

Organizational Change Through Transformational Leadership Practices: The Principal's Role

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20165> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20165

Published Date: 21 December 2023

Abstract

This concept paper aims to discuss the principal's transformational leadership role in facing organizational change. Previous studies found that transformational leadership has a significant relationship with the reaction of employees to organizational change by increasing commitment to change, openness to change and readiness for change and reducing resistance to change and cynicism about change. The findings of the study show that transformational leadership has the strongest correlation with readiness for change ($p = 0.376$) while the lowest correlation with support for change ($p = 0.204$). In addition, transformational leaders will make employees see organizational change as an opportunity rather than a threat through ideal influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Findings from this concept paper give implications to the Malaysian Ministry of Education through the 5th Shift of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), where principals who practice a transformational leadership style will improve the quality of education and quality management. In addition, transformational leadership also gives implications to the school organization and the community by constantly interacting positively so that good cooperation exists within the school organization and with the local community. In conclusion, principals should practice transformational leadership to increase the level of organizational involvement and develop an attitude of fighting for the people to manage change in the school.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Educational Change, School Organization, Principal's Role

Introduction

Changes in the education system are challenging to implement because something needs to be carefully planned or prepared to produce effective and positive changes. Changes and improvements made should be in accordance with current needs and be able to be realized.

Therefore, principals should be prepared from the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective aspects in facing the demands of today's educational changes (Dexter et al., 2020).

Principals must be ready to adapt to every change to develop and empower lecturers' abilities and guarantee the delivery of high-quality education in all contexts. According to Drucker (2017), a leader needs to prepare himself in all aspects to face the changing world of education to be able to adapt to any situation. According to Fullan (2002), effective school leaders are essential to implementing large-scale and long-lasting educational reforms. Only leaders with the knowledge and ability to manage a rapidly changing, challenging environment can implement reforms that result in continuous improvement in student performance. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) has agreed on the joint goals of stakeholders through the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025) to pioneer the use of appropriate technology and digital capabilities to drive the education agenda in the face of changes in education.

Leaders are strong and influential figures who can advance an organization (Liang, 2020). This means that the principal cannot only focus on achieving excellence in the curriculum but must be able to carry out his responsibility to lead changes in the school and steer it in a more practical direction in accordance with the current changes (Dexter et al., 2021). Transformational leadership is defined as leadership that forms an organizational vision to motivate and inspire subordinates (Mohd Firdaus & Norsiah, 2018). The transformational leadership style is very necessary in various sectors and fields because this transformational leadership can have many positive effects and benefits where the leader needs to handle the problem of stress in the workplace and take seriously the mental and physical health of employees to avoid the risk of depression among employees (Hairunisak & Halimah, 2021).

Theory and Model

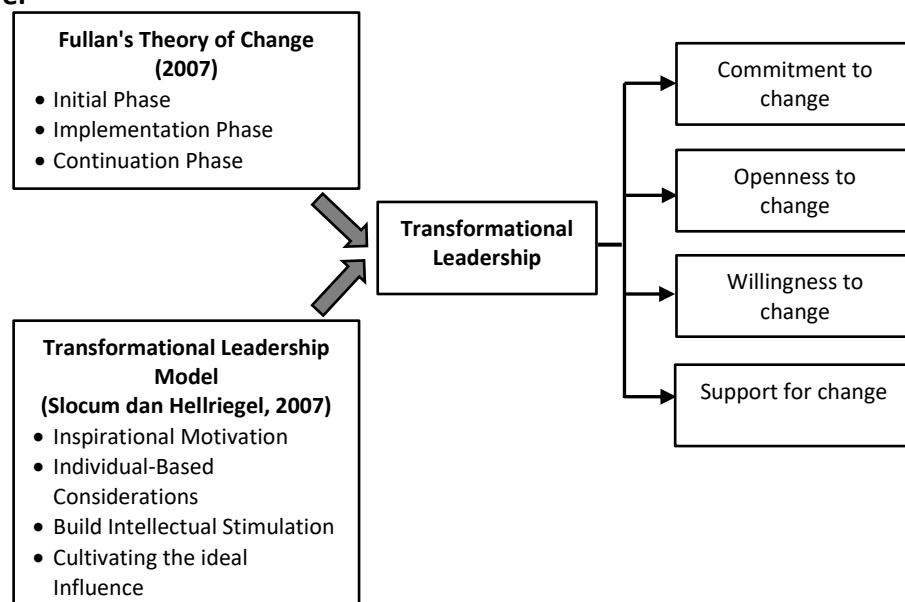


Figure 1: Theory and Model of The Principal's Transformational Leadership Role in Facing Organizational Change

Figure 1 shows the relationship between transformational leadership style and the reaction given by employees when Fullan's Theory of Change (2007); Slocum and Hellriegel's Transformational Leadership Model (2007) are applied by leaders. Leaders who practice this transformational leadership style will look at employee commitment to change, employee

openness to change, employee readiness and support for change to achieve organizational goals and be ready to face change according to the initial phase, implementation phase and continuation phase.

