The concept of discrete management as a proposal for the style of a school headmaster in leading a team of teachers

Grażyna Bartkowiak

University of Economics in Poznań, Poland

Abstract

The paper presents a unique concept of managing a team of teachers. The article consists of two parts: theoretical, which discusses basic assumptions of discrete management concept with regard to teams of teachers, with reference to trends occurring in the literature on the subject (in humanities and social sciences), conducted studies, and empirical literature presenting opinions (diagnostic survey) of teachers about the presented concept.

Keywords: discrete management of teachers' teams, headteacher, leadership

Introduction

School management is the management of a community of students, parents, teachers and administrative staff. This management involves maximum mobilization of a school community, especially teachers, within the scope of taking actions in favour of the process of learning and teaching and implementation of jointly shared values. These teachers see a particular school as a place of learning and working that is friendly, allows them to pursue their interests, needs, and career and life goals. Awareness of the headmaster concerning the need to care for the development of community members should inspire and lead to innovative actions: creative from the point of view of individuals and innovative in relation to school as an organization. One important

entity that the headmaster should be concerned about is certainly teams of teachers.

The increase in public awareness of the importance of the role of teachers and institutions related to education of social capital observed during the last few years, greater and ever-growing awareness concerning the management of teachers and staff of strategic importance for the organization which is a school, care for their development, job satisfaction, and welfare require continuous efforts towards the development of optimal management style. It aims to ensure maximum but realistically recognized harmony and integration of the objectives of the values and needs of those teachers as well as the mission of school.

The presented article aims to develop an optimal approach to the management of teachers' teams and is an attempt (pilot studies) at its empirical verification.

Key assumptions of the concept:

Discrete management is an eclectic management concept, which refers to the philosophical direction of *conventionalism*[1] (Lat. Conventionalis - based on the agreement) , as well as a psychological, humanistic concept of a human which is characterized by the use of "discrete control" over knowledge workers and especially gifted workers in order to enable them the need to implement autonomy in their work, value of subjectivity, self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1990; Rogers, 2002) and emotional comfort in their work.

The concept of discrete management also refers to the theory of positive potential of an organization (Glińska-Neweś 2010), which aims to refer to the strengths of the workers employed in it.

So the great importance of a sense of meaning in the performed work for its creativity was indicated by many other authors (e.g. Bakker et al.; Drazin et al, 1999), also positive psychologists as well as representatives of a positive organizational theory (Glińska-Neweś, 2010; Henry, 2007; Joseph, Linley, 2007; Weisburg, 1993). These authors emphasize the motivating importance of sense of meaning of the performed work as a factor that triggers commitment to the performed work. In their opinion the aforementioned sense of meaning is a key factor determining the activity of knowledge workers.

A sense of meaning of employees' activity is based on two assumptions. One of them has the nature of a logical cause-and-

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[1] **Conventionalism** is a natural history philosophical trend that was created in the fifth century BC (Protagoras, Aristippus, sophists), and was developed in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. (Poincaré,Bergson, Ajdukiewicz), according to which all claims and theories of a scientific nature are conventions (i.e. have contractual nature).The role played by these conventions is the convenience of thinking in the processes of cognition and valuation in a given section of space-time, which - in a common translation - is distinguishing in a certain reality in which certain judgments are conventionally assumed as true or false, and certain things as good or beautiful or bad or ugly. A kind of "useful message" of conventionalism is that in practice there are no endlessly unchanging attitudes towards reality - because of the fact that human thought has a developmental nature. (Ajdukiewicz, 1983, p.84) The reference to conventionalism here means acceptance by both parties: management and knowledge workers and especially gifted of a specific convention allowing to build relationships that in a formal way reduce the asymmetry of superior-subordinate position. This situation does not mean of course that such asymmetry does not exist.

effect dependence, as it leads to the effective implementation of objectives, which in case of this type of work should also have a long-term nature (Obuchowski, 1993). On the other hand, sense of meaning of the performed work is associated with the implementation of recognized values. These values define actions with a more hierarchical and generalized nature and do not necessarily translate into concrete actions, although in the long run they lead to them (Obuchowski, 2000).

