

Transformational leadership roles between Principals and staff in PNG schools

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Abstract

The PNG education system has undergone various reforms that have had tremendous impacts on teaching and learning in schools. Despite the challenges, school leaders and teachers sustain reform intentions through professional development and in-service activities. School leadership is vital if schools are to progress further to improve standards and stay abreast of knowledge and technology advancements. Leaders within schools can practice transformational leadership in order to empower colleagues in educating the future leaders of this nation. This paper, deliberates and elaborates on the general perceptions of leadership, and transformational leadership roles that grow relationships which are based on empowerment, trust and building a sense of community within schools.

Key words: transformational leadership, relationships, psychological safety, team building

Introduction

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) education reforms accompanied by new government policies have caused major issues in the managing of schools. Agigo (2010) states that many teachers considered that the outcomes based education (OBE) curriculum reform was forced upon the PNG education system under the Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP). It was claimed that the reform was not underpinned by research to find out whether the model and its principles were relevant to PNG development and cultural needs. The OBE model was found to be unsustainable and not appropriate for the country (Agigo, 2010). Aihi (2011), in her report about the teachers' concerns on the OBE curriculum reform, found that teachers were either unaware of reform implications, not informed well by relevant authorities, or simply refusing to practice the new approach in their teaching. The OBE curriculum reform was associated with an inadequate transition from existing practices to new ways of teaching and learning (Guthrie, 2012).

The introduction of the government policy on fee free tuition (FFT) has resulted in a high increase in school enrolments resulting in overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources. Teachers are overworked with few incentives to compensate for their efforts. The limited teaching and learning resources and the aging infrastructure add stress to the performance of teachers. The perception is that the PNG education system is at the crossroads, and that

the leadership at the school level is a vital component in achieving national goals.

Leadership in all sectors needs to work toward achieving pillar one of *PNG Vision 2050* (Government of PNG, 2009), that refers to human development, gender, youth and people empowerment. The Vision aims to achieve a well-educated, healthy, appropriately skilled and honest work force that is committed, proactive and innovative. Leaders from all sectors and levels are encouraged to display honesty, innovation, proactivity and inspirational leadership based on the core values of quality, productivity, discipline, accountability and professionalism.

PNG is a land of diverse cultures, languages and people. The diversity has created a huge challenge in the roles of many school leaders in PNG. Leadership practices vary from school to school. Against all odds, the one thing that has enabled the school systems to thrive throughout these challenging times is the collaboration of the Principal and teachers in sharing skills and knowledge in school based professional development activities. Agigo (2010) states that school based in-service activities were evident throughout the country during the implementation of curriculum reform. Principals' leadership coordination of school based in-service activities needs to be integrated to PNG cultural contexts. All staff members need to be united in seeking to acquire new skills and knowledge. Transformational leadership is practical in the PNG context in that it is exercised in many PNG traditional ways of life. Leaders identify the need for change and inspire followers to execute the change.

Sound leadership is an imperative aspect of growth and success of educational institutions. While the statement of "*everyone is a leader in their own right*" is true to some degree, leadership is particularly important for people in positions of responsibility. The leadership practices are the consequence of the type of exposure people have encountered and developed over time. The leadership journey develops and matures as the school leaders are exposed to greater challenges. They find themselves in the position of sharing, developing and empowering others to reach their potential through coordinating learning activities. Transformational leadership practices in schools cultivate relationships that enhance professional development of teachers.

Transformational leadership in schools

Leadership is not a general strategy that can be applicable to all situations; therefore leadership styles need to change in order to be effective within particular contexts. Peoples' perceptions of leadership are determined by various aspects of the context. The culture of the community where the organisation is located can affect the practices executed by the leaders. An innovative leadership approach will always encounter challenges from the stakeholders until it is proven to be workable. The situations surrounding the operations of the school at a specific time call for appropriate leadership strategies to counter emerging issues and challenges. Leadership practices that

are aligned toward empowering staff to achieve the goals of the education system can produce positive outcomes.