Theory of Change

Fullan's theory of change (2007) lists three phases in shaping the process of change in education, which consists of the initiation phase, implementation, and continuation (Nur Asyikin et al., 2021). The initial phase is the phase that contains the process to continue and accept a change and the process to the result of a change. The implementation phase is the second phase, where a leader implements reforms. The last phase is the continuation phase, where the changes implemented by the leader will be accepted by the organization or not.

Transformational Leadership Model

The model built by Slocum and Hellriegel (2007) makes the Bass model the basis. Transformational leadership is divided into four main dimensions, which are providing inspirational motivation, building intellectual stimulation, fostering ideal influence, and showing individual-based consideration. Slocum and Hallriegel's transformational leadership model states that a leader can influence his followers through his leadership style. These dimensions of leadership can increase effort and productivity, reduce absenteeism, and increase the ability of an employee to do work.

Providing Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leadership practised by the leader inspires subordinates through actions and words shown by the leader. Transformational leaders make themselves a source of inspiration to their followers through actions and words so that they do their job well and can achieve the organization's goals. Transformational leaders will guide followers by making them aware of the challenges and meaning in everything they do. Followers will be guided in carrying out tasks, solving problems and facing challenges.

Building Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leadership practices encourage followers to think outside the box to be more creative and innovative. This leadership encourages leaders to question assumptions, find new ideas and methods, and see problems in new ways. Transformational leaders are willing to change the status quo to bring about change in the organization to ensure that the organization's goals are achieved. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to be more creative, use a rational approach in solving problems and develop their followers' thinking and intellects.

Cultivating Ideal Influence

Leaders become a source of inspiration, and their followers will follow the leader's behaviour. This leader cares more about the needs of the employees than his own. Transformational leaders are willing to let go of their desire to meet the needs of employees. Leaders will not use the power available to the full, but they use the power available to employees to cooperate with the leader in performing tasks. A leader's influence is built on the charisma shown by a transformational leader. The positive attitude exhibited by leaders causes transformational leaders to be admired, respected, and trusted.

Demonstrates Individualized Consideration

Individual consideration means leaders are sensitive to the needs of each employee and respect diversity in the organization. This situation can create a bond and agreement among leaders, and employees to achieve the targeted goals.

Reviews of Past Studies

The transformational leadership style is widely discussed in previous studies where transformational leadership is defined as leadership that shapes the organizational vision to provide motivation and inspiration to subordinates (Firdaus & Norsiah, 2018). Bass (1995) stated that transformational leadership refers to a leadership style that aims to change the self-interest of employees to self-awareness, leading employees to show more concern for the success of the organization. By fostering a vision (or goal) that inspires employees, stimulates employees to think in new ways, and shows consideration for the individual needs of employees, transformational leadership can effectively create employees' positive attitudes and reduce their negative attitudes toward organizational change (Eisenbach et al., 1999; Zhao et al., 2016).

Mohd Firdaus and Norsiah (2018) stated in their study that work-life balance is an important issue for employees and employers where principals who have a transformational leadership style are those who can be patient and face the teachers' hard work during stressful times which require teachers to face challenges in completing their respective tasks. Saravanan and Shahizan (2020) in their study proved that there is a significant relationship between the dimensions of the head teacher's transformational leadership style (charismatic, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration) with work commitment among Tamil National Type School teachers in the Kulim Bandar Baharu district.

Findings

Table 1

Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Reaction to Organizational Change

Reaction to organizational change	Effect size and 95% CI				
	k	N	Effect Size	LL	UL
Commitment to change	20	7,452	.252	.186	.316
Openness to change	4	1,257	.312	.135	.470
Willingness to change	3	636	.376	.307	.441
Support for change	3	1,148	.204	-.083	.459
Resistance to change	5	2,202	-.180	-.306	-.047
Cynicism towards change	5	2,782	-.401	-.482	-.313

Source: Transformational Leadership and Employees' Reactions to Organizational Change: Evidence from a Meta-Analysis (Peng et al., 2020)

Based on Table 1, the study of Peng et al (2020), transformational leadership has a positive relationship with commitment to change ($\rho = .252$, 95% confidence interval [CI: .186, .316]), openness to change ($\rho = .312$, 95% CI [.135, .470]), readiness for change ($\rho = .376$, 95% CI [.307, .441]) and negatively correlated with resistance to change ($\rho = -.180$, 95% CI [-.306, -.047]) and cynicism about change ($\rho = -.401$, 95% CI [-.482, -.313]). However, transformational leadership was not significantly related to support for change ($\rho = .204$, 95% CI [-.083, .459]).

The study of Nazmul et al (2020) found that there is a positive relationship between the perception of transformational leadership and fighting behaviour in the context of organizational change. The study of Nazmul et al (2020) also found a positive relationship between the perception of transformational leadership and employee engagement and championing behaviour in the context of organizational change.

