Development of Leadership Soft Skills Among Educational Administrators

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cAbstract

Leadership soft skills are very beneficial for administering organization effectively and efficiently. The aim of this study is to measure the development of leadership soft skills among educational administrators using the guidelines. The school administrators need to complement hard and soft skills while working with organizational staff and community. A total of 477 school administrators and teachers are involved in this study. In addition, there are 15 school administrators and teachers who have participated in a focus group discussion. This study utilized mixed mode method, comprised of quantitative and qualitative design. Quantitative method using questionnaire and qualitative method using interview protocol to obtain data. The statistical data analysis that employed in this study including percentage, mean value, and standard deviation meanwhile content analysis is used to analyse qualitative data. The results of this study indicated that the level of leadership soft skills among educational administrators is high. This finding is further supported by qualitative findings revealed that educational administrators have to improve their communication skills, using technology to monitor and evaluate teachers’ teaching strategies, promote team work spirit and healthy interpersonal relationship. In conclusion, educational administrators’ leadership soft skills should be highly adapted in their administration in order to ensure the positive change of the teachers’ attitudes and behaviours.

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1. Introduction

The current educational management is highly emphasized on the quality, knowledge, competency, learning skills, readiness for learning, good life skills, flexibility while dealing with problems, and competency in using information technology of the students (Prasert, 2011). The learning process in schools should provide ample opportunities for students’ directive learning to achieve their learning goal through their experiences. Consequently, educational administrators have to consider the individual differences due to every student has his or her own aptitude or intelligence. Therefore, teachers have to design various learning activities so that their students will enjoy learning, have good learning habits, and participate in social activity (Trilling and Fadel, 2009). Consequently, educational management should be congruent with social needs.

Wijan (2012) stated that the human’s major skills for living in the 21st Century are learning and innovation skills, problem solving skills, communication and cooperation, creative thinking, critical thinking, information technology and communication skills in order to access information quickly, occupational skill, life skill, social skill, cross cultural skill, leadership and responsibility skill. Wijan further emphasized that it is the educational administrators’ duty to develop these soft skills among their staff so that they are highly performed. According to Katz (1974), educational administrators have to utilize and integrate these important skills including technical skill, conceptual skill and human skill if educational administrators want to manage school organization effectively and efficiently.

Educational administrators are the key personnel to improve their organization for the transformation of ASEAN community. Educational administrators in current situation have to develop their soft skills while managing human resource and developing staff so that they committed themselves professionally for the transformation. The power of soft skills cannot be neglected by educational administrators because they are the motivator in encouraging collaboration as a shared learning process and continuous development in order to achieve their school goal.

2. Problem Statements

Soft skills can be defined as skills that related to human skills focusing on the competency in working with other individuals. This was supported by Wilaipan’s (2013) statement regarding soft skills for instance thinking skill, interpersonal skill, and motivation skill are those basic factors for human to perform better in their workplace. As a result, educational administrators need to complement both hard and soft skills in order to accomplish organizational goal. In other word, educational administrators not only use their knowledge, modern science, and management skills into many school management process but also participating, focusing on communication skills to develop organizational awareness and continuous improvement. Specifically, educational administrators are urged to emphasize on progressive management so that they have to ensure that their school staff are ready to face changing and transformation by cooperating with all their school staff. Therefore, to what extent these educational administrators possess sufficient soft skills are still questionable.

The office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25 is a work unit that responsible to monitor educational management for a total of 84 secondary schools at Khon Kaen province. The vision of this unit is to be quality organization focusing on educational development up to universal standard by 2018 academic year. This vision have to comply with appropriate strategies practiced by Educational Service Area to ensure that not only teacher and staff development in the whole system is well developed, efficient development in educational management but also is highly participated by every sector through cooperation, promotion and support provided (The Office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25, 2012). However, report of work performance in 2012 academic year indicated that teachers were not participating actively due to lacked of communication throughout the organization and insufficient usage of information technology media. In addition, educational administrators found to be unable to implement strategies according to the policy in their school management efficiently was a major impact on quality of schools, teachers, staff as well as students, reported by the Office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25 (2012).

