

**Beliefs shaping the practice of Christian school
leadership:
Implications for the principalship**

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Soli Deo Gloria

Abstract

This research investigated the extent to which the biblical and theological beliefs of principals associated with the Christian Schools Australia (CSA) group influenced their leadership practices.

In many nations worldwide schools are experiencing a series of seismic shifts in terms of the educational, social, economic and political expectations being placed on them. In this process the role of principals has come under greater scrutiny as they seek to effectively lead increasingly complex, sophisticated educational centres of learning and teaching.

Researchers have explored the influence that principals have on the dynamics of such diverse areas as school culture, community, values, relationships, stress, academic performance of students, and professional development of staff. However, limited research has taken place to investigate how the personal beliefs of principals influence their school leadership practices.

This research project was undertaken within the Christian school sector, which is one of the most rapidly growing areas of Australian education. Its purpose was to determine how and to what extent the biblical and theological beliefs held by principals of the Christian Schools Australia (CSA) group influenced their school leadership practices. The notion of leadership was explored through examining various theories, especially those of transformational and servant leadership. Additionally an inductive method was employed to explore the biblical dimensions of leadership, concluding that the Bible identifies Christ as the paradigm for human leadership, and that leaders are to be seen as God's people in God's place to fulfil God's purposes. Against this theoretical and theological background the research was undertaken in three interconnected phases, adopting a case study methodology which offered a multi-method, triangulated approach.

Phase 1 was designed to establish what core theological beliefs were held by principals within the sector, and to what extent these beliefs were considered to be

influential in the ways that principals led their schools. This was done by collecting data from questionnaires completed by principals across the nation. Phase 2 was designed to explore what core educational leadership competencies principals of Christian schools possessed. Data relating to specific educational leadership behaviours and practices were collected by using an online 360° review of principals which was completed by up to 35 staff from their respective schools. The results from these were compared with national benchmarks to ascertain the relative status of their educational leadership capabilities. Phase 3 consisted of 96 interviews with principals, board members and staff from six case study schools in both urban and regional areas across Australia. These interviews explored in depth the question of whether the biblical and theological beliefs of principals did influence their school leadership practices.

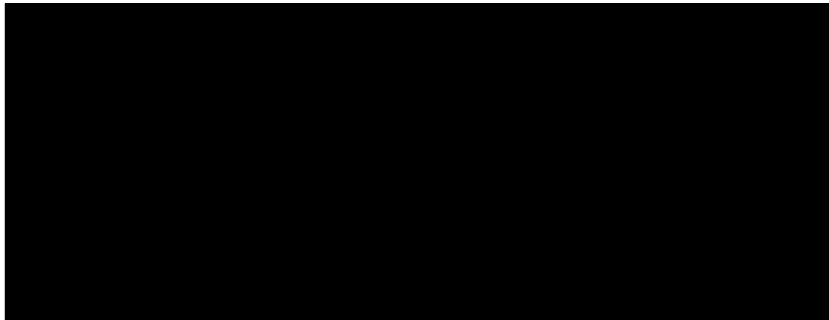
Findings from this research indicate that Christian school principals do hold a set of core biblical and theological beliefs which they view to be highly influential for their leadership practices and that they do possess core educational leadership competencies generally equivalent to national benchmarks. A major conclusion is that biblical and theological beliefs do influence school leadership practices, especially in the important areas of vision, leadership style and relationships, but they do not do so uniformly or consistently. Nor is the positive correlation between beliefs held and practices an indicator of effective leadership.

Implications of the findings are the importance of having systems and mechanisms in place for principal preparation that include biblical, theological and organizational training.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Ian Sinclair O'Harae

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Certification	v
Table of Contents	vi
Abbreviations	xv
Chapter 1	Context, purpose and orientation
Introduction	1
Purpose	4
Assumptions	4
Orientation	6
Context	9
Biblical leadership and schools	14
Methodology	17
Significance of the study	18
Limitations of the study	19
Outline of the thesis	20
Chapter 2	Literature review
Introduction	22
In the eye of the beholder – defining leadership	23
Trait or ‘Great man’ Theory	25
Behaviour theories	26
Situational and Contingency theories	28
Transactional/Transformational theory	29
Measuring Transformational leadership	30
Transformational leadership and schools	31

