

Fostering an effective school through moral leadership: A South African case study

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Abstract

School principals today face a number of challenges and many dysfunctional schools are plagued by low teacher morale, drug abuse by learners and violence. While many critics argue that it is necessary to bring back morality and ethics in “messy workplaces”, others do not agree. The focus on ethics, as some would argue, appears soft and elitist in dysfunctional schools, “the job is to clean up the mess and get the kids learning. Ethics we can worry about later” (Sobol, 2002, p.83). Yet, effective principals learn the art of leading with their staff members. Moreover, it is also crucial for staff members to be involved in bringing about solutions. When educators learn to address the challenges their schools face, they empower themselves. Principals who want to create leaders within their schools will utilise morals and ethics as they involve the educators in improving their schools. This case study investigates how a principal of a dysfunctional school used a people-centred approach that emphasised morals, ethics and values to bolster the school’s effectiveness. Using ubuntu (African) philosophy, the principal encouraged character-building through values among the educators. This study shows that school leaders should not overlook collaboration with their followers as they create a community of leaders. Furthermore, effective leaders would not eschew values as they take their followers with them while learning to learn.

Keywords: *Values, Moral leadership, Ethical leadership, Effective schools*

Introduction and problem statement

It is a critical but commonplace reality that the 21st century school principals are confronted by moral and ethical dilemmas. Arguably, morality and values should be the core of education in general. Sobol (2002) contends that troubled and dysfunctional schools where justice and equity are absent are precisely the places in which ethical thought and action are needed. Moreover, school leaders and managers today require certain qualities to survive the challenging demands of their jobs. Ramsey (1999, p.6) points out that most school

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administrators are stuck and usually limited to function strictly as managers. Ramsey (1999) also avers that managers make do, they are constantly monitoring, and that being a manager is hard work and not much fun. However, leaders energise and excite the organisation and the people in it by showing what it can become. "Leaders deal with visions, dreams and possibilities" (Ramsey, 1999, p.7). Many writers have tried to look for the best leadership practices and have discovered that today's schools require shared leadership and shared decision-making (Singh & Manser, 2000; Pretorius, 1998; Kotter, 1996). However, employees cannot share vision or decision-making in the institution unless there is a high morale in the workplace. Ramsey (1999) perceives employee morale as one of the cornerstones of productivity and contends that while some managers might care less about morale, effective leaders will place a high value on it. Good morale results in a strong sense of common purpose, mutual support and unified effort. There are also various cultural models that acknowledge the importance of morale.

Cultural models in organisations have become crucial as organisations begin to emphasise the informal aspects. Bush (2003, p.156) avers that cultural models focus on the values, beliefs and norms of individuals in the organisation and "how these individual perceptions coalesce into shared organisational meanings. Cultural models are manifested by symbols and rituals rather than through the formal structure of the organisation." In a time when violence and drugs have become commonplace in a majority of schools, school leaders have perceived a need to emphasise morality and values. Furthermore, Bush (2003, p.156) state that:

The increasing interest in culture as one element in school and college management may be understood as another example of dissatisfaction with the limitations of the formal models. Their emphasis on the technical aspects of institutions appears to be inadequate for schools and colleges aspiring to excellence. The stress on the intangible world of values and attitudes is a useful counter to these bureaucratic assumptions and helps to produce a more balanced portrait of educational institutions.

The demands and pressures that the principals are subjected to every day require them to be prepared for their jobs. Yet until recently, there has been no formal training for school managers in South African schools. The Advanced Certificate in Education, School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) is a programme planned to address some of the challenges encountered by principals in schools. The ACE-SML is a practice-based part-time study programme that is aimed at providing management and leadership support through a variety of interactive programmes to improve the learners' practice, professional growth and ethos of leadership (Mestry & Singh, 2007). The programme equips school managers as they

constantly learn about various themes in leadership and management. Schools, like all organisations, reflect some kind of dynamism that is indicative of a fast changing society. Principals need to employ contingent approaches to deal with the challenges of the rapidly changing environment. Morality and values are supported by the post-apartheid curriculum in South Africa which has its foundations in the Constitution of the Republic. However, when one looks at the problems that schools currently have, linked to violence and drugs, one can argue that school principals have major and unique challenges on their hands.

