

*Leadership Skills
among Middle
Management People
in Vocational School.
It is important?*

Azlinda Mazlan

Students, Faculty of Education Technical and Vocational, Tun Hussein Onn University, Malaysia

Azlimi Mazlan

Graduate Education Officer, International Islamic College, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dr. Ahmad bin Esa

Associated Professor, Faculty of Education Technical and Vocational, Tun Hussein Onn University, Malaysia

Abstract

Unavoidable that middle management is the people who are required to have leadership skills. Not because they are recognizing in managerial potential but they are the person who are responsible to produce skilled students in the vocational school as they are teacher leader. Thus, having leadership skill is not only important but needed to the middle management level in vocational school.

Keywords: Middle management people, leadership skills, vocational

1. Introduction

The frequently forgotten tier in schools is middle management. Most of the literature on school leadership always focus on principal leadership and often overlooks the critical role of middle management. Middle leaders are the 'engine room' of the school. They play a crucial role in developing and maintaining the nature and quality of pupils' learning experience (Bennett, Newton, Wise, A Woods & Eonomou, 2003). Besides, middle management also managing the great deal of work in teaching-learning processes in school level (Fitzgerald, 2004).

According to Hobby (2012), General Secretary National Association of Head Teachers, middle management is the people that have more day-to-day impact on standards than principal. Middle leaders are simply and closer to the action or implementation of school curriculum. Most frequently, teachers' and pupils' experience of leadership comes from their middle leaders.

A leader also innovates, develops, focuses on the people and emotions, inspired people, challenges, has long-range perspectives and leads people (Bennies, 2011). In school level, the essential work of curriculum planning, monitoring and developing teaching also belongs with middle leaders. Middle leader who plays in leading teams of teachers need to ensure that curriculum are well developed, delivered and assessed, programmes are evaluated and teachers are well appraised (Curriculum Development Centre, MOE, 2001).

For effective leadership, competency models are not a prescription, but represent an attempt to capture the experience, lessons learned and knowledge of seasoned leaders to provide a guiding framework for the benefit of others and the organization (Spendlove, 2007). Thus, middle management people need to have the leadership skill to execute their tasks and responsibilities efficiently. This is because middle management is the person who was appointed as a leader because they were successful teachers and not because they displayed any managerial expertise or recognized managerial potential (Adey, 2000).

2. Research Objective

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a review on the leadership skills among middle management people in vocational school. It is to examine either the leadership skill is important or needed to the middle management people in vocational school level. The research has been conducted through the journals, e-books, conferences papers and Internet search.

3. Literature Review

The American Heritage® Dictionary (2009) stated that vocational school is the secondary level school that offers instruction and practical introductory experience in skilled trades such as mechanics, carpentry, plumbing and construction. In addition, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) defines vocational education as technical and vocational education to aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. In Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 stated that vocational school is the center that prepares students for skilled, semi skilled, technical and professional careers acquiring expertise in a specific set of techniques.

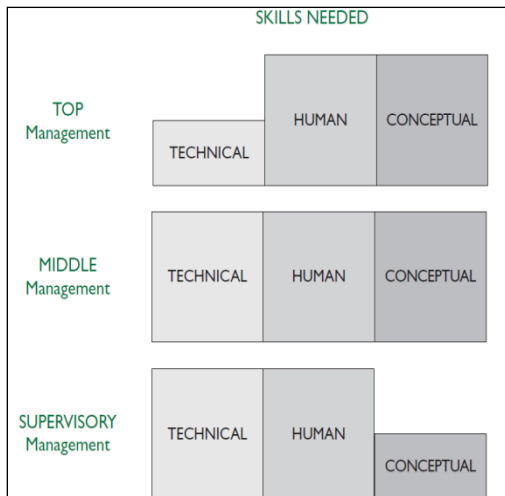
Therefore, in a simple statement, vocational education center is not only practically involved in the advancement of skills and knowledge, but also human well being. In relation to this, the leadership skills should be instilled in the students. Thus, to be able to have that, the middle management people who is the top level management in the education center play a very important roles in the deliveries of knowledge, skills also well being as role model. Thru vocational school students are exposed to the concept of doing things right, how to do it right and the correct way to deliver it. Without leadership skill, is this can be implemented?

4. Findings

Leadership is not about management or directing people. Leadership is the ability to inspiring or influencing other people to strive the leader towards the leader's goals (Robbins (2003) and Carter (2007). In other words, leadership is a complex process by which the leader influences others to perform and achieve the organization's vision.

Like the trait approach, the skills approach takes a leader-centered perspective on leadership. However, in the skills approach which usually emphasis on skills and abilities that can be learned and developed. Although personality certainly plays an integral role in leadership, the skills approach suggests that knowledge and

abilities are needed for effective leadership. Being an effective leader requires not only excellent technical skills, but also human and conceptual skills. Katz (1955) mentioned that the leadership skills comprises of three abilities which different from one another based on the type of leader. Nevertheless, it is also result to the different type of leader quality. The ability of leadership skill is as below:



Source: Adapted from “Skills of an Effective Administrator,” by R. L. Katz, 1955, *Harvard Business Review*, 33(1), pp. 33–42.

