Research Article

School Administrators as Legitimation Agents: Linking Perceived Organizational Legitimacy and Legitimation Strategies[*]

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Abstract

Schools operate in an environment heavily influenced by institutional and political factors. While standardizing effects of strict legal regulations and the public education system impose certain structural and professional limitations on schools, political pressures from various interest groups may create gaps between rules and school practices. It can be suggested that school administrators can benefit from these gaps to legitimize school level practices. In this study, we examined the effects of proactive, protective and reactive legitimation strategies used by administrators on legitimacy perceptions of internal stakeholders. Using a prediction research design, the study was conducted with 365 administrators and 426 teachers working in 94 schools. The researchers developed a "Perceived Organizational Legitimacy Scale" and a "Legitimacy Management Strategies Scale" to gather data. Findings showed that proactive and protective strategies had positive effects on all types of legitimacy perceptions whereas reactive strategies had positive effects only on taken-for-grantedness. Moreover, reactive strategies mostly had negative effects on pragmatic legitimacy and comprehensibility, but no significant relationship was found between these strategies and moral legitimacy.

Keywords

Legitimation • Organizational legitimacy • Legitimacy management strategies • School administrator • Teacher

Schools are politically controlled organizations established predominantly to meet societal needs rather than those of individuals. They can gain legitimacy to the extent that they satisfy the needs of other organizations (or institutions) and obtain necessary resources to sustain their functions (Meyer & Rowan, 2008). In addition, the public nature of education and the amount of public and private funds allocated have turned educational organizations into a field of applications for governmental policies. The increase of governmental and societal control over schools has highlighted education's function of legitimation of social roles or identity categorizations of individuals. A choice to be made from the pool of roles or identities requires standard and reliable social typifications (Rowan, 2006). Over time, this requirement regarding social categories has given birth to large scale education bureaucracies aiming at management and standardization of production procedures in educational organizations. This collective control may not be needed provided education is merely seen as a teacher-student interaction. Contrarily, educational organizations have emerged as accreditation institutions of modern societies and, therefore, modern individual-society interactions require the education process to be standardized and controlled to legitimize current social roles to which individuals are allocated. In other words, educational organizations which have the burden of producing legitimacy for prospective social roles and identities of individuals, must be managed and structured in accordance with the standards and the rules widely accepted by the general society (Meyer & Rowan, 2008).

In this respect, legitimacy can be conceptualized as school stakeholders' generalized perception of the desirability, propriety or appropriateness of organizational practices that is necessary for schools to acquire resources, motivate staff members and ensure their own survival in the longer run (Mampaey & Zanoni, 2014; Suchman, 1995). Despite schools' role of producing legitimacy for the general society, only a few of studies have to date examined the link between legitimacy management strategies used by administrators and school stakeholders' legitimacy perceptions regarding organizational practices (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009; Mampaey & Zanoni, 2014). This study aims to address this issue by using the empirical approach, since legitimacy, as a generalized perception, can be empirically tested and only the empirical approach can avoid a tautological circle which often traps legitimacy debates (Dogan, 2009).

Organizational Legitimacy

Since the studies of Weber (2009) and Parsons (1985), researchers have placed organizational actors in the center of an extensive theoretical system that involves restrictive, constitutive and empowering normative and cognitive powers. According to this sociological approach, legitimacy is not a temporary concept which emerges only from political processes and is caused by instant obedience. On the contrary,

it is a restrictive and regulative, prevalent and common mechanism constituting and sustaining social phenomena ranging from human behaviors to large-scale social institutions applying isomorphic pressures on those behaviors (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). This is because organizations need to provide valid reasons for their stakeholders to survive in a restrictive environment constantly demanding justifications to carry out their activities (DiMaggio & Powell, 2004). In light of these arguments, legitimacy can be defined as a general perception or assumption that acts of an entity are desirable, proper or congruent with social norms, values and beliefs, and cultural definitions (Suchman, 1995).

Studies in organizational legitimacy literature can be classified into two categories: *institutional* and *strategic*. Perspective differences lie behind the distinction between these approaches. While institutional theorists adopt the perspective of an outsider looking in an organization, strategic theorists adopt the perspective of organizational administrators looking out (Massey, 2001).

Institutional Approach

The "new institutionalist" researchers define legitimacy as a set of constitutive beliefs, rather than an operational resource (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). According to these researchers, organizations do not gain legitimacy solely from the environmental culture. Local pressure groups and individual and organizational experiences may be influential in the institutionalization of schools (Hanson, 2001), but external institutions also play critical roles in founding and sustaining a school in all respects. Cultural definitions determine how organizations are built, operated and, at the same time, understood and evaluated. According to this approach, legitimacy and institutionalization can be considered as synonymous (Scott, 2003; Suchman, 1995). In sum, the new institutionalists focus on sectors, such as health, education, press and energy in which structuration dynamics generate isomorphic pressures on organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 2004).

Institutional theorists assume that schools operate within a highly institutionalized environment. This environment determines the legitimate forms of schooling by setting the rules and standards regarding the functioning of the whole education system. Schools gain legitimacy through conforming to these rules and standards that define effectiveness. Unlike business organizations, the standardization of procedures and certification of products are more prominent criteria of effectiveness than measurable outcomes in educational organizations. In other words, schools can retain their legitimacy through conforming to environmental standards, such as teacher certification, minimal conditions for granting diplomas, class periods, class size, legal regulations, etc. which are independent of the success of their graduates. Accordingly, not only the function of a school within a society, but also the consequences of

educational activities, procedures and structural properties established to produce these consequences must also be legitimated through the institutional environment (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 2008). Moreover, legitimation is a social process; however, the proportion of society that must approve the organization or its practices is not clear. For example, private schools, which have to renew their legitimacy through being constantly preferred by a small proportion of the society, can be more successful in meeting stakeholder demands (Bidwell, 2001). At this point, Suchman (1995) suggests three main types of organizational legitimacy: "pragmatic legitimacy", "moral legitimacy" and "cognitive legitimacy." All three represent a generalized perception that organizational activities are desirable, proper and congruous with social norms, values and beliefs (Suchman, 1995).