Bush (2007) mentions a number of models of educational leadership and management. Among these are managerial leadership, transformational leadership, participative leadership, political and transactional leadership. One of the models that caters for the diverse nature of school contexts and has the advantage of adapting to a particular situation is contingent leadership (Bush, 2007). Furthermore, Bush argues that:

"South Africa has one of the most diverse education systems in the world. It ranges from well-endowed city schools, comparable to the best in the developed countries, to very poor schools without access to the most basic facilities, such as water, power and sanitation. Given such disparities, it is unwise to prescribe one universal approach to school leadership and management."

This is also supported by Bush (2003) who highlights the importance of using theory to improve practice. Furthermore, he is of the opinion that no single theory is sufficient to guide practice and that managers need to develop conceptual pluralism (Bush, 2003). This is similar to the notion of contingent leadership because both recognise the diverse nature of the educational context. Evers and Katyal (2007) cite Hallinger who points out that it is meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to the school's context. Furthermore, they suggest that principals and other school stakeholders should be actively involved in knowledge-building in order to solve the challenges of practice and to place their work in a context that may give it meaning and purpose (Evers & Katyal, 2007).

The main question asked in this case study was the following:

In their attempts to attain school effectiveness, can principals use morality as they instill certain values to change their educators into transformational leaders?

The following sub-questions were asked:

- Can teachers of dysfunctional schools learn any lessons from character education?
- Can a philosophy such as that of *ubuntu* enhance morality and effectiveness in schools?

Definition of terms

For the purpose of this article the following terms will be clarified as to is meant in the context of this case study: ethics, moral leadership and *ubuntu*. Morality and ethics are frequently highlighted when people talk about character education or character-building. Wiley (1998) points out that character is a reliable inner disposition to act in a morally good way; having attributes such as honesty and integrity. Furthermore, she describes character education as a form of moral education, the latter being a “broad umbrella covering student knowledge, understanding, intentions and desires, attitudes, and behaviour in relation to what is right or wrong” (Wiley, 1998, p.18).

Ethics – Isaacson (2007) cites Starrat who defines ethics as the study of what constitutes a moral life and the underlying beliefs, assumption, principles and values that support a moral way of life. Wiley (1998) concurs and further states that ethics express moral principles and is especially important in preventing the abuse of power.

Morals – According to Isaacson (2007) morals are values based on fairness, honesty, truth telling, justice and promise keeping. A moral leader is one who is concerned with whether the decision-making process and the impact on the school-community reflect concepts of justice and equality. Kirschenbaum (1995) associates morality with concepts such as conscience, loving the good, self-control, humility and moral habit. Ethics and morality are not synonymous but they are related. Timm (2000) shows the relationship between these two when he points out that ethics are an individual’s collection of morals. People who are ethical or moral are people who make decisions based on what they feel is right.

Ubuntu – Broodryk (2006) states that an *ubuntu* worldview contains the basic values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion. Broodryk further points out that these core values are associated with other positive values such as warmth, empathy, giving, commitment and love. Mbigi (1997) concurs when he points out that *ubuntu* has become prominent under the democratic dispensation in South Africa. Furthermore, Mbigi posits that South African organisations are faced with ruthless global competition, hence the need to negotiate a shared common agenda. An *ubuntu* leadership style involves a departure from hierarchically structured management relations and introduces a cooperative and supportive form of leadership in which collective solidarity of the group is employed and respected (Prinsloo, 1998).

