# Male educational leadership in Greek primary schools
## A theoretical framework based on experiences of male school leaders

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper can be summarized in the following research questions: How do male school leaders perceive the role of an educational leader and educational leadership in general? What are some of the male school leaders' leadership styles and features? What distinctive factors influence and hinder the leadership process for men in Greek primary schools? Are there any perceived gender differences in educational leadership? What are the attitudes and the level of motivation that male school leaders have towards promotion?

**Design/ methodology/ approach** – The study utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the views and perceptions of Greek male school leaders in a profound manner. The main research tool is in-depth semi- structured interviews that are employed to a final sample of 20 respondents.

**Findings** – The results are represented in a systemic model, which outlines the various influencing and resulting notions. For instance, a wide range of influencing factors are revealed alongside a series of leadership styles and behaviors that are displayed by male school leaders in Greece. Moreover, the research paper offers a concise sum of concepts that are deemed to portray leadership effectiveness.

**Research limitations/implications** – Further research may be undertaken in the specific or other sectors, in order to determine or test the various concepts that have arisen. The findings also offer useful recommendations for male school leaders and related stakeholders to understand the educational leadership process in a better way.

**Originality value** – As there is a lack of relevant empirical work both in the fields of educational leadership of males and educational leadership in Greece, this project aids in understanding important issues and reveals additional factors that are exceedingly relevant to educational leadership of males in Greece.

**Keywords** Leadership, Primary schools, Education, Men, Management styles

**Paper type** Literature review

### Introduction

Leadership is the one of the most often observed and least understood phenomenon on earth (Burns, 1978). Conceptualized from managerial to militant, parliamentary to political, formal to informal, transactional to transformational, the formal study of leadership continues to attract the attention of researchers. A review of leadership literature reveals an array of definitions concerning its nature and application. Leadership has been widely studied, and often defined, by scholars in at least 7,500 studies (Bass, 1985). In describing literature about leadership it seems that it is a shambles, a mess full of philosophical confusion (Ribbins, 1997). Similarly, Andriessen and Drenth (1997) have observed that "the area is swamped with competing models – and it is becoming difficult to retain a global view". More recently it has been noted

that there is a voluminous literature on leadership which offers a bewildering array of theories, models, principles and strategies (Day *et al.*, 2000). On a similar note, there seems to be a variety of theories several of which overlap as the discourse of leadership is confusing due to similar models being given different names, or in certain cases, the same term being used to denote different approaches (Bush, 1995). Even the very definition of leadership is controversial (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Southworth, 1995). In the face of this abundance of literature and apparent confusion, and mindful of the fact that there are no recent studies which examine the relationship between men and their leadership style in primary schools, it would seem useful to consider theories and concepts in light of shifts in emphases over the years.

The concept of leadership has been misunderstood. Many people believe that leadership is about the first, the biggest or the most powerful. Trying to be as simple as possible, a leader is interpreted as someone who sets directions in an effort and influences people to follow such directions. (McNamara, 2008). In addition, leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute in making something extraordinary happen (Brady and Woodward, 2005). Leadership has also been described as the process of social influence in which one person can inflict the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task (Chemers, 2002). Likewise, over the years a number of theories have been developed in order to explore the inner meaning of the leadership concept.

The Great Man theory has been the first attempt to explore leaders. The assumption of this theory is that leaders are born and not made. Research based on the study of "great" people or commonly leaders showed that leaders were originated from the aristocracy, as few from lower classes had the opportunity to lead. Gender issues were not on the table when the Great Man theory was proposed. This theory was followed by the trait theory. According to the trait theory, people are born with inherited traits and some traits are particularly suited to leadership (Carlyle, 1841). On a similar note, Stogdill (1974) identified the traits and skills shown in Table I.

In response to the criticism of the trait approach, another theory was developed. According to the behavioral theory, leaders can be made, without necessarily possessing certain inherited traits. Behavioral theories of leadership do not seek for inherited traits but for actual activities accruing from a pattern of motives (McClelland,

| Traits | Skills |
|---|---|
| Adaptable to situations | Clever (intelligent) |
| Alert to social environment | Conceptually skilled |
| Ambitious and achievement orientated | Creative |
| Assertive | Diplomatic and tactful |
| Cooperative | Fluent is speaking |
| Decisive | Knowledgeable about group task |
| Dependable | Organised |
| Dominant | Persuasive |
| Energetic | Socially skilled |
| Persistent | |
| Self-confident | |
| Tolerant of stress | |
| Willing to assume responsibility | |

Table I.
Traits and skills of a leader

www.man

1985), under a democratic – neither an authoritarian nor a *laissez-faire* – style of work (Lewin *et al.*, 1993). Successful leadership is based on definable and learnable behavior. On a similar note, according to the participative theory, collaboration and involvement in decision-making improves the understanding of the issue involved by those who must carry out the decisions. A participative leader, rather than an autocratic one, seeks to involve other people in the process by making them feel less competitive and more collaborative when they are working on joint goals (Coch and French, 1948). Hence, there are cases in which individuals do jobs better than teams as groups are slow to reach decisions. Besides, there is no guarantee that a team makes a better decision than a person acting alone (Harvey and Von Behr, 1994).

The functional theory (Hackman and Walton, 1986; McGrath, 1962) is a particularly useful theory for addressing specific leader behavior that contributes to organizational or unit effectiveness. This theory argues that the leader's main job is to contribute to group effectiveness and cohesion (Fleishman *et al.*, 1991; Hackman and Walton, 1986).

In recent years, the transformational-transactional leadership construct has become a popular theme in leadership literature in both the general management (Avolio and Howell, 1992; Bass, 1985; Hater and Bass, 1988; Seltzer and Bass, 1990) and educational management fields (Neumann and Neumann, 1999; Ramsden, 1998). According to the transformational notion, people will follow a person who inspires them. Burns (1978) first introduced the "concept" of this theory and Bass (1985) later added the transactional leadership theory. The transformational leadership concept comprises four elements of that a transformational leader possesses:

(1) Individualized consideration – the leader "respects" followers' concerns and needs.

