

The Role of Female Principles as Leaders in the 21st Century Learning Organization

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Abstract

Discussion about female leadership is not to be separated from the issue of partnership and social justice role between men and women and this has been constructed by religion, customs and culture. Commonly, the literature on women and leadership is identified with bias, contradiction and paradox. Thus, masculine dominance is still visible for the classification of leadership and management dynamics. In the last few decades we have seen various education institutions are racing to improve the quality of schooling. The role of school principals is quite significant in realizing the success of the learning process. One of the most important things the school leaders should do is to build a strong communication and collaboration with their staff which contributes directly to the learning process. And this is the significant strength of the female leaders. While, in a learning organization, learning itself becomes a source of intrinsic satisfaction of its members and every individual in it has the fundamental desire to be part of the meaningful process. Hence, principals do have important roles in directing and guiding their schools to be effective learning organization. This descriptive study shows how female principals effectively lead their schools as strong learning organizations.

Keywords

female leaders; learning organization; school development



I. Introduction

Leadership has become part of the human existence since they built groups to survive from the environment threat, dangerous animals, and other human groups. Discussions about leader and leadership have emerged since the existence of the Greek- Roman philosophers as well as in religious texts including Old Testament, New Testament, Bhagavad Gita, and Al - Quran. Essays and discussions on leaders and leadership have emerged over the last few centuries. However, the scientific study of leadership only started about 80 years ago when social psychologist Kurt Lewin and his students began to study group dynamics and distinguish between authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Callahan & Grunberg, 2016). Of so many discussions about leaders and leadership, there was just a little discussion about women as leaders. The development of social, cultural, and political during the past 50 years has been clear that men and women can be effective leaders and vice versa. Definitely, men and women do have the equal opportunity to become compelling leaders.

To optimize the effectiveness of male and female leadership, it is important to go beyond consideration of the type of sex. It is important to consider if and how gender relates to leadership. Gender is a characteristic difference in individuals that are relevant to how people think about themselves, thought by others, and act in various situations. Because it is, gender is relevant to consider in connection with leadership. The

effectiveness of the organization leader is also influenced by gender. Boatwright & Forrest (2007) stated that a woman is more likely to interpret the leadership in the form of transformation, while a man is more likely to interpret the leadership in the form of the transaction. In addition, a woman is more likely to describe the style of leadership they adopt in a form of transformational one, while a man is more likely to adopt the transactional. Meanwhile, Elliot & Stead (2008) stated that contemporary ideas about gender and leadership caused feminine characteristics to give women an edge in the workplace where organizational style is preferred to be participative and democratic.

The digital age creates new challenges in the education world (Abersek, 2017). The challenges are marked by the emergence of two important requirements: new thinking methods and compelling problem solving. In fact, education in the digital era gives so many unlimited opportunities to lifetime learning. Learning and knowledge in this era is an advanced learning system that allows each individual to acquire knowledge and skills for the rest of his life. The fast and massive development of economy, technology, communication, and information areas, greatly affect education system in Indonesia. Ministry of Education and Culture is committed to lifting the quality of education system nationwide in order to be comparable with the world's advanced education systems which can produce human resources with competitiveness and good characters.

Education is a very important human need because education has a duty to prepare Human Resources (HR) for the development of the nation and state (Pradana et al, 2020). According to Astuti et al (2019) Education is an obligation of every human being that must be pursued to hold responsibilities and try to produce progress in knowledge and experience for the lives of every individual. Education is one of the efforts to improve the ability of human intelligence, thus he is able to improve the quality of his life (Saleh and Mujahiddin, 2020).

Changes implemented in the realm of education nationwide require school organizations to enforce a dedicated change necessarily needed to achieve a balance with the massive changing environment. The consistent changes in the realm of education can lead the school organization at risk of becoming backward and lose the relevant influence if they fail managing the efficient changes (Savas et al., 2013). Most major practitioners of the education management agree that applying the practice of organizational learning in school is seen as the simplest solution since it can create an atmosphere of the best work (Sayed & Edgar, 2019a). Learning organization is a paradigm change practice which can help schools deal with environmental changes. Its practice is to encourage learning and provide a foundation which can support the transformation, progress and generate an organization that excels its quality performance (Marquardt, 2002). Schools are required to implement the practice of the learning organization to be able to successfully face various challenges. Schools as learning organizations will have the capability and the ability to organize the process of learning which can develop the outcomes of more innovative and competitive learning. Most importantly, the school will be able to form an organization that is valuable for all stakeholders' interests (Mukiur & Revilla, 2016).