Discussion

The study by Peng et al (2020) conducted with a meta-analysis stated that transformational leadership has a significant relationship with the reaction of employees to organizational change by increasing commitment to change, openness to change and readiness for change and reducing resistance to change and cynicism about change. These findings can be seen in Table 1. The findings of this study correspond to previous studies in terms of positive and negative values and the strength of the relationship between transformational leadership and reactions to organizational change (Wu et al., 2007; Zhao et al., 2016). The findings of Peng et al. also found that transformational leadership had the strongest correlation with readiness for change ($p = 0.376$).

The study of Nazmul et al (2020) found that transformational leaders have a positive relationship with employee fighting behaviour by building a positive bond between the leader and his employees. This study also found that transformational leaders inspire and motivate their employees or followers, influencing followers to get involved in achieving common goals. The findings of this study are supported by Faupel & Süß (2019), who found that transformational leaders influence the fighting behaviour of employees during organizational change. Nazmul et al (2020) also found that the bond between a transformational leader and his followers can foster the level of work engagement while managing change in the organization.

Transformational leaders will make employees see organizational change as an opportunity rather than a threat through ideal influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Accordingly, principals should motivate teachers to provide information about organizational change in a positive way. It will help teachers generate positive cognitive and emotional reactions to organizational change to reduce cognitive and emotional resistance. However, if principals do not practice transformational leadership behaviours, they will lack idealism, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation to teachers (Bass & Avolio 1995). As a result, teachers will be less concerned about the importance of school goals.

Issues in Malaysia

Many studies have been conducted on leaders who practice transformational leadership to face change. The study of Aizat et al (2018) found that teachers' attitudes towards change were at a moderate level. A study by Arokiasamy et al (2016) also showed that the relationship between principals' transformational leadership and teacher commitment was at a moderate level. The main factor in stimulating change in education is the teacher's attitude towards change. When the attitude shown by the teacher is negative to face change, it will delay and hinder the change process. A study by Hairunnisak and Halimah (2021) found that respondents agree that their leaders have characteristics that can increase the level of employee motivation but lack stimulation and support for employees to be able to bring out ideas that have never been asked and think in a new way thus reducing employee involvement in the organization.

The failure of school leaders and administrators to maintain the commitment of teachers in schools has a large negative impact on school organizations (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Low commitment among teachers is the reason why teachers have negative behaviour in school. Leaders cannot take this situation lightly, and it must be dealt with properly so that teachers can perform their duties well at school (Norlaily & Izham, 2020). Therefore, a leader needs to determine an appropriate leadership style that can influence attitudes and subsequently be able to deal with the problem of low organizational commitment in teachers.

According to Abdullah et al (2014), transformational leadership is an ability possessed by an individual to influence a group of other individuals to achieve targets and objectives. Leaders are important people in organizations because they must be responsible for their followers to get the desired quality of work. The followers of leaders with transformational leadership characteristics will be more loyal, trust and respect the leader (Mohamed, 2017). Therefore, the transformational leadership style is important to be practised by leaders, including principals because it has a positive and beneficial effect on their followers (Geeta & Halimah, 2018).

Implications for the Malaysian Education System

Against Policy

The 5th shift of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013 - 2025) is to ensure that every high-performing leader is placed in every school. A principal is not just acting as an administrator but a community leader who needs to be smart in managing and administering the school organization. Principals who practice a transformational leadership style will improve the quality of education to a higher level, as well as practice quality leadership and management at the grassroots level.

Against Practice

In administering and managing the school organization, a principal needs to be wise and always maintain a good relationship with the school organization. A good relationship needs to exist between the principal and the school community to ensure that the objectives and goals of the school are achieved. The principal must always interact positively so that good cooperation exists in the school organization.

The community and parents always expect the principal to improve the school to improve teaching and learning performance. The community has a great impact on the school. Communities that belong to different circles give different experiences to students. Urban and rural schools also provide different experiences for each student. Accordingly, the principal must always understand the values of the community around him. Principals who practice a transformational leadership style need to build effective relationships with the local community to enable the active involvement of parents in the school to achieve the school's goals. A positive relationship between the school and the community will help the school organization understand the problems faced by the students and vice versa.

Against Training

To ensure high-performing leaders are always prepared for any changes made, the Aminudin Baki Institute, as an institution responsible for managing and providing training needs to ensure that leaders in educational institutions under the MoE always receive continuous training to improve knowledge, competence, and professionalism in the face of educational change towards a world-class education system.

Conclusion

Leaders should generally demonstrate transformational leadership behaviours to show employees' positive reactions to change and to prevent negative reactions. A leader should articulate the vision to be achieved, be a charismatic model, encourage challenging behaviour, and show personal consideration for employees in the process of a change. Accordingly, leaders should practice transformational leadership to increase the level of organizational involvement and develop an attitude of fighting for citizens to manage change in educational institutions. Leaders should also devise the necessary strategies to motivate and inspire employees to increase their level of engagement to ensure the behaviour that strives to manage change.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express her appreciation to the Vocational Technical Education and Training Division and Ministry of Education of Malaysia for providing technical support in preparing this concept paper.

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