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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**An investigation of female leaders' perceptions of themselves
and their roles as leaders in a Catholic School**

Submitted by

Vejanda Kauaria

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ABSTRACT

The question of gender in leadership continues to be a contentious and poorly understood phenomenon. There seems general agreement that women do lead differently from men, and this study begins from that premise, focusing on a case in which leadership has traditionally been the domain of females. The case was chosen for its uniqueness, the assumption being that in these circumstances leadership may have developed particular characteristics. Following a qualitative approach (drawing on phenomenology), the study seeks to investigate how women leaders experience their roles as leaders. In-depth interviews made it possible for me to capture the perceptions and experiences of the three women leaders I interviewed.

The study reveals that women are more inclined to use interactive styles of leadership. Women use leadership that is more participative, negotiative, cooperative, shared and collaborative. These characteristics are in line with the features of transformational leadership which differs from the more traditional transactional leadership that is more controlled and directive.

The study has also shown that leadership develops from within the person of the leader as the leader is the one who spearheads the organization through vision, ideas, beliefs and assumptions.

The findings of this study suggest thus that unless women are given chances to prove how they can lead, this new approach of leadership within them and that is required by modern organizations would be lost and leadership would remain relatively unchanged and undesirable. In the context of Namibia, this study should be of potential significance because of the rapid change that is taking place in the inclusion of women in leadership and management positions in education.

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CHAPTER ONE

An overview

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to gain a clearer understanding of female leadership in education. For many years, researchers wanting to explore gender differences in leadership were hampered by the fact that so few women occupied leadership positions. Slowly the situation has changed and increasingly women are beginning to fill leadership positions in many spheres. It is true, though, that there still considerable ignorance of and even doubt about women's leadership skills (Bass as cited in Carless 1998: 1).

In Namibia, as far as I could establish, very little research has been done on female leaders in education. This study is an attempt to make a contribution in this area. In investigating the leadership experience of a small sample of women leaders in a Catholic school setting, I hope to illuminate their perceptions and experience of leadership within their contexts.

1.2 Context of the research

Historically men have dominated management and leadership positions in education. A recent study by Enomoto (2000) revealed that little has changed in this regard over the past few decades. The study reveals that, despite their large numbers in teaching and in school leadership preparations programmes, women remain under-represented at higher levels of administration (Enomoto 2000: 375). Her study confirms earlier findings of Kearney and Ronning (1996: 15) which indicated that men with similar qualifications and experiences generally meet with greater career success and participate more fully in the

management process than their female counterparts.

The picture is no different in Namibia. According to the First Country Report, although the biggest number of employees of the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation (MHETEC), are women, the management positions are occupied by men. The Report further claims that men constitute 69, 4% (Namibia 1995:87) of top management positions in education. Presently, both the Ministers and two deputy ministers of these two ministries are men, while only five out of fourteen directors are women. There are no females in the University of Namibia's top executive, and the rectors at the Teacher Training Colleges are all men. Notwithstanding the under-representation of women on a management level, women constitute the majority of teachers in Namibia at 60, 6% (Namibia 1995:87).

The reasons for this phenomenon have by now been fully explored and analyzed, and this study will not seek to explore these further. The historical roots of patriarchy have been comprehensively traced (see, for example, Greyvenstein 2000) where women were denied leadership roles. Investigations conducted within critical feminist orientations, (such as Enomoto 2000) have helped to expose the subtler dimensions of gender discrimination. So, it is now evident that management and leadership are male-gendered constructs, because early management and leadership theories were developed in male working environments, by men and for men. Similarly, research over the previous century has largely been male dominated thereby perpetuating the myth that management and leadership are essentially male phenomena (Enomoto 2000, Tanton 1994).

1.3 Motivation for the research

My study will be guided by the view that women do lead differently from men.

The argument may be traced back to the late 1980s. This argument or view is supported by Coleman as cited in Bush (1995: 66) who argued that women leaders in education tend

to be more democratic than men, and they demonstrate qualities of warmth, empathy and co-operation. Al –Khalifa as cited in Bush (1995: 189) further claimed that women leaders adopt different management styles from men with a much greater emphasis on collaboration, negotiation, shared problem-solving, co-operation and other “feminine” behaviors. Smit and Cronje (1997: 296) also noted that women leaders use interactive leadership, which according to them, is concerned with consensus building, is open, inclusive and more caring, and that it encourages participation by others.

Rosener (1990: 121) introduced the notion that women are more likely to engage in transformational leadership than men. The concept of transformational leadership was first clarified by Burns in 1978. He distinguished between transactional leadership (in which there is a “contract” of a material nature and a consequent emphasis on task), and transformational leadership, in which the contract is less material and the focus more on person (Burns 1978:1). In Rosener’s study, based on an IWF survey of male and female leaders, she found that women are more likely than men to use leadership where the leader seeks to satisfy higher needs of followers and engage all aspects of followers. Rosener (1990: 121) said that there is tendency to associate transactional leadership with men and the transformational leadership with women.

I am also guided by the thinking of Thomas Greenfield who proposed a radically different view of organizations, management and leadership in the mid-1970s (Cahill 1994: 253 - 259). Greenfield broke with the prevailing structural–efficiency model of management, and emphasized the importance of the human will and imagination in organizational life. He was concerned with the unique meanings which people bring to and make of organizational life (Cahill 1994: 253 – 259). The extent to which Catholic schools have been influenced by Greenfield ‘s theories has been explored by Cahill (1994) and her work may also prove to be helpful to me in making sense of the phenomenon of female leadership in a Catholic school.

How do women cope in what has traditionally been a man’s world? How do they

negotiate the challenges of leadership and management? These are questions I bring to the research, partly from my own experience as a female leader, and partly from what I have been exposed to in my readings and studies. I became alerted to the fact that though women were increasingly being placed in leadership positions, little is known about how they lead, and more importantly how they perceive the act of leadership.

1.4 The nature of the research

A case study was found to be both a fitting and appropriate option because it is well suited to opinion seeking and the relation of experiences. Furthermore, I wish to focus on a particular school, conducting an in-depth analysis of a single setting, a feature of the case study method. Pons (1992: 61) described case studies as focusing on inquiry around an instance. It is concerned principally with the interaction of factors and events and sometimes it is only by taking a practical instance that we can obtain a full picture of this interaction. Johnson (1994: 22) noted that a case study is an inquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence. It investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. I do not draw on “multiple” sources, but since my interviews interrogate three different leaders within the school context, there is I believe the potential for enriched understanding of the case as whole.

I am working within the interpretive paradigm since I want only to illuminate and gain an understanding of how these female leaders experience leadership. As an interpretive researcher, I aim to make sense of the reality of my research participants - their meanings, hopes and aspirations, which I view as constructs of the human mind and human action. The reality to be studied consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world. Bassey (1995: 13) noted that interpretive research views the descriptions of human actions as based on social meanings, and that people living and working together interpret these meanings which are capable of change through social intercourse. Thus, participants’ meanings, hopes and aspirations are very important to the interpretive

researcher and her chief function of to understand these by interpreting the meaning of what participants say of their reality (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999: 4).

1.5 The research site and sample

I have selected a research site where the female leadership phenomenon may be investigated at various levels. Catholic schools (or convents) break with the norm of male dominance, and have traditionally been run by female principals. In fact, leadership of the school at all levels (management, staff and learners) at this school has traditionally been the domain of women. Perhaps, in these circumstances, leadership as a female phenomenon will have gained characteristics that make it distinct and therefore potentially interesting for closer investigation.

Three leaders at different levels in the school management were selected as the sample: the principal, the deputy principal and the head girl. Although the participants selected themselves, the aim was to get the experiences of leadership at different levels. I hoped this may reveal an institutional interpretation of leadership, in which individual understandings might be incorporated. Interviews with open-ended, in depth questions were used as data-gathering tools, since these are effective in seeking opinion, perceptions and experiences. Open-ended interviews have also been viewed as being the principal means of gathering information in case studies, as they allows the researcher to go more deeply into certain issues because it also gives freedom to ask more questions (Euvrard 2000: 1). Thus, they enable one to have more in-depth coverage of the subject. Dockrell and Hamilton (1980: 47) also noted that interviewing is probably the most productive fact-finding activity for an analyst. Not only do interviews provide the facts, but they also enable the analyst to verify facts and they provide an opportunity to meet and overcome user resistance.

1.6 Goals of the research

My interest is in developing a broader understanding of female leadership. As such, I shall focus on discovering how the participants' descriptions and narratives are shaped by experience and by their interaction with others (Bassey 1995:13). What I wish to explore then, is the phenomenon of female leadership as it is lived for each of the participants I strive to depict, and as it may reveal itself in the institution as a whole.

1.7 Outline of the study

The thesis takes the following format:

The first chapter sheds light on the reasons for the study and the potential value of the research. It outlines the research approach, sample, data-gathering procedures and goals of the study.

Chapter two presents an outline of some of the literature which has informed this study and other research studies. It locates the theories and other factors that have hindered women's advancement in leadership positions in education. It also looks at the way women lead in education, by trying to focus on the argument that women lead differently from men.

Chapter three is on research methodology. Here I address the paradigm I work in, its principles, methodology and research design. The chapter also delineates the data collection methods and processes I use and motivates why I selected them. Ethical issues as well as the procedures guiding the data collection are also discussed here. My research participants will also be introduced here. The chapter concludes by describing the data analysis techniques employed.

Chapter four is the presentation of the raw data as it is without much comment.

Chapter five is the discussion of findings that links with the research goal, questions and the literature. The discussion here highlights pertinent issues to leadership from the point of view of the three leaders. Issues that emerge are linked to literature and other research done elsewhere.

Finally, chapter six provides a summary of the main findings, recommendations and comments based on the findings. A critical reflection on the study and the potential value of the study are also given in this chapter. The list of references follows.

CHAPTER TWO

The Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a selective account of literature I found to be relevant to this study. It represents current and recent thinking in the field of female leadership.

2.2 Female leadership in education

2.2.1 Background

Men have historically dominated management and leadership positions across the spectrum of our institutions, whether in government, education, business, the armed forces, or the church. Male dominance in management and leadership positions can be traced back from to Biblical times; according to Greyvenstein (1996) religious thoughts have contributed towards the traditional stereotyping of gender roles and sex role socialization.

2.2.1.1 Religious theories

Religious thoughts and beliefs have contributed to preventing women from advancing in management and leadership positions and so have affected the relative position of women in education and society. Those who support patriarchal attitudes argue from the Biblical point of view, using the interpretations of the Old Testament, that women were indeed inferior and needed to be subjected to the wills of men (Greyvenstein 1996: 76). They argued that she had been taken from the man's rib, so she was subjected to him although the Bible (Good News Bible Gen. 2: 18) reveals that God, at the creation made a woman as a suitable companion to man and as a partner to help him.

They further argue that the subjection of women is decreed by God who told Eve that she would be subjected to Adam's will (Good News Bible Gen. 3: 160). This simplistic interpretation entirely ignores the historical context, and, as Van der Walt cited in Greyvenstein (1996: 76-77) has noted, does not query whether what God said was simply a descriptive statement of women's position after the fall or whether it was a prescriptive command. He also warns against converting a fact into a norm and argued that God meted out a specific punishment but did not sanction it. Shiman (1992: 11) also noted that the Old Testament did not relegate all women to a silent and passive role. She mentions heroic women, who at various times played a critical role in the survival of the Hebrews, such as Merriam who rescued Moses and Deborah, who was a prophetess and a judge.

The New Testament presents a different picture of women. Greyvenstein (1996: 77) argued that women were forgiven by the redemption of mankind in the New Testament. Jewell cited in Greyvenstein (1996: 77), argued that the subjugation of women is finally reversed by the teaching of Jesus Christ because He speaks of the restoration of the order of creation. Christ never rejected women and his preaching was for everyone, women also. Nor did He teach of institutions with hierarchies that reserved all positions of authority, power and importance for men (Greyvenstein 1996:77).

Thus the Bible is seen to record an equitable relation between men and women which was disturbed by the fall but rectified by the redemption of Man through Christ (Greyvenstein 1996: 79). Charles (1987: 58) also stated that Christ never preached that women were subordinate or inferior to men.

To summarize, the teaching of Jesus Christ did not and could not discriminate by gender. However, it seems everyone interprets the Bible in her/his own way to reinforce individually held values and also to satisfy herself/himself.

2.2.1.2 Cultural and sexual differences

Our worlds are gendered through culturally determined patterns of behaviour such as rights, duties, obligations and status assigned to women and men in society. Language, societal expectations, and so on, all will play their part in what we are. They affect the work that we choose to do or is open to us and they will also affect the values and commitments we bring to our work. Greyvenstein (2000: 31) is of the opinion that the superordinate factor that underscores all the barriers is the traditional patriarchal stereotyped view of gender roles and attributes held by both men and women. According to Sanders, Koch and Urso (1997: 2), culture through environments and ways of doing things reflects its male history and therefore has been traditionally masculine. Sexuality, seen by Greyvenstein (1996: 78) as a woman's most valuable asset, is also both the cause of women's downfall and a source of danger to men. Greyvenstein (1996: 78) further said that men are valued for other attributes that include their power, strength and authority and their domination over this sexual power of women. The Marxist feminists also located women's oppression in sexism and challenged the attempts to isolate gender from social class. Meena (1992: 83) and Klein (1992: 19) also connected women oppression with gender and sexuality.

Apart from contributing to women's discrimination/oppression and disadvantages, sexism and gender have also contributed to women being seen as mothers. That was the view expressed by Coats (1994: 19) when he noted that:

We live in a gendered society, where not only women's experiences are different to those of men but those differences lead to discrimination and disadvantages. The central task of patriarchy was the transformation of women from sexual beings to women as mothers. Females were seen as mothers and males as sexual beings.

Enomoto (2000: 348) followed Coats (1994: 19) in thinking that cultural and sexual differences see a woman as a mother who has to bear and look after children as a "fertile

mother". Therefore, these gender-biased beliefs see a woman as having the skills necessary for managing the home, caring for the children and feeding the family with what the man has provided. In line with these expectations, careers suitable for women have traditionally been nursing, teaching and social work, where they would be able to show their love and ability to care for others. In those fields women were seen as being uniquely gifted. Greyvenstein (2000: 32) stated that these cultural beliefs cause women to behave within the norms of typical female traits. These norms do not accommodate women in management roles, which are perceived to be male roles, associated with typical male behavioral traits. Shiman (1992: 88) observed that:

Women, even successful ones, accepted the notion that they were inferior to men and that they were physically and psychologically unfit to function independently in public. They condemned any female who tried to rebel and came to believe that a woman doing so, was an unnatural woman. Some of the Anti-feminists saw their position threatened by any attempt to change the role of woman.