3. Literature Reviews

Soft skills are vital in promoting organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This statement has been supported by the past researchers, namely Wijan (2012), Tang (2012), and Wallapha (2012). Wijan (2012) stated that leaders
in this century need to integrate their hard skill and soft skill in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness of work practices. Wijan further emphasized that soft skill leadership was an important leadership style for developing and learning innovation to be occurred through cooperation. This is further supported by Tang’s (2012) argument on leaders have to be experts in using their soft skills because leaders have to be competent in moving their organization efficiently and effectively. Tang justified that leadership soft skills comprised of team work, communication, personal mastery, personal development, initiative, leadership ability, planning and organizing, and presentation skills are required by leaders in human developmental process.

Wallapha (2012) identified seven soft skills including analytical thinking and problem solving, communication and presentation, team work, lifelong learning and information management, development and construction of innovation, morality and professional skills are the soft skills should be used by administrators and teachers in educational management. Furthermore, Wallapha’s research findings indicated that those educational administrators who were able to utilize leadership soft skills in teaching professional development found to be associated with students’ learning achievement and positive organizational climate.

4. Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to measure the development of leadership soft skills among the educational administrators by using the guidelines. The following are the main objectives of this study:

a) To study leadership soft skills of educational administrators under the Office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25.

b) To study the guidelines for developing leadership soft skills of educational administrators under the Office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25.

5. Conceptual Framework

Below are the research framework synthesized by researchers, utilizing Crosbie’s (2005) concept, Somerset’s (2001) model, and Tang’s (2012) concept. The studied variables were eight components of leadership soft skills for educational administrators including: (i) communication and presentation; (ii) leadership competency; (iii) team work; (iv) analytical thinking and creative problem solving; (v) professional and morality; (vi) learning; (vii) usage of information technology, and (viii) development of interpersonal relationship.

6. Research Methodology

This study employs mixed method that is comprised of quantitative and qualitative methods. Population of this study is consisted of those educational administrators and teachers who work under the Office of Secondary
Educational Service Area 25, 2013 academic year. In short, there are 201 educational administrators and 3,382 teachers, giving a total of 3,583 persons from 84 schools. From the total population of 3583 educational administrators and teachers, the required sample size is 132 educational administrators and 345 teachers by employing Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) formula. The sampling method used is stratified random sampling which is considered appropriate, accurate, and efficient as it provides more information with a given sample size.

This study employs questionnaire which constructed based on the above conceptual framework as a method to collect data. There were 3 sections in this instrument. Section 1 of the questionnaire was intended to gather information regarding demographic factors of the respondents which included information pertaining to their personal background. Section 2 was used to gather respondents’ opinion on leadership soft skills. Finally Section 3 was developed to gauge respondents’ opinions on guidelines for developing educational administrators’ leadership soft skills in an open-ended question.

The content of the instrument was validated by using experts’ index congruence (IOC) and was found to be fulfilled the index ranged between 0.60 to 1.00, which is good and acceptable. To improve the quality of the items in the instrument, reliability test was carried out to 30 educational administrators and teachers who would not involve in the actual study. In addition, they were also asked to give suggestions and comments on the items in the instrument. Revisions were made based on the suggestions and feedback from the 30 participants. It could be concluded that the instrument was reliable and good to use as the Cronbach alpha value indicated that all the research variables had high Cronbach alpha values as 0.978. Descriptive statistic and content analysis were utilized.

7. Findings

7.1. Perception level of agreement on eight components of leadership soft skills

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the level of agreement on eight components of leadership soft skills by respondents. As indicated in Table 1, the mean scores for the eight components of leadership soft skills ranged from 3.96 to 4.28. The highest perception level of agreement was development of interpersonal skill (mean = 4.28, standard deviation = 0.89). The next highest was learning (mean score = 4.17, standard deviation = 0.78). This is followed by leadership competency (mean score = 4.16, standard deviation = 0.76), usage of information technology (mean score = 4.15, standard deviation = 0.81), team work (mean score = 4.13, standard deviation = 0.87), professional and morality (mean score = 4.10, standard deviation = 0.83), and analytical thinking and creative problem solving (mean score = 4.08, standard deviation = 0.80). The lowest mean score was communication and presentation (mean score = 3.96, standard deviation = 0.87). The overall perception toward the leadership soft skills of educational administrators in schools, under the Office of Secondary Educational Service Area 25 is at high level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership soft skills</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication and presentation</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership competency</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team work</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical thinking and creative problem solving</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>0.81</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of interpersonal relationship</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2. Guidelines for developing educational administrators’ leadership soft skills