Theoretical background

Wharton (2000) points out that immoral behaviour persists in organisations because of two things: (i) a failure to see that the essence of leadership is moral behaviour and (ii) a misunderstanding of how moral actions arise and are inculcated in the workplace. Kirshenbaum (1995) also posits that morals and values are embodied in character education; and that character traits and goals of character education include respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline and loyalty. Another goal of morality is to produce autonomous individuals who know those moral values and are committed to acting in a manner consistent with them (Kirschenbaum, 1995).

“Leadership is not about ‘technical’ (or job) knowledge, it is about having followers, those who willingly work their hearts out to get great work done” (Wharton, 2000, p.9). Wharton also contends that moral leadership is about engendering respect within the organisation top to bottom. According to Wharton, the following four qualities are contributors to immoral leadership behaviour:

- (i) ***Behavioural drivers*** – sometimes leaders have this need to win, to be loved, to avoid conflict, to be perfect, and to be successful.
- (ii) ***Style*** – style factors affect leadership negatively when leaders impose their leadership styles on others to get things done rather than finding a way to understand and better work with others.
- (iii) ***Habit*** – a leader can act immorally through habits that are either positive or negative. Small habits can be destructive to organisations.
- (iv) ***Intention*** – a leader acts consciously and intentionally in ways that harm others.

Brief related literature review

Excellence and effectiveness in schools are affected by many factors which include constantly enforcing the rational approach to management. Peters and Waterman (1982) state that professionalism in management is regularly equated with ‘hard headed rationality’. However, these authors argue that although the rationalist approaches teach people that well-trained, professional managers can manage anything; these approaches miss some arguments (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Bottery (2004) writes about the need to have moral leaders to guide institutions if people are to have a moral society. According to Bottery (2004, p.207),

"[s]uch a person is in most ways the antithesis of the opportunist, for this leader, rather than inventing an image, and constructing a persona calculated to appeal to followers, instead sees the school as a community and embraces and reflects back to the core educational and moral values of that community. School life, then, is defined at its

core as the public celebration of certain values, and it is the leader's role to articulate and provide leadership in the attempted resolution by the school community."

McLennan and Thurlow (2003, p.5) state that the recent changes to the school governance system have resulted in the majority of principals being under-prepared for their new roles. These writers also add that the collapse of culture of learning and teaching (COLT) in many schools has eroded the confidence in education managers. "They have little idea of what would be required to restore the culture, especially as they have consistently been at the receiving end of a top-down management system, working in a structured milieu and receiving direct instructions from departmental officials" (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003, p.5). It is not only the changes outside the schools that have put much pressure on school principals. Some challenges appear to emanate from the schools themselves; factors cited above such as bullying, drug abuse and violence are some of the main aspects that impact negatively upon the school leader and school manager.

Aspects such as culture and norms have been underscored by some leaders. Other leaders have perceived such informal qualities as spirituality, as important aspects in guiding effective schools. Successful school leaders state that getting culture right and paying attention to how other stakeholders define and experience meaning are two widely accepted rules for creating effective schools (Sergiovanni, 2000, p.1). This writer also contends:

Culture is generally thought of as the normative glue that holds a particular school together. With shared visions, values, and beliefs at its heart, culture serves as a compass setting, steering people in a common direction. It provides norms that govern the way people interact with each other. It provides a framework for deciding what does or does not make sense.

The above shows how crucial culture is within an organisation, and that the leader's role is important in refining this culture. Some research has shown the importance of certain African models in guiding not only successful but also highly moral organisations. Mbigi (2005) as well as Msila (2008) highlight the need for an approach such as *ubuntu* in leadership. Mthembu (1996) describes *ubuntu* as the key to all African values and that it involves humanness, a good disposition towards others, and a moral nature. Furthermore, Mthembu avers that *ubuntu* describes the significance of group solidarity and interdependence in African culture. Mbigi (2005, p.v) supports this by pointing out that *ubuntu* is a metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity on issues that is vital to the survival of African communities. The constant calls for a moral society are desperate calls for society to embrace this solidarity as it changes for the better.

