

Leadership Action Plan

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Introduction

In today's education segment, more than ever, school leaders are under pressure to validate their impact on school improvement. Leaders are faced with unprecedented challenges related to rising expectations in the education sector, caused by new knowledge-driven by globalization. Effective leadership is viewed in the context of school improvement. This paper describes a personal leadership action plan to improve a poorly performing school. In this paper, school leader and principal will be used interchangeably. This paper provides an analysis of the school's previous leadership, identifies reasons for failure, and subsequently provides a comprehensive alternative and effective leadership plan.

Assessment of Previous Leadership Style and Possible Reasons for Ineffectiveness

- Lack of Sharing Responsibilities

Researchers consistently link effective school leadership with successful outcomes, including learner achievement. The poor performance of the school is a result of numerous ineffective leadership characteristics and processes. According to Marsh (2015), transformational and servant leadership have a positive impact on educational settings because the two styles are uniquely focused on people and their welfare. Despite numerous concerted efforts by scholars to identify what makes a school leader excel, no definitive characteristics have been found to reign superior. In the modern information age, there is a shift of focus from the individual toward the concept of shared leadership practices (Marsh, 2015)

It is a widely held notion that school leadership's focus is on teaching and learning. As such, leaders need to remain grounded in these two areas. School

leadership in its core ought to be effectively distributed by utilizing collaborative and collective leadership practices. The absence of these essential leadership components contributes to ineffectiveness.

The school's previous leadership may have lacked the ability to delegate responsibilities effectively. Leaders must embrace distributed activity as part of their leadership style to effectively nurture individuals and institutional procedures. This type of leadership approach has a positive impact on teacher participation and instructional changes. Also, success in distributed leadership is reliant on building progressive relationships with others.

- Uninspiring Leadership Affecting Staff Member Morale

According to a study on leadership styles of school principals in a public school, staff member's morale and work performance are intrinsically linked their leader's innate characteristics. The research used the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) assessment; encourage shared vision, model the way, challenge processes, support members to act, and provides inspiration. From the findings, staff members' dedication to duty was influenced by the following leadership characteristics; knowledgeable, accessible, relatable, openness in mind and communication, and love for the profession (Branch et al., 2015). Additional positive traits responsible for lifting morale were accountability and recognition for good performance. In educational institutions, student performance is dependent on teacher competence, which is equally reliant on leadership support. As such, leadership with characteristics that are inconsiderate of staff member welfare eventually produces poor performance. It may be said the previous leadership of the school neglected the

needs of its staff members resulting in low morale, and therefore, negatively affected the overall performance of the school.

- Unproductive Learning Environment

Since the inception of the modern schooling model, educators have struggled to pinpoint best practices regarding teaching and student learning. Even though the perfect blend of a learning and teaching approach is yet to be realized, there is an emerging trend aimed at designing school operations as living systems, which eventually culminates in improved learning and instructional capacity (Mitchell & Sackney 2016). A living system views the world as multifaceted and integrated, where all elements are interrelated, shared and interactive. In living systems knowledge is incomplete, temporary, and to be found all around (Mitchell & Sackney, 2016) Administrators and teachers operating in this system implement conditions where instructors and students learn and develop according to their uniqueness, while dignity is preserved.

Managed systems operate on the premise of a comprehensive analysis of situations and processes; subsequently defining procedures and predicting activities. The focus is on regulating and controlling human behavior to fit the regularized rules and values. In managed systems, teachers ensure students attain the standardized norms, while administrators implement the defined procedures, policies, and supervisions, to ensure standards are adhered to. It is notable these two systems have distinct definitions of knowledge, practice, and reality. In practice, educators have traditionally blended elements of the two systems and have reported success. Regardless of the efforts to mix the two, there remains tension in principalities.

In contemporary learning institutions, contentious difference lies in – planned curriculum versus lived curriculum. The effective leader must be highly conversant with the elements of the two systems and be adept at striking a balance. From the understanding of managed and living systems, the previous leadership failed to create a productive and authentic learning environment, for both instructors and learners.

