

Management strategies in conducting schools to right place

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Abstract: This paper explores the secondary school Principals views and experiences in managing change their organizations. The focus is upon how innovative the Principals are in their decision-making and leadership styles. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology using open-ended interviews to explore the leadership styles of the six Principals in selected secondary schools in Malaysia. The analysis of the data revealed most of the Principals did not realise that they were being innovative because they had been using the innovative strategies simply thinking they were finding a solution to their problems. Another common perception among the Principals was that being innovative only involves computers and technology. This idea resonated throughout the interviews. The interview transcriptions also revealed that Principals have positive perceptions about the changes that have been happening in the Malaysian education system. Other emergent themes included: Principals as catalysts for change; staffs' trust towards Principals; Principals' confidence in solving problems; Principals' boldness in discovering solutions and the importance of a people-centred approach for leadership. The participants of the study comprised six secondary school Principals who were all recipients of the Innovative Leader's Award from the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The study also investigated the thinking processes for leaders' innovation as well as their attitudes towards their subordinates.

Key words: Leadership • Innovative • Creativity • Change Management

INTRODUCTION

Currently, managing organizational change is perhaps the most critical issue most Principals have to face. An educational leader encounters change at different levels, at curriculum, resources and community levels. Leithwood and Day [1] argue that Principals must realize that in order to manage change in organizations effectively, they must be flexible, reactive and resourceful. No organization can avoid change. Change is inevitable and will certainly happen. In the past decade, societies have taken a huge leap forward in terms of innovative technologies that have made our lives easier, for example, computers and the internet. This is especially apparent in education, where technology has begun to take over the role of the teacher. With these changes, have come substantial responsibilities and new roles for schools and their leaders. New skills are required and these need to be taught and learnt to today's principals and teachers.

This is where the role of Principals is crucial so that he or she can become a catalyst for change for students, teachers and the school as a whole.

Creativity or Innovation?: First, let us look at the differences between creativity and innovation. West [2] defines creativity as "...bringing together of knowledge from different areas of experience to produce new and improved ideas". Creativity involves us in constant discovery of new and improved ways of doing things; it means challenging well-tried and traditional approaches and coping with the conflict and change which this inevitably causes."

He further argues that one of the most important contributors to an individual's creativity in organizations is the sense of confidence in his or her own creative abilities. When we are confident, then changes become simply a challenge to be overcome. The characteristics of a creative person include:

- Possessing intellectual interest and artistic values
- Being attracted to complexity
- Concern with work and achievement
- Perseverance
- Independence of judgment
- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Need for autonomy
- Self-confidence
- Orientation towards risk-taking.

If creativity is the development of new ideas, innovation is the process of actually putting them into practice. In its simplest form, innovation means “the introduction of new and improved ways of doing things at work” [2]. While creativity happens at a micro level, innovation is an extension that involves the process of implementing this creativity into organizations. Gerstein [3] defined innovation as using technology to change the rules of the game. He argued that innovation is a social process arising from the delivery of increased value to customers. Focusing on the value of the customer is a key to success. It may arise from many sources, which includes technology.

SuffeanHussin [4] defines innovation as the renewal or modification of an idea, thing or knowledge, while artistic creation means to enhance or fulfill a certain requirement. Humans innovate to set a trend or become pioneers in certain fields. He adds that innovation happens in two stages: the individual stage and the organizational stage. In the former, the individual takes an active role in collecting information and building on it to improve on an idea, while in the later, the whole organization moves to improve on several ideas or procedures.

Miller [5] defines innovation as a new idea, practice or objective adopted by the relevant unit of adoption, whether it is an individual or an organization. He claims that innovation is an effort to introduce a practice that will bring about a social change. The practice need not be totally new; it is the efficiency and potential of the practice in new contexts that are the main criteria for labeling it as an innovation. His emphasis is on the strategy used to deal with a specific local or national problem.

Meanwhile, Dutin [6] defines innovation as “an idea or practice that reflects an emergent trend and offers an optimistic alternative for current a situation of dissatisfaction”. Dutin quotes Drucker’s [7] notion that

innovation offers solutions for changes in organizations. In Dutin’s [6] own study of an innovative school, she discovers that there are three ways to cope with organizational restrictions: namely - setting an exception, re-allocating resources and adopting alternative standards. This is particularly relevant to Malaysian schools where restrictions are prevalent and innovative leaders need to find ways to solve problems creatively.