Mbigi (1997) points out that fears and uncertainties are characteristic of transition and it is the task of leadership to manage the fears of the people. A DoE publication (2001, p.16) states that out of the values of *ubuntu* follow the practices of compassion, kindness, altruism and respect which are at the core of making schools places of effective culture of learning and teaching. *Ubuntu* is envisaged as a philosophy that would ensure that there is more diligence and a culture of achievement. The publication further points out that:

Equality might require us to put up with people who are different, non-sexism and non-racism might require us to rectify the inequities of the past, but *ubuntu* goes much further: it embodies the concept of mutual understanding and the active appreciation of the value of human difference...Ultimately; *ubuntu* requires you to respect others if you are to respect yourself.

In a society that has been made complex by a number of social issues, the philosophy of *ubuntu* encounters many social currents that flow in various directions. Ntuli (1999) states that the spirit of *ubuntu* has long disappeared and that that is the reason why we need an African renaissance. Furthermore, Ntuli argues that in the face of the present cultural and moral collapse in South Africa, there is a need to strive for a rebirth. Yet, Dandala (1996, p.70) states that *ubuntu* requires a great deal of learning and sharing and institutions can achieve this through the training of people to practice greater interaction. Schools and the societies around them need to learn the values of *ubuntu*. Msila (2008) also highlights these dynamics and agrees that when led effectively, educators can learn the values of *ubuntu* and subsequently use these to enhance the running of the school in an effective manner. Schools do not have to tinker with failing strategies but should transform the leadership culture by focusing on innovative ways that would ensure their success.

The Research design

This case study was conducted in a historically black (township) school where a new principal had just inherited a school labeled by many as a ‘dysfunctional organisation’. Among the causes cited for this dysfunctional nature were low morale and lack of commitment among learners and teachers. Learners were said to be violent and some allegedly used drugs on the school premises. According to the principal and five of her staff members, the school “was fraught with mismanagement, low morale of teachers, disobedient learners and aloof parents.”

Liso High School (a pseudonym) has 29 educators excluding the principal. The researcher had visited the school while conducting a comparative study of managerial challenges in township schools. The principal was trying to transform the school by introducing general moral values as well as the *ubuntu* philosophy. The researcher, together with two co-researchers, interviewed and observed the educators in the school. The ethnographic study spanned a total of 10 months. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) describe the purpose of educational ethnography as providing rich, descriptive data about the contents, activities and beliefs of participants in educational settings. Bailey (1987) points out that in ethnographic research, the observers attempt to become part of the culture or subculture that they are studying. The researchers visited the school at least twice a week. During most visits the researchers were complete observers and they adopted a passive role thus minimising contamination of the natural setting. The researchers visited the teachers in their classrooms, in staff meetings and also attended four Teacher-Parent meetings. On two separate occasions, the researchers observed meetings between the School Management Team (SMT) and the Learners Representative Council (LRC).

Procedures

The principal and 24 of her educators were interviewed during the course of this study. Of these 24 educators, 13 are male and 11 are female. The researchers asked open-ended questions and the participants were accorded a chance to comment on a number of issues including values, norms and culture in the school, teaching as well as the impact of all these in the culture of learning and teaching. While the research results became rich and a number of themes and topics resulted, eventually one of the aspects that came through clearly was the enhancement of morals and values in the school. Observations were made in a number of places including the school grounds and classrooms. The principal was shadowed for a total of three weeks during this study – a week at the beginning and five days in about the fourth month and then for the last time just before the conclusion of the study. Over a period of four months, 16 educators were visited in their classrooms. Among other things, the research team was interested in whether the educators were reflecting the Department of Education's (DoE's) policy in teaching aspects of *ubuntu* in the classroom. The principal had many challenges, many of which because she was new to the school.