- Lack of External Administrative Support

Poor performance in the school may have also been a result of uncoordinated activities within the school district. The search for remedial actions to improve performance is not limited to internal school structures. School superintendents hold influential positions due to their closeness; to school boards and communities, building principals, including resource allocation and operational, procedural authorities. These administrative bureaucrats – superintendents – have an impact on school performance within their jurisdiction, and this is dependent on leadership style. Superintendents are also responsible for numerous processes and practices in school districts, and their role in school performance cannot be overlooked (Bird et al., 2013). Multiple actors within a school district are involved in ensuring schools achieve excellence, and these efforts need coordination. The superintendent is the only authority within a district, who can effectively harmonize activities of these diverse interests (Bird et al., 2013). A superintendent with an authentic temperament for effective leadership ought to have facilitated the implementation of appropriate school improvement practices.

Assessment of Culture, Climate, and Performance in Current School

The school principal's influence on learning is facilitated through culture and climate, though this is never projected directly. Excellence in performance is the result of a cordial culture and climate, though the latter two concepts have overlapping features. School principals are obliged to establish prevalent cultures of learning and teaching in their institutions. In organizational literature, climate is perceived as behavioral, whereas, culture consists of values and norms; this is equally true in our educational context. In analyzing a poorly performing school, it is essential to gauge the correlation between the school's climate and culture.

The relation between climate and culture has been amplified, with the observation that values, rituals, norms, and climate are all expressions of culture (Feit & Florida Atlantic University, 2016). An effective leader inspires and remains focused to create a conducive climate that enables success. Additionally, the leader nurtures a desirable culture to sustain the success, attributes that were most likely neglected by the previous school leadership. Climate is the favored construct when assessing school performance.

- **Climate and Performance**

A poorly performing school is indicative of unfavorable climate. Various factors make up a positive school climate; a common vision, shared leadership, teamwork, professional development, and a mutually supportive environment. From these characteristics, it is clear that school climate is what draws students and teachers to be part of an educational institution and consequently enables good performance (DiPaola & DiPaola, 2018). Lack of effective leadership

negatively impacts climate, and neither students nor teachers remain motivated. School leadership is responsible for facilitating and sustaining the positive attributes of school climate.

- **Role of the Principal: Climate, Culture, and Performance**

The relationships which nurture the climate and culture of well-performing schools are developed by school principals. The previously discussed researched-based element of effective leadership leaves no doubt the leadership was responsible for poor performance in the school I have been assigned to improve. As mentioned earlier, the principal's involvement in student and teacher performance is never direct but happens indirectly through impact on climate and culture of the school. An in-depth understanding and development of school climate and culture allow leaders to retain the capacity to shape beliefs, attitudes, and values.

Identifying Areas in Need of School Improvement

The above analysis on the school's current climate, culture and performance provide insight on areas in need of improvement:

- **Developing a New Vision and Strategy** – This is a collaborative effort and will involve the entire school community. The new vision statement will involve all stakeholders and is based on agreed values. The new leadership will emphasize inclusivity and shared leadership. Additionally, the new focus will be a goal centered around clear, definitive goals and objectives, as well as,

collective support. My leadership action plan will effectively communicate the following new vision and strategy for identifying areas in need of improvement.

- Improving learning conditions is essential, this includes the physical structures – classrooms and other teaching facilities. Changes must be effectively implemented as a way of moving the school towards its vision.
- Redesigning and reassigning roles – Restructuring will occur progressively to redesign and refine roles. Promoting engagement and a sense of ownership with staff and student is equally important.
- Enhancing learning and teaching – Through a participative process, and we can formulate new ways of delivering instructions.

Teachers will be provided with a safe and free environment and will be allowed to be creative through the introduction of new models or approaches. Refining the curriculum to make it more student-friendly, through the introduction of a broad range of activities outside the classroom. The focus is on creating a living system rather than re-enforcing an existing managed system.

- Building Internal and External Relationships with School Community – To strengthen the new leadership, I will strive to build meaningful and positive relations with the school staff. I will also strengthen ties with outside stakeholders to foster a cohesive school community.

- **Building on Short-term Wins** – The new leadership will give stakeholders time to orientate and adjust to changes, slowly building on gains. Leadership teams must be cautious about the pace of activities and tasks supporting the improvement initiatives. The teams can be effective through defining short-term goals, which are easily achievable and co-opting into the action plan. Upon effective completion, the leadership can formulate rewards so that the stakeholders retain a feeling of accomplishment and momentum.

- **Consolidating Improvements and Implementing More Changes** – At this stage, the team will focus on sustaining the improvement processes.

Areas of concern will be student data, monitoring instruction, developing and implementing the improvement plans, and assessing effectiveness.

- **Consolidating New Approaches in Climate and Culture** – The leadership team fortifies all the gains to become the new school culture and practices, and finally, a conducive climate for learners and teachers.