Literature Review

The Notion of Change in Organizations: The notion of change is related to innovative behavior. As many would agree, change is inevitable in organizations and change is often connected to problem-solving; thus, schools Principals are constantly faced with organizational problems that need to be resolved. We measure innovative behavior through examining how leaders solve problems. Nevertheless, what does change really mean in organizations? Nilakant and Ramnarayan [8] assert that organizational change affects the processes of growth, decline and transformation in an organization. We live in a modern society where organizations are everywhere. We are governed by organizations and they run our lives, whether we realize it or not. Most people view organizations as the foundation of society and consider them as stable and firm structures.

In fact, organizations change most of the time and go through different change processes in order to survive. In our own educational institutions in Malaysia for example, we see many changes happening since the time of post-Independent Malaya to the present day Malaysia. During this time, the Malaysian education system has changed its philosophy, curriculum and objectives several times over the short span of 50 years. These changes have taken place mainly to accommodate the demands of globalization. When Malaysia was formed in 1963, the education system had already gone through a process of change and development, in accordance with the nation’s policies [9]. We see that in the past, education was more focused on religion, in this case, the religion of Islam, when knowledge was disseminated through ‘madrasahs’ or ‘pondoks’ (small huts or buildings). Syllabi included learning Arabic, memorizing Al-Quran and learning the Muslim way of life. The British colonial administration set up vernacular schools throughout the Peninsular of Malaya, but these were seen as a threat to the Muslim way of life. A typical day in a vernacular school would consist of learning the alphabet, as well as reading and

writing. Mathematics and geography were included in the curriculum to equip students with the essential skills for life. In addition to this, separate Malay, Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools were set up. These were different from the 'Free' English schools, where English was the main medium of instruction.

Consequently, the Barnes report in 1951 advocated the creation of a dual education system comprising of Malay and English schools only. The ethnic Chinese and Tamils protested regarding it as an attempt to assimilate their culture into Malay or English culture. Due to this, another report by Fenn-Wu in 1952 tried to establish a more liberal education system where the culture of the Chinese and Tamils were included. Subsequently, the Razak Report in 1956 addressed the need for unity between the different races in Malaysia as a basis for the curriculum. Later on, the Rahman Talib Report of 1960 changed the educational landscape once again. In 1979, the government decreed that a study be conducted about the state of education in Malaysia and a report was issued outlining several key issues areas that needed to be addressed. This 1979 Cabinet report was the turning point for the Malaysian education system with several of the key mentioned in the report being resolved in later years. At present, the 1996 Education Act is the basis for the National education system in Malaysia.

The purpose of this historical description is to show that the Malaysian education system has gone through many changes, particularly in its curriculum, based on the changes within society and the political scene of the country [10]. These changes have certainly affected the way Principals' think and manage their schools. However, there is one important question - why have some schools succeeded while others have failed? The answer to this question is simple; the Principals who learnt how to manage change effectively have succeeded while the schools of those who could not, continue to be mediocre.

Another question that school Principals continually ask is - how can they use innovation to make their schools successful? Most Principals and teachers believe that without funds or appropriate resources, innovation cannot take place; yet, we see many schools that have achieved awards of excellence and where the Principals have successfully raised the standard of their schools to national and sometimes to international levels, without financial support from the government. In other words, they have managed to find ways to fund their school projects without government help. A school in the State of Perak, Malaysia, is renowned for implementing a

free-source operating system on a shoestring budget. Another school in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia, is also famous for developing a novel approach that was developed by the Head.

One of the basic problems of implementing changes in school is that change means different things to different people. For many people, innovation and change mean setting up new computer labs or using an attendance system. It is true that such things do constitute change, but there is more to change than this. Nilakant&Ramnarayan [8] define 'change' as something which happens inside an organization that involves resources, procedures and changes within individuals of the organization related to emotions, motivation and leadership. The two processes of innovation and change cannot stand alone and are reliant upon each other.