In other words, men and women tend to stereotype their own behaviour according to cultural views of gender-appropriate behavior and that also determines the position in society. Thus, the socialised stereotyping of traditional gender roles compels women (in management and leadership positions) to try to cope with the traditional role of being a *wife* and *mother*, and the *career* role for her to succeed in all those roles. Eagly & Johnson, cited in Carless 1998: 4) suggest that gender differences vary according to the extent of gender congeniality, the fit between gender roles and particular leadership roles. They make an example of the military where leadership positions are defined in more masculine terms thereby being congenial to men, whereas nursing, teaching and so on are defined in more feminine ways and are thus congenial to women. In other words the organizational setting plays a very important role.

The question is whether women should be excluded from top positions or from managing and leading because of those cultural patterns and beliefs. Wisker (1996: 140) argued that

there should not be excuses for excluding women from other jobs, as they would balance their various roles, such as academic life and domestic responsibilities. They would contend with role conflict-wife/mother and the career. Acker (1989: 37), in the literature on the sexual division of labour in school, suggests that women's lack of influence beyond the classroom was due to their lack of ambition, confidence and also to those many responsibilities at home. I find this to be an impoverished and stereotyped view. It overlooks the powerful cultural forces at play in the construction of women at work and home.

Thus gender distribution and gender-typing in education have been considered factors that constrain women's participation in education management and leadership.

2.2.1.3 Attributes attached to men and women – an overview of the theory

Attaching certain attributes to men and women has also hampered women's advancement in management and leadership positions in education. Greyvenstein (1996: 78) stated that women are commonly regarded as weak, passive, emotional, dependent, fearful and unsure of themselves while men are regarded as aggressive, impersonal, forceful, fearless, independent, self-assured and rational. This is a consequence of trait thinking (the Great Man theory), which dominated leadership research in the early decades of the 20th century. The theory postulates that only traits determine leadership capabilities and that leaders possess qualities and abilities that differentiate them from followers or people in general (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 376). By the 1940s, however, researchers and thinkers started to shift away from the trait theory. The publication of a literature review by Stogdill (1948 as cited in Hoy and Miskel 1996: 377) put the trait thinking/theory to rest. He asserted that a person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits because the impact of traits varies widely from situation to situation. A listing of personal traits, the categorization of individuals according to him, ignores the complexity and uniqueness of the leader. Kimbrough and Burkett (1990: 108) also argued that the possession of a trait or a unique set of traits does not explain the nature of

leadership because the traits exhibited by a leader in one situation may not result in leadership status in another situation. Furthermore Kouzes and Posner (as cited in Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard 1996:108) said that leadership is everyone's business. It is not a gene; it is not something mystical and ethereal that cannot be understood by other people. Their research had shown that leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices. In over fifteen years of research they have been fortunate to hear and read the stories of over 2 500 ordinary people who have led others to get extraordinary things done. They further warned that when leadership is viewed as a non-learnable set of character traits or personality traits, then self-fulfilling prophecy is created that dooms societies to having only a few good leaders. Blackmore in Ngcobo (1996: 10) argued that people who continue to think in terms of the "Great Man theory" do that to justify the exclusion of women from leadership positions on the basis that most women do not possess leadership qualities such as forcefulness, competitiveness, aggressiveness, independence and rationality, the very qualities that have come to be associated with leadership practice.

Following Stogdill's virtual dismissal of trait thinking, leadership research focused on the complexity of the situation, thereby giving rise to situational theories such as the well-known Hersey & Blanchard model of situational leadership, Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, and Fiedler's Contingency model (Hoy and Miskel 1996). Models such as Hersey & Blanchard's suggest that effective leaders are able to vary their styles according to the situation, chiefly determined by the maturity level of followers. Fiedler's contingency theory was an attempt to blend personal characteristics and context. Behaviourist theories such as these dominated leadership research throughout the 60s and 70s, and seemed pre-occupied with the central tension between what is variously described as person and task orientation, or concern for human relations and organisational structure. In studies undertaken at the University of Michigan Research Center and at the Ohio University the tension is described as *employee-oriented* and *production-oriented* (Robbins and de Cenzo, 1998: 395). *Production-oriented* is also referred to as *task-oriented* by Stoner (1982: 473) and Smit and Cronje (1992: 342).

Employee-oriented leadership emphasises human relations; employees are encouraged and motivated rather than controlled. With task-orientation employees are controlled, and task aspects of the job are emphasized (Stoner 1982: 473). The Michigan researchers (Robbins and De Cenzo 1998: 395) concluded that employee-oriented behaviour was the one favoured because these leaders were associated with higher group productivity and higher job satisfaction. The production-oriented leaders were associated with lower group productivity and lower worker satisfaction. On the basis of these two extreme leadership behaviour models, Blake and Mouton (in Stoner 1982:474) devised the *Managerial Grid* based on the styles for *concern for people* and *concern for production* ranked in a scale of 1-9. Obviously the ideal style would be 9.9, scoring highly on both task and person orientation.

Interesting as these theories may be, they do little to advance one's understanding of leadership as a human, lived phenomenon. Naturally, in an attempt to understand female understandings and leadership practices, it would be essential for me to engage with what women leaders think, believe, and do. In this sense these theories present over-simplified summaries of what is essentially a highly complex phenomenon. Not do they explicitly address female leadership. Indeed, the literature of this period is entirely silent on female leadership, and is it obvious that the researchers and writers assumed they were talking about men, to men.

It was not until the publication of Burns' book, *Leadership*, in 1978, that leadership was thought of along dramatically different lines. As mentioned earlier, Burns drew a distinction between transactional leadership (which would describe the models and theories discussed so far) and transformational leadership, which is about more than simply getting the job done.

Transformational leadership is essentially non-positional. It is an extreme subjectivist view of leadership, which states that leadership is a product of personal qualities and skills and not simply an automatic outcome of official authority (Bush 1995: 105).

Subjective theorists prefer to stress the personal qualities of individuals rather than their official positions in the organization. As Greenfield (cited in Cahill 1994: 258) put it, what is important is not the **characteristics** of the leader but the **character**; according to him character development encompasses the whole person. Thus, according to Kouzes and Posner as cited in Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard (1996: 108) “any person can be a leader as long as you bring forth the best from yourselves and others and ... are capable of developing yourself as a leader.” In other words, leadership emerges in the social system and may well be contingent upon many factors; there is not a universal set of factors that will explain the emergence of leadership in all situations. Kimbrough and Burkett (1990: 108) believed that the emergence to leadership status is the result of the interaction of multiple variables, some of which are contingent upon the situation. In essence, the notion of transformational leadership has made it possible to redefine leadership, or to think of it along different lines. In emphasizing the context and personal qualities of leaders (rather than a checklist of characteristics), researchers are able to focus on what leaders do and think in order to understand their roles.

It is thus immediately apparent that it is not useful to attach certain characteristics to one or the other gender, because by doing that one suggests that a complete range of behaviours is not available either to women or men. Meena (1992: 43) refers to this way of thinking as “essentializing and naturalizing”. It leads to the kind of stereotypical thinking that classifies women as nurturing and cooperative, and men are essentially competitive and instrumental. Such concepts become totalizing; they generalise from one trait or aspects of a person to the whole and ignore possibilities of differences and change. John Adair (cited in Eggins 1997: 23) also argued that there was no point in labeling certain attributes - such as compassion, warmth, gentleness and humility - as being feminine and other qualities as being masculine, for these qualities are to be found in both sexes in different measures or combinations. He further said that both sexes could express some qualities (even those not ‘assigned’ to them) if the context called for such behaviour. Pringle (in Tanton 1994: 124) went so far as to suggest that the so-called ‘feminine’ characteristics might even be regarded as a covert form of power seeking, an

attempt at control or manipulation taking the form of an organizational mother role.

Nevertheless, the belief that men and women do possess distinctly different leadership traits has been a powerful one. When research evidence revealed only minor differences between the behaviour of male and female leaders, this has often been ascribed to the belief that the female leaders had successfully adopted masculine behaviour (Eggins 1997: 24). Those women leaders who were described by their colleagues as being cold were regarded as contradicting stereotypes of nurturing female behaviour (Marshall 1995: 312). Beardsley (in Enomoto 2000: 385) also reported that traits could be possessed by both sexes but are often appraised differently in males and females. In her findings, interviewees described aggressive males as “masculine, dominating, successful, heroic, capable, strong forceful and manly”, but aggressive females were thought to be “harsh, pushy, bitchy, domineering, uncaring and emasculating” (Enomoto 2000:385). In this way commonplace discourse reveals the pervasiveness of the stereotypical thinking that classifies male and female leaders as distinctly different.

The extreme masculinity of the leadership construct has, thus, worked heavily against understanding female leaders in their own right. The next section discusses how men and the male ‘model’ have dominated management and leadership theories and research.

2.3 Male dominance in management and leadership

2.3.1 Male dominance in education

As already discussed in chapter one, women remain under-represented at the management level. Studies by Kearney and Ronning (1996: 15) revealed that even in the field of education where they make up the majority of the work force, women are less often to be found as heads of departments, universities and research institutions.

The above statements reflect the position of women in management and leadership in education very well. Generally, the perception in the education cadre is that the teaching

profession is a world of women. Women are there to teach the learners and men are there to run or manage the schools. The term *teacher* is associated with a woman and the term *principal* with a man (Greyvenstein 2000: 30).

Wisker (1996: 1) also noted that women are under-represented in higher and middle management positions in education, even in the current post-feminist climate when many people claim that there is no need to assert that equality must continue to be striven for. Acker (1994:74-75) further argued that while nearly all teachers and head teachers of nursery and primary schools were female, women became increasingly scarce as one moved up the age range. Thus, in secondary and higher institutions of learning such as universities, colleges, and technikons, very few management positions are occupied by women.

Since men have traditionally dominated leadership positions in all spheres, it follows that research has been male-gendered (Enomoto 2000: 377). In this way, organization research and theory became male-biased oriented to male ways of knowing (Calas and Smircich, as cited in Hoy and Miskel, 1996: 20). Acker (1989: 36) further noted that the early work on teachers' careers either ignored gender differences or explained them in terms of women's deficiencies. Thus it is possible to see how the field of management itself could be seen as male gendered and imbued with the "culture of masculinism" (Acker 1989: 36). The next section explores this notion further.

2.3.2 Management as male gendered

The concept of management being male gendered is well described by Eggins (1997: 13) when he stated that:

The language of leadership has masculine connotations, images of leaders are often male heroes (great men theories) and popular contexts for leadership encompass traditionally masculine scenarios (Church, King, State and the Army).

Because management and leadership have for long been predominantly male enclaves, the picture of the ideal manager is grounded in masculine attributes.

Many authors went further to support the idea that management was male gendered. Schein as cited in Tanton (1994: 66), drew attention to the natural tendency that to think manager was to think male. Kanter as cited in Enomoto (2000: 377) makes the point that men run organisations in ways that suit them, usually to exclude or sideline women. According to a study by Marshall (in Eggins 1997: 56), women managers reported a feeling of isolation, loneliness and frequently perceive their work place as male-dominant, hostile and contradictory. They felt that organizations were male gendered and men were the ones to manage them. The gendering of society has meant that management has been largely a (white) male preserve to organize so that it reflects their concerns, their way of thinking and behaving and their life styles. While this has been the case in many parts of world (Enomoto (2000: 376-377)), the question of white male dominance in official leadership positions has been ascribed to political and economic developments over several centuries (Van der Mescht 1996: 9).

It is not surprising, then, that many reviewers of leadership literature tend to overlook or downplay the contribution of Mary Parker Follet (1868-1933) to early management thinking. Her work has made a significant contribution to modern management philosophy. In a series of papers dealing with the human side of administration, she challenged the bureaucratic emphasis established by Taylor and Fayol. According to Graham the Japanese have incorporated her teaching in their management culture (in Rosener 1990: 152). It is also obvious that much of what is currently referred to as “transformational” or “interactive” leadership has grown from the human relations view Follet argued for in the 1920s. Thus the challenge of what Shakeshaft (in Ncgobo 1996) refers to as an *androcentric* view of leadership is nothing new. That it is largely voiceless is perhaps an indictment of our social system as much our academic pursuits.

It is clearly unacceptable that beliefs, assumptions and values of leadership and

management in organizations are shaped through one gender lens only. Smith stated that the concerns, interests and perspectives of only one sex and one class are represented as general and a one sided standpoint comes to be seen as natural and obvious (in Enomoto 2000:378). It is therefore not surprising to find that women who become leaders trying to adopt masculine traits in an attempt to be accepted as managers/leaders and also to compete and survive. Wisker (1996: 90) pointed out that when women leaders tend to become shrill and assertive or more like the traditionally stereotypical male leaders than the men themselves. Research by Tanton (1994: 66) revealed similar results.

According to Grimwood and Popplestone (1993: 121, the video on women managers by Ora Fant made in 1980 entitled “A tale of ‘O’: On Being Different”, demonstrates the extra pressure that some women leaders are put under. Some women reported that they were being transformed or having to be transformed in order to survive and get used to the “macho style” for them to fit into the system . Women themselves could see that organizations were male gendered and that men were the ones to run them. That was illustrated by the study done by Marshall as cited in Eggins (1993: 65). As has been mentioned, women managers in reported feelings of loneliness and isolation and perceived their work place as male dominant and hostile. However, in contrast, the “New Age” feminists as cited in Sonnenfeld (1991) argued other way round. To them women who adopt masculine traits did that because they were over identifying with their fathers and thus “denying their true inner femininity” (Rosener 1991: 160). Ozga as cited in Eggins (1993: 82) also turns her attention away from strategies for change which encouraged women to adopt masculine behaviors and values - to be competitive, aggressive, to look like men. She saw women in educational management in a different mode as she suggested that the opportunity would have been missed if women’s increased presence in educational management made no difference to management practice, or if women were simply absorbed into management and become indistinguishable from men.

Clearly the above discussions, definitions, theories and studies for management action contributed to the assumption that men were the ones to lead and manage in education.

But during latter half of the century, the picture began to change. Many started to think in terms of including females in leadership and management positions also. Acker as cited in Lee and Loeb (1995: 262) also noted that research in schools indicated that increased participation in decision making for female teachers could result in increased job satisfaction and increased commitment to organizational goals. It was also assumed that female teachers were capable of participating in decision making not only on teaching, but also on the curriculum and on the whole organization of schools. Authors like Greenfield as cited in Cahill (1994: 253-259) as argued in the previous chapter, had influenced the Catholic Church and its educational institutions. From about 1965 the Catholic school systems responded to the changing environment and started including his theories in their education system, such as welcoming the contribution of each individual.

Feminist movements begun in the 1960s and started gaining greater access to previously male-dominated arenas and women have thus increasingly assumed leadership positions. Feminists started to liberate women not only from the external oppression heaped upon them in their prescribed roles as mothers and helpers but also from the self-censoring voice within that so often limited women's perceptions of themselves (Stan 1995: 103). Notable early feminists (Enomoto, 2000:375) include Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Beecher, Ella Flagg Young and Mary Parker Follet. As women started getting into the men's arena, how did they lead then? The next section is an attempt to provide a meaningful overview or to throw light on how females lead in education.