Pragmatic legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy results from the self-interested calculations of an organization's immediate stakeholders. Its simplest form is *exchange legitimacy* in which these calculations are built either on direct exchange relationships between an organization and its members or on broader, long term political, social or economic interests and expectations. Its second variant is *influence legitimacy*. It arises when an organization involves its stakeholders in policy making processes or adopts their performance standards as its own (Suchman, 1995). It is closely related with the third variant, *dispositional legitimacy*; since through organizational acts leading to influence legitimacy, stakeholders could also create beliefs about how much their contributions are valued and their well-being is considered (Blau, 2009). For example, factors such as administrative support, organizational rewards and working conditions could create obligation within organizational stakeholders, in other words, create a perception that the organization is a legitimate actor (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002).

Moral legitimacy. Suchman (1995) defines three forms of moral legitimacy: *Consequential, procedural and structural legitimacy*. Moral legitimacy is the appropriateness of organizational *procedures* and their *consequences* and *structural* features to the prevailing social norms and implicit moral obligations. In other words, moral legitimacy sends the following message: "This organization acts based on goals that reflect society's values in a proper, efficient manner." A morally legitimate organization is "the right organization for the job." It has gained public trust because relational and institutional contexts of organizations can provide acceptable justifications for organizational activities, and thus opportunities for gaining legitimacy, stabilization and resources (Meyer & Rowan, 2008; Öztürk & Balcı, 2014).

Suchman (1995) considers personal legitimacy as a subtype of moral legitimacy. However, other researchers portray personal legitimacy as the exercise of authority legitimated through institutional processes, rather than a distinct subtype of

moral legitimacy. Furthermore, there are studies defining personal legitimacy as a conceptually-related variable which facilitates the legitimation of organizational practices (Tyler & De Cremer, 2005).

Cognitive legitimacy. The first form of cognitive legitimacy is *comprehensibility*. From this perspective, organizations are legitimate when they are *comprehensible*, that is, there is greater awareness and, therefore, less uncertainty about organizational activities (Shepherd & Zacharakis, 2003). Similarly, Berger and Luckmann (1991) state that cognitive legitimacy occurs when cultural models, which make organizational activities *predictable* and offer *plausible* justifications for these activities, are adopted as *taken-for-granted* by organizational members. *Taken-for-grantedness* is the second form of cognitive legitimacy and is based on the assumption that activities in an organization cannot be carried out in any other way. Organizations can create programs to maintain social interactions and ensure certain paths are followed. In other words, institutions can virtually replace human instincts and allow an act to be carried out without considering its alternatives (Berger & Luckmann, 1995). Such an internalization, in which social behavior patterns that build daily lives of individuals are considered *inevitable*, is deemed a successful legitimation. At the same time, all successful legitimations aim at ensuring the *permanence* of socially constructed realities (Balcı, 2003; Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

Strategic Approach

The strategic approach adopts an administrative perspective, in which legitimacy is considered as a functional resource that organizations draw from their cultural environments and employ in accordance with their goals. According to this approach, legitimation occurs when organizations symbolically manage their activities to gather societal support by appearing to conform to social values and expectations (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). It emphasizes the ways administrators instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols to influence the perceptions of organizational stakeholders about an organization, a person, an activity or an object (He & Baruch, 2010).

Legitimacy management in educational organizations is an active and multifaceted process, including multiple strategies to be used while simultaneously meeting divergent legitimacy demands of stakeholders. It relies heavily upon extensive communication between administrators and stakeholders (Aurini, 2006; Massey, 2001). In order to establish, maintain and defend the school's legitimacy, administrators should get stakeholders (especially internal ones) to buy in to their leadership (Johnson & Fauske, 2000; Mampaey & Zanoni, 2014). Therefore, it seems appropriate to classify legitimacy management strategies into three broad categories: *proactive strategies for gaining legitimacy*, *protective strategies for maintaining legitimacy* and *reactive strategies for repairing legitimacy* (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990;

Suchman, 1995). Gaining legitimacy is generally a proactive process (Fidan & Balcı, 2016), since administrators have advanced knowledge about future plans and the need for legitimation. The proactive strategies can be divided into three groups (Suchman, 1995): (1) efforts to follow the prescripts of preexisting stakeholders within the organizational environment, (2) efforts to pick up among multiple environments to find stakeholders who will support the current practices and (3) efforts to manipulate environmental structure through creating new stakeholders and legitimizing beliefs.

One can analyze the protective strategies in the following two groups: perceiving future changes and protecting past accomplishments. The strategies for perceiving future changes include recognizing stakeholder reactions and predicting future challenges. On the other hand, strategies for protecting the past accomplishments involve organizational efforts to transform short-term legitimacy into long-term effort (Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011). In addition, despite the fact that it is primarily considered as one of a reactive strategy, making apologies and promises not to repeat the problems might satisfy stakeholders and serve as a protective strategy by resolving trust issues caused by instances of mismanagement (Aydın & Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2008).

Most proactive strategies could also be employed to reestablish legitimacy after a crisis. In addition to these strategies, in the related literature administrators are advised to follow these reactive strategies: (1) offering normalizing accounts, (2) restructuring and (3) not panicking (Suchman, 1995). In addition to these strategies, administrators of public organizations may choose to exercise their authority legitimated by a broader institutional system in which their organizations are embedded to repair legitimacy (Majone, 1999).

Linking Perceived Organizational Legitimacy and Legitimacy Management Strategies

Myths shaping the structure of public organizations, such as schools, operate in formal environments in which legitimacy based on legal regulations is prominent. Societies, through governmental organizations, create legal-rational orders which legitimize particular organizational structures. State institutions, such as legislative and judicial branches of government, create administrative organization forms as legal regulations, education systems, local governments, certification, etc., which then lead to the construction of a robust institutional environment comprised of rationalized rules, procedures and employee qualifications (Meyer & Rowan, 2008). In this context, by rulemaking, supervision and when necessary, by punishment and rewards, regulative processes based on legality may lead to the institutionalization of social structures previously legitimized through political processes (Scott, 2003).