From the point of view of individual workers, a sense of meaning in performing professional work has the following functions:

• It strengthens self-esteem and the feeling of agency

• It provides positive feedback

• It initiates and allows maintenance of

a certain activity in a situation where this activity is burdensome and cumbersome

• It allows for the deferral of gratification for the executed task

• It is a factor that builds positive self-esteem, regardless of the position.

Discrete management in relation to teams of teachers can be presented in the form of a following diagram.

Although discrete management in relation to teams of teachers *involves no formal manifestations of power*, so that the way to exert an influence by the school headmaster is not directly visible and recognizable. At the same time it requires a special attitude on the part of teachers: commitment, emotional maturity, as well as specific distance of the headmaster to the outer signs of his power.

Figure 1. Model of discrete management of teams of teachers
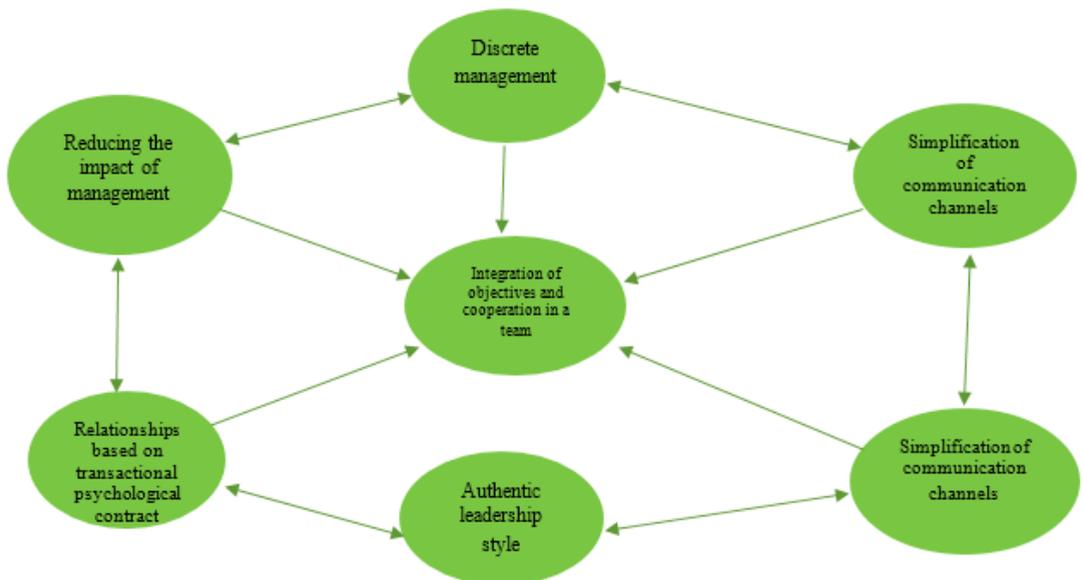
Source: own study

Discrete management does not resign completely from the position of leadership, the leader should inspire the team but he is a leader who is "not visible." This concept, however, refers to and uses the assumptions of authentic leadership style.

Discrete management relating to teachers' teams does not mean the introduction of radical changes in organizational culture of the school, it also does not exclude the presence of leaders in a team of teachers or other persons with a high social prestige and authority. For the determination of managerial function, which is limited, and if it differentiates positions arising more out of processes than from traditional division between managerial and non-managerial jobs, instead of the traditional headmaster the term "coordinator" seems to be more appropriate.

Another element of the presented management concept is the *simplification of communication* channels which is connected with greater availability of the headmaster for teachers who at almost any moment can turn to him or her; at the same time it also requires emotional maturity on the part of the latter, their sense of shared responsibility for achieved organizational results, mutual kindness and high self-discipline.

Another factor—*psychological contract* is the first significant step on the way to building trust between teachers forming teams and the employer-headmaster because it does not result from the realization of the consequences of failure to comply with a formal contract but is

a result of the identification of teachers with the school, as well as concern for them by the headmaster. Thus it is the basis and condition for the achievement of the highest level of mutual trust, referring to emotional bonds between entities (Dunn, Schweiter, 2005). Trust, in turn, occurs as a result of mutual understanding, acceptance of intentions, and identification of the needs and aspirations of the other party. On the other hand, understanding is a result of effective mutual representation of each other's interests.