2.4 Ways women lead in education

The argument has been and is whether women lead differently from men. Many authors came out strongly to support that women do lead differently from men. Rosemary Dinnage and others as cited in Popplestone and Grimwood (1993: 121) revealed that differences in management or leadership style between women and men have been shown to exist by research in both the private and public sector. They further argued that for

women to manage in a male way is to have to become something that they are not - like men. But to manage in a different way - like a woman - is to bring values, behaviour, commitments and ways of being that are grounded in how they are as women. Shiman's (1992: 211) views are in agreement with these, as he argues that being motherly is directly opposed to being patriarchal or fatherly. Does that imply that women *being feminine* would lead differently from men *being masculine*? Does that mean that by trying to manage or lead *mother-like* or *feminine*, women create the possibility of a different style and culture in the organization - that means leading differently from men?

Smit and Cronje (1997:286) began to provide some answers by stating that as women move into higher positions in organizations, they seem to bring a different leadership style – a style that is very effective in today's turbulent corporate environment.

According to Grimwood and Popplestone (1993: 118) a striking feature of many women's management style as Ruth Eley's research (1986) shows, is the emphasis that many women place on developing other staff through enabling, supervision, shared decision-making and so on. That to them, is very different from the male style of appropriation: going it alone, or telling others what to do rather than helping them develop their own solutions. Robbins and De Cenzo (1998:411) also noted that although leaders, regardless of gender, perform similar *activities* in influencing others, the differences lie in leadership *styles* as women tend to use a more democratic style as they encourage participation and share power with others whereas men tend to use a task- centered leadership style.

Smit and Cronje (1997: 286) showed that women tend to engage in leadership behaviour that can be called interactive. Rosener (1990: 120) defined interactive leadership in terms of encouraged participatory leadership, shared power and information and enhancement of other people's self-worth - all these are connected to transformational leadership.

The evidence supporting the idea that women lead differently from men is overwhelmingly impressive. As has been mentioned, the IWF survey of male and female leaders in Rosener (1990: 121) also found that women are more likely than men to use

transformational leadership, that is motivating others by transforming their self-interest into the goals of the organization. She further argued (in Tanton 1994: 68) that transformational leadership is deeply rooted in women's socialization experience and represents an adaptive response on behalf of women in positions consistent with the roles they played at home. This is similar, in some ways to the view of Tanton (1994: 69) that recently women have been identified as potentially better suited than men to run the institutions of today which require transformational leadership. .

A study done on women managers by Marshall (1995: 314) found that these women managers described their leadership style as open, collaborative, person-oriented, focused on empowerment, and based on consensus and equality. Studies done on several British women principals as reported in Eggins (1993: 80), also showed that they acknowledged their ability to get people to work as a team rather than throw one's weight around and lay down the law to get things done. One principal in that study believed that parenting, the experience of creating a home and a loving family team, develop one's leadership capabilities. She rejected the "old macho" management style of the past generation and stressed replacing it with creativity, communication, vision, symbolism and even love as characteristics of good modern management. The view of Johnson as cited in Tanton 1994: 69), is that women leadership is often associated with enhanced negotiating skills, a talent for consensus building and a more balanced world. Furthermore, Tanton (1994: 66) reported on a study done on women secretaries working for women supervisors. These secretaries, in describing their bosses, raised aspects such as interpersonal relationship, co-operation, support, communication, mutual respect, sensitivity, consideration and competence. Eagly (1987) as cited in Carless (1998: 3) noted that the feminine model of leadership includes typical transformational leadership behaviours, like participatory decision-making, collaboration, empowerment and quality interpersonal relationships between leader and subordinate. Even the meta-analysis of gender differences in leadership by Eagly (1987) and Johnson (1990) as cited in Carless (1998: 1) revealed that in the use of democracy in organizations, women use a more participative and inclusive style of leadership and men were more likely to use a directive, controlling style. The

IWF (Rosener 1990: 121) further found that women are much more likely than men to use power based on charisma, work record and contacts (personal power) as opposed to power based on organizational position, title and the ability to reward and punish (structural power). Personal power or individual power (Enomoto 2000) compares well with legitimate power (Covey 1992) and with referent power (Smit and Cronje 1996). With these powers, the followers follow the leader because of respect, they identify themselves with him/her; such a leader is said to have charisma.

Women leaders in the Adler study as cited in Enomoto (2000: 386) acknowledged their personal power more easily than their professional power. Almost all the women in the study stated that they did not have professional power, recognizing that power is relative. They felt happy with the power they had, consciously trying to use it in different, often feminist ways. Structural power on the other hand compares with utility power or professional power or reward power (power over others). With this power, followers follow because of exchange of goods and services (Covey 1992: 101). Structural power (utility power) fits well with the ideas of Sergiovanni (1992: 44) of “what gets rewarded gets done” and also Flipppo (1984: 397) when he said that people act in ways they find most personally and materially rewarding. Extrinsic reasons are more important than intrinsic and moral reasons. Transactional leaders use this type of power in their leadership.

It would not be wise to discuss women as being more transformational and charismatic leaders than men without looking more deeply into these two leadership approaches. They form the foundation for much leadership research, and will help towards our understanding of women leaders.

2.4.1 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978), as indicated in Chapter One, opened a new chapter in leadership research when he introduced the concepts of transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Compared to transformational leaders, Robbins and De Cenzo (1998: 407)

said that transactional leaders guide or motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements while the transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization. They also noted that transformational leaders are capable of having a profound and extra-ordinary effect on followers.

Kuhnert and Lewis as cited in Hoy and Miskel (1996: 393) added that transformational leaders unite followers and their goals and beliefs in ways that produce higher levels of performance than previously thought possible. Smit and Cronje (1997: 286) also said that transformational leaders are distinguished by their special ability to bring about innovation and change in the organization's mission, structure and human resource management. They emerge to take an organization through major strategic change. Similarly, Bass as cited in Colvin (1999: 6) posited that transformational leaders influence followers through both their charismatic personalities and the purposes for which they stand. But again, to him, leaders can be both transformational and transactional, depending on the circumstances, thus transformational leaders are also charismatic. To Bass, what counts are the followers' attitudes and their behaviour that was transformed (Starratt 1993: 10). Bass' views have been criticized for focusing too heavily on leader behaviour, thus weakening the strong emphasis Burns (1978) placed on the active role of followers (Colvin 1999: 7). Robbins (1998: 374) also identified some characteristics of transformational leadership. These include:

- gaining respect and trust,
- giving personal attention,
- coaching and advising,
- communicating high expectations and providing a vision.

Bennis and Nanus as cited in Colvin (1999: 7) conceptualize transformational leadership as a process which changes the organization by focusing action, converting followers to be leaders and leaders to be agents of change. Followers thus become leaders when they are committed to a cause and are self-managing. According to them, the transformational

leader communicates values and norms supporting an articulated vision, establishes trust by announcing and adhering to a position on issues, and models self-confidence through risk-taking. Transformational leadership has also been associated with leadership and transactional leadership with management. In organizations, the two concepts have been distinguished from each other.

Management is concerned with managing resources within organizations and leadership focuses on the development of the individual member and the importance of a transcendental purpose, the singleness of purpose, the dominance of an idea that inspires one to enthusiastically fit his or her contribution to the whole (Colvin 1999: 3).

However, sharing power and information, in transformational leadership creates trust, loyalty and respect but on the other hand, it allows for the possibility that people will reject, criticize, or challenge what the leader has to say; his/her her authority.

Employees can also be frustrated when leaders listen to but reject their ideas and leaders can be seen as naïve or needing to be liked (Rosener 2000: 123). Thus even inclusion is not always successful. There are those people who like to be told what to do, and wait for some ideas/opinions from others. Some followers regard a leader who consults as a weak leader who does not have answers her/himself. Graham in Rosener (2000: 153) argued that personal power of a person is inherent and cannot be shared. He talked about *power – with* but not *power – sharing*. By *power-with* he meant pooling individual powers, so that we get not only the addition of the separate personal powers of those in the group but also something extra - the extra value created through the interaction and thus increased individual and overall effectiveness. That was also the view of Enomoto (2000: 386) when she talked about power with others as the extent to which one might aid or influence others through activities such as mentoring, networking and developing relationships.

Therefore we need to be very careful when we talk about “democratic leadership”. As we know the context of leadership in Namibian schools, before independence, was extremely authoritarian, but since then a more facilitative style of leadership has emerged.

Education reforms are directed towards raising the quality of schools that require administrators or leaders who are collaborative dynamic and innovative. Therefore schools demand participation and interactive leadership that would provide teachers with aspirations and dreams. But unfortunately, this has sometimes become too laissez faire, giving space to many voices being heard, without adequate guidance. Thus, what is needed is an approach to leadership which recognizes the need for directives within a culture of negotiation and a commitment towards building autonomy (empowerment) for all participants – that is effective democracy in schools (Davidoff, Kaplan and Lazarus 1994:16). One should not ignore the extent to which leadership can be shared and the conditions facilitating successful shared leadership because shared leadership is not always needed in all situations.

In conclusion, transactional and transformational leaderships are not in opposition to each other; rather, transformational approaches built on transactional leadership because they produce levels of employee effort and performance that go beyond what would occur with a transactional approach alone. Yet both begin from the clear understanding that there is a job to be done.

2.4.2 Charismatic leadership

There seems to be some confusion regarding the two concepts: transformational and charismatic. Is there a difference between transformational and charismatic leadership? Can one be a charismatic leader but not a transformational leader or vice versa? Some people regard the two as one and the same thing, while others suggest that there are similarities, maybe small, between the two.

Authors like Smit and Cronje (1997: 296) noted that transformational leadership is similar to charismatic leadership, but transformational leaders are distinguished by their special ability to bring about change and innovation. Bass as cited in Starratt (1993: 9) also said that transformational leaders are charismatic leaders. Robbins and De Cenzo (1998: 407)

agree, but they went further and saw transformational leadership as being more than charisma when they stated that the purely charismatic leader may want followers to adopt the charismatic's world view and go no further. *The true transformational leader will attempt to instill in followers the ability to question established views.* Charismatic leaders, according to Smit and Cronje (1996: 296), have the capacity to motivate people to do more than what is normally expected of them; they motivate followers to transcend their expected performance and are in this way successful in influencing follower commitment.

Bolman and Deal (1994: 86) also said that charismatic leaders are willing to take personal risks and make sacrifices, and they have high levels of commitments. According to House and Howell as cited in Hoy and Miskel (1996: 393) charismatic leaders are capable of making a profound and extra ordinary impact on followers by the force of their personal abilities. Compared with non-charismatic leaders, Conger and Kanungo as cited in Robbins and De Cenzo (1998: 406) identified key characteristics of charismatic leaders:

Self-confidence, vision, ability to articulate the vision, strong convictions about the vision, behavior that is out of the ordinary, appearance as a change agent to environmental sensitivity.

Max Weber as cited in Van der Mescht (1996: 17) defined charisma as a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities. They appear somewhat mysterious and larger than life, a person who can be trusted to succeed where most people would fail (Yukl 1981: 24). Bush (1995: 81) added that charismatic leaders exercise personal power because of their perceived wisdom or insight. They use influence rather than authority. Once they can no longer influence followers there might be a problem, because the overwhelming self-confidence of a charismatic leader often becomes a problem in that they are unable to listen to others, and become uncomfortable when challenged by assertive employees. They seem to be needed when there is a crisis or when there are some changes to bring in as such conditions involves

ideological components

The concept of transformational and charismatic leadership emphasizes the leader as a person and explanations of these two leadership styles were based solely on traits. Even in the definition of Max Weber on charisma, he returned to the “*great man*” model (exceptional qualities). There was little concern for the other aspects of leadership as though the traits in leaders would carry all organizations to the path of success. And yet, for a transformational/charismatic or a transactional leader to be effective, there are other factors that play a role, not only few traits. Clearly the situation (including the maturity level of followers) needs to be favourable. Thus it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which researchers have explored the complexity of the context in which leadership occurs.

2.5 Debating the difference: Can we talk about female leadership style and exclude men from those leadership styles perceived to be female?

Criticisms of the exclusion of men from those leadership styles perceived to be female, came from Rosener as cited in Tanton (1994: 69) when she warned against linking transformational leadership to being exclusively female and encouraged organizations to expand their definitions of effective leadership. Although Rosener (1990) argued that women differ from men in that they encourage participation, share power and information or that they lead with an interactive leadership style, in my opinion, these qualities might also be found in men. Smit and Cronje (1996: 288) mention, for example, that a transformational leadership style as well as charismatic leadership style would apply to someone like Nelson Mandela, he inspired a shared vision, enable others to act, modeled the way and encouraged others. Siegel (in Rosener 1991: 153) also warned about attaching male and female labels to the two leadership styles- transformational and transactional styles. For him the time has come when we accept a people-oriented, fair and cooperative way of dealing with staff members and organizations.

To Mansbridge (in Rosener 1991: 153) gender differences are fascinating but they do not explain much of the variance between one manager and another. Davies and Rosser (in Tanton 1994: 125) also said that claims to humanize organizations monopolize all loving behaviour and human values on the female side which could steer women managers into communion and caring arenas in the organization, for example staff development rather than policy making functions of management. They further said that women are expected to somehow humanize the organization by doing the emotional work to sustain relationships with a caring approach that is assumed by some women as well as men to be female attributes, rather than a learned skill. Marshall (1995: 15) also argued that organizations might automatically resist any style perceived as "*feminine*". It runs the risk, however of recreating old stereotypes of women as caring and relational, and as fitted to jobs in new female ghettos. Bradford (in Rosener 1991: 155) also argued that even if more women than men lead with an interactive leadership style, by linking these with gender, we fail to understand why some managers can make the transition to leading differently and others not. Thus, there is no point in assigning certain leadership attributes only to one sex/gender as these could be found in both men and women. Women ought to be in management because they are intelligent, practical, efficient and capable of compassion, as are other human beings but not because they are women (Rosener 1991: 149).

Further criticism came from Kanter as cited in Carless (1998: 4) who argued that the major issue in organizations is for managers meeting the organizations' expectations regarding effective management performance, but not conforming to culturally defined gender roles. Thus, he said, when female and male managers occupy the same role within an organization and have equivalent access to status and power there is no reason to expect gender differences in leadership styles. In his research on lawyers and in his own experience working as a staff member in a large women's voluntary organization, he had seen many women demonstrate authoritarian, combative, and punitive behaviour as well as the warm and interactive capacities that they are known for (Rosener 1991: 149).

This illustrates that leaders perform similar activities in influencing others regardless of gender because when a woman leads in a job that requires a task-centered style, she tends

to lead in a manner that is more task-centered; think for example of a police-woman.