Meanwhile, Ball [11] and West [2] see change and innovation as equal, quoting Mort's study on the processes of innovation. Their findings show that there is a pattern for the adoption of a new educational idea over time in the form of an S-shaped curve. At first, only a few innovative schools adopt the idea, then the majority of schools decide that the idea is desirable and finally the adoption curve levels off where the last remaining schools adopts the idea. This notion of adoption over time is repeated by Bishop [12], who calls it, the: "Process of planned change". He argues that any process of innovation involves four major factors: 1) the change agent; 2) the innovation itself; 3) the User and 4) Time. The idea of phases for the diffusion of technology is further discussed by Rogers [13] who lists the parts of the process of diffusion as follows: : 1) innovation 2) communication through a channel 3) time 4) members of the social system. The implementation of this process, according to Rogers, is not easy and acceptance requires time. Rogers [13] agrees with Mort's argument that any new idea or innovation takes time to be accepted by the people; however, he adds another two dimensions to the equation, namely, societal values and culture which he sees as pivotal for the acceptance of technology. Of course, innovation may be accepted later if people apply a wait-and-see approach where they start to use the technology when they see that others are benefitting from the innovation.

It can be noted from the ideas above those Malaysian school leaders and teachers perceive the agencies of change to be the policy makers in the Ministry and not themselves. In the Malaysian setting, there may be some truth in this perception, because most of the time schools are required to implement projects that are handed down

to them by top officials. It is then the school leaders on the front line who are expected to make the policy work or fail. Even so, there are many schools leaders and teachers who can be considered genuine agents of change because they continue to strive for excellence whilst coping with changes that occur in their schools. Havelock and Hubermann [14] argue that:

“It is important to understand that innovation is not adopted by people on the basis of intrinsic value of the innovation but rather on the basis of the adopter’s perception of the changes they personally will be required to make. Those designing, administering and advising projects do not generally have to make very many changes themselves. It is others who will have to modify their behavior and very often in a rapid manner. This is an example of showing danger in cases where the innovator is separated from the public.”

This shows that most of the time the agents of change do not want to change their own mindset but require subordinates to make the paradigm shift for the sake of the school. Most school Principals feel that they are only administrators and are too old to learn new things. They therefore delegate tasks to younger or more experienced teachers and then simply monitor the developments. This is what Havelock and Hubermann [14] mean when they say the innovator is separated from the public.

Havelock and Hubermann [14] further explain four factors that are significant in determining the likelihood of success or failure for innovative projects, which are: 1) Infrastructure, 2) Authority, 3) Consensus and 4) Resources. Infrastructure here means the procedural configuration of the systems involved in the various phases of innovation. Put another way, it means a system which can identify correctly the needs and problems inherent in an organization and from these problems, solutions are implemented. Here, there is a relationship between authority and leadership values. A high level of leadership ensures that projects are implemented and that innovation is carried out, while a low level of leadership has the opposite effect. ‘Consensus’ means that the end-user of the innovation agrees with the objectives and the way that they are implemented. Finally, Resources refers to the funds, materials, equipment, facilities and personnel that contribute to the success of the project. A diagram illustrating these factors of innovation is depicted below:

Based on diagram 1, it can be seen that Havelock & Huberman focus only on external factors and not internal ones, such as values and cognitive processes. They concentrate on the macro level, negating the micro



Diagram 1: Havelock and Huberman's Profiles of Innovations

level and what is happening within the minds of the innovator. It is important to know ‘how does an innovator’s mind work?’ and what type of mental processes are taking place when an innovator tries to solve a problem?

The literature shows that most of the theories about innovation are concerned with external factors, paying little attention to the internal ones. Wilson and McPake [15], on the other hand, argue that Principals are successful when there is a substantial ‘team culture’ among staff. A study done on small, rural schools in Scotland indicates that when teachers are not bogged down with teaching or administration, they can be very receptive to teamwork and to change. Nevertheless, this was reliant upon the skills and values of the Principals. The values that were mentioned included firmness, preparation, realistic planning and risk-taking. These findings are supported by James and Vince’s [16] paper on Principals’ leadership capabilities, where Principals are seen as a ‘visible’ role model’ for teachers and students. Hence, Principals who encourage and implement team culture fare better than their counterparts who do not inculcate a team culture.

Purpose of the Study: The study investigates innovativeness and change management among school leaders. According to Kirton [17], innovativeness can be observed in the decision making and problem solving styles of school leaders, along with creativity, which is the main requirement for innovation and decision making.

