Education leadership essay sample

1. 0 Abstract

Leadership is one fundamental aspect of effective school administration that can not be ignored. It is for this reason that. It is for this reason that this research paper tries to look into the running of a school whose reputation is already in the gutters. The paper tries to discuss leadership by examining the qualifications of a good leader, the best leadership styles and models of change that would be suitable to turn the situation at this elementary school around. The paper examines such ideas as a leader's personal influence in an organization, the role of the teaching staff, students and the community. It attempts to explain the nature of school management while trying to emphasize on the conditions that would influence the community to change its predilections. Some personal qualities attributed to an effective school leader are explored. This goes hand in hand with the effectiveness of individual influence in management.

2. 0 Introduction

Before a new leader makes any changes on a school structure and towards its improvement, it is vital to find out the successes the school has had and the needs it exhibits. This means that the new leader has a responsibility to create a clear image of the school in which his services will now be required and decide on the interventions to input. This will determine the approach with which one will make adjustments. It is also important that the person realizes that improvement is a process and not an instant occurrence.

Evidently, West High School has a reputation for poor management and indiscipline. The result is the high teacher turnover and possibly poor

academic performance. The situation is made worse by a community that clearly has an attitude and the new principal has burden to carry.

The reason for school upgrading is to make an analysis of the pattern of records in order to create achievement not only for the students but for the whole community. In order to make any significant improvement, a leader needs to establish a clear goal. When one is able to understand where they are headed and have a plan that will get them there, the mission is made that much enjoyable and easy. It also turns into a learning experience. The goal is based on the records that show exactly where the situation is at the present moment.

Such a venture can not be successful if one chooses to work it alone. It is important to get a lot of people involved in the process of setting goals for success. If many people are aware of the goal and take it upon themselves to work towards that goal, the chances are high that the drive will be sustained and success is more possible.

An important part of setting goals for the improvement of West High School is creating a vision for the school. It is said that all journeys begin with a single step. The process of improving this school will necessitate setting a goal and creating a plan that will help attain that goal. The plan is responsible for establishing how to get to the goal. A vision is evidently the first step in that plan.

In the planning stage, it is vital to set comprehensible responsibilities for all those who will be involved in the improvement process. It will hence be

fundamental to work together with the population within the school as well as in the community. The standards of academics in a school present the teachers, parents and students with instructional goals while social standards dictate the relationship between the three groups of people. If families and the community make efforts to work together, the evolution of expectations is flawless. Professional development besides sustained management is a vital component in maintaining the momentum for school development.

3. 0 Discussion

3. 1 Qualifications: Qualities of good leadership and organization

Warner and Curry (1997) look at the scholarly definition of leadership. They define leadership as the process of directing and influencing the activities of group members that are task-related. These group members, when they exhibit a willingness to accept directions, assist in defining the position of a leader. They also help in facilitating the process of leadership. The idea of leadership integrates the impression of power and influence. Stoner and Wankel go on to add that a leader must be in a position to use power to implement influence over the activities of his subjects. Warner and Wehlage (1995) support this by asserting that leadership is a major component in the success of any group or institution.

On the other hand, effective leaders are viewed as the people that have the ability to renew the institutions they manage, communicate the goals of the institutions effectively and be competent enough to lead the institution to

the peak of its vision (Bennis and Nanua, 1997). The people who are linked to an institution must be able to vouch for the credibility of their leaders as well as trust in them.

When the behavior of a leader can improve the environment in which the subordinates are working or bring about satisfaction or improved performance through the means of training, directing and positive reinforcement, that leader is said to be motivational. A good leader is one who can effectively influence the activities of the employees towards achieving goals of the institution. This he does by soliciting the help of fellow workmates and thereby promoting teamwork (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 1985). Flexibility is also emphasized as vital in successful management.

In line with the needs of West High School, an effective principal is not necessarily the one who can teach best. They say that the best athletes do not often make the best coaches. It is therefore important to note that differentiating between the skills of performance and leading that performance will determine how one goes about improving a system. With this respect, a potential principal should be one who has the ability to learn leadership skills. The process of learning leadership is continuous and does not stop with attaining a leadership position.