Psychological contract can be, and is, the area within which the agreement of teachers' expectations takes place in a team and in relations with the employer, headmaster. It concerns a number of commitments the nature of which is not written down in the employment contract but which are psychological, and which relate to teachers' teams and the school headmaster as people interested in acting in the interests of the school and the whole community. On the other hand, it is about the possibility of understanding possible difficulties and continuing dialogue among interested parties, both within the team and outside of it.

Assuming that the psychological contract that meets the hopes placed in it is based on the principle of adaptation of the employer to the individual expectations of employees, mutual benefits, voluntary decision of both sides and mutual loyalty, it can be considered as a specific area for dialogue between school headmaster and knowledge teachers because it is

• a source of knowledge about mutual expectations of the headmaster and teachers because it gives the opportunity for an open presentation of the interests of both sides,

• a method of neutralization of potential divergences—as a result of an unwritten agreement between the parties

• a tool for building confidence in the organization—school (Schoorman, Mayer, Davis, 2007, p.344-354).

The concept of *transactional psychological contract* involves a high degree of flexibility and adaptability of teachers that are part of the team for situations of the school and the whole school community that creates it. Within this contract the teacher assumes responsibility for himself and the team. The commitment of a headmaster and school community, in turn, is to create conditions conducive to the development of his or her competences.

Transactional psychological contract assumes the existence of a special relationship of teachers and the headmaster because it accepts a relatively high independence of teachers' teams and taking over responsibilities for the relatively structured tasks related to the operation and further development of school as an organization carrying out a specific mission and the ensuing values.

Another factor that co-creates discrete management is *authentic leadership*. This concept is an expression of concern of the headmaster for maintenance of a balance between the mission of the school, specific tasks that it wants to

pursue, and the broadly understood pursuits, interests, professional aspirations of members of teachers' teams, which is reflected in worker's sense of job satisfaction, resulting in their increased involvement, and even enthusiasm at work (Gardner et al., 2005). An authentic leader is characterized by transparency and consistency in action, in accordance with shared values (Bartkowiak, 2011; Bartkowiak, Krugiełka, 2012). Transparency of a leader is associated with his or her high level of openness, transparency and trust in close relationships.

The concepts of authentic leadership are deeply rooted in positive psychology and mainly focus on particular components of leadership, enabling the development of employees and leader (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa (2005, p. 12) they define such development as a process that takes place thanks to "positive psychological competences" of a leader and other members of organization, leading to a greater self-awareness and creation of positive behaviour of a leader and his subordinates (see also Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003). According to Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa (2005, p. 13) authentic leaders "know who they are and what they believe in." The basis of such a perspective oriented at authenticity has become Kemis's (2003) concept concerning "optimal self-evaluation."

In case of discrete management an authentic leader performs management functions in a way that minimizes control,

and is characterized by transparency and consistency in action in accordance with shared values. In addition he or she is strongly focused on improving his or her positive qualities such as trust, optimism, hope and confidence. These features play a key role in his personal development as well as in the development of the whole team and organization (see Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Seligmann, 2002). A condition for the transparency and stability of own behaviour is consistent and integrated functioning in all areas of life. As these authors emphasize, you cannot be authentic if, depending on the situation (job responsibilities, family life, etc.), you have to wear a different mask each time. Other researchers (Gardner et al., 2005) emphasize that genuine behaviours are a consequence of the real "Self" of a leader, reflected in his or her beliefs and feelings, independent from environmental influences and the pressures of others. Transparency of a leader is associated with *his or her high level of openness, transparency and trust in close relationships.*

The result of a style based on authentic leadership is undoubtedly the *increase in trust, and also commitment, satisfaction, enthusiasm and welfare of subordinates* (Harter et al., 2003; Ryan and Deci, 2000). When it comes to trust, the authors (Gardner et al., 2005) indicate that authentic leadership related to transparency increases trust of a subordinate in him- or herself and the entire organization. Through a sincere assessment of their own abilities authentic leaders build

relationships based on trust, which are essential in the development of skills of coping in difficult times for the organization. Hence, workers guided by authentic leaders have a higher level of trust in relation to superiors. One of the key factors, according to Gardner et al. (2005), serving as a mediator between authentic leadership and effects for subordinates, is *commitment.* The term "employee commitment" here refers to the "personal commitment to work" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269). Authors point out that internal integration of authentic leaders, coupled with personal development, mental sense of security and sense of purpose of work increase the commitment of subordinates. Authentic leaders contribute to the inducement of employees' commitment by helping them discover and use their talents and through support in matching their own objectives to those arising from their professional role (May et al., 2004).