This paper presents the school leaders’ perceptions of the changes that have taken place in the Malaysian education system. Malaysian schools have seen many changes and innovations and these may have changed the image of education as a whole. Principals are the ones who have to implement these changes into schools and so it will be interesting to explore principals’ opinions about these changes. After all, Principals are the agents of change who ensure that policies are implemented into

schools, thus their perceptions about these changes could affect the implementation process of the programs that will ultimately benefit the policy makers.

In addition to this, the study investigates how school leaders cope with the changes that have taken place in Malaysian education how they make decisions based upon the management routines of their schools?; how they synergize teachers into groups and make them work together with the principal? and what styles do they apply when problem-solving? Kirton [17] argues that all humans are creative and fall into one of two categories: adaptive or innovative. When we merely follow rules or when we think outside the box, Kirton considers this as creative. Innovation, on the other hand, requires us to think differently.

This study will therefore look into the mechanisms used by school Principals to make decisions that bring change to their schools.

Significance of the Study: The study investigates the cognitive characteristics of innovative leaders. Innovative leaders are often measured by outcomes i.e. the quantity of products rather than the process by which they arrive at these results. In Gerstein's [3] definition, innovation means creating or exploiting new needs, or the use of technology to change the rules of the game. However, the majority of the studies are concerned with 'outer' factors like environment, subordinates, the organization and funds. Foster in Senge [18] for example advocates that the more money that is pumped into the program, the more successful it will be. Meanwhile, Drucker [7] argues that innovation is an economic and social term, rather than a technical one that entails the use of political and market influences to fully realize innovation and increase productivity in organizations. In contrast, Senge [18] argues that it is the 'Learning Ethic' of the whole organization that contributes to its success.

"The basic rationale for such organizations is that in situations of rapid change only those that are flexible, adaptive and productive will excel. For this to happen, it is argued organizations need to 'discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels'

Most management 'gurus' are concerned primarily with organizational variables and they ignore the 'internal' factors that drive a person when making decisions. What really happens before the outside factors start to take effect and make things happen? This brings us to the concept of creativity which is a subset of innovation. In 1985, Kuhn suggested that 'creativity means to create

something from nothing, while innovation 'shapes that something into products and services'. Many other proponents of this idea have argued that without creativity, innovation would not be possible.

Research Questions: Two general research questions have been developed for this study. Firstly, how do Malaysian Principals and Headmasters view changes in the education system? With the many changes that have taken place in schools since Malaysia's independence, what is the general perception among school leaders; bearing in mind that Malaysian Principals and head-masters have been promoted to their posts with an average of forty years of teaching experience in the Malaysian education system. This means that they have seen and experienced these changes in the curriculum and in administration first hand as teachers, but not as school leaders. In spite of the fact that political pressure forces them to abide by the directives of the Ministry, what do Principals really think about the changes that have taken place? More recently, Malaysian teachers have been complaining that they are bogged down with non-academic tasks in school that are handed down from the district and ministry levels. What are the Principals' and head-masters' views on these matters?

Moreover, how do Malaysian Principals and head-masters approach decision-making and problem solving? In their line of work they will have come across different ways of making decisions and solving problems, especially when managing change in school. So what do they do when they are faced with these kinds of changes that need to be implemented into their schools? How do they handle their subordinates who may be 'difficult' or incompetent at times?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs qualitative research methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from six Principals of government secondary schools from the Klang Valley region. The schools are known as 'smart schools' having received awards for their innovative programs. Participants were selected and nominated by the Ministry of Education based on their achievements in innovative projects and activities.

School A is in a town located about 80 miles from Kuala Lumpur. It was selected as a pilot 'Smart school' in 1999 and successfully achieved Smart-school status. The school provides boarding facilities for students who

have achieved high scores in national Malaysian examinations for their district. The school has approximately two thousand students and forty five teachers. The Principal is a lady who has shown a certain level of confidence and tenacity in managing her school.

School B, on the other hand, is situated in an urban area of Kuala Lumpur known as Ampang boasting the only golf course in the area within the school's premise. The Principal was a Ministry official and has a substantial interest in golf. Not only that, he passionately implements ICT projects in the school and encourages his teachers and staff to use ICT in their classes. The school is clean and secluded from the hustle and bustle of the city. The main advantage of the school is that the majority of the parents belong to the upper middle class band, with the result those abundant financial contributions to the school.