The guidelines for developing educational administrators’ leadership soft skills derived from the results of this study as follows:

- **Staff development**: The implementation of staff development should be performed according to issues in order to develop educational administrators’ soft skills in their work practice. For example, Action Research Workshop to develop the usage of English Language and information technology. In addition, Mentoring and Coaching Workshop can be utilized to promote the construction of learning innovation and followed by the Enhancement for developing the Learning Community program.

- **Administration and Management**: Educational administrators should be encouraged to use information technology in their daily administration, management, and learning as well. They should be provided opportunity to present necessary information technology for academic conference and reporting work performance. Teachers’ work should be evaluated and follow-up actions have to be taken if necessary. Research should be enhanced as part of professional development. Lastly, development of shared value as well as collaborative team working concept should be promoted.

- **Strategic planning**: Collection of resource to provide and develop technology equipment together with community. A systematic problem solving need to be emphasized on the usage of information technology while making decision or solving problems. Academic and sharing climate has to be developed. Good governance in administration and management has to be applied.

- **Morale Development**: Development of morale consisted of creation a friendly climate in order to decrease conflict in the organization, develop good relationship among school staff, recognition and honoring colleagues, and educational administrators set good examples for self-development.

- **Monitoring and follow-up actions**: Monitoring and follow-up actions including educational administrators’ change of their attitude and behavior while using information technology in their work practice, value development, and team work. Monitoring, follow-up actions, and evaluation have to be consistently carried out in their work practice.

8. Discussion

Finding of this study revealed that all the leadership soft skills of educational administrators are at high level especially the development of interpersonal relationship. Since development of good relationship among the organizational staff or work units is essential for an educational administrator while carrying out their administrative tasks, therefore this component of leadership soft skills should be highly emphasized by the Office of Educational Service Area 45 particularly. Therefore, the director of the Office of Educational Service Area 45 should establish a related policy so that work progressively implemented and at the same time improve student quality to ASEAN community.

Results of this study showed that educational administrators have to possess human relation skill, communication skill, develop mutual understanding, and actively participate in reformation until achieve its goal. This finding is in line with Tang’s (2012) statement that efficient leaders have to be able to make equilibrium between self-knowledge and self-development in developing the interpersonal relationship for organizational development. It is also congruent with Macvicar’s (2006) ideas. Macvicar mentioned that educational administrators have to adjust their leadership style to be relevant to fit their colleagues’ needs.

On this line of reasoning, soft skills especially developing human relationship will be the most important factor to promote work morale among the organizational staff. This finding seems to be supported by Chachama’s (2012) findings. Chachama found that educational administrators’ management skill including these leadership soft skills, namely competency in collaborate efficiently with community, internal and external collaborative networking, effective communicative management system, rapport human relationship, and good cooperation between school and community.
Besides that, findings of this study indicated that communication and presentation was not popular among the educational administrators. This finding has broken new grounds suggesting that educational administrators should focus into this leadership soft skill since it seemed to be neglected. The importance of open reciprocal communication and good presentation skills is vital as educational administrators need to be able to communicate effectively with a variety of different constituencies such as academic staff, administrative staff, students and stakeholders. Hence, educational administrators need to have effective interpersonal skills. Skills such as listening, questioning, giving presentations, writing, conducting an effective meeting and getting the best out of the staff or team can be continually improved, and self-development in these areas remains central to become a good leader.

9. Conclusion

Most educational administrators thought that hard skills are more important to bottom line, though the significance of leadership soft skills has long been recognized (George and McLean, 2007). However, past research showed that leadership soft skills are as critical as leadership hard skills, especially in managing employees for organizational excellence (Siti Asiah, 2011). The results of this study have several implications specifically to the Secondary Office of Educational Service Area 45. This is especially true as educational administrators need to better understand the roles that leadership soft skills may play in increasing the organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Educational administrators may not have much knowledge and experience in leadership soft skills. In addition, they may not be exposed and familiar with the formal concepts, significance and value of soft skills.

Acknowledgements

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References