(2) Intellectual stimulation – the leader stimulates followers to rethink old ways of doing things and to reassess their old values and beliefs. This dimension is concerned with the degree of which followers are provided with interesting and challenging tasks to encourage the solution of problems in their own way (Den Hartog *et al.*, 1997; Hinkin and Tracey, 1999)

(3) Inspirational motivation – the leader propounds his/her vision.

(4) Identification model – the leader provides a communal design of vision and purpose, values and norms that give meaning to their work.

The transactional leadership, based on contingency, assumes that people are motivated by reward and punishment. The transactional leader is given power to perform certain tasks and reward or punish for the team's performance.

### Educational leadership

The words leadership or leader are usually correlated with team, companies, organizations and not schools and education. Educational leadership came into currency in the late twentieth century. After the World Wars, the need for development was by far the most significant issue. This need was not concerning only the material goods but also the mental outlook of people's personality. The only way to affect one's mental world is by changing and accurately improving the provided education. Education has always been the vehicle for change. These expectations can be fulfilled by people with a specific vision who will persuade others to follow them, and such

people are the leaders in the educational context. Such leaders can be either men or women. Authors have noted not only that men posses the majority of upper level but also that the increase in the number of women taking up significant roles in society is likely to continue into the twenty-first century (Davidhizar and Cramer, 2000; Stanford *et al.*, 1995; Valentine and Godkin, 2000).

Is it widely accepted that education can change the way that people think and behave. In order to achieve the covetable pupil outcome, the leaders aim at the following key themes. These are: the role played by teacher-leader in leading school success, and the complex relationship between leadership distribution and school effectiveness in order to improve pupil outcomes.

Although teachers-leaders certainly did not act alone in leading the case study schools, it is important to note that early results from case studies show that the role of the teachers-leaders is pivotal in ensuring schools' success, which is a result that contradicts recent research reported by Tymms (Henneberg *et al.*, 2007). As previous studies have shown, school leaders play an important role in establishing a school culture which centers around a strong vision for future success (Hallinger, 2003; Silins and Mulford, 2002; Waters *et al.*, 2003). The early case study data provide us with more specific insights into what it is that school leaders do to establish such a success culture. Key among these strategies are establishing and communicating a clear strategic vision for the school, setting an ethos or culture wherein change and innovation are accepted by staff as necessary to ensure the continued improvement of student outcomes in the school.

For many years researchers have been discussing the concept of distributed leadership (Begley and Zaretsky, 2004; Copland, 2003; Hargreaves and Fink, 2008; Harris, 2008; Heller and Firestone, 1995; Robinson, 2008; Smylie and Denny, 1990; Walker and Qian, 2006). Such approach to leadership has been described as a practice that is distributed over leaders and followers, a practice that includes the activities of multiple groups of individuals (Spillane *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, distributed leadership has also been described as a web of leadership activities and interactions stretched across people and situations (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, there is empirical evidence that reveals that distributive leadership positively affects organizational change and positive outcomes in schools (Harris, 2008) and such democratic processes should be applied to schools due to their diverse social and cultural context (Begley and Zaretsky, 2004).

Over the last ten years, the literature has supported the notion that distributed, shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003) collaborative (Wallace, 2002) and participative leadership are all overlapping concepts (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). While shared leadership endeavors to address important hindrances such as lack of implementation time and lack of support from teachers and parents (Voulalas and Sharpe, 2005), collaborative leadership may be directed at developing and empowering the team, delegating and recognizing responsibility, communicating effectively and managing change (Crum and Sherman, 2008).

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, it has been argued that one probable way in which leadership impacts on student achievement is by acting as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). Past research shows that building capacities such as knowledge and skills of staff within school is an important means of achieving

school improvement as well (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001). School leaders place particular emphasis on building both the teaching and leadership capacities of the staff team so as to ensure the continued effectiveness of the school in raising pupil outcomes.
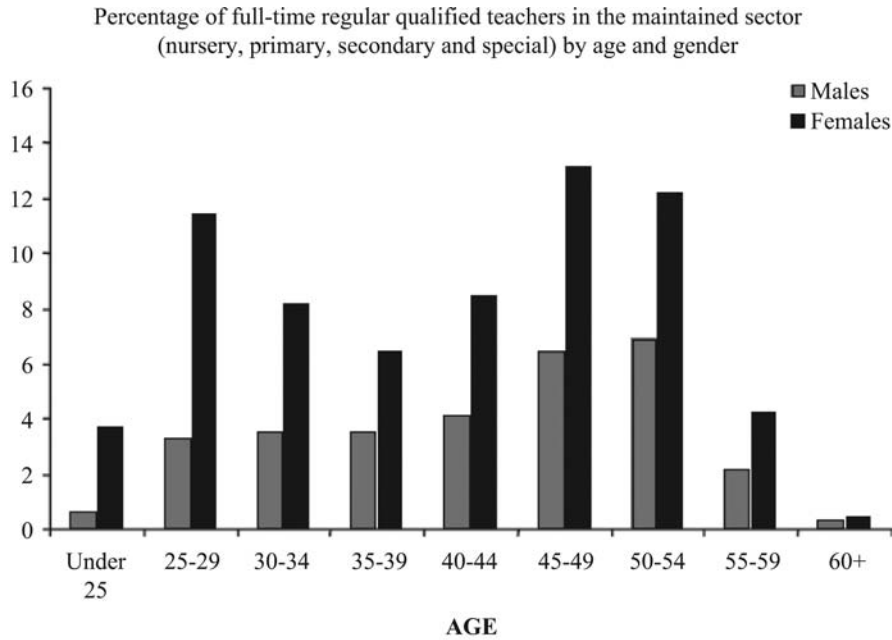
*Barriers in educational leadership*
Furthermore, the barriers and difficulties that school leaders face are worth mentioning. For instance, school leaders lack sufficient time and the support of staff and parents when they try to instigate effective leadership practices (Voulalas and Sharpe, 2005). Besides, many educational leaders strive to balance their focus between administrative and academic tasks, deal with important dilemmas and tensions, manage the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership and cope with the paradoxes of leadership (Daresh *et al.*, 1998; Day *et al.*, 2000; Knight and Trowler, 2001; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Ramsden, 1998; Ribbins, 1997; Robilliard, 2000). Moreover, the school leaders tend to be judged and compared to their predecessors and they also have to overcome the established culture and behaviors, deal with underperforming and challenging teachers and uplift the image of the school that may be poor (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006; Yariv and Coleman, 2005). The formal system, which does not enhance the school leaders' performance, alongside the reluctance to ask for help for personal and image reasons, leave the school leaders helpless when faced with challenging situations (Nir, 2009).