Servant leadership theory	35
Measuring Servant leadership	36
Distributed leadership	41
Leadership theories and this study	42
Conceptual framework	43
The leader as person	46
Leadership and credibility	48
Leadership and relationships	51
Leadership and values	52
Leadership confronting a challenging, changing environment	54
Relationship of this study to previous areas of research	56
Summary	60
Chapter 3	Biblical perspectives on leadership
	62
Introduction	62
Towards a biblical perspective on leadership	62
Old Testament words	63
New Testament words	65
Towards establishing a biblical framework	67
The enigma of biblical leadership	72
Constructing a theological framework	73
The Triune nature of God as the core determiner for leadership	73
Leadership inherent in the Triune God	74
Leadership is inherent in humanity as created in the image of God	79
Humanity – male and female – created in the image of God	82
Leadership and Jesus Christ – the God-Human	83
Summary	85
Chapter 4	Biblical leaders and leadership motifs
	87
Introduction	87
Old Testament conceptualisations of leadership	87
Leadership in pre-fall Eden	87
Specific Old Testament leadership roles	88

Servant motif	91
The OT use of <i>'ebed</i>	92
The Servant of the Lord	92
Shepherd motif	95
New Testament perspectives on leadership	96
Christ as the Servant of the Lord	97
Christ as Shepherd of his people	99
New Testament patterns of leadership	100
New Testament leadership and its Greco-Roman background	102
Summary	105
Chapter 5	Methodological considerations
	107
Introduction	107
Rationale	108
Ethical considerations	109
Research codes to maintain anonymity	109
Selection of schools for the study	111
Case study methodology	113
Research phases	116
Linguistic and philosophical dimensions	117
Verifiability and triangulation	119
The methodological process	120
Phase 1: Survey/Questionnaire	120
Phase 2: 360° Principal profiling	122
Phase 3: Semi-structured interviews with key informants	124
The interview process	125
Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)	127
QSR N6	128
Summary	131
Chapter 6	Key beliefs shaping the practice of leadership
	133
Introduction	133
Phase 1 Survey/Questionnaire	133
Demography	134

Summary of demographic data	136
Main motivation for becoming a principal	136
The call	136
Making a difference	140
Core beliefs	142
Rationale for including the five areas of Christian belief	143
Core beliefs – The Bible	145
Core beliefs – God	146
Core beliefs – humanity	147
Core beliefs – Jesus Christ	148
Core beliefs – Salvation	149
Other influential beliefs, factors or comments	151
Open-ended questions	152
The main factors shaping an understanding and practice of leadership	155
God’s sovereignty	156
The Bible	157
The call	158
Principals’ vision of Christian leadership	159
The dual dimensions of Christian schools	161
What principals hope to accomplish in leading their present school	164
Strategies to achieve these goals	166
Spiritual dimensions – Prayer and Bible teaching	167
Conclusions from Phase 1	168

Chapter 7	Educational leadership competencies:	
	Findings and discussion	170
Introduction		170
Phase 2: 360° leadership profiling		170
QUT’s Quality Leadership Profile (QLP)		172
QLP results		176
Christian school specific items		177
School and principal profiles		179
Sydney Christian College		180
Melbourne Christian College		186

Brisbane Christian College	192
Kimberley Christian College	197
Eyre Christian College	201
Huon Christian College	205
Comparative tables	210
Summary	212
Chapter 8	Case study schools: Principals' biblical and theological beliefs and school vision
	214
Introduction	214
Framework	215
Vision	216
Relationships	216
Leadership styles	217
Leadership practices and vision	218
How Paul's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of SCC	218
How Robert's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of MCC	222
How Michael's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of BCC	226
How John's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of KCC	230
How David's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of ECC	232
How Steven's biblical and theological beliefs influence the vision of HCC	236
Summary	238
Chapter 9	Case study schools: Principals' biblical and theological beliefs – Relationships and leadership styles
	240
Relationships	240
Staff	240

Power	245
Relationships and conflict with board and/or church	245
Leadership styles	252
Motivation	252
Legacy	257
Summary	261
The person of the principal	262
The history of the school	263
Relationships	263
The relationship of the principal with the board chair	264
The relationship of principals, schools with the sponsoring church	265
The perception of the principal by staff	265
Chapter 10 Conclusions and recommendations	266
Introduction	266
Key findings	267
Key conclusions	269
1 Christian school principals adhere to core biblical and theological beliefs	269
2 Christian school principals displayed core educational leadership competencies	269
3 The biblical and theological beliefs of principals do influence their school leadership practices, but not uniformly or consistently	270
Vision	270
Personality types and perceived people skills	271
The identity of the organization as a Christian school	273
School success was measured by tangible and intangible elements	273
Curriculum and pedagogy	274
Intra-school relationships	275
Governance	275
Building community and developing culture	276
Conflict management	277