Other authors cited in Tanton (1994: 69) like Mumby and Putman also stated that poststructuralist feminist theorists contend that as long as organizations' practices construct the identities of men and women very differently, women will be cast as marginalized actors who participate in only certain dimensions of organizational life. The notion of a female management style has been proposed as a by-product of male organizational culture. This concept is underpinned by the notions of women and men's essential differences. This has influenced not only analysis but also much training targeted at women managers. The notion of a woman's management according to Pringle (1989) in Tanton (1994: 124) implies universality, and is therefore itself exclusionary: what of the woman who operates primarily as an agent of change, or with ambition, or who covertly and overtly seeks power and control? Is this to be defined as adopting a male style and exclude from a notion of superior female identity? Is it to be assumed that she lacks an authentic female self?

I think we are in an era of moving away from the traditional style of leading and bringing in new thinking which emphasises mutual influence, true participation, joint decision-making, shared vision and responsibilities. Perhaps the command-and-control leadership style according to Schwartz as cited in Rosener (1991:153), was suitable to a manufacturing economy but the information-service-economy needs interactive leadership. He warned that we should not view them as gender related but rather as appropriate for both men and women and needed in modern organizations that require greater utilization of the talents/views/ideas of people at all level of organizations.

The fact that the traditional leadership style has become outdated has necessitated new approaches, so leaders are forced to use those new approaches of shared power, open communications and building of better relations with employees. Those are regarded as the most appropriate way to run organization, and have become closely associated with organization effectiveness and improvement. Thus, modern organizations require participative styles of leadership and thus any manager who thinks positive will start to

enhance the style that works well in his/her organization.

Women, being human beings, naturally have desirable leadership attributes; the fact that there is a phenomenon labeled “feminine leadership” is the result of how boys and girls are socialized. To most people it makes sense that women tend to use a more democratic, sensitive leadership style, thus leading differently from men. Since this seems to be the preferred style of leadership in today’s organisations, there is clearly an important role for women to play.

2.6 Conclusion

It may seem contradictory at this stage to claim that this study is based on the assumption that women do lead differently from men, while at the same time arguing against the stereotyping of ‘male’ and ‘female’ leadership styles. What I have tried to show is that the practice and theory of leadership has been dominated by male interests and aspirations, and that the realization that so-called ‘softer’ qualities women bring to leadership are today very much in demand. My contention is that female leadership needs to be studied in its own right, not as a deviant example of the male-gendered construct of leadership.

Karl Weick (as cited in Rosener 1991: 151) noted that if you want to understand a phenomenon, you should look for where you can confirm that phenomenon, hence my selection of a Catholic school where leadership has historically been female at every level. This study is tries to understand how females lead in education in Namibia, and to illuminate their experiences as leaders. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I am also guided by Greenfield (in Bush 1986: 89) who asserted that it is the individual who lives and acts, not the organization and it is therefore the experiences of individuals that we must seek to understand. The research approach that suits this line of enquiry is the interpretive and in the next chapter I describe this paradigm, its importance to my study and the methods I use in my study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the interpretive research paradigm, by touching on the features that have directed this study. In the first section I give definitions of the interpretive approach. In the second section I explain the purpose of the interpretive research paradigm and also why I have chosen to conduct this research in the interpretive research paradigm. I touch on some of critique of the approach and some key concepts in it in relation to how I approach them in my study. I then discuss the plan of action and procedures used during the research. Finally, I look at the data and how I present it.

3.2 The interpretive approach

According to Bassey (1995) interpretation is a research process that allows one to obtain a deep understanding of particular events and theoretical insights. This paradigm is also called the constructivist, symbolic or hermeneutic paradigm and it finds its philosophical foundation in the work of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. Proponents of this paradigm believe that:

People interact with each other through meaningful symbols. For the interpretivists, the human reality is not out there awaiting scientific study but it is socially and symbolic constructed, always emerging and relative to other facts of social life (Sherman and Webb 1988: 124).

Irwin (2000) also said that the interpretive approach views science as a tool for understanding the reality experienced by people. That is also why my research area fits well within the interpretive approach as the role of social science is discovering how different people interpret the world in which they live. The social world and social reality are seen as products of the interpretation and meaningful constructions of individuals (Cuff and Payne 1981: 176). Cuff and Payne (1981) added that the unique quality of being human is found in the symbols people invent to communicate meaning or an interpretation for the events of daily life. What seems to be important here is the fact that rather than predicting or explaining the behaviour of people, attention is given to the interaction and negotiation in social situations through which people reciprocally define expectations about appropriate behaviours with the purpose of developing theory about social affairs. The interpretive paradigm portrays social life as adaptive and functional and the social world as being of a “much softer, personal and humanly created kind” (Cohen and Manion cited in Irvine 1999:49). Events are understood through mental processes of interpretation that are influenced by and interact with social context (Cantrell 1993).

3.2.1 The purpose of interpretive research

The purpose interpretive research is then to illuminate human action by interpreting it; by retrieving the meanings embedded within it. Bassey (1995) also said that the purpose of interpretive research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with others. The task of interpretive research is to discover and conceptualize the essence of specific interaction process. The resulting theory provides a new way of understanding that specific phenomenon.

According to Cantrell (1993), interpretivists accept the inseparable bond between values and facts and attempt to understand reality, especially the behaviour of people, within a social context. Stern *et al.* (in Sherman and Webb 1988) added that interpretive research goes beyond existent theories and preconceived conceptual frameworks in search of new

understandings of social processes in natural setting. Interpretation is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities, but no certainties, as to the outcome of future events. Cuba as cited in Dison (1998: 27) argued that constructivism “intends neither to predict and control the ‘real’ world, nor to transform it but to reconstruct the world at the only point at which it exists: in the mind of constructors”.

3.2.2 Why the interpretive research paradigm?

Because my study seeks only to understand, not to generalize or to prove anything, it fits well within this paradigm that describes, interprets and explains how participants make sense of situations and the way meanings are reflected in their actions. Interpretive research allows me to disbar myself from making external judgments and to glean interpretation it from the participants themselves, in this case how female leaders experience their own leadership. Since interpretive research frequently provides fresh insights into apparently well-known phenomena, I find it particularly appropriate to my own research, in which I aim to gain a new understanding of the phenomenon of female leadership.

3.2.3 Critique of the interpretive approach

This paradigm has been criticized for the following:

Its sole reliance on an “internal explanatory apparatus” (Carr and Kemmis cited in Dison 1998: 10), by which is meant the researcher’s reliance on the subjective experiences and accounts provided by research participants. The conditions that generate and sustain actors’ understanding and providing actors with ways of overcoming the constraints on their action are given little attention. The view that “transformations of consciousness are sufficient to produce transformations of social reality” is open to question, according to Carr & Kemmis, *ibid*. In my opinion, this criticism fails to credit the power of personal

testimony, the telling of stories and the sharing of lived experiences.

Generalizing from such a small sample. The question is could a theory generated in a specific context be generalized to a larger group? Sherman and Webb (1988) argued that a basic social process would be identified to people in similar situations. Of course, the generalization of any theory can only be established through verified studies. They went further and said that interpretive theory is not replicable because it depends on the interaction between the data and the creative processes of the researcher. It is unlikely that two people would come up with the exact same theory. The question of replicability, to them, is not relevant, since the point of theory generalization is to offer a new perspective on a given situation. Perhaps as Cantrell (1993) put it, the approach is criticized for not being something it never intended to be, and not given credit for its strengths. According to Kaufmann in his book "Up the Down Staircase" (as cited in Dockrell and Hamilton 1980), large numbers of people do find truth even in the fictionalized instances. The problem is not whether it is worth studying individual events but whether one can do so in a way that captures the attention of one's audience.

It has also been accused of sentimentality about "underdogs". Many studies conducted in this paradigm have been sympathetic to the plight of those who are low down in organizational and hierarchies and critical of those who are better placed. Because society is a continuing tussle among diverse groups, the lower status groups are therefore not able to speak for themselves in the way the powerful ones can (Cuff and Payne 1981). It could of course be argued that the approach is significant for this very reason, that it allows the voices of marginalized and disempowered actors to emerge.

It makes no rational choice between different views. Although many educational decisions require choices to be made between apparently conflicting but internally coherent understandings, the interpretive approach helps to understand why the parties hold the view they do but provides no help in making rational choices between them. It does not seek to arbitrate between views, to say which ones are correct or wrong. It does

not go beyond interpretation. It needs to do more than just offer understanding about human experiences. But as already said by Cantrell (1993), it was not intended to judge/to prove what is wrong or right. Indeed, to pass judgment would be to occupy moral high ground, which would imply an approach that is sharply framed by strong value systems and expectations. Perhaps judgment in this case lies with the reader.

3.2.4 Some key issues in interpretive research

3.2.4.1 Objectivity

The researchers should bracket their own pre-understanding in order to make accurate inferences about unfamiliar social practices. Complete bracketing can of course not be achieved. Van der Mescht (1996) argued that researchers could not approach the phenomenon in total “conceptual silence”. According to him there is no such thing as “immaculate perception”. Smaling as cited in Dison (1998) also contested this argument and saw objectivity as a goal to be aimed at, with the recognition that it is never reached in the absolute sense. Yet the attempt must be made to reduce personal preconceptions and presuppositions by making them explicit.

If interpreters bring different pre-understandings to their inquiries, they will produce different, if not conflicting, interpretations. Berger and Kellner (in Sherman and Webb 1988) argued that bracketing strengthens the scientific enterprise. Therefore bracketing is very important, as the research should see a situation from a new perspective, not merely as a mirror image of his/her own hopes and fears, wishes, resentments or other psychic needs. The researcher must become aware of his/her own preconceptions, values and beliefs. In this study, I have aimed to “let the participants speak” by going into the study without any hypothesis to test, other than the belief that women do lead differently from men. Exactly how this happens and plays itself out I intend to interpret from my participants responses. Only by being aware of my own “mind set” and bracketing my own values, can I begin to search out and understand the world of others (Sherman and

Webb 1988: 130) and allow the data to speak for themselves.

3.2.4.2 Ethical issues

There is some degree of familiarity between myself and the school principal, but because I went into the research without any preconceived ideas of the outcome, I did not think it would influence the research in any significant way. The research is framed in an exploratory, qualitative approach, and I made every effort to keep personal beliefs at bay. The fact that it is qualitative research implies that one usually does not have any strong agenda, thus minimising the chances of participants telling the researcher what she/he wants to hear. In this study I had the additional complication of having to interview a learner. Here I had to avoid treating her differently. I have communicated with her the same way I have done with the principals and the deputy principals. I kept the channels open so that she could talk to me about anything she wanted to know. She even wrote back and said that she felt honoured and “big” to be involved in a Masters Degree project. I believe that she got something in terms of seeing her contribution and that she had something of value to contribute.

My participants all signed consent letters (the head girl’s letter was signed by her parents too). The consent letters stipulated the following:

I offered them anonymity if they wished.

I assured them that all information would be treated as strictly confidential.

They were also free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time.

They would have the opportunity to amend or delete, extend or develop data when the research was in draft form, and would receive a copy of the final draft.

The head girl sent her consent letter back to me, but the two principals did not bother to send them back. This either meant that they had no objection to being named, or that they

simply did not have the time to attend to this task. The school was very busy with a production of “Annie” at the time.

3.2.4.3 Validity

Cameron *et al.* (cited in Dison (1998: 87), argued that the move away from a belief in a reality “out there” and waiting to be discovered by a neutral, detached observer, does contribute to validity being questionable in this paradigm. Criticism of interviews/case studies that participants may lie, distort the truth or withhold vital information and that in such cases the researcher may be misled by incomplete, inaccurate or biased data or the researcher may misunderstand/misinterpret the responses, also does limit the existence of validity in these methods. Another criticism that may also threaten validity in case studies, is that of the perceived influence and expertise of the researcher that may prevent the participants from speaking out fully or may encourage them to slant their responses in some way (Irvine 1999). I attempted to minimize this attitude by keeping strictly to the role of the interviewer but not as an expert in the field.

I relied on face validity in my study by going back to the participants and giving them drafts of my data discussion for their comment. I also wanted them to see how they had been represented in the discussion and to let me know if there was a problem. Yet one could argue that even a consensus on the findings does not necessarily ensure validity. Irvine (1999) said that validity is difficult to accomplish since it is very possible that participants may reject facts and interpretations when they are confronted with them in written and official form, even when they themselves have generated them. To me also, what is important in case studies, is the fact that they can produce theories that closely mirror social reality and therefore are more useful than speculative theories that are not data based.

3.3 Methodological aspects

3.3.1 Case studies

I have chosen a case study because case studies are used when little is known about the phenomenon being studied and the researcher wants to look at relevant concepts intensively and thoroughly. Case studies also allow the researcher to probe one situation in detail yielding a wealth of descriptive and explanatory information (Moorhead and Griffin 1995). According to Dockrell and Hamilton (1980) the case study is a form of single-subject research, undertaken on the premise that someone who is typical of a target population can be located and studied. They argue that case studies allow the case study worker to capture and portray those elements of a situation that gives it meaning. Case studies seek to describe and understand, as opposed to correlate and predict. They promote broad insights into situations (Janse van Rensburg 1995). Case studies give insight into specific instances, events or situations. Pons (1992: 61) noted that the strength of case studies is that they allow the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes.

Johnson (1994: 22) gave the following as the strengths of case studies:

- they cope with complexity because even a single case study can provide descriptive data, address problem of meaning,
- they provide interpretations of other similar cases because they can be compared to other examples when similarities and differences can readily be identified,
- intelligible, non-technical findings are easily readable and easily understood.

Cohen and Manion (1994) also said that case studies are strong in reality because they are down-to earth and attention-holding. On the other hand, Johnson (1994) felt that the lack of scientific rigour is a potential weakness of case studies. Of course, any research design could be open to this criticism, and it is perhaps unfair to assume that case studies in particular are vulnerable to this weakness. It is perfectly possible, as I hope to show, to be rigorous in case study research.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews have been described by Cantrell (1993) as allowing the researcher to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words and to access the unobservable; to walk in the head, so to speak. She further described them as the backbone of qualitative research.

Sherman and Webb (1988) said that in- depth interviews of the participants lend meaning to their observed experiences. Interviews according to them permit researchers to verify, clarify or alter what they thought happened and the meanings participants attribute to a given situation to achieve a full understanding and to take into account the "lived" experiences of participants by seeing the situation through the eyes of the participants.

Cohen and Manion (1994: 282) as cited in Irvine noted that in an interpersonal encounter people are more likely to disclose aspects of themselves than they would in a less human situation because the interviewer develops greater rapport with the participant.

Thus, the distinctively human element in the interview is necessary to its validity although the work of Quinn, Gutek and Walsh (as cited in Kidder 1981) has shown that this assumption of greater validity is not always justified. According to Cantrell (1993), for example, interviews have weaknesses in that the responses from interviews are highly reflective of interviewers' perception and biases, interviewers' emotional state and respondents' ability to recall. It is of course not possible to counter each of these potential traps, but an alertness to their existence makes it possible to guard against falling into them.