In this article, using a qualitative approach, the author would like to explore the role of female principles as leaders in 21st century learning organization and how they develop every human resource in their schools as an effective and valued leader.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Leadership of School Principles in Learning Organizations

Discussion about female leadership is not to be separated from the issue of partnership and social justice role between men and women and this has been constructed by religion, customs and culture. Commonly, the literature on women and leadership is identified with bias, contradiction and paradox. Thus, masculine dominance is still visible for the classification of leadership and management dynamics.

In the last few decades we have seen various education institutions are racing to improve the quality of schooling. The role of school principals is quite significant in realizing the success of the learning process. One of the most important things the school leaders should do is to build a strong communication and collaboration with their staff which contributes directly to the learning process. And this is the significant strength of the female leaders. Arpah (2017) states that the teacher is the spearhead of learning so that his/her position cannot be replaced. While the role of the school leader is to lead, direct, create policies, improve the quality of learning and conduct surveillance at the institution. The school leaders and teachers make a strong collaboration to create the quality of learning which becomes the school priority. The three variables determining the quality of learning are the model of the leadership in school, the school culture, and the process of learning to teach (Hasanah, 2020).

Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, *Bapak Pendidikan Indonesia*, granted a well-known philosophical understanding of the education leadership called *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo*, *Ing Madyo Mangun Karso* and *Tut Wuri Handayani* (Tukiran, 2016a). *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo* means that a leader must be standing at front in such of the delicate condition. If the plan which has been set is not running, then a leader must perform in advance to take over the control and conduct a breakthrough to solve the problem. The leader has an important role in encouraging the birth of initiative and responsibility for the sustainability of the organization. After the problem resolved, then the leader must retreat one step to give a delegate to his/her subordinates, but the leader is still in the team to give the spirit (*Ing Madyo Mangun Karso*). And when the organization has achieved the success, the position of the leader is *Tut Wuri Handayani*, the leader stands at the back row to prepare himself for the next task, commonly the more severe one.

The persistence to excel reflected on the willingness and determination of the school leader to implement the quality leadership and facilitate the improvement of the teacher performance so that eventually the two will be a determining factor to attain the highest student achievement (Mulyani, Meirawan, & Rahmadani, 2020). A school leader plays an important role in the school development so then she must have the willingness and persistence to push, ask, motivate, move, guide and direct all the school stakeholders interests for the sake of the school development (Tubin, 2016). In addition, the school leader has the responsibility of determining the school future, creating a positive school ambience to develop the teachers, students and staff potentials (Adair, 2007).

2.2 Learning Organization Concept

The concept of learning organization was first introduced by Garrat in 1987. However, it started to get a place in the world of management when Peter Senge popularized the concept in 1990 (Ahmad, 2021). The year of 2020 was celebrated as the 30th year publication of the phenomenal Peter Senge's book called *The Fifth Discipline*. In his book, Senge gave rise to a new concept in management and development areas: Learning Organization. Up to now, the concept of Learning Organization has become a

legacy of classical literature but continues to be in demand to be widely studied and applied by various world organizations. Senge (1990) argues that in a learning organization, learning itself becomes a source of intrinsic satisfaction of its members and every individual in it has the fundamental desire to be part of the meaningful process.

At the beginning of introducing the concept of learning organization, its practice gained over many places in profit-based organizations. Looking at the successful practice of the learning organization in the profit-based organizations, the education organizations such as schools and universities began to show interest in the concept in order to be able to answer the challenge of change and transformation to produce compelling education outcomes which could then effectively improve performance (Berkowitz et al., 2013). The practice of learning organization refers to the commitment to provide awareness to all human resources they have and encourage them to implement the changes through the process of extended learning (Hadi & Juniawati, 2018).

Additionally, the practice of learning organizational also refers to the practice which allows the human resource in the organization to acquire the new knowledge and skills. Those knowledge and skills should be relevant to the task completed by individuals through learning process and then they disseminated the knowledge and skills to others within the organization to achieve the organization vision and goal (Al dhuwaihi et al., 2020). The dissemination of those knowledge and skill will rise the knowledge of the organization and gives various competitive advantages to the organizations. The learning organization practices also emphasize the concept of collaboration between the human resources and management which will create some mutual complementary (Prelipcean, 2016).