Transformational leadership in education is measured by the extent to which the leader communicates a mission, encourages development and builds community. The general understanding is that a transformational leader is one who can lead members to new horizons, is enthusiastic about the future of the school, encourages learning through mentoring, is a role model who can be emulated by others, and develops relationships rooted in integrity and respect (Dinham, 2005). School leaders can enhance the staff and school professional capacity by engaging in roles that provide care and liberty with support when required. There is always a possibility of leaders being carried away by their own egos, but transformational leaders operate on the basis of consideration of others as unique individuals with great potential.

Leithwood (1993) defines transformational leadership using generic and technical definitions. The generic definition includes whatever leadership practices foster change not only within the practice of the teachers but their capacities and motivations as well. On the other hand, the technical definition includes the experience of charismatic vision and behaviour by the Principal in inspiring others to follow. The four elements of transformational leadership include; idealised influence, inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and intellectual stimulation to influence members in different ways (Leithwood, 1993).

In the school context, idealised influence is displayed when the Principal acts as the role model whom the staff can emulate (Educational Business Articles, 2014). Trust and respect is attained when the Principal demonstrates the right behaviours toward the staff. The Principal treats the needs of the staff foremost through ethical and moral ways. Power is used by the Principal in order to influence teachers to achieve the school's goals and visions as well as their own. The Principal encourages inspirational motivation through inspiring the staff to challenge the status quo. Teachers are guided with a sense of meaning and challenge. Team building and commitment is encouraged via communication of the visions and goals of the school. Teachers are carried into the vision and goal ideologies and nurtured throughout the process.

In order to display individualised consideration, the Principal acts as a mentor facilitating improvements, ownership, learning and empowerment. Teachers are rewarded for their creativity and innovation and are treated according to the skills and knowledge they possess. The Principal empowers teachers to make decisions that may assist them to develop and learn. The school leader encourages learning in displaying intellectual stimulation. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative and creative in problem solving. New ideas are accepted and never criticised (Educational Business Articles, 2014). Leithwood (1993) claims that even though these roles may succeed in most contexts, there are always variations in the way they are enacted.

Professional development activities are purposely developed by Principals to assist teachers in enhancing the professional skills and knowledge needed to achieve desired school outcomes. Teachers become interested if the activity or event has benefits on them and their students. In-service activities are deemed successful only if they create opportunities for the teachers to transfer learning to improved performance. This enables the teachers to contribute meaningfully to the progress of the school.

The relationships developed within the school are the foundation of the social cohesion and collaboration of the Principal and teachers. The ways teachers relate to others in the school can influence their perception of the visions and goals of the school. Relationships are built on trust, and how it may benefit both parties and instil a sense of social acceptance amongst the staff. Trust is the factor that drives the efficacy and efficiency of the relationship between the Principal and staff. Genuine trust between staff and school leaders encourages open communication for innovation and creativity.

Transformational leadership empowers teachers

The Principal tries to empower teachers through demonstration of qualities that motivate and build respect and pride; mentoring and attending to needs of individual teachers; challenging assumptions; taking risks and soliciting staff ideas; and articulating and facilitating change (Raes, Decuyper, Lismont, Bossche, Kyndt, Demeyere & Dochy, 2012). Principals play a major role in developing enthusiasm and motivation in the staff in their professional growth. Transformational leaders encourage autonomy and inspire teachers to be innovative and creative and challenge the status quo (Hariri, Monypenny and Prideaux, 2014). Teachers are allowed to demonstrate innovation and creativity through autonomously performing tasks while the Principal gives support only when needed by the teachers. This legitimizes teachers to learn as much as they can and as a result produce more than what is required of them in the school growth process.

