

Study of factors relating to becoming an outstanding principal in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: This study adopted a qualitative research method to investigate the attributes of a high school principal conferred with the *principal outstanding leadership award*, for promoting school leadership strategies and management. This study also sought information about creating a collaborative organisational climate and effective school management in global and local environments from the principal. The main methodology of data collection for this study was an interview. The research findings from the six statements show that outstanding school management and leadership strategies should include mission achievement, innovation, communication and coordination, motivation, respect and trust and marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The success of leadership is strongly related to the complexity of social relationships in an organisation [1]. A principal plays an important role in school development, and the school environment is a place full of strategies and transitions [2]. The interactions between individuals and the society are built upon teaching and learning in schools. Thus, a school needs effective leadership to foster transitions [3].

The selection for the principal outstanding leadership award encourages principals to run and to improve the operating results of their schools diligently. Candidates should meet one of the following requirements: 1) excellent leadership and fulfilling the development of school; and 2) have significant effects on their campus developmental plans [4]. Applying for the candidacy should create a harmonious atmosphere and culture of contribution and cooperation.

As the leader of a school, the principal will influence the directions of future development, organisational management and operational efficiency. Some studies have explored the schools from which a principal was granted an outstanding leadership award to understand the reason for their nomination and their campus development strategies.

Leadership is a process that affects subordinates' activities, such as selecting organisational goals, completing works based on stated goals, encouraging their subordinates to achieve goals, maintenance of group cooperation, and acquiring support and cooperation of external group and organisation [5]. Leadership is no longer a personal trait, but an overall function and a complicated dynamic process, which is influenced by many factors in an organisation [6].

When leading courses, a principal should shape the vision of the school, construct organisational operations, provide and integrate resources, facilitate coordination and communication, design courses, build organisational cultures, solve operating problems, supervise the operation, cultivate course features, and promote course evaluations and reflections [7]. Thus, excellent principals can analyse strengths and weaknesses of their schools, and build the vision and organisational goals. With humble and practical spirit, they encourage colleagues and students, exhort school features and specialties, promote the school in the community and society, and build visibility and search for resources, with the aim to improve the school environment, and to build a cooperative and harmonious campus.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research method to understand every aspect of the outstanding principal. The research method was a semi-structured interview with the principal who had won the principal outstanding leadership award. The interview duration was less than one hour. The audiotape was subsequently transcribed.

The school principal promotes holistic education and hopes students grow with senses of diversity, constructs a *learning-based organisation* to enhance administrative efficiency and prioritise teaching, builds a harmonious campus, encourages joint participation, and encourages teachers and students to abide by the decisions of the majority, and respect the minority.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a literature review, data collection, and analysis, the study proposed the statements as follows:

Statement 1: The principal evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the school and establishes a vision as the guideline for campus operation:

As a leader, the principal sets organisational goals to let the subordinates follow. During the process, the principal should analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The principal said, *...The school has more than sixty years of history. The adjustment in departments should comply with the future needs, development of education, and future employment.* The principal has confidence, vision and sensitivity to the environment, which are main characteristics of a charismatic leader [8].

A visionary leader is able to create and clearly express a vision that can change the current status and is practical, credible and persuasive [9]. In the process of leadership, the principal had realised, *...a principal is a wisher and there are many angels helping me fulfil my wishes.* Through active visions, the principal's communication based on high expectations of performance shows the confidence of followers' capability, motivations toward organisational goals and missions, and the contributions to the school development.

Statement 2: The principal builds an innovative atmosphere and leads colleagues and teachers to innovation:

The principal leads the school to develop innovatively. He believes that *...we have to provide diverse learning platforms, recruit teachers from industry, and build creative clubs.* The main characteristic of a charismatic leader is *...having behaviours that are novel, non-traditional, and violate standards.* The principal said, *...Students have various abilities. Creativity develops many abilities. We provide more support and assistance.* The purpose of leadership is to lead members in an organisation toward the same organisational goal and to achieve missions and stated goals based on effective coordination of various factors [5].

Statement 3: The principal gathers consensus through many communications:

A successful leader should adopt both formal and informal communications. The principal stated, *...Colleagues should communicate with one another to understand everyone's opinions.* The principal often communicated with colleagues before making a resolution. The principal also listened to, and communicated with, colleagues outside the meeting, *...I am busy, but my door is always open for you. If I am not in my office today, you can make an appointment with my secretary...* People at different posts hold different perspectives on school affairs, regardless of administration or teaching. The principal gathered the consensus and solved problems in a harmonious way [10]. Effective communication is one of key elements possessed by a successful principal.