Despite the regulative power of legality, the multiplicity of legitimacy dynamics provides a large "room for maneuver" for administrators within cultural environments

of organizations (Suchman, 1995). When legitimacy is conceptualized as an interaction between organizational strategies and expectations of stakeholders in particular, it is a better approach to consider legitimacy management as a dialogue process between organizational administrators and stakeholders, rather than a unidirectional organizational activity. In this sense, legitimacy management could be deemed as a strategic communication process that includes the involvement of stakeholders dissatisfied with particular decisions or practices and aims at winning the approval of them, rather than defending the arguments claimed by an organization (Massey, 2001).

From an institutional perspective, organizations claim legitimacy by adopting normative, widely accepted features. However, institutional theorists have not fully explained the mechanisms of transmitting legitimizing features to critical stakeholders. Hence, it is apparent that well-organized legitimacy management can be carried out by administrators who are aware of which techniques should be used in different situations (Elsbach, 2003; Suchman, 1995), because administrators play a crucial role in designing a formal structure reflecting the myths of an institutionalized environment and/or imitating legitimate organizational forms. As representatives of authority, they feel responsible for legitimizing school practices, which in turn leads to perceptual differences between administrators and teachers (Bidwell, 2001). Similarly, Elsbach (2003) claims that legitimacy management can be performed through a spokesperson's use of verbal accounts to explain, justify or improve organizational activities.

Accordingly, we argue that pragmatic legitimacy is relatively more exposed to the influences of the communication between organizational administrators and stakeholders than the other types of legitimacy, because pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interest calculations of the immediate stakeholders of organizations. Any organizational act directly influencing self-interests of stakeholders might be considered within the framework of pragmatic legitimacy. For this reason, it could be suggested that proactive accounts used for gaining legitimacy have a greater relative influence on pragmatic legitimacy. Similarly, the protective strategies aimed at maintaining legitimacy have a similar influence, as high quality exchange relationships between organizations and stakeholders must be consistent, predictable and by no means uncertain (Suchman, 1995). On the other hand, the intensive use of symbolic activities like impression management strategies and coercive practices, such as exercise of authority, might lead those stakeholders who are directly affected to worry more about their own self-interests (Ogden & Clarke, 2005).

Unlike pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy is based on social judgments about the appropriateness of organizational behavior to social value patterns, instead of self-interest calculations of stakeholders directly affected by that behavior. For this reason, proactive strategies are expected to have a positive influence on moral

legitimacy perceptions, since these strategies indicate conformity to regulative and normative principles required for legitimation process. In the same way, protective strategies appear to have a similar influence as they aim at pursuing conformity to normative standards and values, and protecting the existing legitimizing features. On the other hand, when compared to pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy perceptions are more resistant to the influences of impression management strategies and coercive exercise of authority that are employed by organizational administrators to repair legitimacy since moral legitimacy is based on social judgments rather than individual interests (Patriotta et al., 2011; Suchman, 1995).

Unlike the above mentioned legitimacy types, cognitive legitimacy is associated with the comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness of the subject of legitimation, not with interests or evaluation (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). From this perspective, legitimation not only tells social actors why something is done, but also explains why it is done that way (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). For this reason, organizations can ensure cognitive legitimation through conformity to the existing models and standards. In this respect, it is obvious that the proactive strategies based on conformity and the protective strategies including messages that the existing organizational behavior is natural and inevitable could particularly influence perceptions of comprehensibility. In contrast, the use of impression management strategies and the exercise of authority with the aim of re-legitimation, might lead to questioning and eventually the destruction of the existing organizational practices (Berends, 2015, Ogden & Clarke, 2005). Unlike comprehensibility, taken-for-grantedness requires a stable, clearly defined world image in which organizational stakeholders safely shape their own behaviors, expectations and identities without having to re-define the meaning of their existence every single day. When viewed from this vantage point, we argue that the taken-for-granted legitimacy perceptions have to show less variability than the other types of legitimacy. In other words, the existing institutionalized organizational structures are likely to be more resistant to legitimacy management strategies employed by administrators. Even the use of impression management strategies and the exercise of authority legitimated through institutional processes may not be influential on the deeply embedded assumptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1995).

In light of the above mentioned discussions, the overall goal of this study was to discover the relationship of the legitimacy management strategies used by school administrators to administrators' and teachers' perceptions of organizational legitimacy. On the basis of this general aim, more specific research questions pursued in this study include the following:

1. Do proactive, protective and reactive strategies used by administrators predict exchange legitimacy and influence-dispositional legitimacy dimensions of perceived pragmatic legitimacy?

2. Do proactive, protective and reactive strategies used by administrators predict consequential, procedural and structural legitimacy dimensions of perceived moral legitimacy?

3. Do proactive, protective and reactive strategies used by administrators predict comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness dimensions of perceived cognitive legitimacy?

Method

Procedure and Sample

New institutionalists describe schools as institutions consisting of persistent social action patterns taken-for-granted by individuals (Berends, 2015). Of course, institutionalization pressures manifest themselves through not only external stakeholders but also internal stakeholders (DiMaggio & Powell, 2004). Therefore, administrators and teachers were included in the study as they are both the agents and the subjects of the legitimation process (Bidwell, 2001). In this context, a prediction research design was used to gather data from administrators and teachers working in public and private high schools in the Province of İstanbul between May 2015 and January 2016. A prediction design is a type of a correlational study in which the goal is to predict the value of one variable given the level of another variable, with the independent variable usually occurring before the dependent one rather than simultaneously. In this study, multiple prediction research design with more than one independent variables predicting a dependent variable is used (Beins, 2017, p. 265).