3. 1. 1 Ability to learn leadership

Smith (1996) says that a good leader should learn from past positions of leadership. History is a determinant of the present and the future. A good leader will more often than not have taken on leadership outside the job and

portrayed good leadership skills there. In this case, West High School needs a person who has dealt with the management of another learning institution and therefore related with students, parents, teachers and the community. This person can then possibly have some potential for the job of principal.

Another leadership quality is the aptitude to make or seize vision. It makes other people interested in the ability one has to change a situation and make the future worthwhile. When one has a vision, everyone is expectant. Such a leader is also able to assemble the available resources and make good use of them to build a successful institution. This means that in order to improve the standards of West High School, then it is necessary to change the personnel or the facilities. It is only essential to build a team with the current teaching staff and community and show them the need to make a reputable school out of the present situation.

West High School is a big school in a community with upward mobility. The families have great expectations for their children's future. The school however does not enjoy good publicity where discipline is concerned. This might be attributed to the poor management that has been running it for some time now. The teacher turnover is high. The parents and general community has high expectations for the incoming principal. While these might only be descriptive attributes of the school, they are actually aspects that pose the challenge for the next leader. It is upon him to turn the situation around and succeed where the previous leader has obviously failed. A potential leader should feel the pleasure of challenge.

To add to this, the unpleasant condition of the school is worth criticizing. A critical mind will see the bad reputation of the school and point out the failures in the system. A leader however is constructively discontented. While the may hold the current situation in criticism, they see the better way to do things. A principal who will think of a better way to go about the management of West High School is definitely being challenged by this spirit of constructive discontent. The leader itches to get to work and make things better. In addition, such a person is not a captive of status quo.

Nevertheless, a potential leader is practical. He does not solely rely on his ideas to run the show. He believes in the criticism and contribution of other people who are affected by the system. While his ideas should be practical, being highly original is a shortcoming. This is because such a leader might not be able to judge the output of their system. A leader needs another person to tell them whether an idea is practical or not. In line with this factor, every person who possesses practical ideas should not automatically be considered a leader. A leader however is able to identify the ideas that are practical. Brainstorming is not a particularly bright idea in leadership.

A potential leader should be willing to take responsibility. This is evidently that needs a lot of dedication. If a teacher would feel that it is up to the principal to set things straight at the institution, they are not being responsible. The goal they set should be a joint venture and all concerned should participate. A potential leader is one who thinks of the outcome and not the personal benefit or the amount of effort they are putting into it. Carrying responsibility should not intimidate a potential leader. Leadership

has everything to do with finding satisfaction in accomplishment and feeling good about contributing to the well-being of others.

Smith (1996) goes on to say that a good leader is one who portrays commitment to a task. The former principal, Dr. Jones left the school after two years. He had not made much impact on the school in terms of improving its standards. Though the fact that Dr. Jones left the job can be attributed to intrusion by the parents, students and union leadership, Dr. Jones might not exactly be a good leader. A potential leader does not let go of a problem until it is solved. He possesses an iron will that keeps telling him to keep going and never leaves work half-baked.

Dr. Jones was clearly criticized and discouraged from carrying on his duties. No good leader can successfully lead without facing criticism and discouragement at one time or the other. A potential leader is one who is tough-minded and is ready to pay the price for doing things right. It would also be wise to keep ideas to oneself until that time which seems right when the leader can disclose them to the rest of the institution. At this point, they are better formulated and have the potential to work and therefore the subordinate staff will not work in confusion.

A potential leader, as Smith (1996) argues, should not only portray good leadership qualities but should also reveal good character and personality. Respect for peers is one way that though it does not show ability, reveals a person's personality. The potential in a leader is not necessarily the reason people are willing to comply. Smith says that people may like you but that does not mean they will follow you. However, if people respect you, they are

more likely to follow in your footsteps regardless of whether they like you or not. A potential leader also displays a quality that attracts people's attention. When such a person speaks, others listen.