Based in the diagram above, it shows that different level of people in organization need different type of skills. It’s means that the top management need less technical skills as compared to the human skills and conceptual skills. But for middle management technical, human and conceptual skills are needed in parallel level. On the other hand, supervisory management need technical and human skills more than conceptual skill. Technical skill is about knowledge and proficiency in a specific type of work or activity. It includes competencies in a specialized area, analytical ability, and the ability to use appropriate tools and techniques (Katz, 1955). For example, in a steel workshop, technical skills might include knowing the welding and assembling process of steel. Thus, technical skills involve the hands on activity which the processes play an essential role in producing the actual product from the basic process needed to be accomplished.

Human skills are people skills (Katz, 1955). The human skills deal a lot with people. Human skill is about knowledge and ability to work with human being. Good human skill is a support to work efficiently with the subordinates, peers and superiors in order to achieve an organization’s objectives. For academic middle managers, managing resource also took on the routine administration of their department or unit but with limited people management role (Bush, 2012). In addition, the leaders that always with human skills will constantly think about their employee welfare in the decision making.

Ability to work with ideas and concepts is the skill known as conceptual skills. People with this ability

comfortably throw ideas upon the achievement of the organization. Conceptual skill enables people to understand and better decide the actions and measures that have to be taken in a particular field of work (Virkus, 2009). Through the conceptual skill, middle management people are able to prepare and execute effectively the respective plan to ensure the achievement of the objective. Besides, they also have to figure out the problem face by the supervisory level people as well as students in making decisions.

However, human skills such as communication and strong relationships are mostly needed by middle managers because middle managers need to communicate across the organization in order to do their work well. But, they also need conceptual skills to set the goals that achieve the strategic objectives. Nevertheless, they are expected to have more technical skill and less conceptual skill than the managers above them because they are closer to the supervisory level. Leadership is the central feature or organizational performance (Hussin, 2013). As for middle management people in vocational school, these characteristics are needed as they are the teacher leader. This is because teacher leader are not only teacher but also a leader who have acknowledged the need for management tasks, including the monitoring of colleagues' teaching (Wise & Bush, 2006).

A leader is the effective advocator. A leader is able to drive and change other people to be better than before. A leader is also able to be the enablers to the organization. Efficient leader initiate ideas, innovative, creative, and having a future objective to the betterment of the organization. Even though there are opinions stated that middle management need more human skills than technical and conceptual skills, these three skills are highly needed at the vocational school level in conjunction with the objective of the government in producing the skilled and quality generation.

The middle management is the people who are not only having high knowledge conceptually, but they are also need to have good human skills as they are most dealing with colleagues. Besides, they need technical skills as vocational school is all about hands on activity which need people with knowledge, skills and experience. To be competitive with the develop countries around the world, the education system in Malaysia should be able to have educated, critical thinking, creative, leadership skill among the youth in the global level (Blueprint Malaysia, 2013). Related to this, Zulkifli & Nik Zafri (2006) stated that the students well being is influence by the curriculum quality and teachers. Thus, it is very important for the middle management to set up excellent curriculum planning and developing teachers' leadership skills as they are one of the elements to the students for their well being especially involving leadership skills specifically for the vocational school students who are preparing themselves to the career environment in future.

Even middle management remains difficult to fulfill the new expectations because of the shortage of time; middle managers still give top priority to their teaching, which takes up a high proportion of the school day; (Wise & Bush, 2006). This is because middle manager also a teacher. As a teacher, their leadership skills are the needs for vocational school (Boateng, 2012 & Sacks, 2013). Teacher in vocational school not only knowledgeable but they are also equipped with abilities and skills in the specialization areas. Teachers' ability does matter a lot as they are the one who delivers the knowledge, information, skills and experiences. The teacher ability cultivates specialization in the vocational school as the teaching content and requirements build its own characteristics in the vocational teachers (Guo G. & Zhan Q., 2013). Therefore, as a teacher in the vocational schools the exposition to the leadership skills which include the technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills as introduced by Katz R. (1955) are truly needed. These leadership skills develop the teacher leader that suit with the needs and criteria of the vocational school in order to prepare students for the employments and industrial knowledge and skills that the students are specialized in.

When it comes to move education forward, having quality leadership in workplace makes big differences to the student. Students that have knowledge are not competitive if they are not able to be a leader. This issue has been agreed by the employer and industry players whom actually relate the soft skills such as positive work ethic, communication skills, teamwork and decision maker as well as leadership are the major factors that able to affect the value of the Malaysian graduates (RMK10). Therefore, leadership should be had among the middle management people and it is the important factor to practice the skills to the students especially in vocational school level.

5. Conclusion

Therefore, it is very important to the middle manager as they are the teacher leader to portray the good examples to the students. As a role model, it is one of the imperative means in creating a learning organization in which efforts are focused on ways in which increasing instructional capacity can influence student learning. As for my opinion, in order to be an effective middle management, it's really important and needs to have leadership skills mainly in human skills as they are responsible to produce skilled students in the vocational school, educate, train, facilitate and consult the students to be on the set to the employment area. Therefore, to develop student in this area, the middle management should have the knowledge, experience and leadership skills as they are the person who engaged, encouraged and enforced teacher and students in their own specific area. Although, delivering understanding and information to the other people. As Malay saying, "learn from the examples".

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