School C is a full-time boarding school situated on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Only students with excellent national examination results are selected to attend the 'hostel'. The school is well known for placing great importance on curriculum content i.e. focussing on examination results rather than teaching methods, like other boarding schools; however, the Principal assured me that innovation thrives within the school. In contrast, school D is situated far from Kuala Lumpur, in a town called Membau, in Negeri Sembilan. The Principal was overly concerned about the political situation of the day, yet she still managed to maintain her focus on the realities of students' lives in school. She was adamant that the policy of teaching of Science and Mathematics in English - a hotly debated political issue in Malaysia - should be continued, even though she realized that some teachers and students lack the ability to speak or write in English.

Like school D, school E is situated in a rural setting in the Southern state of Johor. Through determination, the Principal has managed to change parents' and officials' perceptions about the schools i.e. that it must be in an urban area to be innovative. The Principal has shown innovative leadership in the way she considers problems as a challenge. She anticipates problems rather than waiting for them to happen and as a result, has solved problems before they occurred. Moreover, the school conducts many projects aimed at benefitting students and teachers.

Finally, school F is situated on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur being riddled with problems and issues, such as: poor discipline in students and even some teachers!

The Principal was transferred to another school for a while, but was later requested to return to the school. The school is considered big, comprising of two thousand students. To add to the problems, there is another similar school nearby which shares problems. Recently, the problem of students playing truant and loitering in the nearby town area was highlighted by the national newspaper for which the Principal was unofficially blamed. To top it all, some of the teachers are very un-cooperative and refuse to give their full support to the Principal who is trying to curb the school discipline problems. Nevertheless, this has not stopped the Principal from moving ahead and attempting to manage the school in an orderly fashion. Such efforts show great determination and innovativeness on the part of the Principal who is also trying to implement a number of projects to improve the school.

The Principals Were Interviewed Using the Following Questions:

- What is/are your opinion (s) about the changes that have been happening in the Malaysian education system?
- How do you solve everyday problems in your school?
- What are the factors that influence you to be innovative?

The interview responses were recorded and transcribed into a qualitative software called Nvivo version 10. The conversations were then coded into themes and tabulated. To ensure reliability, the transcripts were checked by two experts in the field of educational leadership who were given a table containing the quotations and themes of the interviews which they checked for suitability. The checklists of both experts were compared and used to triangulate the findings.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Change as a Tool for Achievement: Principal A was positive about the changes that have taken place in the Malaysian education system. She is a tough but caring leader and it was evident from her experiences with her teachers and from her opinions about the changes in Malaysian education that she viewed change as a way to improve schools.

- “Changes in education are good because knowledge is dynamic so we cannot be speculative but I am a very open person and I can follow. So, whatever it is. It is easier if you have an open mind and I force myself to be like that...For me change is important because it brings improvement and I can see there are many opportunities for improvements”. (Principal A)

Principal B shared similar views about change and its effects on education. Schools need to be effective in channelling information to students to prepare them for the job-market and the real world. Meanwhile, Principal C asserted that change requires pro-active steps to achieve policy objectives.

Changes that are happening in education need to be realizing the demands of today’s world. This means the content is not static and it develops with present time and technologies. Similarly, history is not static but alive and full of information. This also means teachers will have to have the complete information as sometimes the students are more informed than the teachers.” (Principal B)

- “Change is something that we cannot avoid in education system because they are changing with the development of the world around us. I see these changes as a proactive step towards the preparation of the students and Malaysian in general to become the developed nation in 2020 so it must be done now.” (Principal C)

Theme 2: Leaders as Catalysts for Change: In many instances of the problems faced by Principals, they acted as catalysts for change - as in the following example:

- “Challenges come in human form...the staff and teachers and the resources within my authority. Once there was competition involving robots at a national level. The teachers wanted to do something different with the robot so I suggested to them to do a traditional Malay dance to accompany the robot so I asked the teachers to look for a doll that can be used in the presentation. I gave them RM700 for costs and expenses. The teachers finally got a doll and we got many teachers to chip in and contribute. They won the competition and were very happy.” (Principal A)

In the above conversation, the Principal described how teachers approached her and asked her for advice on how to complete a project for a competition that utilised

a robot.. The principal was very supportive of the project and used her own money, along with the contributions of other teachers' contributions. She gave suggestions on what teachers could do to complete the project and asked the teachers to prepare materials for the project presentation. It was a combined effort where the principal acted as a catalyst. The outcome was that the teachers respected her for her efforts and the school won the competition. The principal not only identified the problem, but also helped to find a solution and acted as a catalyst for the teachers to cooperate effectively.. In another situation, the principal solved the problem of unsold sports –T-shirts.