**Male educational leadership in primary schools**
It is an open secret that the distribution of men and women teachers in primary school is unequal. The quotation "women teach and men manage" (Allen *et al.*, 1980) is the real depiction of the situation in most of the Western and Asian countries. According to empirical research, female teachers overrun their male colleagues making male primary teachers look like "endangered species" (Powney *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, 39 per cent of boys currently have no lessons, including sports and music, with a male teacher and 8 per cent have never been taught by a man (Bawden, 2007). The article also states that, on average, English primary schools have only three male teachers, and one in ten do not have any men at all on the teaching staff at all. The following chart shows the distribution of male and female teachers in Great Britain in 2003.

The annual figures published by the DfES (2003) indicate that only 31 per cent of full-time qualified teachers in the maintained sector are male (see Figure 1). Furthermore, men are much more likely to be found in secondary schools. While 46 per cent of secondary teachers are male, only 32 per cent of special school teachers and 16 per cent of primary teachers are male (DfES, 2003). Despite, the absolute female dominance in primary schools if someone tries to design the distribution of both genders according to promotion hierarchy he would probably come with the following outcomes. The male distribution in primary schools is negatively skewed, whereas the female distribution in positively skewed. Both distributions probably have excess kurtosis. As a result of the above the Jarque Bera statistic is bigger than the $X^2$ critical values.

The above distributions reflect the fact that men are far more likely to be found working as head teachers than as classroom teachers (see Figure 2). This dominance of men in senior positions over these years has triggered much research to determine the

Percentage of full-time regular qualified teachers in the maintained sector
(nursery, primary, secondary and special) by age and gender



Source: DfES (2003a)

Figure 1.
Distribution of male and
female teachers in Great
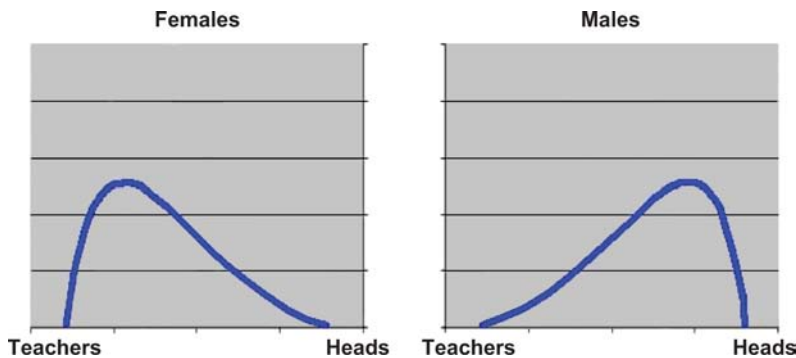Britain in 2003



Figure 2.
Female and male
distribution in Greek
primary schools

elements that drive men more easily to senior positions as well as the elements that
discourage men from becoming primary teachers. As far as the lack of male teachers in
the primary school sector is concerned according to Farquhar (1997) and Smith (1999)
the most important factors are the following:

- low social status of the primary teacher;
- poor wages in relation to the work performed;
- low social status;
- limited career path for those not seeking administrative roles;

- the labelling of male primary school teachers as homosexual or not "real men";
- the current media spotlight on allegations of child sexual abuse;
- the fear of being labelled as a paedophile;
- the impact of child protection policies in schools.

As far as the relative dominance of male school leaders is concerned a poll, carried out by Yougov PLC for the TDA (2007), 600 (eight- to 11-year-old) boys across England surveyed said that the presence of a male teacher or head teacher makes them behave better and 42 per cent said they worked harder with men. A variety of other reasons exist as well:

- In contrast with a man head teacher, angry (usually) teenage boys are not threatened by a woman head teacher (Coleman, 2003).
- Subordinates tend to view females in senior positions as emotional, sensitive and indecisive when they are facing difficult situations (Valentine and Godkin, 2000).
- Women face stereotypes concerning their management abilities.
- Women usually take breaks in services for a series of reasons, which makes them remain on the lower promotional scale (Jones, 1990).
- Women are more attracted to the social aspects of their work and would not apply for promotion if it meant that they might be unhappy (Jones, 1990).
- Many head teachers who wish to maintain gender balance will more probable offer a man teacher a scale post.
- Men are usually less tied with family responsibilities.
- Most of the teachers asked in different surveys look for strong leadership while at work. This aspect favours a male gender leadership.

The TDA's survey showed that 49 per cent of the boys and 83 per cent of parents would like there to be more male teachers. But although everyone seems to agree that more male teachers would be a good idea, the fact that educational attainment is improved as a result, has not been proved yet.

It would be thus very interesting to deduct some key points that characterize male school leadership, and attain a basic understanding, based on first- hand experiences, of the role that a male school leader has in a primary school.