3.4 The research process

3.4.1 Selection of the site

The school I have selected is a Catholic primary school in Windhoek. The school has several features that make it attractive as a potential case, the key feature being that the entire leadership cohort is female, and this has been the case for some time.

It is, therefore, a case in which there is a concentration of female leadership, and it is likely that the school, as an organization, will have developed a strong sense of what leadership entails. The participants largely selected themselves since I wished to interview three leaders at different levels in the school hierarchy. I therefore decided to focus on the principal, the deputy principal, and the head girl.

3.4.2 The start-up phase

To gain access to the school I phoned the principal and explained my project to her. She did not have any problem and advised me to contact them in advance for the interviews. She gave me the names of the deputy principal and the head girl. I then wrote to each one of them. Although I wanted to finish the interviews by September 2001, I could not, as the whole school was busy with a play and everybody was involved. The reply was “try to get an appointment after our play” - that was in October 2001. Then the interviews were set for October 2001.

3.4.3 The interviewing process

I used a semi-structured, in-depth interview format. Johnson (1994: 45) noted that semi-structured interviews enabled one to get equivalent information from a number of interviews with less emphasis on a standardised approach. He further said that a more flexible style is used, adapted to the personality and circumstances of the person being

interviewed. Non- verbal behaviour, according to him, could also be observed and assessed. I interviewed the principal, the deputy principal and the head girl, using a tape-recorder because I thought it would provide the most reliable and confidential record. Tape-recording is also essential because stimulus as well as responses are recorded. While recording, I also made notes. I interviewed all three individually because I wanted more than one perspective to present a more comprehensive or richer picture. It is typical of the interpretive paradigm to draw on small, information-rich samples to allow the researcher to focus in depth on important issues in the study.

I found it very interesting to talk to the three leaders, especially to the girl. I thought, as a fourteen years old child, the questions would be difficult for her, but to my surprise she managed (although I had to change the wording of the questions here and there). I asked questions that invited them to reflect on their leadership positions and experiences such as “How would you describe yourself as a leader?” “Mention your strongest leadership qualities.” These are open-ended questions to encourage the participants to talk about their perceptions, about what is happening, what they believe about the event and how they are feeling. Such questions were appropriate because my interest lay in the description of a phenomenon and the exploration thereof. I encouraged them to relate actual experiences and anecdotes that would hopefully provide me with the raw data I needed to address the research question.

The question “How do you think other people experience you as a leader “, was to focus on the followers, to probe the extent and nature of any feedback and to further flesh out the respondents’ portrayal of themselves as leaders. It also provided a starting point for probing their perceptions of their followers. Other questions such as “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” were not for the sake of trying to find out how the respondents “rated” themselves as weak/strong but to find out what they regarded as strengths and weaknesses in leadership.

This style of interviewing was particularly appropriate to my case, since it enabled me to

vary the level and complexity of my questions in accordance with the respondents' age and professional maturity.

3.5 Data

I started by immersing myself in the data. Data analysis in this case took the form of reading interview transcripts with an open and receptive mind, bracketing my meaning and interpretation and entering into the world of each participant, noting not only the literal statements but also non-verbal and paralinguistic communication. I noted themes and sifted through the information, clustering seemingly similar ideas/themes to get one or more central themes, but at the same time acknowledging perceptions that were peculiar to each case. Then I provided a summary by describing the world in general as experienced by the participants and noting significant individual differences too. I tried to base my interpretations on careful consideration of all relevant data, presenting the views of the participants as they expressed them.

Similar steps/stages are suggested by Cohen and Manion (1994: 293) starting with noting the units of participants' meaning and the units of meaning relevant to the research question, and then establishing categories which the data fit into and then developing themes. Initially, I developed a broad structure for my discussion that had to correspond with the units.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described interpretive research and the plan of action used in this research. I have discussed definitions of interpretive research and its purpose in general and also as it pertains to my study. I have further provided some of the pertinent criticism of the interpretive approach. I gave an account of the methodological aspects of my study and lastly I defined the research process and procedures used during the research.

In the following chapter, I describe and present the data in raw form as taken from the transcribed interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of data

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I first give a background on the school and on how the three women leaders became leaders. I then discuss what difficulties and problems I encountered in presenting the data and lastly I present the data in raw form as given by the three women leaders I interviewed. Although most of the questions were the same to the three leaders, these were open-ended questions, so new issues/questions emerged in each case.

4.2 Background of the school

The school faces Stubel Street in Windhoek. Its recent history started in the late 1920s. In 1950 the name Hohere Tochtterschule was changed to Holy Cross Convent. It first catered for white children but in 1977 it opened its doors to all population groups. It caters for pre-primary also. There were eighty-five (85) pupils in 1920. Today, it has four hundred and seven (407) children, two hundred and eighty six (286) girls and one hundred and one (101) boys, excluding the pre primary school. There are twenty- two teachers in the primary school and all are females. It is an English medium school and German and Afrikaans are taught as Second Languages.

The front part of the school facing Stubel Street is covered by well pruned shrubbery around the high fence. As one enters the gate, there is a garden on the left side with green trees and beautiful flowers and lovely plants that provide shade and lend beauty to the environment. A waiting area has been created in the garden where learners wait either for their parents to pick them up or for their afternoon extra mural activities.

The school is in good condition. The environment looks very clean. The school buildings and its surroundings are generally well tended to. There is a gatekeeper who welcomes visitors in. The learners I met looked very neat in their school wear and I noticed how well different ethnic groups from different cultures mixed and interacted.

The classroom blocks are double storied and the principal's office, the deputy principal's office, some classrooms and the staff room are upstairs. At the office block, I noticed Biblical posters and Bible verses on the pin-boards that reminded me that the school is a church school and has Christian or Gospel values as it also shares in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church. The principal and the deputy principal's offices are neat and ordered. Although I met the two leaders in their offices, I had to do the interviews in the staff room, which was also very neat and ordered. I was offered a cup of tea which made me feel welcome and more relaxed.

Let me shed light on the process through which the three women became leaders. The principal was asked by the church authority to become the principal. The deputy principal was asked by the principal and the school board members were also consulted in her appointment and they agreed for her to serve as a deputy principal of the school. In the case of the head girl, the teachers chose the prefects and out of them the one who had the most was then elected as the head girl. Interestingly, these processes present mixtures of trait thinking and situational influences. In nominating a teacher as a potential leader, the church authority were clearly recognizing her leadership potential, no doubt against some form of socialized checklist of how a leader should act. The same may be said of the appointment of the deputy and the head girl. On the other hand, it is also obvious that all three had been seen in action for some time, and had proven themselves in their contexts. The question of to what extent their appointment was a result of pre-conceived notions of leadership, and to what extent it was due to proven performance in a given context is a complex one which this study will not attempt to answer directly. It is nevertheless interesting to contemplate.

4.3 Concerns I encountered before and during the presentation of data

I have to say that I found it very difficult to transform the raw data obtained from the three women leaders into something meaningful, because when I started working with the raw data a large number of new questions and issues arose. I discuss these below.

4.3.1 Is my data making sense?

By reading the interview transcripts I could not at first make out what the data was telling me. I reread and reread my data until I asked myself “What is it what I was looking for? As I was looking for leadership qualities, I then realized that the interviews provided a rich and interesting view into how the women leaders saw themselves as leaders through their experience, as well as how they saw leadership in general. Thus, the task was to highlight what I regarded as integral to the three women leaders’ understanding of their leadership experiences. By doing that the picture started gaining clarity.

4.3.2 Bracketing

Another problem was to identify what I regarded as leadership qualities without bringing in my own preconceived ideas. As an interpretive researcher, I had to try to reduce personal preconceptions as argued in Chapter Three. However, it would have been absurd to set aside what I know of leadership, since I would then have “nothing” to look at. Rather, the challenge was to bracket what I thought I might find in response to my research questions, which focuses on leadership as a female phenomenon. Even this was a very difficult exercise, and I hope I was able to achieve it.

4.3.3 “Cutting and pasting”

I think it is very easy to say that one has to use the participants’ words and avoid bringing in your own comments. But doing this in practice is another matter. By trying to avoid my own words, I ended up just cutting and pasting the raw data that resulted in my work just being unconnected chunks of what my participants have said. The challenge, however, was to narrate the data as I was the one who has to create a description out of my participants’ experience. I came to realize that the data cannot speak for themselves but can only find a voice through my mediation. Once I had come to this understanding, I started to connect the data, to narrate the stories and thereby capture the experiences of the three women leaders.

What follows is a description of the lived experience of the three women leaders, arranged according to themes I have identified.

4.4 Leadership qualities

4.4.1 Leading by personal example

All three women leaders believe that being an example to others is a very important aspect of leadership. All three believe that the leader models the way by setting the example. According to the deputy principal, “what one sees carries much weight than what one hears.” The three leaders make reference to themselves as being good role models for others that contributes to others trusting them, having respect for them and trying to “act accordingly”. They are thus conscious of doing what they expect others to do. Therefore they try to instill this by exhibiting good time management by being punctual and never late. They are always well-dressed, well spoken, well disciplined, hardworking, helpful, organized, honest and they guard against jealousy.

They further believe that, having forgiveness, having integrity, having no favoritism,

having understanding and through the “leader’s influence”, others try to be like the leader and as good as the leader, by identifying themselves with their leader. This was strengthened by the head girl who said, “I am a sport hero and I love sport very much ... the fact that I am crazy about sport, contributes further to the fact that learners accept me and respect me as their leader.”

The three women leaders also express active concern for the students because they are kind, caring, supportive and fair to all students. The students can trust them because they are trustworthy, thus, they extend trust to the student as they demonstrate consistency and trustworthiness. The two principals further say that they set good example in the way they deal with children and other people such as parents and the other teachers and also in the way of speaking to children and adults and the way they conduct themselves as teachers and as leaders. This is illustrated in what the deputy principal mentioned as the feedback they get from previous students when they come to see them and talk about what they have learnt at the school. She mentioned that the students had learnt some morals and ethics from them, they had learnt to speak good English, how to conduct themselves as people, how to be disciplined, how to behave wherever they found themselves, how to be responsible and how to approach others.

She further said

I can say that I have a huge hand in sort of
educating the future leaders in Namibia,
some of them are there in good jobs and
I feel I have given them something. And that
is what I am most proud of.

These students, according to her come to school to see them (their teachers) and to show their appreciation. This shows that she is a good role model to others or to students; she is being an exemplar to others as she is leading by personal example. Thus, the three leaders believe that personal qualities are important to command the respect of others.

Leading by personal example is also seen as not just ending where one is a leader but that it should go everywhere, follow the leader wherever she or he finds her-/himself. This is demonstrated in the example given by the head girl of being an example to her brother at home: "... even at home I am now telling my brother what to do and not to do". I also like to say, "Look at me", "Look at what I am doing". She says that her brother listens to her and he is changing day by day, doing his homework before playing and so on. She further tells the story of how she stopped a man who mistreated a child. She immediately responded by telling the man not to do that as children also have rights. Thus, according to this woman leader, nothing was wrong with her because she was doing what was expected of her as a leader. This kind of incident affirms this leader's strong sense of self, and her confidence in herself as a leader who can help others: she felt good about herself.

The three leaders also mention some people in their lives who were and who are still their role models. The head girl mentioned that the most abiding influence in her life has been her parents, especially her father. She described her father as a very hardworking and a caring person and a good role model to the teachers at his school:

When they have social functions at the school
or when there are problems at school, then all of
them are involved and they stand behind my father
as the principal, because I think they trust and
respect him as their leader.

Another powerful influence has been her teachers at school: "... the teachers are supportive, loving and caring and they are really good examples to me and I am trying to be loving, caring and fair to all students just like them, I could rely on their support." The principal mentions Jesus Christ as being the greatest example of all, being the best teacher. "The love we have, compassion, patience, acceptance of everybody, all these come from what we learn about Jesus in the Bible."

The sisters at the school are also mentioned by the deputy principal as good role models because of their calmness. The Mother Superior, for example, extends her loving spirit

towards everybody. Her acceptance of everybody and broadmindedness never ceases to amaze her.

The deputy principal's past is strongly present in her life. She mentions her first role model, her mother, who was very kind, beautifully turned out, always neatly and well dressed, "never a hair out of place" and that she has really learnt a lot from her such as how to conduct herself, the way of speaking to people.

Thus, leading by personal example was a dominant theme throughout the interviews and regarded by the three women leaders as being an important leadership quality and thus considered to be important in their leadership.

4.4.2 Involvement and participation of others

The two principals believe that involvement and participation of others in decision making and collaboration with others are very important elements in the effective running of a school. They strongly believe that for others to be involved and to participate fully in the school activities, they need to be consulted. They point out that they do involve others in their leadership and by that they let others feel that they are part and parcel of the school, although not every one needs to or could be involved in every aspect of the running of the school. This shared leadership is characteristic of the principal as she believes that principalship is not a 'one man show' but that it involves a lot of other people such as parents, students and teachers. To her, the school is like a triangle, consisting of parents, teachers and the students and all should be involved in the activities of the school:

A principal really needs other people, never mind how good the principal might be, she or he needs other people to run the school with. A principal should let the others also feel that they are part of the big family through their involvement, contribution and participation.

She further notes that she does not lead alone and therefore does not really have a heavy burden on her shoulders. She notes, “There is nothing that is unsolvable, one just has to try very hard by getting solvable solutions and ideas from others and one would succeed”. The deputy notes that “Leadership is not a one man’s island, because one does not lead others but one leads with others”. According to her “firm and honest decisions, taken by all are very important.” To her, decisions taken collectively have more value than decisions taken by one or two people.

Thus, both leaders share leadership with others, they do it with others and do not lead alone. Giving others a chance to be part of the decision making process is very important to both. They enlist others, teach others the vision, appeal to a common purpose, share information and thus make others feel part of the process.

Furthermore, these two women leaders are clearly “not authoritarian or dictators” because they share leadership by involving others. That is also indicated in what the deputy principal mentions in strengthening democratic leadership:

I am not an authoritarian or a dictator, no.
I do not sit on an ivory tower and dish out
directives. I am not a separate figure or the
figurehead. No, I make myself available to the
other teachers and I am just one of them.

Being autocratic to this leader does not help much. She says, “You will bump your head, no, you will not get things done”. She noted that “... one could run a school or an organization well or effectively also by not being authoritarian but by being accommodating and approachable.” Furthermore the principal mentioned that she did not have the “I am the boss attitude”, but to her all of them are bosses and therefore responsible. To her it is a matter of “let us share this, let us discuss this, let us hear your views, what is your opinion, comment on this or that” which helps to “build trust, confidence and commitment.” Thus, this leader fosters collaboration, develop

cooperative goals, seek integrative solutions and involve others in planning.