- “The t-shirts were unsold due to poor management from the previous management. So how did I solve the problem? I put the t-shirt in the co-operative and made an announcement that students will have to buy the t-shirts. Even though it is unconventional and I know that many parents were dissatisfied about it, I pushed through and managed to pay back the debt to the printing company. With the balance we bought presents for the sports and prize giving day. This would never happen if the previous management were to handle the problem.” (Principal A)

Likewise, Principal E single-handedly transformed her rural school into one of the best schools in the district. When the Principal first arrived at the school, it was very disorganized and dilapidated. She saw that there were several things in need of improvement. For example the Internet connection at the school was very slow, so she and her team succeeded in collecting funds from politicians and stakeholders to set up a computer network.. She created a centralized notice board to give information to visitors and students. She was also the first person to think of rebuilding the toilets so that they were more open, to curb cases of student smoking and acts of vandalism:

- “I think its more discovering the problems like the first time I arrive so few students can pray so i build bigger surau so i solved it. The rubbish and washroom problem. The school have these notice boards all over the schools and I created this centralized information notices. So all the co-curricular clubs and uniformed. These are the little things that make our school get noticed.” (Principal E)

The main characteristic of innovative leaders is that they seek problems rather than waiting for problems to occur before solving them... This pro-active management approach was seen in several participants of the study. One example was Principal E who discovered that there was a poor system of rubbish disposal and so she set up an incinerator in school:

- “I have done a lot of physical innovations for example the rubbish incinerator. When I first came there were hardly a small rubbish bin. If you see our enrolment thousand nine the amount of garbage everyday. We need a healthy place and all that and we did.” (Principal E)

Theme 3: Trust: In managing the school’s finances, one principal told the story of how she collected funds for student-activities feeling that the money would be better spent if it was used for the benefit of students. This is another example of using innovation to solve a problem.

- “I would take the money paid by the students and use it for activities that need to be done early in the year. As you know, the funds from the government can only be used in the third month of the year and we need some money to fund activities early in the year. So instead of depositing it in the bank, I used it to implement the activities” (Principal C)

What is interesting here is the idea of trust, which is evident from this example.. Even though failing to deposit school fees into a bank account is against the 'rules', the principal questioned the 'norm' and reasoned that it would be better to use the money for students’ benefit. The result of this action was that trust was instilled in the students for their superior, which is a distinctive characteristic of an Asian values and culture. Perhaps it is not surprising that the concept of trust is seldom studied by Western academicians, especially in the context of innovation.

In a similar way, the second smart school Principal was very comfortable with his position as an agent of change in the school. He showed great energy and was full of ideas for the benefit of his teachers and students. His philosophy was 'the ends justify the means' and this resonated in his everyday dealings with his subordinates.. Interestingly, his method for managing fees and funds was somewhat unconventional, but he justified it by claiming that it was done for the benefit of the school, the teachers and the students.

- “I found out that waiting for the government funds is useless because the school needs funds at the beginning of the year so I make it my mission to collect contributions from the vendors. I know it is wrong but would you rather sit around doing nothing and wait until March before you can do anything? So I collected a sum of money and we organized an activity for the kids. Some people might ridicule me for doing that but I feel that the students are my first priority.” (Principal E)

This principal prided himself with his innovative ideas for managing the school. For example, he showed us a small book for recording the use of the computer labs by students. Students who used the labs several times would receive a gift from the school. Many schools are not concerned with managing their computer labs, but this principal encouraged students and teachers to access the Internet and save useful information and knowledge onto a cd to be put in the library for everyone to use. The principal worked independently when implementing new ideas, but made sure that he stayed within the limits of rules and regulations. Only in the case of school funds did he question the rules and regulations and in this case he found an alternative solution to resolve the problem.