### Leadership – a systemic approach
Bourantas (2002) considered leadership as a system with its own inflow, outflow and the main procedure that involves the transformation of inflow into outflow. Furthermore, the inflow involves the factors that contribute to specific leadership behavior. Such may include the power of the leader, his/her personality characteristics, his/her values and beliefs as well as his/her abilities and skills. In this particular case, according to the present literature analysis, the inflow consists of influencing factors such as the leader's education and knowledge, his personality and characteristics, the surrounding context, his culture and background, his motivation and career expectations, his management skills and abilities and his relevant experience. The system procedure, which is the actual leadership process includes the leadership

behavior, the leadership roles (i.e. what the leader does), as well as the leadership styles (i.e. how the leader does it). Moreover, the outflow of the leadership system is the actual output of the leadership behavior such as the suitable trends and manners, the developments of skills, the improvement of strategies and others. In the particular study, the leadership outflows entail constituents of effective leadership, thus displaying what is deemed to be effective and ideal in educational management among male school leaders (see Figure 3).

### Research design

The primary objective of this particular research paper is to indicate the views and notions that male school leaders have about their job and the role of the school leaders in general. Consequently the methodological approach that has been deemed to be relevant is a qualitative one, as it allows for deeper analysis and interpretation of processes through inductive analysis (Bird *et al.*, 1999). The particular research paper involves the review of the extant literature in the field of leadership, educational leadership and some assessment of gender issues in leadership. The main sources have been professional and academic journals of leadership and educational leadership, pertinent web sites and textbooks. Alongside the literature review, the primary research process has been utilised so as to verify the derived data as well as to offer some new insights into the topic. The particular research process is a qualitative one, as there is no aim of generalising the findings to the rest of the population.
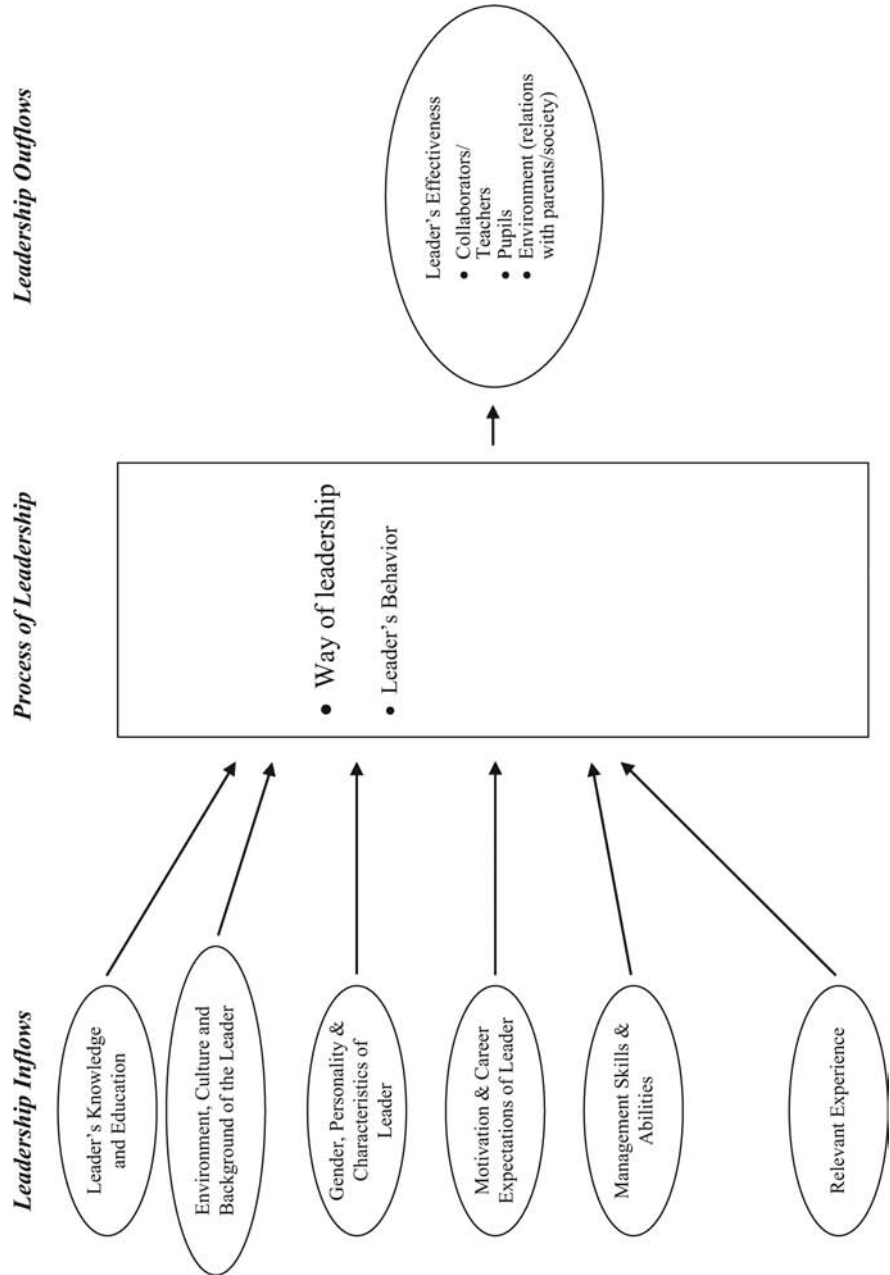
The use of a qualitative approach to research studies relies on the data production methods that are flexible and sensitive to the social context that such data is derived from, without losing any of the standardization or structure, and on data analysis methods that presuppose the understanding of the complexity that is entailed onto the details (Mason and Pauleen, 2003).

### Sampling design

The original study, which was conducted during the 2008 to 2009 academic year, examined in depth the professional experiences of 20 male principals from primary schools located in different districts of Greece. The size of the sample is relatively small, making it possible to investigate it in-depth. The criteria that were applied for the sampling were the sex and the administrative position in primary education. The sample of the primary research consisted of 20 men directors in primary schools in Greece. These respondents were aged between 41 to 57 years old and all worked in rural or semi- urban regions of Greece. Principals from schools which were located in Athens and Thessalonica, the two biggest cities of Greece, were not questioned. This is due to the fact that the input of results derived from big cities does not meet the criterion of objectivity and the sample suffers from "selection bias" as well as "data-mining bias". Aligned with Patton's (1990) work, the participants in the original study were generated from a purposeful sample of 30 men (i.e. primary school principals), of which 20 chose to participate. Pseudonyms were used for each principal for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality.