Involvement and participation of others is also illustrated in the way the parents or the community are involved in the school activities. Community involvement is seen in structures such as School Board and in the way the parents are involved by requesting them to serve on different committees, and also by inviting them to different meetings. They also seek the parents' advice on different activities in which the school is engaged such as coaching different sports and so on.

On the other hand, the two principals raise concerns about the poor involvement and interests of the parents in the school activities. They are very worried that the parents are not as involved in school activities as they are supposed to be and that is something they would like to try to achieve, to get more parents' involvement and participation and a better understanding between their school and the parents. Parents' involvement and participation is regarded by the two leaders as very important in a teaching profession as the deputy principal stresses that especially in an independent Namibia where people need each other and where people know and exercise their rights and responsibilities. The principal mentions further with concern that they are looking for a coach, a parent who can assist their soccer team, but they are struggling to find one. The example of the play, "Annie", which has recently produced, was also mentioned. Many of their school parents did not attend. These leaders would like the parents to take the school as their school too and the school they are prepared to work for. For the principal, the parents have to sacrifice their time for the school and get involved seriously. Parents should not just be enrolling their children at the beginning of the year and then "whoops" to disappear from the scene or to be seen at the school when there are social functions only.

On the question of why parents were not involved, the principal believes that the school is too efficient and so parents lean too much on the teachers. She considers that it is high time that they sat back a little and gave the parents chance to be involved and to participate. She also admits that perhaps some parents might be overworked and they do

not have enough time to participate in the school activities. Coupled to this is the deputy principal's belief that some parents might not know or understand what their responsibilities are towards the schools. Both leaders are of the opinion that it was really something they would try to achieve as much as they could, to get the strongest involvement and participation of the parents as they believe in distribution of leadership among teachers, students and the larger community.

Their need to involve others indicates that these leaders believe in teamwork and thus do work as a team to solve problems. All three mentioned that they had the cooperation of their fellow colleagues through teamwork. The head girl said, "I believe in teamwork and as a result I have the co-operation of my fellow students." The principal confirmed that she never talked about "my school" but "our school", she never said "I" but "we" and by that she had the support and the assistance of the other teachers. The deputy principal said, "I am part of them in laughing with them, joking with them, gossiping with them and socializing with them". Interaction with others also helps to build good team spirit and good relationships. Thus, these women leaders do not show clear aversion to behaviour that could set them apart from the others, but rather, make themselves very much part of the others.

The principal believes that it is within this environment of involvement that others become more influential, more supportive, more committed and more collaborative. She said that this type of environment also creates loyalty because others feel that they are trusted and their ideas are respected. She further mentioned that teachers get frustrated when their ideas are sought for or listened to but not used. Therefore enough time should be given for others to get involved and to participate and most important to follow up should the need exist. The deputy principal also stressed that what was most important was "what we have achieved, not what I have achieved because leadership is a collaborative effort."

Thus, the three women leaders stress that all, if necessary, should really be involved in the

interest of the school.

4.4.3 Empowerment

According to the two principals each member of the staff has a unique contribution to make to the effective running of the school and therefore each should be encouraged and motivated to do that. The principal noted that “Nobody is perfect and that’s why the leader should remember always to motivate and encourage others”. She believes this to be very important as it fosters pride and self-esteem. She also believes that one thing a good leader should remember to do is to try and encourage and motivate others for them to feel more appreciated because according to her every one is important and has the potential for growth. Both principals stress that the leader him-/herself should be motivated to be able to motivate others otherwise she would not be able to get others motivated and encouraged. These two women leaders say that to influence others is to have power to do that and to be confident about yourself and in what you are doing. The principal noted that she does not think any leader would like to work with “people who depend just on the leader but at least with people who stand up and come with initiatives and solutions to problems”, thus people who are responsible, accountable and independent. In the interview, the principal mentioned ways she empowered others by motivating and encouraging them.

She talked about recognizing individual accomplishments by giving others credit, recognition and praise and also acknowledging good work by talking about, it not only privately but in front of others, that is, she says, is one way of reminding people that you recognize their good work. She also mentioned some of their teachers at her school who had started with very small projects but they stood behind them and today those projects are big projects. She further praised the teachers in the interview and gave them credit for what they were doing, making the school the way it was. She believed that this was a very important way of giving others a chance to exert influence and to be responsible because that would empower them and motivate them to take responsibility for what they were

doing and the contribution that they were making. The deputy principal believes that the staff should have clear guidelines and directives that would not cause any confusions and misunderstandings for everyone to be “well-informed” about their roles and responsibilities and thus, they become responsible and confident. This is what she had in mind when she said:

I know what I am doing and therefore, I am
Responsible, committed and accountable. I am
doing what is expected of me and I am happy.
For one to be in control, is to know what one
is doing.

Roles are further illustrated in her comments on her own role as a supporting one and thus she empowered the principal by standing firmly behind her, or the principal empowered her:

I rather work in the background by being in a
supporting leading role, being a strong back up
for the ultimate. That is where I feel most
comfortable. I am very comfortable behind the
principal, by giving her all the support she needs.

However, the principal expressed her concern that not everyone encouraged and motivated others. She mentioned the play, “Annie” and noted that some parents phoned them to show their appreciation of what the teachers were doing with their kids by congratulating the school on the work well done and encouraging them. This built them up: “.... it helps a lot ... encourages one to do better.”

The deputy principal also mentioned her first role model who picked her up in a crowd of all the other children and made her to pull herself together. She told her to stand up, be proud of herself and make something out of herself. She said that was a little thing but it had made a big impression on her. That is, according to her, encouragement and motivation.

The deputy principal in her interview also gave credit to women and acknowledged what women were doing in general and that they should be given credit for their contribution to the progress of the world, for keeping the peace and harmony and for educating children because of their motherhood. She further said that women should be respected as equals of men and they should be at parity with men, equal pay for equal work and so on. This leader further believed that women were vital to the progress of the world and thus they should be given opportunities. By the same token she cautioned women to have a balance in their lives and also be the homemakers, wives and mothers. She gave an example of herself, that she has worked all her life and raised two children but she said it was through choice as she was happy to be a woman. She noted, “I am not a hard line feminist, not a burn your bra feminist, and I like someone to open a door for me or to give me flowers.”

The head girl also mentioned how her parents, teachers and the other students congratulated her after she spoke in front of the students and the parents and that she felt happy and proud of herself. Her parents also congratulated her on the progress she made with the encouragement of her brother in doing his homework and so on. She encouraged students to take their education seriously, beware of HIV/Aids, listen to their parents, respect older people, fight for what they believe is right, work until the end and try and achieve what they want.

Thus the three leaders believe in strengthening others by giving them power and autonomy, giving visibility and recognition that make others feel strong and build positive relationships in schools.

Another element mentioned by the three leaders in getting co-operation and a contribution of other people is open communication with others. I discuss this in the next section.

4.4.4 Open communication

The deputy principal mentioned:

I am a very much approachable and an accommodating person and somehow a person who can solve problems. It seems I am a natural coordinator, someone who gets things done that needs to be done. Teachers come automatically to me for advice, guidance and assistance.

She noted that she had good relationships with people and people would come to her with problems. She noted, "It has been nearly twenty-two years at this school and I had no any problem with any member of the staff." Other teachers would phone her at home to say that she should tell the others that they would not be at work because they were sick or had other personal problems. They knew that they could come to her with any problem, big or small and she would have a sympathetic ear. This is illustrated in the feedback she gets from people that they regard her as a person they can trust and a much approachable person.

The principal also mentioned that she had built a good relationship between the teachers, the students and some parents. Her patience and her calm disposition make easier for the people to approach her. She thought people found her an easier person to work with, because she listened and they were comfortable with her.

Furthermore the head girl mentioned that she had made friends when she went to play netball in South Africa and some had become pen pals. This was mentioned as an indication that she gets on well with people and people respond well to her.

To facilitate open communication, the three women leaders have create mechanisms such as:

- They promote an “open door policy, every one is welcome to come and see the principal as long as there is an agreement on the time”
- There is a pleasant atmosphere at the school because the principal does not keep grievances in her heart. She noted, “I just say it and it is finished.” She also tries to listen and understand other people, what they have to say and at the same time, respect their opinions.
- Open discussions strengthen open communication. The head girl said that her approach to wrong-doers was to sit down with them and discuss the problem. Parents were even called in to discuss problems before written warnings were given to students. Rows and disagreements “are reasonably thought through and quickly forgotten” and straight and firm decisions taken by all.
- Corporal punishment was also mentioned by the head girl as not being the best way of communicating to a child that she/he had done wrong, whereas discussions and talking seriously to the child was regarded to be helpful.
- Parents are informed about all school activities through memos, meetings, committees and different functions – that is open communication.

The three women leaders also acknowledged their weak points, those that they regard as poor communication skills. The principal mentioned the following:

- Lacking patience.
- Not accepting criticism.
- Not being very firm and too slow to act.

The deputy principal mentioned the following:

- Blowing up if a person keeps on nagging about something.
- Speaking in the heat of the moment, lashing out without thinking.

The head girl mentioned being shy of speaking up in public as her weak point.

The three women leaders are thus aware of their weaknesses, they learn from their mistakes and are thus oriented toward self-improvement; they do not deny their shortcomings, as discussed earlier. The deputy principal said, “That is something I have to work on very hard to make sure that I do not do it, lash out without thinking and that is something I have to guard against, very strongly.” The principal is of the same opinion: “I think I have to work very hard to overcome that” and that sometimes she has “to try and understand others’ attitudes and so on.” Even the head girl noted that she had to improve on her weakness because as a leader “I cannot remain shy”.

Therefore I conclude that the three participants believe that open communication contributes to good working relationships among staff and students that would again contribute to good and effective leadership.

4.4.5 Stability and security

The participants, especially the two principals, believe that the stable and secure environment in which they are working does contribute to the good personal relationship among teachers and students. The principal strongly believes that she has given the school stability and security. How she has done that, is illustrated in the following:

“I have taken the school through the transitional period before and after independence and by that I have given security to the teachers, parents and students”. She has been the principal of the school for twenty years. Thus the school had not experienced the anxiety and perhaps created by a change in leadership and she had built that trust in the students. The school has stable enrolment. That indicates that they are happy and comfortable and there are no reasons for them to move to other schools. There is a low teacher turnover at the school because most of the teachers have stayed there for quite a long. They do not receive higher salaries and do not have many benefits but they stay because they are happy: “Those teachers who leave, do leave because of other outside reasons but not

because they are unhappy and so on.”

The deputy principal has also been at the school for more than twenty years and she also expressed the same view:

I have obviously been at this school longer than at any other place, this is my longest period of employment. Many schools around asked me to become a principal but I have never opted for that. I am comfortable here and I am happy.

She also mentioned that they work in harmony together although they were all women. She said, “In many work areas, you would find it very difficult to find twenty-five women, even men, who can work in harmony together, but here we are and we are doing it here”, and she attributes that to the loving spirit of the sisters around.

The head girl also mentioned that she had built harmony among students because they were now kind to each other.

Good organization was considered to contribute to effective leadership and to a more stable and secure environment. All three leaders mentioned that they were organized, they liked to organize and that they liked others to be organized. The principal mentioned that the best organization was only through God. She noted “One cannot run organizations well without the assistance of God, because He is the best Organizer, the best Leader and the best Adviser.” Further, she advised that one needed to build good relationship with God, let Him be your Guide, your adviser and your leader too.

The deputy principal noted that being in a private school made it possible for her to be a full time deputy principal in an administrative role to contribute to good organization. She stressed, “That would not be possible in a government school, as there would not be a position like that.”

Calmness, caring, being loving and motherly were seen by the three leaders as

contributing to a strong and a stable environment too. These qualities were evident in the sisters' Mother Superior who had been the school's first deputy. The head girl said that "the teachers are just like our mothers here and they are very much supportive, loving and caring to all of us here."

Women in general were also seen by the deputy principal as being different from men because of their motherhood. She noted that they were warm, calm, loving and kind and led with care and love.

Thus I see a supportive culture being important in the ethos of the school. The principal stressed that "I think it is also very important to show that you care, people have to know that you care."

Acceptance of others was also emphasized by the three women leaders and that was especially seen in the sisters' "acceptance of everybody" as mentioned before. The deputy principal mentioned that she thought people had accepted her because she was helpful. The fact that they would come to her for assistance showed their acceptance of her. She also praised the sisters for their loving spirit towards everybody and said:

Being different, I am not a Catholic, I wondered how that would affect when I first came here, but it had no effect at all. I have never been pressurized about not being a catholic and I have always been accepted for who I am and I think most of all, it was because of the sisters' loving spirit towards everybody, that is something that comes strongly across here.

A strong personality in leaders was seen by the principal as being one of the strongest leadership qualities for competent leadership because without it one would not be able to be in control. She admitted that she was not being a tough leader while the deputy admitted that she had quite a strong personality.

Having committed and dedicated teachers was also mentioned by the principal as

contributing to the effective running of the school and thus to a stable environment; without commitment, nothing would be successful. As has been mentioned, it is not high salaries that attract their teachers but the fact that they are contributing to the school's success and to the profession as a whole. The principal said these about their teachers:

They do not mind about high salaries they could get somewhere else, but they are committed to the children and the profession. We do not attract many teachers here as we do not pay much and we do not have many benefits such as housing allowances and so on but those teachers we have or those we get, are really here because they want to be here because for them teaching is a calling.

So, according to the participants, the nature of the environment also contributes to the effectiveness of leadership. To them people should be happy, they should trust the leader; the leader should be caring, loving and supportive, then she or he would obtain cooperation and support from the others.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on what the three leaders' responses to my interview questions.

In the next chapter I attempt to analyse the data in terms of themes and theory suggested by literature. My aim here is establish to what extent my research question has been answered.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I try to make sense of my data by focusing on my main findings.

I discuss the five themes I identified in the previous chapter, but necessarily under the same headings. Here I have invented new headings in an attempt to capture the richness of findings. At the same time, I try to establish whether my goals were addressed and my research questions answered. This is where I try to engage in a dialogue between the data and the existing literature, to integrate my findings into the vast body of leadership research that already exists.

As my main concern has been what kind of leadership is used by women leaders, my themes are related to the leadership qualities as experienced by the three women leaders interviewed.

5.4.1 Leading by personal example

In my opinion the three women leaders try to create a community where the school's staff and students learn from each other through role modeling and thus develop a sense of shared values. They see themselves as role models to others. They do this through the examples they set by for example, being honest, trustworthy and fair to all. Setting an example to the three leaders is essential to earning credibility because they believe that when it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words but then also watch the actions. The three leaders show clear convictions and standards and live the values, thus practicing what they preach. Leadership itself seems to be role-playing, because the person occupying that role is expected to behave and act in a more or

less well defined way. Thus how one behaves is determined, to a larger part, by the role defined in the context in which you are acting. These roles according to the three leaders are very important to them and to their followers also.