Principal C showed how innovative leadership can be implemented in a boarding school. She received complaints from students about the opening times of the computer labs - students were frustrated because most of their assignments required them to gain information from the internet; however, the daytime opening of the computer labs were inconvenient. The Principal discussed ways to solve the problem with the teachers and decided to install some computers outside the labs, to ensure that students could have access to the internet in the evening. This was an ingenious way of solving the problem with only a few negative consequences i.e. students stole a computer mouse or occasional cases of vandalising the computers.. In spite of this, the program continued and students were able to complete their assignments on the computers. This is an example of thinking 'inside-the box'. That is, the principal ignored the regulation that said computers must be kept inside a secure room. It is probably true to say that this would not have been practical in a day school because the computers would be carried off in the night.

Lastly, Principal E was very outright about abiding by the rules and regulations, yet her school was famous for being innovative. There was nothing very different about the way she managed her school as she followed all the

programmes given by the Ministry of Education. However, she managed to find ways to get around restrictions without breaking any rules., This showed that she was an adaptive person. who displays leadership characteristics, like: efficiency, thoroughness, methodicalness, organization, preciseness, reliability and dependability.. Such leaders tend to be strict, adopting a 'follow-the-book' type of leadership; however, they generally perform well due to their long experience in the field as school administrators that has taught them how certain problems can only be resolved.. This is typical of many school principals who follow normal procedures when solving problems. .

Theme 4: Innovative Leaders Are Confident and Bold:

One participant, when talking about personality, indicated that confidence and determination are important factors that influence innovativeness. It is normal for Principals to be confident and even serious about matters pertaining to their schools. After all, that is their main concern. However,there is one characteristic that separates the two innovative Principals mentioned above from the others and that is that they dared to take risks. Innovative leaders stand out as leaders who venture out into unknown territory with self determination and experience.

- “I agree with that but I think you need to have proper personalities. You need to project the proper personality. My teachers are (i wouldn't say scared of me) they respect me but scared in the situation where when work is concerned there is no compromise.” (Principal E)

Another factor mentioned by one of the Principals was that of creating teamwork among the players within the school. An innovative leader divides staff and delegates tasks between them.. Such leaders manage the school by making decisions together with staff and do not act alone.. In this way, the school management becomes a collective entity where everyone can contribute.

- “I think I'm efficient, thorough and organised. I'm not independent and original. I work as a team. I will be like collective management. I have my thinktank my executive committee. We have our meeting regularly, there, we make our policies. we brainstorm and argue, then we come out as a team. I'm not independence because of my team.” (Principal E)

Most of the time, leaders are the main determinant of the success of their school. Whether he or she is charismatic or autocratic, they need to have the right attitude in managing and solving problems. They must possess interest and passion in what they, do thus experience plays an important role in making decisions:

- “An important factor is the leader himself. Besides doing routine tasks, he must do something creative and innovative. Something new.This will make his career interesting and relevant. The second factor is his knowledgeand discovering knowledge through the internet or his experience overseas and that can be implemented in school.”(Principal C)

Theme 5: Innovative Leaders Are People-Centered:

“Challenges that I face are from humans: from students, teachers, staffs, private workers. From human we get attitudes which are everything. That is why I don't use the word change to them instead I say improvement” (Principal A)

Principal A saw herself as a people-centered person because she placed importance on her relationships with students, teachers and staff.. In one instance, the Principal discovered that one of the teachers came late to school. The Principal approached her and asked why she came late. The teacher explained that she had to send her handicapped son to school, which did not open until 8 am. Consequently, thePrincipal arrangedfor the time of the teacher's class to be moved to a later time to ensure that the teacher was able to come to school on-time.

- “When I returned to the school, many teachers are surprised that I came back. They are teachers who give me problems but I gave them a chance. Some of them even approach me and started to change and acknowledge me as the reason why they change. All these change will create a continuous improvementenvironment.” (Principal F)

Principal F had more difficult challenges to face. Firstly, herstudents' truancy was reported in a national newspaper. Secondly, she had to deal with uncooperative staff. She was then temporarily transferred to another school but was subsequently asked to return. Her school was large school with approximately three thousand students and to make matters worse, the adjacent school was also large having a big population of students. In

spite of all these obstacles, Principal A kept going and reasoned with her teachers. She kept trying to win their hearts and eventually some teachers responded to her. With the support of these few responsive teachers, she succeeded in implementing several initiatives in the school. Her perseverance therefore paid-off so that in the end, the teachers joined-in and helped her.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