According to the questionnaires the average age of the 20 men principals was 50 years and all men principals were married and had on average 1.75 children (see Figures 4-6). All principals had university education and 20 per cent of the principals

**Leadership Outflows**

Leader's Effectiveness
- Collaborators/
- Teachers
- Pupils
- Environment (relations with parents/society)

**Process of Leadership**

- Way of leadership
- Leader's Behavior

**Leadership Inflows**

Leader's Knowledge and Education

Environment, Culture and Background of the Leader

Gender, Personality & Characteristics of Leader

Motivation & Career Expectations of Leader

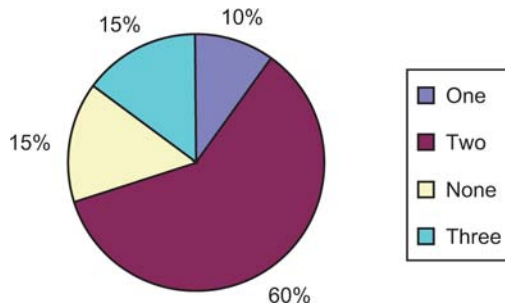Management Skills & Abilities

Relevant Experience

**Figure 3.**
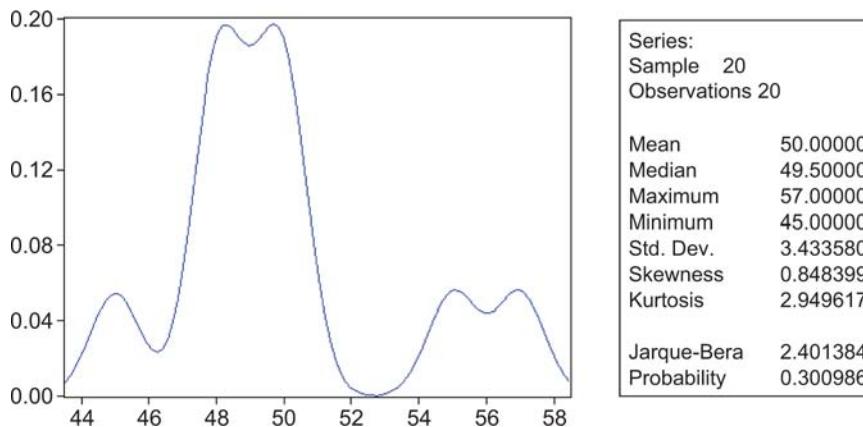Systemic approach to male educational leadership at primary schools

also had postgraduate studies (Master studies). The average total years in service were 26.8 years with a standard deviation of 3.48 years and a range between 24-34 years. Additionally, the average years in service as a principal, were seven years with a standard deviation of 8.33 years and a range between 2-30 years. The average number of students in the schools of the sample was 189.1 students with a standard deviation of 58.02 students and a range between 110-300 students. Furthermore the average number of teachers in the schools was 16 teachers. The schools had 10.2 classes on average and a range between 7-13 classes.
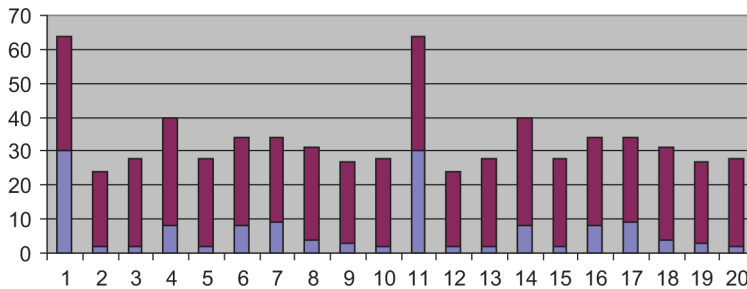
Figure 4.
Descriptive statistics of sample – total years in service and total years as principal



Figure 5.
Descriptive statistics of sample – number of children



| Series: | |
|---|---|
| Sample 20 | |
| Observations 20 | |
| | |
| Mean | 50.00000 |
| Median | 49.50000 |
| Maximum | 57.00000 |
| Minimum | 45.00000 |
| Std. Dev. | 3.433580 |
| Skewness | 0.848399 |
| Kurtosis | 2.949617 |
| | |
| Jarque-Bera | 2.401384 |
| Probability | 0.300986 |

Figure 6.
Descriptive statistics of sample – principals sample age distribution

## Data collection procedure

The primary research process incorporated two research instruments. The first tool was a demographic questionnaire that determined the actual sample and respondents of the second method. In- depth semi-structured interviews were then employed to such sample. The use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews offers greater richness of insight to the researcher and also initiates a climate of constant data flowing from the respondent to the interviewer (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gummesson, 2000; Yin, 1989). Furthermore, the in-depth semi- structured interviews can also assist in comprehending complex behavior and thoughts that cannot be identified and categorised before the research process (Cassell and Symon, 1994; Westgren and Zering, 1998). The semi- structured in-depth interview was the most appropriate research tool, according to the research objectives, as it provides the opportunity to gather data that is directly related to the object of study, and can be used alongside other methods when conducting research (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Ultimately, the essential advantage is the attainment of a personal contact that contributes to in-depth investigation of the research topic and to a better communication process, thus leading to more genuine results. In specific, the semi-structured in-depth interviews have enlightened the researcher with invaluable data about the perceptions of leadership from the male school leaders, their particular leadership styles and characteristics, and the factors that inhibit them from accomplishing their work.

The particular interviews that were used consisted of flexible questions that did allow for additional issues and questions to arise. All the questions that were asked were open-ended, giving freedom to the respondents. Subsequently, the interview was designed according to five central topics that have also been investigated in the literature review. These topics are:

(1) Male school leaders' views and perceptions of educational leadership.

(2) Male school leaders' educational leadership styles and characteristics.

(3) Difficulties and barriers faced by male school leaders.

(4) Perceived gender differences in education leadership.

(5) Motivations and attitudes towards promotion.