3. 1. 2 Successful school leadership

A successful school is often the result of excellent leadership. Weak leadership is the prelude of a falling school. Leadership is very influential in student learning. The effects of leadership are only second to those of the curriculum and the instruction of teachers. In schools, leadership is provided by administrators and teachers. A major set of the practices of leadership is the foundation for successful leadership. These practices are important in all educational environments. A successful leader is able to respond to the challenges of accountability as well as educating students with diverse needs (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003.

3. 2 Leadership styles best for the job

While there are several leadership styles that can be employed in the improvement of West High School, some could prove more effective than others. The style of leadership is that method and approach of giving direction, executing plans and motivating people. Various styles of leadership have been identified by some researchers (Lewin, 1939). These include: a) authoritarian approach or the autocratic method, b) participative or democratic method and c) delegative or free reign approach. Good leadership employs all the tree styles integratively.

1. The authoritarian or autocratic approach

This method is used when leaders tell their subordinates what should be done and how it should be done. They do not seek the contribution of the latter. Lewin posits that this approach should be employed when a leader has all the information needed in solving a particular problem, there is little time and everyone is motivated towards attaining the goal. The method is misinterpreted as using assertive language, commanding, threatening and ultimately abusing the power of leadership. A leader should in no way entertain this sort of bossing others around. In addition, this approach should not be used very often. The method is not popular with most people and it often leads to high levels of staff turnover. With time in the leader's hands, it is always the participative approach that produces great results (Lewin, 1939).

2. Participative or democratic approach

When a leader uses this style of leadership, he accommodates the participation of other employees in the process of making decisions that affect an institution. This does not however leave the employees with the ultimate choice. The leader retains the authority to make the final decision. Leaders draw respect from their employees when they use this approach. The approach is employed when a leader has some part of information needed to solve a problem while the employees have other parts of that information. Employees are supposed to complement the abilities of a leader. The latter is therefore not expected to have a solution to every practical problem. He requires the assistance of other employees at times. By employing this style of leadership, all employees are made part of a team. Decisions are also informed (Lewin, 1939). Though participation takes

time and the process might be slower, the end results are better than with the autocratic approach. The approach is suitable where one is in need of quality more than speed.

3. Delegative or free reign approach

The French refer to this approach as laissez faire which is basically not interfering with the affairs of other people. While the leader is still accountable for the decisions made, he lets other employees make those decisions. Lewin explains that the approach is used in the case where employees can analyze the situation and establish what needs to be done in order to solve the problem at hand. While a leader can not solve all problems, it is in order to participate. However, priorities have to be set and some duties delegated to others. Unfortunately, leaders shift blame when the decisions made ruin things. A leader should hence use this style only when he can trust the people to whom the duties are delegated (Lewin, 1939).

3. 2. 1 Application of the three styles in leadership at West High School

Evidently, the structure at West High needs a lot of modification. The authoritarian approach might work only after the next leader has had a chance to learn the environment and behavior of the population. Meanwhile, it is important to involve all and sundry in the running of the institution. The students will help the next leader to grasp the various needs they have as well know their backgrounds as well as the attitude they have. Teachers might just provide the right vehicle to set records straight and establish viable goals for the institution. Besides, they are also in the management of

the institution. Moreover, parents can provide the next leader with information on the expectations they have for the management and their children. The community also bears its own expectations. The delegative approach, like the authoritarian approach can only be used once the next leader has set a pace towards achievement of the new goals and vision.

3. 2. 2 Integration of the three styles

Lewin points out that a potential leader should be able to use all the three styles together. This depends on the forces that are involved between that leader, the subjects and the prevalent situation (1939). The institution for instance has high teacher turnover and certainly new personnel once in a while. An authoritarian approach would be suitable for use on a new employee who is training on the job. With a competent leader, the new employee is motivated to learn something new. In this case, the situation to work with is the new environment for this employee.

A participative approach will then be used on the present team of employees. These are already in the game and since they possess information that the leader does not have, being a new principal, the employees will provide that information. This way, they are part of a team whose main aim is to solve a problem. This is how Lewin looks at it.