Statement 4: The principal encourages members to participate and to achieve organisational goals through expressing visions and goals:

During the process of school operation, the principal encouraged students and colleagues to exert their potential. *...Running a school is important. We must know how to care for different children and encourage them to exert their potential.* The individual's intention to achieve specific goal is the main force of work [11]. *...Good development of a school depends on teachers. We have to constantly encourage teachers to participate more.* An efficient leader will apply charming rhetoric, metaphors, slogans, symbols and rituals [12]. An effective and open communication can let leaders and followers share power and related information [13].

Statement 5: The principal emphasises campus safety and cares for disadvantaged students:

The disadvantaged groups should be assisted and taken care of. In this view, the principal cares more about the disadvantaged groups. *...I think I promote barrier-free facilities and toilets everywhere I go because toilets are places we visit every day. If toilets are dirty, some students will not be willing to go, which is bad for their health.* The principal first improved students' physical needs and helped them solve problems around them to increase ease and reduce mental stress. *...School resources should be continuously distributed to the disadvantaged students. We do not want to see their future being affected by their family.* The principal is a guardian and a leader who shapes the school's visions and builds the organisational team [14].

After running several schools, the principal has always cared about the campus safety and the disadvantaged groups. Whenever taking over a school, the principal will first improve the environment, including the campus safety and barrier-free facilities.

Statement 6: The principal enhances the school image through oral presentations and media propaganda:

The school made topics to encourage colleagues and students. The principal said, ...*Besides the school's reputation, the school should highlight the news to make the students, alumni, and parents feel proud.* Under intensive competition, the principal has strived to call for assistance in acquiring school resources. ...*What is important is changes. The school is too outdated. Life safety, environmental safety, sanitation, and school funds should be reorganised. More importantly, the school must improve quality.* The brand reputation is the subjective conception of consumers. When facing different choices, consumers will purchase products based on knowledge of the brand and past experiences [15]. Therefore, in the process of marketing, the school needs to continuously improve its accessibility, reputation, and identification of students and their parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Leadership should focus on the establishment of visions, communication and good organisational atmosphere.

During the process of leadership, the principal should build a good organisational atmosphere, establish and promote visions, solve problems through open discussions, and build a collaborative organisational atmosphere. Thus, based on the joint establishment of visions, principals should encourage members to participate in the decision making process and to provide commitments to the organisation, in order to increase members' internal motives.

2. School should focus on the campus environment and care for the disadvantaged groups.

The campus is the main venue for education, and the students are the main customers. Students act, live and receive education on the campus with functional software and hardware facilities in a living environment, which are important components of premium quality of education.

The principal should focus on the campus environment, eliminate any places with potential risks, and provide a healthy environment that meets physical needs, such as toilets, safety equipment and fire facilities. In addition, the school should also build barrier-free facilities and hire counsellors for the disadvantaged groups in order to enhance the quality of teaching and students' learning.

3. School should build a brand image.

The school should make topics through propaganda to encourage the faculty and students to move forward. To have a good brand image, the school should promote branding strategies and fulfil students' different needs, in order to strengthen the competition in the education market. In addition, with limited subsidies from the appropriate authority, the school should collaborate with the community and contact external stakeholders (people in the community, parents and alumni) to obtain assistance in subsidies, knowledge and skills to maintain high quality of teaching and learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

In the education market with intensive competition, improving educational quality is the focus of every school. Leadership of principals directly influences organisational activities and efficiency of the school. The study adopted a qualitative interview to obtain an outstanding principal's strategies for success.

1. The principal builds visions and encourages colleagues to achieve organisational goals.

In terms of operating results, the school leader should have the systemic knowledge of school visions, cultures and management strategies [16]. The principal achieves the organisational goals by setting up visions. The study found that the training, internal activities and social atmosphere may facilitate participants' internal motives. When participants are motivated, they will work harder, increase satisfaction and improve performances [17]. The outstanding principal needs to be willing to encourage colleagues to plan strategies for goals in order to improve the school performances.

2. The principal builds a harmonious organisation through communication and care.

The principal usually communicates with teachers regarding policy promotion, the future of the school and the consensus with teachers. Through clear communication, goal setting and incentives, leaders can drive the subordinates towards excellent performance [18][19]. Thus, the principal is sensitive and sympathetic towards the care for colleagues and the disadvantaged groups.

3. The principal obtains resources through marketing and innovative strategies.

The outstanding principal should satisfy students, academic teachers and stakeholders in the community [19][20]. To create an outstanding brand image and to collaborate with the community, the principal had promoted the school in

an innovative way, which was recognised by students and their parents. Also, the promotion had further influenced students' learning motives and improved the school reputation.

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