My Leadership Style – Internal Qualities and Behavioral Practices – to Improve School Performance

My new assignment involves creating a new vision and mission and subsequently managing change. I am also tasked with building new relationships internally and externally, inspiring stakeholders, managing conflict, and implementing policies and processes for high performance. In my earlier deliberations, I embrace distributed leadership as the basis of shared responsibilities and my focus on creating living systems in the new educational setting. My

leadership style will also balance other existing researched approaches to ultimately find the best fit.

Distributed leadership in the educational setting engages skills from anywhere within the institution, notwithstanding position or role. This approach has been identified as ideal for promoting teacher participation and interventions and applies to instructional changes. Effective distributed leadership is reliant on the following: values and attitudes, a personality of trust, honesty, consistency in trust, developing and strengthening relational and institutional trust (Marsh, 2015). Utilizing these distributed leadership characteristics, in addition to, my choice of shared leadership practices will allow me to improve the school in the following areas: relationships, time, teamwork, aptitude, and communication.

The basic and desirable characteristic of an effective leader is consciously using acquired knowledge and implementing positive change. Success in the new assignment requires a mix of emotional and cognitive understanding related to defined sets of values and standards (Norton, 2013). My passion regarding education and people is a trait that will positively impact and help enable effective overall school performance. The most celebrated and effective leaders display certain moral and ethical purposes and a great sense of social justice. My passion for education and people is driven by my desire to improve standards and experiences of students and teachers. To sustain the mission and vision in the new school, my moral and ethical compass will be driven by: continuous professional dialogue about learning and teaching, unrelenting social support in resolving problems, collective responsibility and common goals, standards of justice, and equity, and individual and team efficacy. My openness to new ideas, flexible thinking, optimism, and resilience will aid in my ability to promote positive change.

My Effective Approach to Improving the School's Performance

At the heart of school, improvement is refining student experiences and adopting high-quality instruction models. Leadership is only a conduit to these ends. I intend to adopt distributed leadership with its characteristics of shared practices to achieve my objectives. To effectively manage change in my new environment, I need a shift of leadership through a social distribution of responsibilities, where functions are spread out to a number of people and tasks are achieved through multiple leaders. My affinity for distributed leadership concepts is not an implication that prescribed leadership structures within institutions are redundant. However, there remains evidence of a relationship between lateral and vertical leadership processes, though the focus now is on leadership as interactive instead of it being an action.

Distributed leadership can also be interpreted through a different lens– a nascent project of a network, consisting of interacting individuals (Marsh, 2015). Lessons drawn from published literature show that whenever leadership is broad-based, and instructors are given opportunities to collaborate, institutional change and development improves. The instructors also actively and confidently participate in change and innovation.

- **Leadership Legacy Assessment**

My results revealed the following instinctive traits, in descending order according to strengths: Experienced guide and Creative builder, Ambassador, Truthseeker and Advocate, and lastly, People mover. Applying my innate characteristics, combined with elements of distributed leadership, I intend to offer a creatively tailored leadership approach effective enough to improve the school's performance.

- **My Leadership Style and Improving School Performance**

As an ‘experienced guide,’ I am innately a good listener, empathetic, and derive pleasure from helping other people develop the right perspective. My other instinctive quality is ‘creative builder,’ and this is a product sum of strength of belief in result, plus the ability to tolerate the process. According to Branch et al. (2015) in their Leadership Legacy Assessment (LLA), I am equally ranked high as an ‘ambassador’ – persuasive, respectful, and able to handle all situations with grace. Distributed leadership thrives on delegating responsibilities, and my ‘ambassadorial’ characteristic will support this pursuit. As a ‘creative builder’ it is definite I will oversee the improvement process through the end. An element of distributed leadership is development of professional learning communities in educational institutions. This requires leadership to extend responsibilities beyond the school principal, a practice I will effectively implement as a ‘creative builder,’ ‘ambassador,’ and ‘advocate.’

School improvement proponents emphasize the importance of teacher participation in decision-making processes and the need for shared purposeful relationships. A closer look at effective schools indicates there is a common convergence on issues of values and norms in relation to teachers and principals, with corresponding performance results. Arguments have been made against the viability of distributed leadership, with skeptics saying it places leaders in awkward positions through surrendering control over important activities. Nevertheless, as an ‘experienced guide,’ I am prepared to provide leadership from the ‘rear’ if need be. Moreover, I am wise enough not to feel threatened after delegating and sharing leadership.