In order to gather demographic data, details as the previous work experience, and educational characteristics additional questions have been recorded. According to the research plan, the interviews were conducted individually, so as to encourage respondents to express their views freely, without being affected by others, and to ensure a high level of verity (Denscombe, 1998). Such interviews were recorded, after asking the respondents, in order to achieve accuracy and soundness of the data gathered, and with the aim of freeing the interviewer who was able to observe carefully the respondents. Following the interviews, a detailed record was put down so as to record any additional clues such as the body language, the expression the tone of voice.

## Measures and criteria of evaluation

Safeguarding the quality of the output data has been a great challenge, which has been addressed by placing special care on the techniques that have been utilized to collect reliable and relevant data to address the research questions. Therefore the reliability and validity issues have been taken into serious consideration.

With regards to reliability, a detailed plan has been followed in order to address all the research issues via the sound design of the interview topic questions, taking into account various issues and problems that tend to arise in similar research situations. All such actions were done in order to diminish any impartiality that the interviewer could have (Cohen and Manion, 1994). As far as the application of the interviews is concerned, the researcher followed a standardized tactic through all interviews, letting the respondents develop their views unbiased, and recorded everything without ignoring or reinforcing any of the findings.

In order to address the issue of validity, that indicates the level of correspondence of the research output with the research questions, the researcher informed the respondents about the object of study, reassuring an objective, standardized interview process. It is also worth mentioning that the place that each interview took place in was chosen by the respondent so that they could feel completely at ease.

Another tool that was utilized in order to avoid the presence of such negative issues was the implementation of a small scale pilot survey, with a different sample, that shared the same characteristics. During the research process and the brief analysis of the derived data, the researcher discovered any vagueness that was evident and later revised the interview questions.

### Data analysis
The research data were examined alongside data that was available from government sources, which refer to Greece or the EU. The data that were derived from the interviews were analysed using the content analysis technique that is suitable for searching and evaluating issues that relate to people's views (Verma and Mallick, 1999). Based on the research questions, the content analysis technique employed techniques of conclusions extrapolation that were based on impartial and systematic attribution of particular characteristics of the messages, attempting to read between the lines (Hostli, 1969). After the completion of the interviews, which lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, the transcript of such interviews was produced and a brief synopsis for every interview was written.

Moreover, the categorization of data allowed for transforming the verbal content into succinct findings, which in turn had to be interpreted in qualitative terms. The next step of the data analysis process included the definition of the recording units of the text that have to be categorized in each category (Weber, 1990). The units of the text that were categorized included: words, word senses and synonyms, sentences and themes. Withal, key phrases, which were directly linked to the research questions, were detected as well as data that was repeatedly found in the interview transcripts. On the contrary, data that was repeated or data that was deemed to be totally irrelevant was erased from the database.

The criteria that were taken into consideration in order to form categories were the homogeneity, the entirety and the harmonization of the categories with the gathered data, and the relevance, the interpretive character as well as the objectivity of the data (Bird *et al.*, 1999). Subsequently, specific thematic categories were created in order to subsume data that were particular relevant to our research questions. In particular, the researcher carefully considered the questioned data in advance so as to explicitly and successfully predetermine the classification units, the data analysis categories and the possible singularities. Throughout such process, relevant points were encoded and

organized in order to reveal and summarize in a descriptive manner, the issues that were relevant to the research topic.

## Results

The findings of the research study have provided us with a rich insight of issues regarding the administration and leadership of men in primary education in Greece.

### Views and perception of educational leadership

The totality of the male school leaders that were interviewed throughout the research process, view the role of an educational leader as a complex and multi-task role, which includes many and diverse duties and responsibilities. Moreover, the study participants attain that their job entails maintaining healthy relationships with people, such as teachers, parents and students as well as with the local community. In particular, as one respondent has mentioned "leading a school is a multifold process, which also involves the blending of parents', students' and teachers' needs". Many of the respondents also mentioned the ability to aid and synchronize as key to the job of a school leader, as school leaders have to encounter management and organizational issues, evaluate the services that are provided and also manage staff.

Above and beyond, as some respondents mentioned "the managing of a school unit requires proficient problem solving abilities, an animating spirit as well as the ability to display a model behavior so that the others (i.e. teachers and students) can follow". Furthermore, leading and managing a school involves anticipating problems and change, and planning as the ultimate aim is to enhance all sorts of processes within such a school unit. Consequently, it is obvious that school leaders need to possess certain skills and characteristics so as to be suitable for their post. Overall, the respondents claim that the school leader needs to possess good communication skills and also needs to have a positive attitude being willing to offer. In addition, the school leader has to be open-minded, welcoming to other people's views, knowledgeable and he also has to initiate a climate of communication and co-operation. Accordingly, it is safe to say that the quality of his personality, experience, knowledge and abilities play a key role in managing the school unit. In retrospect, as it has been previously mentioned in the literature review the concept of leadership involves a wide array of issues and topics, being rather complicated with a social aspect as the leader constantly strives to influence other people so as to achieve the accomplishment of goals and tasks.

### Male educational leadership styles and characteristics

There is a widespread belief among the respondents that they do possess the appropriate characteristics and skills so as to practice ideal educational leadership in their schools. Therefore, the vast majority of the respondents display the trait of being self- confident, which has already been mentioned in the literature review, and perceive themselves as being rather accessible, open-minded and willing to cooperate, moving away from the assertive leadership style. The majority of the respondents claim that they possess great communication and interpersonal skills, and have a shared vision, which is also pursued by the other teachers. There have also been quite a few respondents that mentioned "leading by example" as a central feature of their leadership behavior. In particular, some respondents mentioned "I aim to display model behavior, so that others can follow, and at the same time assist and expedite teachers' jobs". The totality of the male school

leaders utter that they value the importance of discussion as a means of solving problematic situations and influencing others. With regards to control and centralizing of management, a few male school leaders have stated that they pursue a different focus depending on the occasion. As one respondent has stated "With new teachers I tend to be more centralized in authority, doing most of the staff on my own, whereas with more experienced teachers I am more than happy to let go more authority into their hands". The majority of respondents have also acknowledged the importance of maintaining a right balance between task and people orientation, thus placing the same amount of emphasis on both, while very few respondents mention that they perceive people as more important than tasks.