The population of the study consisted of 4,209 administrators (3,133 public and 1,076 private school administrators) and 44,633 teachers (35,102 public and 9,531 private school teachers). Sample sizes were determined as 352 for administrators (264 public and 88 private school administrators) and 381 for teachers (300 public and 81 private school teachers). A proportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted to ensure the representation of each subpopulation within the overall population. Cluster sampling was applied within each stratum (Balcı, 2013). The strata were defined based on the İstanbul Life Quality Index developed by Şeker (2011) who classified 39 districts into five groups in terms of their levels of living standards. This index is also used by the Turkish Ministry of Development. Sixteen districts with different life quality levels were randomly chosen from these five groups. There are 24,408 teachers (19,999 public and 4,409 private school teachers) and 940 administrators (660 public and 280 private school administrators) working in these districts. Questionnaires were distributed through the help of the Department of Education Inspection Board of İstanbul and district national education directorates. More questionnaires than required by sample size calculations were delivered as a measure against potential response errors. Five hundred administrators

and 600 teachers from 66 public and 28 private high schools in these districts were sent questionnaires. Four hundred four questionnaires were returned by administrators and 507 questionnaires by teachers. Due to missing values, response errors and outliers, 120 questionnaires were discarded from the study and questionnaires from 365 administrators (280 public and 85 private school administrators) and 426 teachers (332 public and 94 private school teachers) were included for analysis. Of these participants 46% were administrators and 54% were teachers. The average age of administrators was 42.82 (SD = 8.72) years. 76.7% of them were working in public schools. 24.1% of them were women and 30.4% of them had postgraduate degrees. The average managerial tenure of the administrators was 7.64 (SD = 7.37) years. Their average professional tenure was 18.52 (SD = 9.01) years. The average age of teachers was 36.41 (SD = 7.97) years. The number working in public schools represented 77.9%. Of the sample, 62.4% of teachers were women and 23.9% of them had postgraduate degrees. Their average professional tenure was 12.03 (SD = 8.26) years.

Measures

Perceived organizational legitimacy scale. A scale was constructed to measure the perceptions of organizational legitimacy of participants. An item pool was generated by using conceptualizations in the literature, the scales employed to measure the different types of organizational legitimacy (Berger & Luckman, 1995; Eisenberger, et al. 2002; Elsbach, 1994, 2003; Meyer & Rowan, 2008; Schabracq, 2007; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006; Suchman, 1995) and pre-interviews with eight administrators and eight teachers working in public and private schools. As a result of these procedures, an item pool with 40 items was generated to measure three types of perceived organizational legitimacy. In the first stage, a pilot study was carried out with 101 participants (51 administrators and 50 teachers) working in the province of Ankara. The K.M.O. value of .88 and the Bartlett's test results ($X^2 = 1836.181$; $p < .01$) indicated that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis of 40 items using the principal components method with varimax rotation. The number of factors was determined in accordance with Suchman's (1995) theoretical classification. After the successive deletion of 14 items, a seven-factor solution accounting for cumulative 75.97% of the variation in the data was obtained. Based on the items loading on each factor, the factors were labeled in line with the theoretical classification of Suchman (1995) as follows: "exchange legitimacy," "influence-dispositional legitimacy," "consequential legitimacy," "procedural legitimacy," "structural legitimacy," "comprehensibility" and "taken-for-grantedness." The items regarding influence legitimacy and dispositional legitimacy loaded on the same factor.

In the second stage, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with another group of 280 participants (140 administrators and 140 teachers) working in the

province of Ankara. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that a seven-factor model captured distinct constructs and provided an acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999) fit to the data, with $X^{2[292]} = 642,077$, $X^2/df = 2.19$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = .07; GFI = .85; CFI = .93. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item, using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items on the scale and their factor loadings, item total correlations and Cronbach alpha coefficients for each subscale are presented in Appendix 1.

Legitimacy management strategies scale. In order to construct a scale to assess administrators' use of legitimacy management strategies, we first reviewed the literature regarding impression management, perception management and legitimacy management. As a result, it was determined that legitimacy management strategies were conceptualized in three dimensions: proactive, protective and reactive strategies (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Elsbach, 1994, 2003; Massey, 2001; Ogden & Clarke, 2005; Suchman, 1995). In addition to reviewing the related literature, findings from pre-interviews held with eight administrators and eight teachers working in public and private schools were used to generate an item pool with 37 items. In the first stage, a pilot study was carried out in the province of Ankara with 100 participants (50 administrators and 50 teachers) who had not participated in the pilot study of the perceived organizational legitimacy scale. The K.M.O. value of .85 and the Bartlett's test results ($X^2 = 1237.530$; $p < .01$) indicated that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis of 37 items using the principal components method with varimax rotation. After the successive deletion of 13 items, a three-factor solution accounting for cumulative 59.94 % of the variation in the data was obtained. The number of factors was determined by the scree test which indicated a substantial decrease in eigenvalues after the third factor. Based on the items loading on each factor, factors were labelled in line with theoretical dimensions in the related literature (Suchman, 1995) as follows: proactive strategies, protective strategies and reactive strategies. Strategies based on pragmatic, regulative, normative and cognitive accounts used by administrators to legitimize newly introduced practices were loaded on a proactive strategies dimension. The strategies aiming at perceiving the change and protecting the past accomplishments were loaded on a protective strategies dimension. Strategies based on reactive, manipulative and coercive accounts were loaded on a reactive strategies dimension.

In the second stage, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with another group of 280 participants (140 administrators and 140 teachers) working in the province of Ankara. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis indicates that the three-factor model captured distinct constructs and provided an acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999) fit to the data, with $X^{2[247]} = 547,535$, $X^2/df = 2.22$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = .07; GFI = .85; CFI = .91. The response format was standardized using a 5-point

scale ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always. The items on the scale and their factor loadings, item total correlations and Cronbach alpha coefficients for each subscale were presented in Appendix 2.

Control variables. Private schools can focus on the expectations of the local society more effectively while public schools are obliged to produce outputs determined through political processes in accordance with the expectations of the larger society (Aurini, 2006), and there may be differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers (Bidwell, 2001). As a result, controls included school type (public vs. private) and position (administrator vs. teacher) variables. These two variables were dummy coded as 1, "public" and 0, "private" and 1, "administrator" and 0, "teacher."