Organizational structures	277
Spirituality	278
Recommendations	279
Principal preparation	280
Theological training	282
Training in biblical leadership	283
Areas for further research	284
Gender and leadership in Christian schools	284
Effective mechanisms for the biblical and theological training of principals	284
The relationship between personality types and emotional intelligence and the principalship	285
Relationships between the sponsoring church and the school	285

List of tables

1	Order of persons in NT Trinitarian passages	76
2	NT uses of Isaiah's Servant songs	95
3	School codes and principal pseudonyms	110
4	Case study school profiles	112
5	Principal age	134
6	Principal gender	134
7	Principal cultural background	134
8	Principal tertiary qualifications	135
9	Principal total years in teaching	135
10	Total years as principal	135
11	Total years as principal at current school	135
12	Principal: Other professions	136
13	Core beliefs – the Bible	145
14	Core beliefs – God	146
15	Core beliefs – Humanity	148
16	Core beliefs – Jesus Christ	149
17	Core beliefs – Salvation	150

18	The main factors shaping an understanding and practice of leadership	153
19	The main biblical and theological beliefs shaping an understanding and practice of leadership	155
20	CSA principal QLP averages compared with national averages	176
21	Christian School specific items: Principal averages	178
22	Christian School specific items: Principal averages by ranking	179
23	Paul's QLP averages compared with national and CSA averages	181
24	Differences between Paul and other school respondents	181
25	Paul and further development required	182
26	Paul and Christian leadership profiling	184
27	Robert's QLP averages compared with national and CSA averages	188
28	Differences between Robert and other school respondents	188
29	Robert and Christian leadership profiling	191
30	Michael's QLP averages compared with national and CSA averages	193
31	Differences between Michael and other school respondents	194
32	Michael and Christian leadership profiling	195
33	John's QLP averages compared with CSA and national averages	198
34	Differences between John and other school respondents	199
35	John and Christian leadership profiling	200
36	David and Christian leadership profiling	203
37	Differences between David and other school respondents	203
38	David and Christian leadership profiling	204
39	Steven's QLP averages compared with CSA and national averages	206
40	Steven compared with CSA averages	207
41	Steven and Christian leadership profiling	208
42	Six principals QLP average scores compared with national and CSA averages	210
43	Six principals Christian specific items average scores compared with CSA averages	211

List of figures		
1	Conceptual framework	45
2	A theological framework for biblical dimensions of leadership	68
3	Conceptual and biblical framework linkage	70
4	Research phases	116
5	Epistemological and methodological linkage	119
6	Key Christian belief-school outcome connections	163
7	The principal's biblical and theological beliefs and school leadership practices	215
8	Terry's Action Wheel	263
Bibliography		287
Appendices		321
Appendix 1		322
	Invitation letter to CSA principals	322
	Information sheet	323
	Consent form Phase 1	325
	Questionnaire	326
Appendix 2		338
	Information sheet Phases 2 and 3	338
	Consent form Phases 2 and 3	340
	Letter re QLP	341
	QLP 360° profiling process and questions sets	343
Appendix 3		348
	Suggested in school interview process	348
	Case study interview questions	351

Abbreviations

Bible books

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Jud	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
1 Kings	1 Kings
2 Kings	2 Kings
1 Chron	1 Chronicles
2 Chron	2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Ps (plural Pss)	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Solomon
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel

Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jon	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Romans
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
James	James
1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Pet	2 Peter

1 John	1 John
2 John	2 John
3 John	3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

Other abbreviations

OT	Old Testament
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
BC	Before Christ
AD	Anno Domini

CCS	Christian Community Schools
CSA	Christian Schools Australia
CPCS	Christian Parent Controlled Schools
ACE	Accelerated Christian Education
AOG	Assemblies of God

School pseudonyms

SCC	Sydney Christian College
MCC	Melbourne Christian College
BCC	Brisbane Christian College
KCC	Kimberley Christian College
ECC	Eyre Christian College
HCC	Huon Christian College

English Bible

The English Bible quotations throughout this thesis are from the English Standard Version ©2001 (ESV)