The Findings

Right from the beginning, the principal wanted to lead a school where all the teachers were involved in 'some form of shared leadership'. During the three occasions that she was

shadowed, she tried hard to delegate many duties to her colleagues. Yet she noticed that not many educators wanted responsibility. In a journal that she kept, she wrote about various excuses that educators had to not to take part in many school activities. In one journal entry, she wrote:

Mr J won't be part of the assessment team because he is comfortable as a soccer coach. Mr W wants to rather work with the Arts and Culture group and not the entertainment committee because there are number of people who have a vendetta against him there.

The principal also perceived that the staff members were divided into cliques, and it was clear during staff meetings that there were always the same opposing sides. The researchers also witnessed the latter when they observed meetings where educators supported one another depending on which side others chose. The educators also had a tendency to use very strong language, which was frequently “unprofessional”, when addressing one another. The principal started to address some of these issues by suggesting how educators should conduct themselves, especially during school hours. She also convened a few meetings where the staff members were compelled to work together in solving some of the school’s problems. She made many educators uncomfortable initially when she joined them in the staffroom during lunchtime. On certain days, she would task one of them to select a topic to discuss while the they relaxed or ate their lunch. The principal also ran monthly workshops on what could be expected in a school where there is distributive leadership and she showed people why staff members needed to display the *ubuntu* values. She began to instill a sense of celebration in the school: birthdays and personal achievements are some of the things that were celebrated. She made it part of professional development – all the educators needed to be part of the school’s success. The change within the educators was very slow and gradual as many did not appear to want to move away from the positions where they were comfortable.

Breaking down teacher isolation and selfishness was also one aspect that the principal wanted to change from the start. It was interesting to see how different the educators were at the end of the study compared to the first time they were interviewed and observed. At the beginning of the study, they were pessimistic and did not see their role in changing the school. In fact, the majority of the teachers maintained that “the entire staff needed to be changed if the school was to succeed”. Yet, only two were still pessimistic by the end of the study as most said that they were beginning to see the vision of the principal when she said she “wanted to revamp the school’s values”.

The principal started a few new committees in the school and the success of these committees was dependent upon the close collaboration of those involved. She also magnified the school's vision as she repeatedly stated the role of the educators in the community. Therefore, educators were required to work together as they strived to achieve the goals and the vision of the school. The principal also latched on to the spirituality of many of the staff members. She constantly told them of the need to respect and cherish one another in a team and how profane it was to despise another team member. She stressed the importance of *ubuntu* as well as its nearness to spirituality and moral living. While she was wary of attributing the general improvement in learners' success to her determined intervention, the principal was certain that it was strengthening the move towards the school's unified vision. The mid-year results were as follows:

Table 1: Mid-year results of Liso High School

Grade	Current year (<i>pass rate</i>)	Previous year (<i>pass rate</i>)
Grade 8	48	36
Grade 9	60	52
Grade 10	54	50
Grade 11	60	56
Grade 12	42	30

The principal was certain that the "slight improvements in her school as illustrated above were due to her emphasis on values". She stated that her emphasis on values and character made her staff members to be more committed to their work and this translated to good learners' results. She also emphasised that no school leadership would be effective "without proper ethical and moral leadership".

Next, the findings of this case study are discussed under three different headings. The challenges experienced by the principal in trying to entrench the spirit of moral leadership in the school are shown. The discussion begins with the principal facing the challenges as an outsider in a group that had internalised cultures.

Discussion of the findings

Changing an "inherited team"

The principal arrived from another school and district and inherited the challenges in Liso High School. It can be challenging to arrive in an environment where performance is not as it should be and to advance organisational effectiveness. Rowling (2003, p.49) states that business and industry are far more unforgiving than educationalists when they discover that they have the wrong people on the bus. However, when she arrived at the school, she realised something needed to be done to transform it. Rowling states that:

It is essential to avoid the 'It's them, not me' complex. This is a situation where it is most easily felt; yet most transformational leaders attempt to make change to their senior leadership teams with genuine belief that it is possible, indeed transformation of a leadership team is as good a place to start at any.