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS program. Firstly, the data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as arithmetical mean and standard deviation. Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationships between variables. Also, Harman's single factor test was used to check common method bias. Secondly, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships of the legitimacy management strategies to organizational legitimacy types. Moreover, a variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to examine the multicollinearity and the Durbin-Watson test was performed to detect the existence of autocorrelation among the residuals.

Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for each of the variables. As seen in Table1, we found very weak to very strong correlations between variables. The highest level of correlation was between proactive and protective strategies at .73 which does not suggest a problem of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Also in the regression analyses, the VIF values were found to be less than 2.26 implying that multicollinearity did not exist. Durbin-Watson values ranged from 1.76 to 1.91, which indicates no positive or negative autocorrelation between the errors of the regression models. According to the results of the Harman's single factor test, one general factor accounts for 33.82% of the covariance among the variables which suggests that there is no common method bias. In the next step, multiple regression analysis was conducted to test for relationships between control variables, legitimacy management strategies and subscales of the perceived organizational legitimacy.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Exchange L.	3.66	.81									
2. Inf.- Disp. L.	3.82	.71	.72*								
3. Cons. L.	3.55	.80	.47*	.46*							
4. Pro. L.	4.16	.63	.49*	.61*	.52*						
5. Str. L.	3.71	.78	.48*	.54*	.58*	.57*					
6. Comp.	3.96	.72	.59*	.69*	.46*	.63*	.58*				
7.Taken-for-grantedness	3.37	.82	.33*	.40*	.37*	.37*	.42*	.45*			
8. Proactive S.	3.95	.57	.47*	.51*	.41*	.51*	.46*	.54*	.38*		
9. Protective S.	3.97	.59	.48*	.57*	.40*	.51*	.47*	.57*	.38*	.73*	
10. Reactive S.	2.18	.96	-.23*	-.32*	-.15*	-.23*	-.16*	-.30*	-.03	-.28*	-.35*

Note: n = 791; *$p < .01$; Inf.-Disp.= Influence-Dispositional; Cons.= Consequential; Pro.= Procedural; Str.= Structural; Comp.= Comprehensibility

As shown in Table 2, control variables entered in the first step were significant predictors of two types of pragmatic legitimacy. School type and position variables together explain 6% of the variability of exchange legitimacy and 8% of influence-dispositional legitimacy.

Table 2

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses: Effects of Legitimacy Management Strategies on Perceived Pragmatic Legitimacy

Variables	Pragmatic Legitimacy Types			
	Exchange Legitimacy		Influence-Dispositional Legitimacy	
	B (S.E.)	B	B (S.E.)	β
Step 1				
Constant	3.72 (.06)		3.79 (.06)	
School Type	-.28 (.07)	-.14**	-.19 (.06)	-.11**
Position	.33 (.06)	.21**	.39 (.05)	.27**
R^2	.06		.09	
Adj. R^2	.06		.08	
Step 2				
Constant	.994 (.24)		1.21 (.20)	
School Type	-.11 (.06)	-.06	-.02 (.05)	-.01
Position	.12 (.05)	.07*	.14 (.04)	.10**
Proactive Strategies	.33 (.07)	.25**	.28 (.05)	.22**
Protective Strategies	.37 (.07)	.25**	.41 (.05)	.34**
Reactive Strategies	-.05 (.03)	-.05	-.09 (.02)	-.12**
R^2	.27		.37	
Adj. R^2	.26		.37	
DW	1.90		1.88	

Note: n = 791; **$p < .01$., * $p < .05$, DW = Durbin-Watson

When legitimacy management strategies were included in the regression model, school type was no longer a significant predictor of exchange legitimacy and influence-dispositional legitimacy. The direction of the correlation between position and dependent variables can be interpreted to mean that administrators had a developed

sense of identification with their schools and thus regarded themselves as one of the parties in the exchange. The independent variables explain 26% of the variability of exchange legitimacy and 37% of influence-dispositional legitimacy. Proactive (β = .25, $p < .01$; β = .22, $p < .01$) and protective (β = .25, $p < .01$; β = .34, $p < .01$) strategies were found to be significantly related to exchange legitimacy and influence-dispositional legitimacy. On the other hand, the use of reactive strategies (β = -.05, $p > .05$; β = -.12, $p < .01$) was not a significant predictor of exchange legitimacy and was found to be negatively related to influence-dispositional legitimacy. The results regarding the prediction of three types of moral legitimacy are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that control variables entered in the first step were significant predictors of three types of moral legitimacy. School type and position variables together explain 12% of the variability of consequential legitimacy, 7% of procedural legitimacy and 13% of structural legitimacy. However, when legitimacy management strategies were included in the regression model, position was no longer a significant predictor of procedural legitimacy and structural legitimacy, procedural legitimacy and structural legitimacy.

Table 3
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses: Effects of Legitimacy Management Strategies on Perceived Moral Legitimacy

Variables	Moral Legitimacy Types					
	Consequential Legitimacy		Procedural Legitimacy		Structural Legitimacy	
	B (S.E.)	B	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β
Step 1						
Constant	3.88 (.06)		4.31 (.05)		4.11 (.06)	
School Type	-.58 (.06)	-.30**	-.32 (.05)	-.21**	-.64 (.06)	-.34**
Position	.26 (.05)	.16**	.20 (.04)	.17**	.21 (.05)	.13**
R^2	.12		.07		.14	
Adj. R^2	.12		.07		.13	
Step 2						
Constant	1.61 (.24)		1.98 (.23)		1.47 (.23)	
School Type	-.45 (.06)	-.23**	-.17 (.06)	-.12**	-.49 (.06)	-.26**
Position	.11 (.05)	.07*	.03 (.05)	.03	.02 (.05)	.01
Proactive Strategies	.34 (.07)	.24**	.32 (.05)	.29**	.31 (.06)	.22**
Protective Strategies	.24 (.07)	.16**	.27 (.05)	.26**	.34 (.06)	.26**
Reactive Strategies	-.01 (.03)	-.01	-.03 (.02)	-.05	-.01 (.03)	-.01
R^2	.25		.32		.31	
Adj. R^2	.24		.31		.31	
DW	1.76		1.91		1.81	