Another element characterizing an authentic leader is *openness to feedback*, even when it takes the form of criticism. The leader cannot afford to ignore his or her weaknesses and limitations. Therefore, it is important for him or her to be aware of his or her own value system, as well as strengths and weaknesses.

An important issue is also the *ability to motivate yourself to act*, i.e. having internal motivation, based on factors such as: satisfaction from the measures taken, personal development, sense of helping others and awareness of conduct in accordance with the shared values, which in

the case of school is of particular importance. Gardner et al. (2005) stress that authentic leaders who are characterized by optimal self-evaluation and good indicators of mental health, i.e. great optimism, trust, hope, communicate this attitude to their subordinates. In addition, authentic leaders have a **strong sense of morality,** hence all their actions are consistent with the principles that they believe in and thus constitute a model for other employees (May et al. 2003). Processes through which leaders influence their employees rely primarily on **positive modelling** (Avolio, Gardner et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005). True leaders know that leadership is not about personal success, but about the success of people which they affect by their leadership. Hence, authentic leaders are focused on how to help others in achieving their goals as well as the transfer to them of more and more responsibility and authority.

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Welfare of employees is also closely related to commitment, which is expressed by good adaptation, satisfaction with life and good mental health (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Waterman (1993) emphasizes that the so-called "eudaimonic" concept of welfare encourages people to live in harmony with their true "Self," which is connected with authenticity. There is empirical evidence suggesting a significant relationship between authenticity, commitment and "eudaimonic[2]" welfare (Kahneman et al., 1999; Kermis, 2003; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Sheldon et al., 2004). The authors emphasize

(Harter et al., 2003) that the welfare of workers, and in relation to the situation—schools, appears as a natural consequence of the authenticity of a headmaster and other members of the community.

Another element of the model is *deinfluentization* as a phenomenon of deliberate deprivation of the impact of a leader on behalf of a person or team members that have greater competences at this moment, due to the performed task. At the same time it is an action leading to the implementation of postulates of subjectivity and improving efficiency of the team (Kożusznik, 1996). In school practice the headmaster resigns from exerting an influence on the course of tasks if he or she is convinced that there are professionals to whom the task can be appointed. At the core of a leader's—school headmaster's actions targeted in such a way is the belief in a large contribution of work of individual teachers in the work of the entire team. Thus, the headmaster treats his or her "lack of impact" as an instrument for achieving greater involvement and mobilization of the team for the implementation of the community's joint purpose.

Organization and area of studies

The second part of the article was devoted to the analysis of the views of teachers on the importance of individual elements in the model of discrete management concept in educational leadership.

The following research problem was formulated in the article:

How do teachers evaluate the proposed model, and how does the ranking of importance of each of its elements manifest itself in their opinion?

In order to verify the research problem formulated in such a way, studies which were involved 62 teachers from primary and secondary schools in a large city (population of over 500 thousand inhabitants) were designed. The main task of the participants was to assume an attitude towards factors proposed in the model of discrete management.

Each teacher received a written proposal of the model and its discussion together with a request to assign the importance of each factor on a scale of 1–5 (five was the highest evaluation) in the submitted, original concept of managing a teacher team. In addition to making the assignment, people were asked for brief explanations of their decision. In the next stage discussions were carried out in three groups of teachers, consisting of less than 20 people. The study was conducted in the first half of June 2014. The acceptance criterion of the model's element was its selection by a minimum of 51% of respondents.

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[2] **Eudaimonia** understands happiness differently than hedonism, or sybaritism (typically sensual pleasures) not as subjective satisfaction, but as a certain condition that occurs as a result of proper conduct of people and creating the correct meaning of work

Results of the studies

The study revealed the existence of a relatively large variation in rankings of the point value attributed to individual elements.

