharing the objectives and administering the duties necessary for parents to execute to support the event. She was also very clear when it came to the various contributions all members of the centre community were required to make towards the activity. Mrs. Paul then informed the



parents that a failure to contribute towards the activity would result in the children of the associated parents not receiving a Christmas gift.

The leadership approach used in this situation is that of the transactional leadership theory. Mrs. Paul shared the goal of the activity, administered roles to participants and then provided motivation for the execution of these roles through the offering of a reward or punishment. “The followers follow and fulfill role expectations by striving to work effectively” Burns (1978) towards the attainment of their own self-interest.

#### **4.2. Centre activity #2: Staff Meeting**

The purpose of the centre staff meeting was the academic planning of the second half of the school term. While Mrs. Paul led the meeting from its onset, she spent the first portion of the meeting reiterating the goals of the centre and the shared aims of the staff as it pertained to the students under their care. Mrs. Paul also stressed on the fact that the success of the children was dependent on the team effort of the teaching staff and the support network they provided to each other. She then opened the floor with respect to the formulating of a “Curriculum Theme” for the remainder of the term.

It is during this portion of the meeting that one of the members of staff mentioned that her students had asked about the differences between a plane and a helicopter. Recognizing the potential within this statement, Mrs. Paul then suggested that the theme be “Transportation”. She then immediately encouraged and convinced the rest of the team to begin brainstorming ideas based on the provided theme. The staff member

with the original idea was then rewarded by being tasked as the activity coordinator for the remainder of the term.

Multiple leadership approaches were used in this situation. Mrs. Paul exhibited transformational leadership at the start of the meeting by inspiring the staff to recognize their shared goals and motivating her team to strive for the success of the children in their care. Goodwin, Wofford, and Whittington, et al (2001) stated the transformational leader institutes behavioral change, not by threats or promises, but by convincing the followers that their own interest and values should be aligned with the interests and values of the organization.

The subject leader then exhibited transactional leadership when she rewarded the staff member for providing the successful idea for a curriculum theme. The author would also suggest that she exhibited situation leadership when she grasped the potential in the idea and exploited the moment by convincing her team to brainstorm and develop the chosen theme. Mrs. Paul valued each follower and openly considered each one an asset to the team.

## **5. Evaluation of the Subject Leader**

Over the years, Mrs. Paul has refined her leadership style based on her varied experiences within the school setting. The subject leader has exhibited elements of all three leadership approaches discussed in this report. Situational leadership was exemplified through her possession of a rational understanding of the situations and her guidance of her team toward the achievement of their goal.

Transactional leadership was exemplified in both situations wherein the leader “approaches followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another” Burns (1978). Additionally transformational leadership was exemplified where a “leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower and looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (Burns 1978).

When the subject leader used the transactional style, she motivated her followers by setting goals while promising rewards. Whereas when she used the transformational leadership style she inspired and provided individualized influence to her followers. While using the transformational leadership style she also searched for solutions that engaged the hearts and minds of the followers.

## **6. Recommendations**

The author recommends that the subject leader should continue to align her leadership strategy with the organizational goals of the centre.

Within the Centre activity #1, it was noted that the subject leader could have improved the discourse in the meeting had she engaged more in listening to the parents present at the meeting. Covey (1989) states that a leader should seek first to understand, then seek to be understood. The author therefore recommends that the leader may gain value engaging more in her listening skills when dealing with the parents. Her leadership attitude towards her followers should flow from reasoned choices based on the contributions of her followers.

As such the author would recommend the inclusion of a participative leadership style when it comes to her interaction with the parents. Deeper collaboration with and an engaged contribution from the parents with regards to the decision making process, would not only deepen their involvement with the school, but give them greater input in the education of their children.

The author would also suggest that the inclusion of contingency leadership theories be adopted based on the culture, environment and literacy levels present in the parent population of the centre. The many variables present within a rural community lend themselves to a need for sensitivity to the overall environment surrounding the organization.

The author wishes to additionally propose that educational principles and styles be adopted as a means of enhancing the centre leader and its followers. Leaders who have been exposed to advanced levels of education know that leadership requires a number of judgment calls and often requires an educated and sensitive response. Through the use of Houses' path-goal theory of leadership, the subject leader could challenge both herself and her teaching team to extend each other through the pursuit of higher education. The leader could set a goal for all of the teachers to obtain a particular level of teaching certification, offer support through the introduction of a staff study team and provide various rewards to the staff as they proceed toward the certification together.

## **7. Conclusion**

Leadership is important for the success of all organizations since it possesses the influence to compact power, as well as leads and encourages a team. A leader can challenge and motivate followers, but on the opposite spectrum break and demoralize them. Leaders have the power and position to evaluate, correct and train followers, as espoused by the transactional theory of leadership.

Leaders can also inspire followers to high achievement and to aspire to goals which benefit the organisation as a whole, as shared in the transformational theory of leadership. Leaders are also required to “go with the flow” to take each situation as it comes and to navigate their teams to successful goal attainment as exemplified in situational leadership. “Going with the flow” can also constitute a leader employing a mix of the available leadership styles based not only on situations which arise, but on the environment within which the leadership must be exhibited.

In many ways 21st century leaders must exemplify the five attributes which were shared by Sood (2015) at the start of this report and which support the suggestion of a need to employ various leadership theories. The subject leader Mrs. Paul has shown to be a successful leader within her organisation and while like most leaders there is room for improvement, she has managed to harness years of experience and interaction into an effective leadership style.

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