Note: n = 791; **$p < .01.$, * $p < .05$, DW = Durbin-Watson

This finding implies that perceptions of moral legitimacy are predominantly shaped by supra-organizational societal judgments rather than the dynamics of the relationships between administrators and teachers. The proactive and protective strategies were found to be significantly and positively related to consequential (β = .24, $p < .01$; β = .16, $p < .01$), procedural (β = .29, $p < .01$; β = .26, $p < .01$) and structural (β = .22, $p < .01$; β = .26, $p < .01$) legitimacy. Conversely, the use of

reactive strategies (β = -.01, p > .05; β = -.05, p > .05; β = -.01, p > .05) was not a significant predictor of the perceptions of moral legitimacy. The predictors accounted for 24% of the variance in consequential legitimacy, 31% in procedural legitimacy and 31% in structural legitimacy. Table 4 presents the results regarding the prediction of two types of cognitive legitimacy.

As seen in Table 4, control variables are significant predictors of the perceptions of cognitive legitimacy. Two variables accounted for 11% of the variance in comprehensibility and 2% in taken-for-grantedness. When legitimacy management strategies were included in the analysis, school type and position were no longer significant predictors of taken-for-grantedness. The direction of the correlations between control variables and comprehensibility seems to stem from the fact that the mean scores of the participants working in private schools and administrators were relatively higher. Proactive (β = .28, p < .01) and protective (β = .28, p < .01) strategies were significantly and positively related to comprehensibility, while the use of reactive strategies (β = -.10, p < .01) was significantly and negatively related to comprehensibility.

Table 4
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses: Effects of Legitimacy Management Strategies on Perceived Cognitive Legitimacy

| | Cognitive Legitimacy Types | | | |
| | Comprehensibility | | Taken-for-grantedness | |
Variables	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β
Step 1				
Constant	4.00 (.06)		3.51 (.07)	
School Type	-.30 (.06)	-.17**	-.26 (.07)	-.13**
Position[2]	.42 (.05)	.29**	.14 (.06)	.08*
R^2	.12		.03	
Adj. R^2	.11		.02	
Step 2				
Constant	1.33 (.20)		.56 (.26)	
School Type	-.12 (.05)	-.07**	-.11 (.06)	-.06
Position	.19 (.04)	.13**	-.01 (.06)	-.01
Proactive Strategies	.36 (.05)	.28**	.33 (.07)	.22**
Protective Strategies	.35 (.05)	.28**	.35 (.07)	.25**
Reactive Strategies	-.07 (.02)	-.10**	.10 (.03)	.12**
R^2	.39		.18	
Adj. R^2	.39		.18	
DW	1.76		1.85	

Note: n = 791; **p < .01., * p < .05, DW = Durbin-Watson

The predictors explain 39% of the variability of the comprehensibility. Contrary to the arguments in the related literature, proactive (β = .22, p < .01), protective (β = .25, p < .01) and reactive (β = .12, p < .01) strategies were found to be significantly and positively related to taken-for-grantedness. The predictors accounted for 18% of the variance in taken-for-grantedness.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship of legitimacy management strategies used by administrators to perceived organizational legitimacy. Very little research exists about this relationship because of the sharp distinction between institutional and strategic approaches in related literature. This study addresses this issue by indicating how a spokesperson's actions influence organizational stakeholders' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of their organizations. The findings of this study indicate that proactive strategies provide an effective tool set for administrators because strategies based on regulative, normative, pragmatic and cognitive accounts can facilitate legitimation. For example, Suchman (2003) states that organizations are obliged to appeal to legal regulations as normative guidelines within socially constructed cultural reality. Similarly, normative accounts such as widely accepted standards, social values and scientific facts form a frame for legitimation by adding prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimensions to social life (Scott, 2001). In addition, organizations struggling for legitimacy have to conform their practices to the behavioral norms of the sector they are embedded in to get social support and access to the resources they require (Long & Driscoll, 2008). In other words, pragmatic legitimation is likely to occur when regulative and normative accounts about norms, values, beliefs and definitions are shared with the help of a common language (Wilson & Stokes, 2004). Finally, as resistance to isomorphic pressures, such as widely accepted standards, values and scientific facts that have been transformed into plausibility structures has a delegitimizing effect (Beetham & Lord, 2014; Suchman, 1995), adapting organizational practices and innovations to existing models or standards may confer cognitive legitimacy to organizations (Long & Discroll, 2008). In light of the above mentioned arguments, it could be suggested that administrators might employ proactive strategies to reinforce the existing taken-for-granted assumptions, as well as legitimizing newly introduced organizational practices.

Similar to the findings on proactive strategies, protective strategies provide an effective tool set for administrators. Parallel to the findings obtained from the study, there are researchers in the literature who suggest organizations could form perceptions that their own practices, outcomes and administrative decisions are beneficial (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). This can be accomplished by taking emerging pragmatic demands and expectations of organizational stakeholders into consideration, involving particular organizational stakeholders in the decision making process, monitoring of assumptions of cultural environment about organizational practices and managing symbolically to show organizational practices are trouble-free (Ogden & Clarke, 2005; Suchman, 1995). In addition, organizations may choose to foresee emerging ethical trends and build consensus and thus engage in continuous re-legitimation cycles by using protective strategies (Patriotta et al., 2011). This point, at the same time,

guarantees the maintenance of cognitive legitimacy because perceiving the changes in expectations of organizational stakeholders and transforming the previous achievements to tangible and comprehensible mental models against the uncertainty of the external world can facilitate persuasion of stakeholders who are doubtful about organizational activities (Tan, 2013). As a result, administrators can employ protective strategies to reinforce the existing taken-for-granted assumptions, as well as maintaining stakeholders' support for the organizational practices.