School Principals can be categorised as either ‘adaptors’ or ‘innovators’. Adaptors regard rules, regulations and ‘norms’ as sacred things that must be obeyed at all times without exception. School Principals are chosen because they have learnt to be effective managers through many years of experience working in schools. However, some school managers question the norms and restrictions placed upon them, adopting a “do things differently” approach. [17] Principals’ styles of problem solving show whether they are ‘adaptors’ or ‘innovators’. Adaptors, try to solve problems in a safe way, creating a win-win situation, where everybody benefits and school is kept safe. Innovators, on the other hand anticipate problems and try to resolve them before they arise.. Such leaders seek problems not solutions. This pro-active approach is a clear indicator of truly innovative leaders. Of course there are many other traits, such as: implementing new and ingenious ideas into the schools. In contrast, Adaptors,, refrain from violating norms when implementing novel ideas, because they are afraid that others may reject or scorn their new ideas. Conversely, an innovator would not only attempt new ideas but would act as an agent of change, or a catalyst, among teachers and students in order to help the new idea to succeed. Unlike innovators, daptors are rule keepers who make sure that everyone in the school follows the rules.

This study has focussed mainly upon the personal side of innovativeness. In other words, the process of thinking that took place within the Principals when they were problem solving. No doubt, being innovative is not only influenced by personal factors. Many Principals agreed that there are two outside factors that also influence the process of innovativeness, namely: the organisation and the process of change. According to the theory of Diffusion of Innovation put forward by Rogers [13] the process of change is affected by people’s resistance to change [19]. Indeed, there are three main

factors that affect innovation, which are: the individual, the organisation and the change process. These would make an excellent topic for further studies in the field of innovation. Additionally, an instrument for measuring innovativeness within school Principals would be very useful and could add to our understanding of the complexities of managing schools. In order for school leaders to effectively sustain an organization, there must be a balance between the three factors influencing innovative leaderships i.e.: Personal traits, organizational management and change management. Personal traits comprise of the perception, boldness, experience and interests of Principals and. there were many instances where Principals exhibited these personal traits, for example, confidence in making decisions and interest in what they were doing. We saw how innovative leaders are also resilient individuals who do not give up easily when faced with challenges, looking for different ways to solve problems. In transforming their organizations and developing staff, innovative principals accepted the idea that to achieve success, they must embrace the notion of change.

For organizational management, Principals were good at managing the resources available to them, as well as the resources they acquired. They were good at organizing teachers into teams and used discussion to arrive at decisions.. Although Principals possessed authority and expert knowledge, they needed to play the role of catalysts of change, if change was to happen, It was also seen that successful Principals were good at managing change within themselves, their teachers and the students, utilizing their authority to create change in their organizations and projects and being themselves a source of knowledge, funds and motivation for their teachers. These factors sustained the schools and brought the schools to a higher level.. One more trait of successful educational leaders was their ability to gain the trust of their followers and to work alongside them as a team member.. In the absence of trust, silent dissatisfaction hampers teamwork and only serves to prolong crises.

For forty years or more, the Malaysian education system has been developing and evolving; yet is it only recently that the concepts of innovation and creativity have been integrated into the Government’s educational policy. This is due to the ever-changing nature of the local and global environments. Many other nations have likewise recognized that the aims and goals of education are different from twenty years ago. Thus the Malaysian

Ministry of Education is now emphasizing the need for innovativeness and creativity within educational institutions.

Having said all this, it is futile to implement policies or programs that do not take into account the main agents of change and innovation, namely, Principals and head masters. Most of the policies and programs of the Malaysian government tend to focus more on students and teachers and less on the Principals and head-masters. The government seems to be more concerned with offering monetary rewards and keeping teachers and students in-check through contracts and regulations respectively. Nevertheless, through this investigation into what is going-on inside the heads and minds of innovative school leaders, we have seen that Principals and head-masters are the prime movers for the success of any school program.

Finally, this study has looked at school-success in a different way. Whenever a successful school is identified, we tend to focus on the achievements in terms of awards, trophies and exam percentages. We overlook the processes that have led to this success. It may not seem important to the stakeholders or parents to look at the causes of success, but for school-leaders and teachers, it is crucial, if this success is to be repeated in the future.. It is rather like a carpenter who learns a new method of making a table. The way he maintains the quality of his new design for each and every customer is essential to his livelihood. Similarly, in the case of school leaders, the secret to their success in keeping the school at the topmost level of performance lies in his or her leadership qualities and innovativeness in managing the day to day tasks of school life.

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