Being a school where the previous leader has tried and failed, there might be some tips that the present teachers have that could help to deal with the situation. This is considering that these personnel has been here longer and knows the ropes. The next leader can therefore use the delegative approach

with these workers who know more about the environment. The principal can not do all. Teachers and other employees have to take the reigns too when called upon. The situation might also require that the principal attend to other responsibilities.

While the three approaches might be used separately, it is possible to apply all the three at the same time. Once the next principal has been on the ground for some time and tried different methods, he might find that things are not styling up. Telling the rest of the personnel that a certain approach is not effective and that a new method needs to be es6tablished is using autocracy. The leader may then go ahead to ask for new ideas that can be used to create a new procedure. This is the participative approach. In the end, the implementation of these ideas might require the delegation of tasks.

3. 2. 3 Factors that influence the style of leadership

Bennis and Nanua (1997) considered the following factors as influencing the style of leadership to apply:

1. Time available
2. Relationships based on respect or disrespect, trust or mistrust
3. Person with information; the leader or the employee or both
4. Qualifications of the employee and knowledge of the task at hand
5. Internal conflicts
6. Levels of stress
7. Task types

8. The law

3. 3 Models of change

In order to effectively introduce change in any establishment, a leader needs to evaluate the situation critically. For some people change is not welcome while others embrace it passionately and drink from its benefits. A leader needs to employ thoughtful planning and insightful implementation besides consulting with the people that will be affected by that change. Forcing change on people elicits some unforeseen problems instead of solving a problem. In that case, change has to be rational, attainable and assessable. A leader has to evaluate the reasons for the need to implement change before venturing into the endeavor (Newman and Wehlage, 1995).

In addition, a leader should not sell change to people. Change that results in success is a gradual process and it needs to be approached and managed in a way that will help people cope with it effectively. This is considering that change disrupts the normal trend of activities. A leader needs to ensure that people who will be affected by the change agree with the idea and that they understand why change has to occur. They should be given a chance to contribute to that change as it is their lives it will affect. In this case, the students, teachers, parents and community should participate in bringing change to West High School. Communication in person helps in handling sensitive aspects in the management of change (Smith, 1996).

3. 3. 1 Unfreezing-change-refreeze model

Kurt Lewin is behind a three-stage model of change. The model is called the unfreezing-change-refreeze model (Wirth, 2004). However, Edgar Schein (1995) gave more features on a broader model and gave it the name cognitive redefinition. The model that was initially developed by Kurt might be suitable for the improvement of West High School from its current form to a reputable learning institution. The three stages are described by Wirth as follows:

Stage 1

This stage is the unfreezing stage that involves becoming motivated for change (Wirth, 2004). Kurt develops this stage based on the theory that cultural influences and observational learning are the foundation of human behavior. For him, one only needs to add or remove some of the factors that influence behavior. He explains that the process of unfreezing incorporates some sub-processes which are related to motivation to change.

One of these sub-processes is the disconfirmation. Some of the existing factors might not be effective in meeting the goals set for an institution. If the gap between the facts that are believed in and those that should be believed in is large, change might not auger well with the people. The second sub-process claims that the beliefs that have been upheld prior to introduction of change are now invalid. This is cause for some survival anxiety among those people to whom change has been introduced. If there is some anxiety among the people, change might not come about effectively. In addition, the learning anxiety prompts resistance. The reason is that the people have to unlearn that which they had come to accept as knowledge.

The result is denial, trying to find a scapegoat and bargaining against the change (Wirth). In order for a leader to ensure that people progress past the anxiety so as to pave way for change, the survival anxiety has to be bigger than the learning anxiety. The learning anxiety could alternatively be reduced.

Stage 2

Schein (1995) says that the stage involves organization and mobilization of available resources that are needed to bring about change. Wirth (2004) writes that in this second stage of Kurt's model, this is where the situation has been unfrozen and is progressing to a new level. A leader needs to consider what requires changing and then go ahead and change it. Since the current situation at West High School is already in mire, there is a desire in everybody to make changes. It is essential for the next leader to identify the areas that need changing. The new change will consequently lead to new concepts, an interpretation of these concepts within a broader context and a certain adjustment in the evaluation of new input. Wirth argues that this situation calls for identifying the gap that exists between the current condition of the school and the condition that is being targeted. Change could be aided by emulating examples set by other people or schools besides trying to find custom-made ways out by learning through a trial-and-error approach.