Unlike proactive and protective strategies, the reactive ones provide a restricted tool set for administrators, because there is no significant relationship between reactive strategies and exchange legitimacy. However, there is a negative correlation between reactive strategies and influence-dispositional legitimacy perceptions. Coercion, included in reactive strategies, brings temporary benefits caused by stakeholders' merely avoiding sanctions for disobeying authority (Koppell, 2008). What is more, manipulative strategies might lead to uncertain outcomes and even negative consequences when stakeholders notice non-realistic statements of organizational administrators (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). The study has also found that perceptions of moral legitimacy of internal stakeholders are resistant to reactive strategies, because moral legitimacy is said to be based on supra-organizational, societal level regulative and normative evaluations (Koppel, 2008; Suchman, 1995). Accordingly, the use of proactive and protective strategies instead of coercive and manipulative strategies to repair moral and pragmatic legitimacy may give more effective outcomes.

Similarly, the use of reactive strategies by administrators for re-legitimation cannot ensure comprehensibility of organizational practices. On the contrary, cognitive distance caused by the use of coercive authority undermines comprehensibility (Woolthuis, Hillebrand, & Nooteboom, 2005). Moreover, when manipulative strategies used to repair legitimacy are discerned, comprehensibility is replaced by confusion, which, in turn, leads to the replacement of subconscious assumptions by explicit questioning (Ogden & Clarke, 2005; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Conversely, reactive strategies could be considered as an effective tool set to foster taken-for-grantedness of organizational practices. Authority, particularly when considered as a characteristic of a broader institutional system in which an organization is embedded, could lead employees to approve organizational practices without questioning (Koppell, 2008). In the same way, using a manipulative language and behavioral patterns may lead the existing institutionalized assumptions to be rebuilt through symbolic activities (Zott & Huy, 2007). As a result, the use of reactive strategies may have negative influences on comprehensibility of organizational practices while it may be influential in reinforcing existing taken-for-granted practices.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study extends theory development by empirically testing the current theories of organizational legitimacy and legitimation. Studies based on empirical data directly obtained from internal stakeholders are rare and the existing literature offers an abundance of definitions, measures and arguments, although they are not fully consistent with one other (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). In particular, the measurement of some constructs of legitimacy, such as taken-for-grantedness, is still problematic. This study provides an attempt to address this issue, since the nature of schools as highly routinized organizations with relatively highly educated and critically conscious employees enables us to dare to confront this challenge. Moreover, though the influences of factors, such as the distinction between public and private organizations and the position in organizational hierarchy on the legitimacy perceptions of the stakeholders, have been widely researched, our findings enriched our understanding by empirically demonstrating their influences on both perceived organizational legitimacy and legitimation strategies at once. Administrators equipped with this knowledge could easily decide which strategy to use to deal with certain kind of legitimacy problems and foresee the potential impacts of their actions on the perceptions of internal stakeholders.

For example, proactive and protective legitimacy management strategies were found to be powerful management tools as stated by Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) and Patriotta et al. (2011). Administrators should employ these strategies not only for legitimizing newly introduced organizational practices and maintaining stakeholders' support for the organizational practices but also for reinforcing existing institutionalized organizational practices. Similarly, these strategies should be used for re-legitimation of organizational practices, which are considered unfair or opposed to the interests of stakeholders and regain their trust. The use of proactive and protective strategies also enables administrators to re-provide comprehensibility of organizational activities by removing chaos and uncertainty caused by legitimacy crises. Unlike proactive and protective ones, reactive strategies can have limited use in legitimacy management in a school environment. Administrators should avoid using reactive strategies as they may negatively influence interest-based, long-term relationships in schools and lead to confusion about the application of organizational practices. Furthermore, it is futile to use these strategies to influence stakeholders' moral legitimacy perceptions, which are built through societal level regulative and normative evaluations, such as ethical, moral or legal considerations about how organizational practices should be applied. However, the use of reactive strategies by administrators, like proactive and protective ones, may enable stakeholders to acknowledge the existing taken-for-granted practices and could alleviate potential future questioning of such practices.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on data gathered from internal stakeholders of schools; thus, the results may not be generalized to external stakeholders. Still we believe that perceptions of organizational members are as important as those of external audiences for administrators to manage effectively. Above all, administrators must learn how to change organizational members' mental models in order to be a leader. It is also important to note that this is not a longitudinal study and we examine here only the perceptions of high school administrators and teachers at a certain time and in a city environment. However, it is obvious that high school employees are closer to the results of the educational practices and can observe the influences of legitimacy crises more directly than their colleagues working at other levels of education.

Another limitation of this study is that it is conducted in educational organizations functioning in environments rigidly structured by the isomorphic pressures from various internal and external stakeholders. Accordingly, the results may not be generalizable to non-educational organizations. In organizational environments with more flexible conditions and fewer stakeholders, similar results may not be found. However the fact that the results correspond to a great extent to the theoretical assumptions in the literature may serve as a starting point for further research in this area and enhance the reliability of the study.

In addition to the limitations previously noted, school type and position variables were analyzed in the study as control variables. Organizational size and age, which are regarded as influential factors for external audiences of business organizations in the related literature were not included in this study. Yet, it can be suggested that the results regarding school type and position variables are generalizable since the findings of this study overlapped to a great extent with the theoretical discussions in the related literature. We also believe that results regarding these variables may provide empirical references for practitioners interested in organizational legitimacy.

Based on these limitations and the results of our study, future research should continue to validate the results by using larger samples and external stakeholders as well as internal ones. To test the generalizability of the results to non-educational organizations, studies in organizational contexts from different sectors should be conducted. A longitudinal study design could help to reveal how the legitimation process is shaped in time by the influence of the environmental factors and administrative decisions. Future research should also focus on further studying the relationships between the legitimation process and variables, such as procedural justice, trust and leadership legitimacy, in order to examine theoretical assumptions and discussions in the related literature. Finally, using a mixed-method research design is recommended to identify moral discussions and judgments which are regarded as primary sources of legitimacy perceptions.