The process begins by sensing the need for significant change; a recognition that things are not as they should be and that if matters are left unattended transformation simply will not happen.

The principal did well in the beginning when she tried to understand what was happening in the school. She was trying to understand the school's culture and climate. It was crucial for her to gather facts as she put the pieces of the bigger picture together. The principal, however, tried to be impartial at all times, even when she shared lunchtime with the rest of the staff. Glanz (2006) contends that good principals are impartial because bias undermines good leadership. Furthermore, Glanz highlights the need for caring congruent with moral leadership. In trying to change the culture in the school, the principal needed to highlight the problem areas where progress was being stalled. Rowling (2003) mentions four ways of ensuring that transformation is not hindered in any way and these are: re-energising, retraining, redefining, and removing. All these appear to have surfaced in Liso High School as the principal attempted to transform the school while trying to implement moral leadership. Within the context of Liso High School, the four ways mentioned by Rowling above can be briefly described as follows:

Re-energising: This is about finding new energy, which is sometimes referred to as 'a new lease of life' (Rowling, 2003, p.50). Rowling states that this often occurs to demotivated colleagues when there is a change of leadership in a school. The principal constantly motivated the educators by bringing in new interests, underscoring personal importance and highlighting the importance of moral values.

Retraining: The principle had a clear action plan – the educators were accorded time for introspection. Many of them did not see themselves as transformational leaders who could

uphold the qualities of moral leadership. The principal's support was crucial in this regard, as she guided the teachers, magnifying the importance of *ubuntu* and other moral values.

Redefining: One of the most crucial aspects that the principal achieved was redefining the roles of the team members. Rowling (2003, p. 50) argues:

Getting the right people on the bus may be achieved simply by moving their seat. Where it is possible to agree what their strengths are and redefine their role to maximise them, these strengths would be a blessing to everybody. It is desirable to ensure that there is no loss of self-esteem in this process.

While it was not easy for many educators to assume roles as transformative leaders, this is something they gradually learnt as they matured professionally.

Removing: While the principal could not fire any staff member from the school, could remove people from their positions of comfort. The majority of the staff members were idle as they saw the school falling apart.

Moral leadership within the context of a team

As the principal introduced a culture of upholding values, she also built a team that saw the ideals of moral leadership in building the school. Bolman and Deal (2002) point out that when leaders try to do everything, they leave everyone else frustrated and disempowered. "The school bogs down because nothing gets done unless the boss does it or approves it" (Bolman & Deal, 2002, p.66). The principal arrived at a school with a weak culture where the educators did not have any responsibilities. Collaboration was absent and the principal maintained that this is where she needed to start. Involving the educators as she built the morality and culture in the school, the principal became empowered as her educators became empowered.

As highlighted above, the principal arrived at a school with no teamwork, weak cultures, and negative beliefs, values and practices. Bolman and Deal (2002) state that weak cultures often call out for change and they are an invitation to strong leadership. This is the strong leadership that the principal wanted to introduce. Values and culture need to be celebrated by leaders who want to build their schools. The principal highlighted the importance of ceremony in the school when she arrived and this was very beneficial towards her leadership.

"The beginning of school, the end of tenure, or the death of a student all cry out for cultural events. The military learned long ago that a change of command has to be marked with pomp and circumstance. Otherwise, the unit suffers, and the new person in charge has a hard time. In most schools, principals come and go without any special event. This leads to cultural sterility. The ups and downs, comings of life in schools need cultural attention and support.

(Bolman & Deal, 2002, p.105).