2.3 Characteristics of Learning Organizations

In order for schools to successfully carry out the role as learning organizational, they need to identify the characteristics needed to be a certain learning organization. Schools as learning organizations need to constantly create a culture of learning among their human resources to balance the dynamic environment and consistent changes. Learning will always be a culture and lifestyle in a learning organization (Voolaid & Ehrlich, 2017). A learning organization must always ensure the learning activities and information dissemination are continuously improved as the key of the organization success (Raj & Srivastava, 2013). The implementation of learning organization in schools will facilitate the creation of varied innovations (Santa, 2015). Mistakes are made not to be regarded as a failure but regarded as an opportunity to learn the valuables (Odor, 2018). Moreover, schools as learning organization are expected to ensure their human assets are ready and qualified to face the challenges (Rana & Polesello, 2016).

Schools as learning organizations learners also promote the norms in which all sources are committed to sustainable learning and collaborate to pursue the sustainable improvement (Sinclair, 2017). School leaders, teachers, staff and all stakeholders create the culture of collaboration and cooperation to encourage innovation and creativity (Yunus, 2020).

2.4 Human Resources as Knowledge Assets

Changes in the realm of education nationwide has a big impact on the major source in schools; teachers. Teachers are encouraged to constantly improve their professional knowledge through the consistent and continuous process (Prenger, et al., 2019). To ensure the role of the teacher as an important pillar in guaranteeing the success of the student learning process, they need to continuously develop professionalism and capabilities

throughout their career (Admiraal, et al., 2016). Teachers also need to be constantly getting positive feedback in order to ensure the effectiveness of their completed work (Bhaskar & Mishra, 2017).

No doubt that teachers usually face the constraints of time in their efforts to carry out the development of professionalism, and of course it becomes a challenge for teachers to do the observation and reflection on the teaching methods of teaching completed by their fellow teachers (van Driel, et al., 2012). Leaders need to create some space for their teachers to promote informal interaction so they can share problems and experience and at the same time, they can increase collective improvement (Lecat, 2019). Teachers as the main human assets in schools definitely have the key to determine the school success (Ghadermarzi, et al., 2020). Intangible knowledge belonged to the human assets in the organizations which then disseminated to the entire organization could change the tacit knowledge to the explicit one. Teachers and school leaders are required to ensure that they carry out improvements consistently (Adams & Khojasteh, 2018).

III. Research Methods

This paper is a qualitative research with a descriptive approach regarding the role of female principals in leading learning organizations. The author used related literatures mostly found in the most recent journal articles, books and related papers. All those literatures are related to topics on female leadership, leadership development, learning organization, and education development. The author also used empirical review to show best practices of leading effective learning organization by a female school leader in Dieng, Central Java.

IV. Results and Discussion

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a plan of global action contains 17 efforts to improve the welfare of the society in which education is one of the efforts. This education effort guarantees that education should be inclusive, quality, equitable and increases the chance of learning throughout life to all people (Nations, 2015). SDGs as the agenda of global development are in line with the agenda of Indonesia's development set forth in the Plan of National Medium Development Term (RPJMN) from 2020 to 2024. Education becomes one of the strategic directions to the implementation of *Nawacita* and *Misi Indonesia Emas 2024* (BPS, 2020a).

Education is part of the direction of human resource development which aims to foster the energetic, productive, skilled and diligent young generation who master of science and technology, as well as the power of competitiveness, especially in the era of revolution industry 4.0. The survey results of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) in 2018 demonstrated that the system of our education had managed to become more inclusive, open, and has more access to the more spacious ones. However, the results of the survey also showed that Indonesia occupied rank 72 of the 77 countries. Our PISA score average seemed to decline in the three areas of the competence (reading, math, science) compared to the year 2015. The 2018 PISA survey also showed the findings of 3 main problems that needed to be addressed, namely the large percentage of low achieving student, the high percentage of students repeating classes, and high student absenteeism (BPS, 2020b). This result is a big challenge for our education especially for the school principals in leading learning organizations in their schools.

In his phenomenal writing titled *Towards A Theory of Spiritual Leadership*, Louis W. Fry gave birth to a new concept about leadership which later evolved rapidly into a new phenomenon in the management field called Spiritual Leadership. Fry defined spiritual leadership as a kind of leadership shaped from values, attitudes, and behaviours which are needed to motivate one self and others intrinsically so they could extend spiritual life through calling and ownership (Fry, 2003). Fry created a proposition stating that transformation and continued success of learning organizations require spiritual leadership.