Considering the handling of problems, most respondents have mentioned that they engage into a lot of discussion and communication with people. Some of the respondents also utter that they possess great listening skills, trying to learn from teachers and even students. As many respondents have uttered "Discussion often leads to general agreement, which in turn draws away bad behavior and promotes a positive atmosphere".

It is obvious that most of the findings can be associated with some concepts that have already been mentioned in the literature. In particular, some parts of the trait theory have been rather apposite, as male school leaders do seem to be adaptable, alert to the environments, ambitious, energetic, self- confident, knowledgeable, organized, persuasive and socially skilled. In addition, among the various leadership approaches that have been mentioned many male school leaders seem to employ distributed leadership and some exercise leadership according to the transformational theory where the leader inspires, reassess beliefs and shares vision and beliefs with others.

### Difficulties and barriers faced by male school leaders

All respondents mentioned that they face a variety of impediments while doing their job. It has also been noted that due to the great amount of responsibilities it is hard for male school leaders to accomplish their goals and execute their job. One sort of difficulty involved the problems with the facilities that could jeopardize students' safety, whereas many facilities are inappropriate and may cause quite a few accidents. Another impediment related to the cooperation from the local society, as one respondent mentioned "The local society is sometimes rather conservative not allowing for any innovations and out of the box thinking". The bureaucracy is another factor which puts off many male school leaders. The totality of the respondents highlighted "foible parents and everyday problems are difficulties that I face everyday". Moreover there are notable problems with staff, as some schools are understaffed, and some teachers may not be quite cooperative. Ultimately, a very small number of male school leaders are not well acquainted to management tasks and well informed. Similarly, there have also been some hints in the literature that point to probable barriers to school leadership, and the most notable ones include the lack of time and support that has already been mentioned, the balance of focus on administrative vs. academic tasks, as well as the dilemmas and tensions that the school leader faces due to problems, comparisons with predecessors and the formal system.

### Perceived gender differences in education leadership

Most of the respondents claim that there are no distinctive differences between male and female leadership in schools, especially when it comes to effectiveness. However,

few respondents have identified "Female school leaders tend to be more sensitive and vulnerable and at the same time more meticulous". In addition, according to some other respondents female school leaders have displayed better communication skills but in some cases may lack confidence and stamina due to cultural and family reasons. On the other hand, male school leaders are more aggressive and assertive. In particular, one respondent stated "Women may be more sensitive and emotional, and also have good communication skills, but we can stand the pressure and also be more assertive when we need to". A very small number of respondents stated that men may reach decisions easier, while women may not be interested in taking on responsibilities.

On the other hand, there are some hindering factors that inhibit women's aspiration for school leadership. First of all, according to some respondents, women find it hard to express their views, as they are sometimes afraid of being wrong. As some male school leaders have pointed out it is the cultural stereotyping that hinder women's aspirations as the long hours of the job as well as the immense responsibilities at home hinder women's aspirations for applying for a school leader. Ultimately, according to respondents, women may have the potential to become school leaders but it is exhausting for a woman to have and maintain such a post. The above findings can be correlated to the clues in the literature that depict why some people, learners in particular may work harder and better with male principals. Some of these reasons include the perception of women as being rather emotional and sensitive, the stereotypes that women face, the assertiveness of male school leaders and the time and family barriers that women have to overcome (Jones, 1990; Valentine and Godkin, 2000; Coleman, 2003; Yougov PLC for the TDA, 2007).

### Motivations and attitudes towards promotion

None of the respondents have mentioned that their motive was financial. On the contrary, they have indicated that they want to offer more, and do something different in education. Some of them have uttered that they want to experience how managing a school feels. Moreover, respondents view leading a school as a challenge since it has always been one of their main ambitions that led them to applying for such post. Some other male school leaders have even cited social status and curiosity as central reasons to applying for the post of a school principal.

All 20 respondents affirmed that they do not want to pursue any further positions in education. Most of the respondents enjoy the contact that they have with the school and the students in particular, and feel that they may lose such touch if they get another post in education. One of the youngest respondents uttered "There is no way I am getting an administrative job, away from the school and the classroom. I love the school and everything that comes with it, so I might as well stay in this position, where I can exercise my leadership skills and also keep in touch with my young learners".

### Ethical considerations

Moral issues and ethics that related to qualitative research were considered. The participation of the respondents was completed after notifying them and reassuring them about the anonymity and confidentiality as well as of the correct usage of the gathered data. Therefore, relationships based on trust were formed, a fact that aided the interview process.

**Discussion**
The literature review process alongside the primary research process has offered a lot of hints on how Greek male school leaders exercise and perceive leadership, and has also identified some factors that affect such process. The systemic approach model is an apposite way of depicting such concepts. As it is indicated in such model, throughout the literature review process, a wide array of factors was deducted as to what constitutes the leadership inflow, which refers to the factors that affect the leadership process. Furthermore, as a result of the primary research process, more factors have been deducted, and such factors intermingle with the initial factors that were derived through the literature review. Therefore, the leader's knowledge and education may include additional issues such as the acquaintance to management tasks. On the same note, the environment, culture and background inflow relates to the role of the community, the needs of parents, students and teachers and the problems relating to staff. It should be noted that these are all leadership inflows of equal importance that relate to the environment, culture and background of the leader himself. Similarly, the gender, personality and characteristics inflow entails the quality of leader's personality, the healthy relationships and the communication skills of the male school leader. Ultimately, the management skills and abilities include synchronizing management duties and displaying model behavior. It is noteworthy, that there have not been any additional factors that relate to the motivations and career expectations and the relevant experience inflows.