What was crucial in the principal's change initiatives was her timing. She introduced changes when she saw that there was despondence from some members of staff as well as parents. Ramsey (1999) states that ideas and leaders fail because of bad timing and that when the time is right one can accomplish wonders. It was crucial for the principal to understand the culture of the school as she tried to transform it. The norms, values and beliefs of the staff members who make up the school can be very subtle but they add up to what is referred to as *culture* (Servais & Sanders, 2006). Furthermore, these writers contend that the culture of an organisation is essential to its success. In trying to achieve an organisational purpose, the principal employed cultural leadership. Cultural leadership is the opportunity to guide, develop and sustain the culture of an organisation (Servais & Sanders, 2006). Furthermore, Servais and Sanders point out that the transformational leader owns a cultural compass to facilitate relationship building in a way that contributes to a shared vision and a healthy organisational culture.

The principal did the various trials in *ubuntu* because she not only wanted a high-performing school, but also to act ethically, spiritually and morally as she led the school. Glanz (2006, p.xvi) posits that ethical and spiritual leaders are concerned with a number of areas which include the following:

- Examining one's personal and innermost beliefs and values to ensure that one acts with compassion and affirms justice for all people.
- Realising the impact of one's actions on others within the school organisation.
- Making well-reasoned decisions to moral dilemmas that do not have easy solutions.
- Leading others by example.
- Attuning oneself to personal convictions and organisational norms.

Effective leaders use character, integrity, values and morals to guide their organisations. A number of writers have emphasised the importance of these moral and spiritual aspects of leadership. Glanz (2006, p.xix) cites the following quotations:

“The wise leader models spiritual behaviour and lives in harmony with spiritual values” – John Heider

“Every organisation needs to evolve for itself a sense of its own ethical and spiritual core” – Lee G. Bolman & Terrence E. Deal

The above quotations embrace the principal's basic tenets. She wanted to instill a sense of belonging to a community with values and wisdom and therefore utilised *ubuntu* ideals to be able to include some of these pertinent aspects. She incorporated a set of values and beliefs she had about leadership in her transformation plan. This reflects the crucial role played by the principal. Sergiovanni (1992) states that the school principal is the high priest who seeks to define and strengthen the enduring values, beliefs and cultural strands that give the school its identity. In search of an identity, the principal used *ubuntu* values to build the school.

Through the introduction of the *ubuntu* philosophy, the principal was also trying to affirm some form of moral living. Glanz (2006) points out that living and leading with moral purpose does not occur naturally, hence principals need to consciously decide to lead morally. Glanz (2006) also cites Starrott who states that morality flows from one's humanity and that there are three qualities of a fully human person. These are autonomy, connectedness and transcendence. *Ubuntu* philosophy embodies all three these qualities. Morality deals with a system of values that undergirds ethical behaviour. A moral leader might value social justice and equity for all people (Glanz, 2006, p.xvii). The principal was striving to ensure that the staff members embrace all these qualities. It was not easy in a school where the culture and climate had always been negative. However, good leadership and ethical leadership bring no contradictions between leading effectively and practicing moral leadership (McDowell & Buckner, 2002). These writers also add that the exercise of moral behaviour and the articulation of ethical educational values are an essential part of educational leadership (McDowell & Buckner, 2002).

Moral leadership: an overlooked panacea for ineffective schools?

McDowell and Buckner (2002, p.3) state that many failures in educational leadership are due to the lack of understanding of human nature. Furthermore, McDowell and Buckner (2002) contend that principals do not fail because they do not understand school policy – they fail because they cannot make reasonable predictions about human behaviour. One of the most important aspects in *ubuntu* is the building of relationships. The sense of interdependence is emphasised. A school such as Liso High School had always been plagued by suspicion, individualism and low morale of staff members. Managers and educators in the

school had been impeached in a number of professional misdemeanours – from poor performance in the classroom to mismanagement of school funds.

By utilising *ubuntu*, the principal was shedding some of these moral dilemmas endemic in the school. Her sense of purpose proved effective as educators began to realise their potential and purpose in the school. Isaacson (2007) writes about the need for leaders to have continuous introspection, which include the moral, the ethical and purposeful leadership beliefs. The moral leader makes difficult decisions all the time and when leaders understand their moral and ethical positions on educational issues, they are able to make hard choices (Isaacson, 2007).