There is no shortage of credible literature to support the assertion; student outcomes improve in situations where leadership is distributed all through the

community, including empowering teachers in areas important to them. My past performances as a ‘truth-seeker’ is fairly good with the dominating trait being, unquestionable competency. Success in distributed leadership is built on a foundation of trust. Improved performance in my new placement involves progressive improvement in teaching and learning, nurturing a positive attitude, and strengthening teacher autonomy. A genuine ‘truth-seeker’ is not afraid to place trust in others. School principals sharing responsibilities are simply bestowing trust upon others, which increases commitment and effectiveness of staff members.

My Leadership Style and Theories of Leadership

Leadership is a process through which a person influences a group of people to accomplish a shared objective. Effective leadership is a blend of personal traits and leadership style, with knowledge of research-based leadership theories augmenting success (Northouse, 2016). An effective school principal adopts a variety of leadership styles to influence processes and develop social capital. Research is clear that failure in leadership is the main factor contributing to poor performance in schools. The educational environment is evolving, and traditional leadership approaches must adjust to keep up with the changes. My preferred leadership style – distributed – to improve the school’s performance is supported by; Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, and Situational Leadership.

- My Leadership Style and Transformational Approach – In an educational setting, the latter approach is based on; creating and implementing a clear vision and defining directions, realigning and restructuring, empowering staff and supporting curriculum, and building relations with external community. Altogether, transformational leadership effectively manages change in people and institutions. In creating and

implementing a clear vision and subsequently defining directions, my focus is to establish a common purpose as the basis for work motivation. Building a shared vision, nurturing acceptance for team goals, and validating high-performance expectations are specific examples of my transformative leadership approach. This process is the foundation of distributed leadership, as from the onset the emphasis is teamwork and convergence of purpose. My innate traits as ‘creative builder’ and ‘experienced guide’ complements in building and implementing this process. The role of school principal in defining direction carries a significant influence on teacher efficiency and commitment to the institution.

In realigning and restructuring, the focus is on creating a living system and a conducive climate and culture, as discussed above. The learning environment is designed and developed while considering teacher and student, motivation, capacity, and welfare. My strong traits as ‘ambassador and ‘advocate’ will enable me to create a living system within the school. Also, these traits will play an essential role in building dynamic relations with the community and other external structures – superintendents.

Empowering staff and supporting the curriculum also involves ensuring the working environment is productive according to the needs of the teachers. Resource support for curriculum development, staffing programs, and protecting staff from adverse distractions are specific leadership tasks I will focus on to help ensure optimal performance. As the ‘experienced guide’ I will be effective in resolving any conflict internally and even from our external relations.

The transformational approach is adept at building amicable relations with the external community (Northouse, 2016). Positive relationships with external influences will enable the school to sustain its living system. Lastly, the transformational approach

is characterized with inspiration and motivation, two specifics important for maintaining morale within the school. In an effort to maintain school moral, my positive feedback and recognition in creating a living system will help ensure those that I lead feel valued and recognized.

- My Leadership style and Servant Approach – Studies have found a positive correlation between; school principals aligned with servant leadership and a conducive school climate based on trust. The concept of servant leadership is based on the innate desire to serve others and support them to realize true potential (Northouse, 2016). The servant leader behaviors correspond to my leadership style as they both embrace power-sharing across different structures.

The following seven servant leadership behaviors are characteristic which I value and strive to implement; conceptualization, emotional support, placing interest of followers before own, enabling others to grow and excel, ethical behavior, empowerment, creating value for community. My primary objective in my new placement is to improve the school's performance utilizing my preferred style of distributed leadership. Servant leadership in its effective form achieves; high and performance in followers and organization and positive social impact, outcomes overlapping those of distributed leadership (Northouse, 2016).

Conceptualization – The servant leader is deeply conversant with an organization's vision and related complexities. Distributed leadership in its essence thrives in sharing power to achieve a common goal. A thorough understanding of an organization's purpose and intended outcomes supports distributed leadership practices.

My conceptualization of the school's overall transformation will result in applying a distributed approach to tackle issues creatively with the school's vision and values in mind.

Emotional Support – My strength as an 'experienced guide' empathetic to the needs and feelings of others will be instrumental in promoting effective change. This quality is also an instinctive behavior of a servant leader. Emotional support is a vital component in distributed leadership as it offers to relieve for any staff undergoing stress due to new changes. An emotionally supportive school principal readily recognizes problems and is always available to help.