Role modeling is very important as followers learned by identifying themselves with their leaders. It is clear throughout the interviews that the three women leaders also identified themselves with other leaders or people they regard as their role models, ex principals, parents and so on. They seemed to have learnt a lot from their role models - love, honesty, fairness to all and trust.

According to Landgraf (as cited in Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard 1996: 149) one should never listen to what people say to you, only watch what they do to you. He further argued that it is what the leader does in real life situations counts, rather than what he or she says; everyone watches when you are the boss. When leaders are role models, then in a way they convince their followers that they know what they are doing and they are thus confident and through that they generate hope and confidence in their followers. I think how a leader leads his/her life determines whether followers want to put their lives in his or her hands.

Thus, what a leader is doing and how he or she is doing it, is very important. I agree with the notion that leaders have to be transparent, they have to do what they say they will do, “walk the talk”, “act in line with the values they espouse as leaders” (Wick and Leon (1993: 203). Wick & Leon (*Ibid.*) added that role-modeling is not only a matter of influencing but a matter of freeing people below to act in ways that are very natural. Leaders, by behaving in a way that signals acceptance of normal behaviour, free people up to be their natural selves, such as be open about mistakes, free to ask for help and so on. March as cited in Sergiovanni (1990: 92) has described leadership as a drama and said that leaders play a variety of roles to manage the way sentiments, expectations and commitments of individuals concerned with organization fit into the structure of organizational life. He went further and said that, leadership being a drama, the leader

assumes different roles. He or she assumes the role of playwright who develops the plot or script, the role of a director who organizes the activities of others, or the role of an actor who participates in the performance itself. Starratt (1993) used the same analogy to describe the multi-faceted nature of leadership.

Robbins (1989: 175) has also commented on the same phenomenon. He cites Shakespeare's famous lines "All the world is a stage, and all men and women merely players", to support his argument. According to him, leadership is a set of expected behaviour patterns attributed to someone occupying a given position in a social unit. Through role modeling leaders enable others to succeed by providing the means and opportunities for action. They can provide the bridge between ideas developed and ideas in use, stated values and values embodied in school practices (March in Sergiovanni 1990:95).

The three leaders seem to have adopted different roles of mothers – "they are like our mothers", helpers - "I help where I can"; advisers- "other teachers come to me for advice"; and pioneers – by shaping the direction of the school, then taking steps towards it with the confidence that they will succeed. They are thus directors, having the overall vision, plans and ideas that ensure that the school runs effectively with all their efforts and dedication.

On this point Sergiovanni (1994) introduced a note of caution. He said when the "follow me" pattern exists because of leaders' position in the school, the systems of roles, expectations and so on, then it is "bureaucratic authority". On the other hand, when it happens because followers feel driven to or called to follow, then it is personal authority. The leader's personality and the progressive motivational environment provide the model. I believe these leaders would fall into the second category.

5.4.2 Democratic leadership

My participants clearly emerge as democratic leaders. In this section I discuss the implications of what is meant by this.

In the democratic approach to leadership the leader is no longer solely responsible for problem- solving or decision making. Everyone is involved in the process since everyone has a valuable input to make. This is participation or consultation in leadership. Short and Greer (1997: 10) noted that participation in decision making results in greater organizational effectiveness, individual performance and job satisfaction. Participation is the process of giving others a voice in making decisions, thus being involved. From my discussion with the three women leaders several patterns regarding involvement and participation of others emerged. They made frequent reference to their efforts to encourage participation and involvement in management.

Much of what they describe are attempts to involve followers. In general these leaders believe that other people have to be made to feel part of the organization. This is an example of interactive leadership that is associated with women leaders, as discussed in Chapter Three. Thus the data corresponds well with the literature. Rosener (1990) found that women encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people's self-worth and get others excited about their work. The leaders I interviewed are good examples of this style of leadership. They are guided by certain attributes that are prerequisites for democratic leadership such as trust, honesty, openness, respect, support and praise. They live out the notion that individual responsibility for collective decision making demands an atmosphere of trust and mutual support (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 131). Studies of leadership characteristics have revealed these as being the central factors in effective leadership. When these characteristics are in place, teachers are opened up to their fullest potential. They begin to get ideas and be creative, are committed and accountable and want to do more and better. Sergiovanni (1990) referred to this as collegiality, the extent to which teachers and leaders share common work values, engage

in specific conversation about their work and help each other. This results in a climate of interpersonal relationship where relations are friendly, agreeable and sympathetic. Short and Greer (1997:137) noted that participation of teachers in critical decisions provides teachers with a significant role in school decision making. They regarded that as a key element as it increases commitment and teachers feel ownership and accountability to the process. That is precisely what the three leaders also believe in, that accountability is related to responsibility and ownership.

Accountability is, I believe, a very important ingredient of effective organisational functioning. Traditionally teachers were accountable to principal, who in turn has been accountable to education departments or other authorities. But in a democratic vision we need to think of accountability moving in all directions in a school community. My participants clearly subscribe to this view. The belief that decisions of the many will ultimately become the decisions of the one - the school - because wisdom and expertise, according to them, are scattered throughout any group of people. Short and Greer (1997) also cautioned what was stressed by my participants, that for others' involvement in decision making to happen, others must believe that their involvement is genuine and that their opinion may have a critical impact on the outcome of the decision.

Sergiovanni (1990) refers to democratic leadership by referring as resilient and flexible leadership, team leadership and also as the value-added leadership. He develops the notion of value-added leadership by discussing the three "E"s, that is empowering, enablement and enhancement. By empowerment he meant that authority and obligation are shared and thus responsibility and accountability are increased. Enablement means opportunities and enabling experiences are provided that fosters autonomy, choice, control and responsibility and, enhancement means that followers' roles are enhanced, the leader's role is also enhanced and thus commitment and extra ordinary performance are increased. Ulrich as cited in Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard (1996) said that democratic leadership means moving from the individual champion, thus, doing it alone, to team victories, doing it with others because it is how to work with and through others.

He said no one person could possibly master all the divergent sources of information or skills or expertise necessary to make good decisions. Smit and Cronje (1997) also talked about communalism that replaces individualism, that is team playing. Rodriques' concept of collegiate action as cited in Sander (1989: 236) also rejected individualism, in favour of co-operative collective action towards the furthering of the substantive quality of human life in the school and in society. These qualities are evident in the leadership of the three women as they invite others' opinions, advice and ideas and they listen, understand and respect what other people have to say: "Let us share this, let us hear your opinion, your views and so on." Thus they believe in teamwork, doing it with others. This shows that the three women leaders have confidence and are comfortable in receiving inputs, including disagreements from others also. Senge (1990) confirmed this notion, and noted that it is no longer possible to "figure it all out at the job", so leaders need new skills from others to function. These skills include visioning and surfacing.

Erickson and Gmelch as cited in Short and Greer (1997:159) indicated that the overall benefits of adopting a team management approach to school governance include improving the quality of communication and decision-making practices, staff motivation and the enhanced coordination of tasks and plans. Short and Green (1997: 136) also noted that the character of the school climate where involvement in decision making is encouraged, openness, risk taking, improved quality of the problem-solving capacity and decisions that become conscious and well-reasoned choices. Sander (1989: 235) noted his basic assumption as being "participation is the right and duty of every member of a democratic society." This suggests that participation and democracy are two closely linked concepts; thus collective participation is not a point of arrival, but rather a point of departure, among many others, on a long journey.

My participants believe that they live in a democratic society and thus, they as leaders have to practise democracy by extending the idea of democracy to every one, not only to their staff and students but to the parents also. They believe that parents are the prime educators of their children. The inclusion of parents in the governance and process of

schools has been stressed by Sergiovanni (1990: 110) who argued that:

Parents need to be involved because it is a democratic reason to involve them. They also need to be involved because their involvement builds commitment that helps in building shared conception of schooling, thus being the practical reason of their involvement.

Auala (1989: 98) argued the same point and noted that in Namibia where the parental authority is still intact, it is likely that a given idea will gain a foothold once it is internalized by parents. Thus parents' involvement is very important in a school setting.

This is why the participants saw it as one of the things they have not yet accomplished as leaders, getting the strongest involvement and participation of parents as they believe that school leadership is the right and responsibility of everyone. According to them, a supportive management culture can only thrive in a school where the major stakeholders feel ownership of the school's mission and ethos. In this case, the school's mission and vision statements were drawn up by the staff, the Board of Governors, the Sisters and the members of the PTA.

French and Bell (1990: 94) feel equally strongly about participation in management. They mentioned the following as a rule of thumb for participation in leadership:

Involvement of all those who are part of the problem or part of the solution, have decisions made by those who are closest to the problem, push decisions making lower in the organization, treat those closest to the problem as the relevant experts and give more power to more people.

Furthermore, Short and Greer (1997: 12) saw participation in decision-making as being synonymous with empowerment because empowerment is similar to delegated power. I agree with this view because to me empowerment is the process of giving power to others to make decisions and solve problems, thus including or involving them. By that, others

are thus motivated, encouraged, committed, accountable and responsible. Empowerment is thus a broader concept that promotes participation in a wide variety of areas. French and Bell (1995: 94) also said that participation enhances empowerment and empowerment in turn enhances performance and individual well-being. In my opinion it is a very important concept in effective leadership for the effective running of schools as teachers develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems. Empowered teachers believe that they have the skills or knowledge to act on a situation and improve it.

Kouzes and Posner as cited in Colvin (1999) also stress the importance of making followers feel their work and contribution are larger and embracing an almost immortal quality. They argued that followers would be psychologically gratified by knowing their efforts within organizations have a synergistic significance. Furthermore Luthans (1995: 36) came up with basic conditions necessary for empowerment to become embedded in the organizational culture and become operational:

- Innovative- followers have the authority to display existing competencies as well as try new ideas and make decisions that result in ways of doing things;
- Access to information – this enhances their willingness to cooperate and to use their empowerment;
- Accountability – followers are held accountable for results, not to be punished but to ensure that they are giving their best efforts, working towards agreed-upon goals.

Furthermore, the successful process of making a decision executed, and then seeing the positive consequences, can help satisfy one's need for achievement; it also provides recognition and responsibility and enhance self-esteem. All these have certainly captured some of the elements of the three leaders' experiences. The three leaders have developed a culture that emphasizes encouragement. They encourage and praise other teachers and students and view encouragement and motivation as being important elements of good

leadership. This is shown in their recognition of individual contributions as discussed previously in Chapter Four, in their efforts such as in projects and for all the hard work they are involved in at the school. The three leaders believe that leaders must be generous in handing out responsibilities and miserly in placing blame. The leader should encourage risk-taking, appreciate a good effort even if it fails. Thus, the findings lend support to the literature in that shared leadership includes empowerment by giving encouragement and recognition to staff, treating followers as individuals and supporting and encouraging their development, that foster trust, involvement and cooperation (Gilding as cited in Carless 1998). Short and Greer (1997: 135) have suggested the following dimensions for teacher empowerment:

- Professional growth – refers to teachers’ perception that the school in which they work provides them with opportunities to grow and develop professionally, to learn continuously and to expand their own skills through the work life of the school.
- Status – refers to teacher perception that they have professional respect and admiration from colleagues, teachers believe that they have their colleagues’ support and feel that others respect their knowledge and expertise.
- Self-efficacy – refers to teachers’ perception that they have the skills and ability to help students learn, are competent in building effective programs for students and can effect changes in student learning.
- Autonomy – refers to teachers’ belief that they can control certain aspect of their work. The hallmark of autonomy is the sense of freedom to make certain decisions. Schools that create such environments build teachers’ sense of autonomy. Autonomy is also regarded as a necessary prerequisite for a sense of accomplishment.
- Impact - refers to teachers’ perception that they have an effect and an influence on school life.

Empowerment is thus not a matter of process, but rather a matter of building respect by

strengthening and fostering collaboration. Life, liberty, justice, unity and happiness are supplemented with the values of excellence, innovation and empowerment. These values are important to the individual and beneficial to the organization. Thus, the development of followers and attention to the individual is important.

Another aspect of participative leadership is communication, how leaders interact with followers. Smit and Cronje (1997:331) view communication as an integral part of all leadership or management functions. They said in order to plan, lead, organize or control, leaders have to communicate with their followers. I also think that communication cannot be separated from the decision-making process. Thus, decision-making necessitates communication which is crucial in schools, which are striving to create a democratic ethos because according to Davidoff, Kaplan and Lazarus (1994) it creates a certain transparency in the school, thus creating a sense of ownership of decisions on the part of the teachers. A very strong feature of the three women leaders' experience is their personal interactions with teachers, students and the parents. Through these they communicate formally and informally with them. They accommodate them whenever they need them and through this personal contact they make themselves available to others.

Gates (2000:25) argued that a democracy relies on extensive networks of engaged dialogue to achieve collective wisdom and expertise, networks of people. Once the members of a group accept and trust one another they will interact or communicate more openly. Cawood and Swartz as cited in Auala (1989) defined communication as the sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences. They said that leadership is an effective communication because the true leader's relationship with his or her people is determined by the following:

- What he or she shares with them;
- the quality of his or her personal contacts in the group;
- the way he or she opens up to his or her follower.

They went further and argued that communications in schools is very essential because schools are public institutions and thus subjected to the full spectrum of public observation and reaction.

In essence, participative and consensual decision making demands cooperation and teamwork, values that are openly communicated and reinforced. Individual responsibility for collective decision making demands an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. These values emphasise concern for the total person as a natural part of the working relationship, emphasizing the whole person and not just the individual's work force (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 131). In light of the literature referred to earlier, it would seem that the participants in this study would align themselves strongly with the 'person orientation' element of leadership. It is clear that they pursue personal and individual well-being above all.

5.5 A learning organization (LO)

As I became increasingly familiar with my respondents' views on leadership and organisations, it became apparent that what they were describing was what has become known as a learning organization. This section explores the features of a learning organisation in relation to my findings.

Luthans (1995:45) noted the following as being the characteristics of a learning organization (as adapted from Senge 1993: 9):

- There is a shared vision and leaders ensure that this vision exists and is nurtured.
- Formulation and implementation of ideas take place at all levels of the organization.
- Personnel understand their own responsibilities as well as the way in which their

own work interrelates influence that of others.

- Conflicts are resolved through the use of collaboration learning.
- The role of the leader is to empower others, build a shared vision, encourage effective decision making throughout the organization through the use of empowerment and charismatic leadership.

Karash (1995: unpaginated) found that the following responses indicated that the LO was seen as being very important:

- For innovation, creativity, commitment, improvement, empowerment and understanding.
- For awareness of the critical nature of independence.
- For energized committed work force.

It was also noted that a learning organization combines the essential elements of strategy development and personal development. It creates a space for people to achieve tremendous personal results. It values the scientific method of hypothesis development, testing and validation, as well as the personal development pathway found in the concepts of “personal mastery” (Karash 1995: no page number).