Moral and ethical leaders demonstrate ways to care for each other: learners, colleagues, parents and community members (Isaacson, 2007). In fact, moral leadership is encouraged by the post-apartheid curriculum which seeks to perceive the propinquity between schools and society. Based on democratic principles, the South African School's Act (SASA) of 1996 expects educators to work closely with other stakeholders in school governance. Moral leaders are more likely to use moral beliefs to bring about ethical decisions. School leaders who are moral leaders have a sense of purpose and the school is a top priority in their lives. Others might refer to some effective moral and ethical leaders as servant leaders. A servant leader whose guidance is morality and ethical living will encompass the values, vision and mission of the school in attempts to lead it to success. Zohar (1997) highlights the need for servant leadership in organisations facing change. She states that, "servant leaders lead from that level of deep, revolutionary vision that is accessed only by the third of our three kinds of thinking. They change the system and invent the new paradigm, clear a space where something new can be...Such leaders are essential to deep transformation".

The principal tried to be a servant leader in this school as she tried to turn it around. In a time of many managerial challenges, schools need moral and ethical leaders who will be exemplary models for colleagues; servant leaders who will serve the interests of the organisation. Isaacson (2007) highlights that when led by a moral leader, the school becomes an institution where a culture of moral, ethical and purposeful behaviour exists. Moreover, Isaacson (2007) lists the following as a number of traits evident in a purposeful school led by a moral leader:

- Continuing to focus on the needs of the educators and the students as learners.
- Treating educators and learners with consideration and support.

- Living truthfully. This is fundamental to a moral leader, even when he may be wrong. This forces him to acknowledge the data and to take the important first step of recognising reality.
- Considering the wellbeing of others which is at the core of ethics.
- Realising that relying on ethical and moral values will not solve the problem, but it will give direction and point the way.

All the above traits are part of the *ubuntu* philosophy tried out by the principal in this case study. They are qualities that became pivotal in the transformation of Liso High School.

Unfortunately, there are hardly any formulae or panaceas in education. However, moral leadership has an immense role to play at a time when truthful, visionary model leaders are necessary to lead organisations. Making moral and ethical judgements might not be an option for rational leadership theorists. Yet, the continuous reflection and the evolving of a purposeful leader in the process cannot be underestimated. Many schools need purposeful, role models who will enhance staff development as well as the meaning of the school to the community. A moral leader is likely to embrace school-wide goals and cherish what the school stands for. Moral leaders might not redeem all schools from their quagmire; moreover, morality and ethics are not necessarily universal constructs. It is also challenging to use morality and ethics to guide institutions, “yet leading with conviction and integrity means making the tough choices even in the face of staunch opposition, personally and socially. We need principals with deep-seated convictions, a strong sense of morals, and an unwavering commitment to doing the right things” (Glanz, 2006, p.3).

Conclusion

In line with contingency theories, this case study shows that moral and ethical leadership are among the strategies that can be utilised as principals try to turn around their schools. School principals are exposed to the complexities of change all the time; moreover, seasoned school leaders will concur that there is no single strategy for rescuing dysfunctional schools. The principal in this case study showed that values based on ethical and moral leadership can be instilled in staff members and can foster of effectiveness. Moreover, a philosophy such as *ubuntu* has a potential to work effectively when staff is being prepared for interdependence and a moral purpose. However, even in extremely difficult circumstances, moral purpose alone is insufficient (Fullan, 2007, p. 43). Yet, like many religious and other selfless philosophies, moral leadership is concerned with more than one’s own school; it also seeks to address broader societal challenges. As Fullan (2003, p.48) puts it:

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"Individual school principals must be almost as concerned about the success of other schools in their district as they are about their own."

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