As indicated by the obtained data, teachers participating in the studies recognized *authentic leadership* as the most important element of the concept, and in particular such aspects (which results from the discussions) as ethics, feedback, transparency, mutual trust and concern for the welfare of all members of the school community. Interviewed teachers stated that having a headmaster who implements authentic leadership allows increased motivation to work and life, and in particular, participation in the process of self-improvement and creating a creative team. Teachers also stressed the importance of

absence of formal manifestations of power as a factor in their positive mobilization. Some of them mentioned that, actually, there is already such a tendency in school but they expect more and want the introduction of such workplaces where there would be no division of occupied territory (desks) associated with the position.

Similarly, a high position was obtained by an element of simplification of communication channels. The point is that there should be channels of communication which are almost constantly open and allow teachers to contact each other and exchange opinions with the school headmaster in the same way. At this point writing down the dates of meetings in a schedule should be regarded as an inadequate procedure. However, during the conducted interview only the need to extend the time of direct con-

Table 1. Ranking of the importance of various elements of concept of discrete management in the opinion of surveyed teachers

Elements of concept	Sum of assigned points	N	%
Authentic leadership	252	56	90,32
Restricting formal manifestations of power	243	56	90,32
Simplification of communication channels	154	40	62,5
Deinfluentization	96	38	61,29
Transactional psychological contract	87	35	56,45
Integration of objectives and cooperation in a team	71	33	53,22

Source: own study

tacts devoted for the time of talks with the team of teachers was considered.

In next place there is the phenomenon of *deinfluentization*, subjective disposition of a school teacher to transfer power to the person or team that has more competences in relation to managed issues. Teachers participating in the study almost unanimously stressed that in the school in which they are employed such practices have existed and that they fully accept them and believe that this reflects the maturity of the headmaster, for whom the most important thing is to settle the problem using the most competent persons and not emphasize his or her position in the organizational structure and maintain the appearance of prestige.

In the penultimate place in the study teachers participating in the study mentioned *transactional psychological contract*, consisting of the mutual agreement of teachers' and headmasters' expectations. The headmaster leaves teachers freedom in structuring tasks, the execution of which is transferred, allowing the possibility of their implementation according to their own scenario. In addition, he or she accepts the fact of the dynamics of achieving mutual expectations, and attitudes towards implementation of common values, and assumes the existence of trust between the parties and mutual conviction about positive motivation. Members of the contract have the common good of the school community in mind all the time.

The element of the system which was associated with *integration of commonly shared goals and undertaking creative* collaboration in a teachers' team was placed by teachers in last place. It must be remembered that in a teacher's work it is not important how he or she implements his or her role as a leader but to what extent he or she can initiate cooperation in the team. In this way the team may create a process of sharing knowledge and new values may be developed as a result of the commitment of each teacher, and his or her individual competences.

Summary

The presented hierarchy of preferences is consistent with tendencies in leadership in education described in the literature (e.g. Dorczak, 2013; Mazurkiewicz, 2011, 2014). There is absolutely no place in it for the headmaster administrator, which does not mean that he or she should ignore all the procedural requirements; of course they require knowledge of the Teacher's Charter, Labour Code, tracking any changes that appear on the websites of the Ministry and the Board of Trustees; but his or her most important role is to initiate cooperation, build a team of teachers which is most fully involved and creates the process of teaching and education in line with the school list of values.

According to the author of this article, further items of the phenomenon of deinfluentization and transactional psychological contract may result from their incomplete diagnosis and treatment of the latter as new concepts, which, however, refer

to the previously known phenomena. The lowest valued integration of objectives and attitudes to creative cooperation with the team of teachers in a particular school may stem from having a relatively large group of teachers, people with seniority above 20, 25 years, not a very positive experience within the scope of teamwork. As the teachers themselves have admitted, or at least a significant proportion (approx. 35%), prior to studies, cooperation in a team for them was an idea with not very positive connotations and some teachers simply stated that as teachers they have little positive experience within the scope of cooperation in a teachers' team.

This condition does not mean, however, that the integration of objectives and focus on creative work as part of a discrete management is not important.

In summary, statements of teachers both in written form and formulated during the discussions confirmed the validity of highlighting components of discrete management as a proposal for managing teachers' teams by the headmaster but the concept itself still requires, according to the author, theoretical elaboration.

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