Stage 3

This is the refreezing stage where the new ways are embedded into the institution. While the former stages have tried to alter an existing situation and make it acceptable, the third stage involves making the change that has been completed permanent. The introduced trend is made habitual. People develop a new self-concept and set up new interpersonal relationships (Wirth, 2004).

The strategy used here is referred to as the normative-re-educative strategy. It is an approach that supposes that when the norms, attitudes and values of people are changed, their behavior will automatically change. Change occurs as characters change the attitudes they have and they want to behave in a different manner (Smith, 2001).

3. 4 Goals for the future: A successful school

The overall aim of implementing change at West High School is to create a successful school with a good reputation that the community can be proud of. The definitive assessment of success will be a learning community which assists students to achieve elevated standards of citizenship and learning. This is regardless of the background they claim or their individual abilities. Davies (1991) claims that the characteristics of a successful school should describe the school environment, goals and management.

3. 4. 1 Vision

A successful West High School will have a clear vision. A vision will represent plainly expressed statements of goals, values and expectations of the community. If a vision is serving the purpose of unification, the students,

teachers, subordinate staff, administration, parents and general community should be able to communicate that vision through the daily activities of the school. The vision should act as a guide towards attainment of success. It is like a map that points out where one is headed.

An effective West High School will have a clearly define vision that aims at improving learning. The emphasis will be on the realization of a broadly distinct set of standards. These standards include academic excellence, social skill, development and personal growth. There should also be constant communication of the goals and evaluation of the progress being made towards these goals (Davies, 1991).

3. 4. 2 Leadership

Good leadership is the key behind success in any institution. It promotes the upholding of the vision and allocation of resources that will help towards progress. It supports the members of the institution, the activities in that institution and acts as a driver towards achievement of set goals. A leader in any educational institution should focus the efforts of the school on educational excellence and equity. A successful West High will have a leadership which illustrates experimentation with change and flexibility in dealing with this change. It should also be able to make decisions that will be aimed at getting the best results for the entire population (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

In addition to this, the school leadership will be in a position to evaluate scattered information from various sources and apply it in informing

decisions. Communication should be key to running the school and one should be able to use technology that is available effectively to ease tasks and make communication more effective. A leader should also recognize that students and employees have individual differences and should therefore accommodate them and provide an opportunity for their needs to be met.

A good principal will inspire others be up to date on current educational situations and provide such data to stakeholders, respond to the needs of the community and nurture support for the school (Lewin and White, 1939).

3. 4. 3 Academic standards

A successful West High will also enjoy high standards of academic excellence where students' achievements will be expected to be high and communication of learning expectations will be made to students and parents. The academic standards should serve as the root for an all-inclusive curriculum which is used by teachers to conduct instruction (Davies, 1991). It will also be of the standard that directs the strategy for assessment of progress and informs students, teachers, guardians and the community concerning the achievements of the students.

3. 4. 4 Social standards

A good school will create an environment that helps the students to learn the concepts of respect, responsibility for all their actions and honesty. Is should create a good school climate where justice and fairness reign. Moreover, it will be a school with honor for traditions and the participation of families and the community. The learning environment should promote use of talent in

positive address of society's issues so as to mould responsible citizens. A healthy relationship between the community and school population should be encouraged. The leadership should help to establish high standards of behavior both in school and the community (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

4. 0 Conclusion

A good school environment is created when students, teachers, parents and the community consider themselves partners in the learning process. Partnership should therefore be encouraged in learning communities. This is because students learn not only in schools but also at home and in the community. Income or family background does not predict achievement of students in school. It is rather the role the family plays in creating a learning environment, communicating reasonable expectations for their children's future and participating in establishing this future. Administrative leadership only supports the home-school-community organization.

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