The outcome of all such leadership inflows is the actual leadership process. The leadership process is characterized by the leadership style and leadership behaviors that are displayed. The leadership styles that are applied by Greek male school leaders can be recapitulated by considering the following tradeoffs: collaborative leadership/distributed/shared leadership vs centralized leadership, people vs task orientation, visionary leadership vs day-to-day management. Hence, the male school leaders have considered as quite important that they have to orient towards one of such issues or balance among the two different directions. Regarding the leaders' behavior, Greek male school leaders tend to be accessible, cooperative, open-minded, communicative, and disciplinary. They also lead by example, aid teachers and discuss a lot with teachers, students and parents. It is notable that the respondents mentioned mainly positive attributes and qualities when asked to comment on their leadership behavior. Thereon, according to respondents the leader's effectiveness is evident from: the way he deals with day-to-day problems, the way he deals with problems relating to students, parents and teachers, the extent to which he has achieved his goals, whether or not he exercises effective communication and by the degree of general agreement that he has achieved (see Figure 7).

**Conclusion – research implications and limitations**
The current research paper has offered vital and invaluable data with regards to male educational leadership. Throughout the secondary and primary research processes, a wide range of factors, issues and concepts has arisen, which is highly relevant to the leadership of schools by male principals in Greece. Obviously, there cannot be any generalization to further parts of the population, as there is not any quantitative foundation for such. Nonetheless, important issues that have been deducted especially
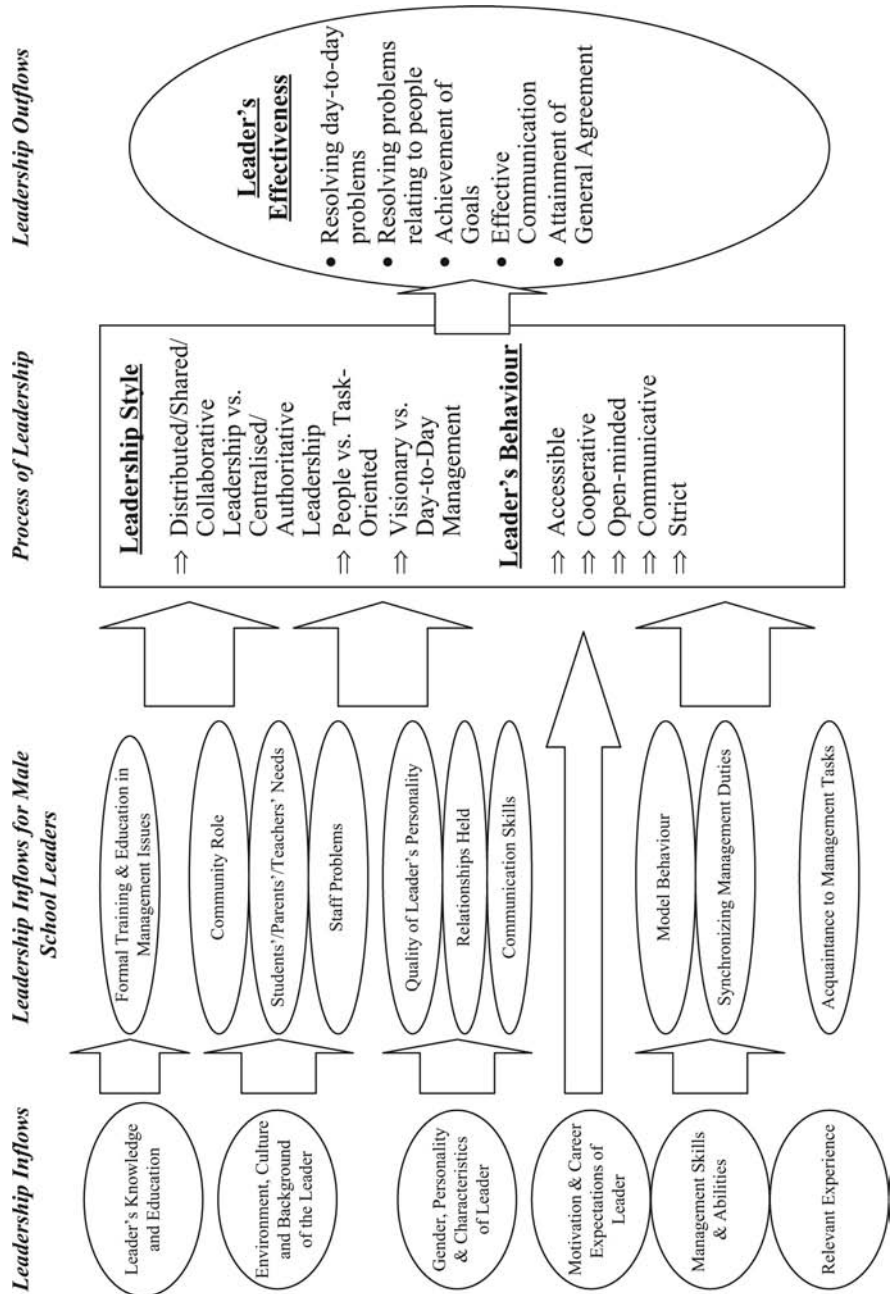
**Figure 7.**
Systemic approach to male educational leadership at primary schools

from the interview process can be the cornerstones for further studies and analyses. Moreover, such concepts can be tested in more extensive parts of the population, so as to reach to the generation of new theory concepts. Finally, it would also be quiet interesting to evaluate such findings on the basis of gender, by comparing them with parallel study employed for female school leaders.

## Research limitations

Throughout the implementation of the research process some limitations and inhibiting issues were identified, that could not be resolved. First of all, the timeframe that was initially set was not realistic, as the distance among the respondents' location was rather big, not allowing the researcher to complete the research process in time, and thus posing a financial difficulty for the completion of research. In addition, the time limitation of the interview process did not allow sufficient time for respondents to answer, making the researcher feel stressed and uneasy. However, the researcher did respond to such issues, by readjusting the time frame that was allocated for the interview process, so as not to omit any important research insight from the data analysis process.

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