Transformational leadership practices enable Principals to exhibit rational decision making styles that strengthen positive relationships with staff (Hariri, Monypenny & Prideaux, 2014). Transformational Principals are encouraged to role model commitment and determination to the teachers (Nir & Hameiri, 2013). Transformational school leaders display a role model character that the staff can be inspired to emulate. The teachers are therefore empowered to develop a sense of responsibility toward the school. Good leadership does not only require high level skills and knowledge, but a character that can inspire others into doing well. Nir and Hameiri (2013) recommend that Principals must avoid using sanctions and threats to teachers directly or indirectly, but instead rely on their expertise and presentation of clear organisational visions to inspire others to achieve goals.

Transformational leaders share leadership roles with staff to develop their confidence (Dinham, 2005; Urick & Bowers, 2013). Sharing leadership roles with staff is a gesture by the Principal of the confidence she/he has in the

teachers. A nurturing attitude, when provided by the Principal, aids in instilling a sense of support yet autonomy in the teachers' attempts to be creative with innovative skills (Klar & Brewer, 2013). Urick and Bowers (2013) argue that Principals engaging teachers with clear mission and support, allow teachers to be motivated to commit to the improvement of the school. Transformational leaders value the institution and its staff through increasing opportunities for sharing leadership roles (Urick & Bowers, 2013). The Principal is focussed on engaging teachers in the organisational processes, sharing leadership, distributing leadership tasks, and building a synergy between the Principal and teachers around school issues. Effective leadership involves collaboration between leaders and individuals, and groups in the effort to develop a positive culture (Dinham, 2005). The core leadership categories and practices in developing people include; providing individualised support, offering intellectual stimulation, and modelling appropriate values and cultures (Klar & Brewer, 2013). The Principal is showing transformational leadership when the teachers feel motivated to perform beyond their abilities because they see the Principal to be a creative, successful and influential role model (Zacher & Johnson, 2014).

Transformational Principals align in-service activities with the school and teachers' professional needs (Klar & Brewer, 2013). Each teacher has a unique background and personality. Achieving a school's goals depends on collaboration, commitment, trust and a common purpose which are the desired ingredients in establishing a positive school culture. Leadership practices need to recognise teachers' professional needs and plan activities that can enable teachers to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

Transformational leadership and trust

Trust is a fundamental aspect of leadership that determines the successful operation of any organisation. Principals need to develop relationships built on trust in order to achieve successful outcomes. Transformational leadership roles inspire relationships fabricated on trust between the Principal and the teachers. Yang (2013) argues that a solid development of mutual trust and support between the Principal and teachers can contribute to the success of the school. Being respectful to others and being respected by others are inner needs of individuals. Mutual trust is the reflection of a strong interpersonal relationship amongst individuals. Principals practicing transformational leadership can gain the confidence of teachers to prompt equal cooperation (Yang, 2013). The establishment of mutual trust and support among teachers and Principals can create a relaxed working environment which allows teachers to perform at a high standard to achieve goals which are guided by the school's vision and mission statements.

Transformational Principals inspire teachers to perform beyond their abilities (Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2013). Principals can increase the interests of teachers when they create awareness and appreciation of the purpose and mission of the school and move teachers to look beyond self-interest. Principals' positive and caring behaviour and attitudes towards their

teachers can motivate and inspire them to work hand in hand with the Principals for the achievements of school goals (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

Leadership is required to develop positive relationships with the occurrence of team learning behaviours that encourage a psychologically safe environment. Raes et al. (2012) define psychological safety as the shared belief that the school is safe for taking interpersonal risks. Professional learning is encouraged by leadership practices that put vital emphasis on psychologically safe environments creating opportunities to teachers to experiment without fear of been picked on or humiliated for saying or doing something wrong. A psychologically safe atmosphere does not occur instantly, but is created through the leadership practices approved by the teachers as unbiased, neutral and trustworthy. Principals can foster a psychologically safe atmosphere by admitting their own mistakes, accepting feedback and critique from others, and neutralising the fear of embarrassment in teachers.