In conclusion, this study extends the research on organizational legitimacy by demonstrating the relationships between legitimation strategies and perceived organizational legitimacy. We also determined the effectiveness of organizational leaders as spokespersons transmitting legitimizing features to internal stakeholders. We found that both proactive and protective strategies had significant effects on all types of legitimacy perceptions. Yet, reactive strategies were found to be a useful tool set only for reinforcing taken-for-grantedness of organizational practices. In total, the results of this study have implications for managing the perceptions of internal stakeholders in practice, as well as identifying mechanisms of transmitting legitimizing features to organizational stakeholders.

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Appendix 1. Perceived Organizational Legitimacy Scale

Cronbach Alpha = .94	Overall variance explained = 75.97 %		
Item		Factor Lds.	Item Total Corr.
Exchange Legitimacy Cronbach Alpha = .83 Variance explained = 10.11			
1. This school does not let extra efforts of employees go unrewarded.		.745	.737
2. There is a lot of give and take in the relationship between this school and its employees.		.744	.654
3. There is a balance between employees' efforts and the benefits they receive in this school.		.741	.682
Influence-Dispositional Legitimacy Cronbach Alpha = .91 Variance explained = 15.98			
4. This school provides sufficient authority to employees to do their jobs well.		.739	.768
5. This school cares about its employees' well-being.		.695	.713
6. This school involves its employees in determining organizational performance criteria.		.693	.690
7. This school involves its employees in policy-making processes.		.691	.802
8. This school regards its employees' interests when making decisions that affect them.		.650	.759
9. This school cares about its employees' personal values.		.646	.703
10. The relationships between this school and its employees are based on mutual trust.		.602	.620
Consequential Legitimacy Cronbach Alpha = .86 Variance explained = 10.58			
11. Personal and behavioral attributes of this school's graduates are compatible with the values of the general public.		.806	.676
12. The general public believes that the graduates of this school are well-trained.		.757	.736
13. Graduates of this school are well-equipped to meet the general public's expectations.		.737	.680
Procedural Legitimacy Cronbach Alpha = .85 Variance explained = 9.01			
14. This school meets the standards set by legal regulations (laws, curricula, directives, etc.) in its operating procedures.		.731	.702
15. The general public approves of this school's operating procedures (rules, practices, methods, etc.).		.685	.656
16. This school's administrators rigorously follow legal regulations.		.627	.782
Structural Legitimacy Cronbach Alpha = .85 Variance explained = 8.63			
17. The structure of this school is designed to meet the standards required by public education system.		.723	.742
18. This school has the appropriate units (administration, guidance service, classes, etc.) to accomplish its goals.		.712	.765
19. This school is structured to ensure accomplishing organizational goals.		.668	.648

Pragmatic Legitimacy (items 1–10)

Moral Legitimacy (items 11–19)

Comprehensibility Cronbach Alpha = .91 Variance explained =13.41

20. When I do something in this school, I know fairly well what consequences it will have. .844   .797

21. I am fairly certain of how I will do my job in the future in this school. .830   .868

22. Administrative decisions in this school are based on plausible reasons. .745   .784

23. I am fairly certain as to how things are done in this school. .557   .741

Taken-for-grantedness Cronbach Alpha = .74 Variance explained = 8.19

24. It is impossible to carry out the tasks in this school in an alternative way. .876   .703

25. The goals of this school are permanent and stable. .825   .573

26. The tasks of this school are permanent, and do not change over time. .633   .436

(Left margin vertical label: Cognitive Legitimacy)

Appendix 2. Legitimation Strategies Scale

Cronbach Alpha = .88   Overall variance explained = 59.94 %

Item	Factor Loadings	Item Total Corr.
Proactive Strategies Cronbach Alpha = .86 Variance explained = 17.27		
1. I explain that the practice is a widely-used standard in all schools.	.798	.611
2. I stress that the application of the practice does not contradict social norms and values.	.751	.666
3. I stress that the practice seems more plausible than its alternatives.	.695	.746
4. I explain that the effectiveness of the practice is supported by scientific studies.	.691	.730
5. I try to get the school stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, etc.) to support the practice.	.581	.545
6. I warn the top management of the potential future problems in the application of the practice.	.568	.526
7. I stress that the practice is a legal requirement.	.523	.556
Protective Strategies Cronbach Alpha =.90 Variance explained = 22.08		
8. I try to win the support of top management for the practice.	.758	.749
9. I try to foresee stakeholder (administrators, teachers, students, parents, etc.) reactions towards the practice.	.746	.684
10. I try to build close relationships with school stakeholders to keep their support for the practice.	.743	.636
11. I carry out inspections continually to prevent miscues in the application of the practice.	.642	.642

12. I apologize on behalf of the school for the problems occurred in the application of the practice.	.611	.460
13. I try to prove that the practice is compatible with the organizational goals.	.611	.687
14. I try to convince school stakeholders of the effectiveness and reliability of the practice.	.602	.626
15. I take the views of complaining stakeholders into account.	.599	.675
16. I try to convince school stakeholders that there is not a problem with the practice.	.556	.513
17. I emphasize the contributions the practice has made to the organizational image.	.529	.634
18. I ask for consultancy from professionals having expertise in the application of the practice.	.516	.569
Reactive Strategies Cronbach Alpha = .88 Variance explained = 20.59		
19. I deny the existence of problems occurring in the application of the practice.	.866	.779
20. I force school stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, etc.) to approve the practice by using the authority of my position.	.829	.734
21. I try to downplay the problems occurring in the application of the practice.	.819	.737
22. I blame external persons or organizations for problems occurring in the application of the practice.	.773	.706
23. I claim that the practice is simpler and easier than it seems to be.	.771	.602
24. I distract the stakeholders' attention by bringing up other issues when a problem occurs in the application of the practice.	.489	.559