Placing Interest of Others First – The servant leader is foremost a steward putting other's interest before own. Sharing responsibility involves entrusting others to perform tasks under minimum supervision. A school principal adopting servant leadership takes time out to assist staff with achieving objectives for the good of all.

Creating an Environment of Growth – Improving performance of the school requires competent teachers. As an empathetic leader, the principal is aware of the personal and professional needs of the school's teachers and extends support to actualize aspirations. By transforming the school climate into a living system, my leadership style will prioritize the career growth of staff members.

Modeling Ethics – Leaders are looked up to as role models, and I must act accordingly. To be effective in my position requires openness, honesty and operating fairly to all within the school environment. A servant leader is unrelenting on ethics regardless of the pursuit for success.

Empowering – The distributed leadership is an intentional and collaborative process and aims to empower others in their roles. Similarly, servant leadership allows staff members to act independently and remain self-sufficient. Sharing responsibilities equally grants control of related activities, to help in building confidence and capacity. Staff members handle challenges according to their own discretion and ability. I had an average score for innate trait as ‘people mover,’ and in this regard, I will have to delegate on this task to a more competent team member.

Creating Value for Community – The school serves the interest of the immediate community, and it is upon the leadership to give back to the community. As an ‘experienced guide’ I intend to encourage staff members and students to volunteer their time to serve the community in ways they see fit. Alternatively, the school can prepare programs to actively engage with the community. Servant leadership, in its context supports my leadership style.

- My Leadership Style and Situational Approach – My new placement comes along with unforeseen challenges, and to be effective requires quick adaptation to meet the expectations of each situation. The adeptness to adjust according to position is the core of the situational leadership approach. Effective situational leadership is a balance between directive and supportive actions, in accordance with each particular situation (Northouse, 2016).

Situational leadership in its adaptive form delegates and provides instructions on how tasks are to be performed. Moreover, it develops goals, defines roles and related actions on achievement, and sets timelines and subsequent evaluation procedures. My

leadership style replicates directive behavior in the process of apportioning new roles during sharing of responsibilities.

Supportive Behavior – My leadership style will be effective through staff members excelling in their roles. In the context of school principal, the element of supportive behavior in situation leadership ensures teachers are at ease with themselves, coworkers, and their environment.

Similar to servant leadership's emotional healing, supportive behavior is responsive to the social and emotional needs of staff members. Supportive behavior in situational approach reflects my instinctive trait – experienced guide.

Applying My Leadership Style to Improve the School.

In the initial stages of my leadership action plan, I identified the areas in need of improvement in the school. A careful assessment of these areas reveals that climate and culture were the main factors responsible for the poor performance. Improving climate and culture ultimately improves performance. Additionally, my action plan addresses the issue of refining contemporary learning and teaching environment to become a living system. My approach is not to entirely abandon the traditional managed system; rather it is to blend the two with a focus on aligning towards the vibrant living system.

The converging consensus in this action plan is to simply improve climate and culture, and the school will be in a better position. In climate the concern is on behavior, while culture is focused on norms and values; these two have obvious overlap. A conducive climate will be nurtured by effective leadership through definitive processes. To shape desirable behavior from the onset, my leadership will create a definitive vision for the school and specific methods for achieving a common objective. Rules and regulations are essential for establishing boundaries

and specifying roles. Checks and balances are essential in ensuring the rules and regulations are observed. Disciplined structures will be in place to protect the gains for the long-term (DiaPaola & DiaPaola, 2018). Other aspects to improve climate include; encouraging cleanliness, safe environment, and extra curriculum activities to improve on cohesion. A responsive school culture will be nurtured through ethical modeling. The school principal is the custodian of norms and values and serves as an example to learners and teachers. I will put structures in place to effectively communicate and sustain the school culture, for the long term. These measures may include; posters and newsletters, workshops and training, and mentorship programs.

Conclusion

In the contemporary school environment, the traditional managed systems – prearranged curriculum, enforced standardizations, and military-like leadership structures do not nurture a conducive climate or desirable culture. In this information age, educational settings must behave as living systems, to accommodate the rising expectations of teachers and students. Poor performing schools are a result of ineffective leadership. School principals in this age must be creative in their leadership approach, balancing the different models to find the ideal style. Distributed leadership blended with situational approach, servant approach, and transformational will aptly improve the performance in my new placement.

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