Thus, when these characteristics are in place ultimate values can be shared. This would imply that, in order for a leader to develop and enhance organizational values, he or she must be engaged in the task of building a community in which this can happen. What results is a cultivating and supporting environment, a work environment that buoys up rather than debases employees’ results: people are fulfilled and the organization thus gains in the long run through the cooperation, commitment and creativity of the employees (Weick and Leon 1993: 150). Weick and Leon (1993: 18) further defined a learning organization as an adaptive enterprise with workers freed to think for themselves, to identify problems and opportunities and to go after them. Therefore, the role of the leaders is to build organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to

understand complexity, clarify vision and improve shared mental model. Senge (1990: 8) defined mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”. He further said that we do not “have” mental models. We “are” our mental models. They are the medium through which we and the world interact. They are inextricably woven into our personal life history and sense of who we are.

In my opinion the three women leaders work in an environment that comply with some of these characteristics. The three women leaders create an environment of shared values and vision or leadership, interact with and communicate with others. Through their democratic leadership, through their honesty which is related to openness, trustworthiness, love and care and their acceptance of everybody, they create a “secure and stable” environment, a trusting school climate where others feel loved, comfortable, competent, responsible, accountable and fearless. The secure and stable environment, discussed in Chapter Four, can be identified with the learning organization; thus the findings correspond with the literature.

To summarize the experiences of the three women leaders’ democratic leadership, I identify the so-called ‘Three Pillars of Leadership’ (Hagberg Consulting Group 1998: unpaginated) within the experiences of the three women leaders:

- Visionary Evangelist: as they create, sell and drive the strategy of the school. They also serve as the spokespersons for the school and demonstrate confidence in its potential for success.
- Team and Consensus Builder: they develop teamwork, commitment, alignment and employee motivation by involving, empowering and creating a positive work environment. They also develop loyalty by investing in building relationships with others and showing interest in others. They are open to ideas and willing to share power.
- Manager of Execution: they are good administrators, they are structured,

disciplined, focused and skilled.

I have tried to show from my discussions above that the various elements of democratic leadership experienced by the three women are clearly interdependent. In other words, while it is possible to describe them separately, they are so intimately related that in the end, they cannot be seen in isolation from one another. One mal-functioning element will affect the whole school system. Equally, one well- functioning element can influence democracy in the school positively.

Thus, vision, values, trust, communication and empowerment in the supportive culture of a learning organisation are central to democratic leadership.

5.6 Transformational and charismatic leaders

Apart then from the characteristics of transformational leaders I discussed in Chapter Three, I would like to look at some characteristics of transformational leadership as identified by Robbins (1998) these include: gaining respect and trust, giving personal attention, coaching and advising, communicating high expectations and providing a vision.

These characteristics correspond well with the three women's leadership qualities as they share vision, enable others to act - thus empowering them - trust others, encourage others and model the way. Thus, the findings support the theories of transformational leadership (Bass, Conger & Kanungo, Kouzes & Posner, Sashkin & Burke, and Trice & Beyer (all cited in Colvin 1999) that include shared vision, encouragement of individual development, giving regular feedback, using participative decision making and promotion of a cooperative and trusting work environment.

It is feasible that the women leaders believe that the hierarchical, bureaucratic, controlling model would be less than effective in energizing and coordinating followers. Thus, their

experience agrees with what the literature says of the emerging conceptualizing of leadership – transformational leadership – as being visionary, values-based, developmental, inspiring and empowering. It focuses on shared values, follower development and transcendental purpose and it is called value-laden leadership, visionary leadership or transformational leadership (Colvin 1999).

Thus, the three women do not treat educational leadership as a form of management (controlling and directive) but rather as a relational phenomenon. Therefore these findings are consistent with the literature that suggests that education reforms that are directed towards raising the quality of schools require administrators who are collaborative, dynamic and innovative problem solvers, that provide teachers with aspirations and dreams (Colvin 1999). Colvin (1991) further noted that the implication of a philosophy of democratic leadership are practical areas such as empowerment of teachers, sharing of leadership and development of leadership qualities among children.

As for charismatic leadership, Avolio and Bass as cited in Colvin (1999) noted that charisma concerns the followers' respect and trust and it includes an articulated vision with a sense of importance. Thus, charismatic leaders have self- confidence, competence and inspire respect and trust. I had already talked about the trust, respect and confidence of the three women leaders. There seem to be elements of charisma in their leadership practice and being. However, as I have already argued, this study did not set out to prove whether women leaders are transformational and/or charismatic: the judgment, then, lies with the reader.

Nevertheless, the findings do confirm what the studies and theories I discussed earlier in Chapter Two have said, namely that women are more likely than men to use transformational leadership.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how an individual's mental modes of the world impact on how an organization functions, thus creating the theory of the learning organization.

I have also tried to show what the three women leaders are doing in order to make sure the school is functioning as a healthy organization, with all these interdependent elements operating well and contributing to the overall effectiveness of the school. Here I refer to leadership capacity - that includes the ability to ensure quality education to maintain creativity and accountability and to provide a role model with respect to the values of the school.

Thus, I think and hope we see in the leadership of the three women that they use democratic leadership, as they are creative, imaginative and empathetic, supporting an important compelling and rewarding vision that encompasses the members' needs and values.

However, we need to be cautious when we talk about "democratic leadership". As we know the context of leadership in Namibian school, before independence, was extremely authoritarian. In the last decade a more facilitative style of leadership has emerged. Education reforms are directed towards raising the quality of schools that require administrators or leaders who are collaborative dynamic and innovative. Therefore schools demand participation - hence interactive leadership - that would provide teachers with aspirations and dreams. But unfortunately, this has sometimes become too laissez faire, giving space to the many voices being heard, without adequate guidance. In Chapter Two I alluded to the danger of a laissez-faire approach that lacks directiveness, and the question of whether the leadership at this school falls into this trap needs to be addressed. Another way of framing the question might be whether these leaders, in stressing person orientation, have neglected task orientation. It should be perfectly obvious that this has

not been the case. The data consistently reflect concern for task and structure, and a well-functioning, organised school. Clearly these leaders are able to balance the dual orientations successfully.

But questions still abound about how best to run schools, how to reduce inefficiency, how to communicate more effectively, how to empower others effectively, how to be more creative. The list seems endless. Perhaps the answer to these questions is simply to recognize how our own values and perceptions shape organizations, how to trust ourselves to succeed and to listen to our own experiences of organizational life. Most important, to start listening and accepting the new voices in leadership - women's voices, the new thinking to leadership – democratic leadership.

Thus, the concept of leadership in women leaders is similar to the concept of “transformational leadership” which is required for the successful transition to a system of democracy in schools.

The next chapter is the conclusion, where I summarize my main findings and then make recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 My research question

I see my chief task in this section as addressing the issue of how successful this study has been in seeking answers to my research question. The previous chapters have outlined and summarised my main findings, and where possible I have related these to the body of literature on leadership. The task now is to return to the central question, and establish to what extent I have addressed it.

The study has been driven a single, open-ended goal, namely to gain an enriched understanding of the phenomenon of female leadership. The study has argued that female leadership has generally been investigated in terms of what is generally known of leadership, which is problematic since most of the theories developed over the past century have been strongly male-gendered. Here I have attempted to study the phenomenon in its own right.

To this end, I deliberately selected a site at which leadership has traditionally been female, and within this site I selected small sample of three female leaders at different levels of operation. I hoped that this would provide me with an opportunity to examine a case in which the phenomenon of female leadership would have had time to grow in a particular way, being in a sense isolated from a male dominated environment. This may be expressed as a sub-goal of the research, and I need to come back to it in this chapter.

I find that my summarised findings, as presented in the previous two chapters, go a considerable way towards answering the research question. It is certainly clear from my findings that these leaders embrace leadership approaches that are generally regarded as

emergent and desirable in the literature consulted. They are democratic leaders, involving others in decision making. Indeed, part of their frustration arises from the fact that they have failed to involve the parents fully in the life of the school. They see themselves as role models, but not in the bureaucratic sense; in other words, it is not their position that gains respect, but rather who they are and what they value. As such they set high standards, and expect nothing but the best. Their work is also continually under-written and bolstered by their personal values which translate into the value system of the school. The strongest values that emerge are their capacity for care and love. They value individuals, and truly believe in their worth. They are committed to empowerment, and to creating a safe and secure environment in which to work. The picture that emerges articulates well with what literature says of transformational, democratic leadership and interactive leadership.

Yet this remains a partial answer, providing little insight into the unique phenomenon I have investigated. In order to explain the real value in what I have found I need to draw on those scholars and researchers who have seen leadership as more than sets of skills and techniques to be mastered. Part of the answer lies with Greenfield (1994: 225), who rejected the study of 'leadership' in favour of the study of 'leaders', focusing on the person rather than the role. Greenfield argues that leadership is a willful act where one person attempts to construct the social world for others. This extreme subjectivist view seems to be in conflict with an interactive approach, and perhaps overstates the case. But his point finds support in several other writers, such as Porter (in Bolman and Deal 1994: 85), who suggested that the separation of leadership from the question of "who I am and what is my purpose and meaning in life is moral illiteracy". Thus the question of values becomes even more important, and I need to ask to what extent my participants are conscious of acting out their morality.

This study has shown, I believe, that leadership for these women is more than a list of what to do and how to do it. There is no doubt that their leadership flows from who they are as persons. Their acts are rooted in their own values and beliefs, which over time

have become those of the school. Here we need to look more carefully at some of the 'softer' characteristics associated with leadership, such as those mentioned by Kimbrough and Burkett (1990: 32), which include acceptance of yourself and others, truthfulness, honesty and strength of character. Covey (1992: 108) has also identified integrity as a non-negotiable principle for guiding a leader's actions. Many of the responses have hinted at these qualities, and I would suggest that the leaders I studied are people who value integrity and honesty very highly, especially as they see themselves so strongly as role models. Strength of character and courage also emerge as themes, particularly in the principal's successful steering of the school through turbulent periods of change, and the head girl's willingness to confront problem students.

Another particularly 'human' aspect of their leadership that emerges is their willingness to face up to shortcomings and weaknesses. Bolman and Deal (1994: 89) refer to this as "self-discovery", which one could argue is an essential component of being human. All three respondents felt free to discuss their shortcomings, and the sense one gets is therefore of real human beings, rather than technocratic leaders.

It is through consideration of these essentially human qualities that I am able to formulate a picture of these women as leaders, and therefore answer the research question more appropriately. In essence, then, what I have learned is that the phenomenon of leadership at this school is the product of lived experience, of individual value systems that have come together to form a coherent whole. It is marked by humanity and concern for others. Mainly, it flows from who the people are and what they stand for. Leadership emerges as an intensely human phenomenon.

The question of whether women lead differently from men perhaps deserves some attention, though it was never set down as research question. It is of course a difficult question to answer, since I have not investigated male leaders at all and therefore have no basis for comparison. What I have tried to show, though, is that these women perceive leadership in ways which are essentially different from mainstream leadership theory, and

more in line with emerging thinking on leadership as an interactive, constructivist activity (Lambert *et al.* 1995). I trust I have been successful.

6.2 Shortcomings and limitations

This research on the leadership of women leaders has provided me with many opportunities for personal reflection. The process of data collection (the interviewing process) was particularly interesting and exciting. I found it very challenging and interesting to place the findings of the data within the arena of already established academic research and literature. In retrospect, I can see that the research has several limitations, the most obvious being the small data base. Three leaders at the same organization were used for the study and thus no generalizations can be made from the study. On the other hand, it is within the nature of interpretive research to look closely at few cases rather than superficially at many. The object throughout has been to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon.

Secondly, the research does not include the perceptions of the other staff (the followers). They would obviously be in the best position to judge these leaders' actions. Here again though, the object has not to judge but to understand. Furthermore, it is the understanding of the leaders themselves that has been sought, since I was interested in exploring leadership as a lived phenomenon.

The three leaders were also not observed. But again, the reason lies in the nature of the study itself. It was not the intention of the study to classify and categorize but just to hear from the leaders themselves, their own experiences and their own perceptions. Thus, the researcher was driven simply by a need to find out what was happening, rather than the need to support or refute a hypothesis.

6.3 Summary and recommendations

Thus, although, the thesis has some limitations, after carefully considering my experiences within the three women leaders, I think that it is very important to make the following observation about the three women leadership:

- Their leadership style centers around communication, positive working relationships and team-orientation because they:
- Are good communicators as they keep others informed,
- Are good team players as they put the success of the team first,
- Have social skills as they use influence rather than authority to lead.

They are good at motivating others by:

- showing appreciation for the efforts of others,
- praising and encouraging others,
- being more enthusiastic.

They are good at managing a diverse school

- are tolerant of differences,
- lead with love, care, respect and trust.

The three women's leadership may be characterised as follows:

- creating and articulating a vision,
- setting clear directions,
- taking charge and risks,
- being inspirational role models,
- setting high standards of performance,
- assuming responsibility,
- having confidence of success.

The suggestion made earlier that women do lead differently from men seems to be confirmed in this study. They tend to use a more participative and inclusive style of leadership compared to the controlling and directive style of men as already discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

The data presented in this research project, although limited, points to the following recommendations:

- At a practical level, these findings have positive implications for the future of women in organizations;
- Women's leadership style (the democratic or interactive style) is better suited to the leadership challenge of today.
- The glass ceiling should disappear and a wider path should be created for women to attain positions in leadership. In this way contribution of women which is the newly recognized interactive leadership style can be valued and appreciated.
- Women in leadership should not be treated differently because they are women but should be assessed on their competence as leaders. That was also the view argued in the Economist 1992: 21 as cited in Human (undated) that positive expectations often create positive outcomes. Thus we should stop thinking of gender as a problem and begin to creatively harness the potential of women in the workplace. Put women in positions, create the right conditions to keep them and organizations will see the results.
- Organizations are hungry to find people who can deliver the necessary skills, thus men will be stretched to change and adopt the more democratic leadership style favoured by women.

While interpreting these findings as positive for the future of women, it is acknowledged that there are many other factors which determine advancement in organization, but it is more realistic to be cautiously optimistic in that organization will answer to the call for

human persons, in all their complexity. Thus, women's experiences should no longer be silenced and marginalized within the organizational setting as they have so much to offer. effective leadership to offer.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

These findings, as I have argued already, are based on a limited sample obtained from one female-based organization with all female leaders. Studies that suggest themselves as obvious follow up work are:

- Further research to examine the perceptions of followers of the leadership of female leaders to get a more fully fleshed out picture of the leaders. I think by hearing from other staff members, a rich and dynamic picture could emerge.
- Further research where observation as a data collecting method is used (with interviews also) that could enable the researcher to observe, ask questions, listen to conversations to grasp acts and the way they are carried out. Cantrell (1993) said that observation gives the researcher direct first-hand experience of events while they occur: it serves as a check against bias, prejudice and selective perceptions.

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