Just like respect, where one has to earn it; trust is of the same nature. In order for teachers to trust the Principal, it must be earned. The Principal needs to be individually considerate by supporting a culture of respect (Raes et al., 2012). Organisational relationships that are built on trust are predicted to have successful outcomes. Browning (2014) argues that creation and facilitation of an environment of trust is necessary for leadership-driven learning to occur. Principals develop trust from teachers by entertaining their inputs through consultation in reaching informed decisions. Both the Principal and teachers need to be open and transparent in their dealings so that honesty is practised in the school environment. Understanding of how trust can be generated within an organisation gives rise to brave new possibilities for the school (Browning, 2014). According to Browning, there is, and has always been, a positive connotation between school growth and strong trust levels practiced in a school.

Transformational leadership instil in teachers a united school culture

The sense of belonging experienced in a school does not happen by chance but via the efforts of teachers and Principals. Principals who encourage collaboration and unity of members foster a sense of community in building a positive relationship. In order to build a sense of community the staff need to engage in team building. Transformational Principals create positive environments that can lead teachers to foster collective growth (Tahir, Abdullah, Ali & Daud, 2014). Principals show support and consideration toward teachers, empathy towards teachers' needs, and strengthen open communication in team building. Transformational leadership practices of delegating tasks and sharing visions and values are among some of the major determinants for enhancing organisational commitment of teachers (Tahir et al., 2014). Principals play an active role in transforming the vision of the school to teachers in order to gain high commitment among teachers. Transformational leadership is conceptualised as an impressive form of leadership in terms of member organisational commitment and outcomes (Zacher & Johnson, 2014).

Teachers can feel the sense of belonging to the school when the Principal or other teachers display care through sharing their expertise. As the saying goes, “*sharing is caring*”, which implies that individuals show how they care for others by sharing whatever they possess. The goals and aims of the school do not belong to the Principal alone, but to every teacher in the school. The Principal has to model this through sharing expert knowledge and skills with the teachers. When sharing expert skills and knowledge to the teachers, the Principal needs to allow teachers to explore for themselves rather than being authoritative. Transformational leadership qualities are vital amplitudes of the social context in bettering the level of member commitment to the organisation (Ibrahim et al, 2013). Raes et al. (2012) define a team as the collection of individuals who depend on each other in their tasks, responsibilities, and are seen by others as an intact social entity. Transformational leadership practices enable teachers to feel safe and free therefore are able to think outside of the box, share insights and question assumptions (Raes et al., 2012).

Teachers contribute more in the shared knowledge and coordinated professional development activities when they feel that they are regarded as part of the school community. The nurturing of collaboration by the Principal can have positive effects on the teachers’ sense of belonging to the school. The transformational Principal shows interest in all the groups operating within the school and therefore develops strategies to nurture these groups toward collaboration in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The Principal is encouraged to place new teachers in positions most conducive to collaboration in order to encourage learning (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the social and political changes introduced within the PNG education system have had huge impacts on the teaching and learning in all schools throughout the country. The school community has grown weary of the increases in their workloads, limitations of teaching and learning resources and infrastructure development. It is during these challenging times that leadership becomes the key factor in maintaining trust, hope and belief for improvement at the school level.

The multiplicity of factors impinging on school operations portrays a diversified array of leadership perceptions within the country’s school systems. Transformational leadership is deemed appropriate in the PNG context in that it is integrated in many of the cultural beliefs and practices. Transformational leadership roles foster relationships that empower teachers to build trust and develop a sense of unity fit for professional development in schools. PNG Principals who engage in transformational leadership practices at their schools empower teachers to growing professionally and achieve successful educational outcomes. Relationships between the Principal and teachers built on trust establish an atmosphere of unity creating an open and positive working culture in the school. Transformational leadership practiced by school leaders

is a move in the right direction to achieving the *PNG Vision 2050* pillar one: human capital development, gender, youth, and people empowerment.

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