The methodology of feminist research approach has become an interesting topic to discuss. The roles of age, education level, work experience, gender and need for relationships are predicted as workers' ideal preferences for relationships and leadership behaviours. Powell's research (1990) found that female leaders receive lower evaluation scores when using gender-inconsistent style (transformational) while the male leaders received much higher evaluation scores when using a style of gender-inconsistent (transactional). This happened for the style of transformational received more positive feedback than the transactional style. So according to this study, it is not clear the effect of using gender inconsistency styles on male and female leaders (Embry, Padgett & Caldwell, 2008). An overview of the research trends with subject of female leaders and managers in the last of 20 years has focused on the following research questions: (1) Can women be leaders?, (2) Why do male and female leaders differ in their behaviour and effectiveness in organizations?, and (3) Why are there only a few of female leaders who can reach the highest level in the organization?

A strong positive environment becomes crucial to improve the performance of teachers and all human assets in a learning organization. Leadership awakens the urge of one self to do something (Tukiran, 2016b). Teachers play an important role for the nation development and they also become a determining factor for achieving educational goals (Min, Modeste, Salisbury, & Goff, 2016). The teacher is the spirit of the school (Kalman & Arslan, 2016). The role of teachers is also important to produce quality graduates. Thus, to produce high quality graduates, there must be teachers with high quality performance as well (de Lima & dos Passos, 2015). Moreover, teachers will demonstrate better performance if they are working under the effective leadership. And the leadership of female school principals is considered more qualified because they are considered to be better in communication skills, empathy and collaboration.

The model of principal leadership is an important factor in the development of effective schools (Yakavets, 2016). Achievement of the school as a whole is affected by the principal leadership (Bendikson, Robinson, & Hattie, 2012). Nowadays, the adaptation of leadership and transformation towards a change are two vital challenges faced by the leaders (Tang, Lu, & Hallinge, 2014). Strong leadership in school does not occur in a sudden. Leadership must always be pursued and honed and strengthened by various efforts to improve the quality of leadership. Why invest in school leadership development? Around the world, there are major changes in the realm of education. Many education systems provide autonomy over the region and schools, so that a decision can be taken at the local level and thus it will be more appropriate to the context.

If we want to encourage positive changes to occur in our school, then there are two things needed: First, teachers and school leaders need to embrace change; second, if the change becomes effective, we should give the opportunity to the teachers to develop and practice the new skills needed to reach the capacity of cultural development. This is why school leadership is fundamental to the success of the reform in education. School leaders need to show leadership to collaborate with various parties and ensure the transfer of knowledge runs effectively in school.

If the school leader is empowered to work effectively, then they will be in a lot of positions to better articulate the reason for the change in a way that it is interesting to work collaboratively to carry out the transformation that is appropriate to the context of their own.

We learn to be leaders not by following a leadership program but by being given the opportunity to lead so that the development focus should be on learning-based work (Munby, 2020). Work -based learning alone is not enough. There is a need to be able to get access to credible colleague or mentors who can provide constructive feedback on leadership practice at a regular basis. Leaders must receive opportunities to see the practices of good leadership and observe different approach. It is done to lift the aspirations and help them develop leadership styles and ethos of their own. In addition, leaders need to continue to study various research on leadership as additional insight. Leaders also need to do a reflection and discussions with other leader fellows. In this context we can see how important the role of a school principal is in guiding all human resources in her learning organization existed in the school she leads.

Best practices of female leadership can be seen at SDN 1 Parikesit, Kejajar, Wonosobo, Central Java. This school is located at Dieng plateau which is surrounded by mountains. Ibu Kushendratmi successfully carried out her duties in building a learning organization in her school. SDN 1 Parikesit is a national pilot school for the implementation of school-based management. Every year, representatives from hundreds of schools in the country and even from abroad visit her school to learn how the school leader and her teachers gained many compelling achievement. SDN 1 Parikesit has more than 200 students with 10 inspiring young teachers. The school has students who excel both academically and non-academically. The teachers also managed to achieve their own recognitions. In addition, the principal has succeeded in inviting parents to play an active role in achieving school attainment.

V. Conclusion

Female principals are not only the leaders of the schools but also the spiritual leaders of the school community. She must have positive morals of life and be able to carry out positive values as reflected in her personal competence in order to facilitate herself in encouraging the formation of an effective learning organization. In the era of revolution industry 4.0, it is important for the female school leaders to contribute actively as a transformational leader for the entire members of the school community. Leadership is needed to motivate others and the leaders themselves. The ability of the school organization to answer all the current and future challenges becomes one of the strengths that should be owned by the organization. A learning organization is a perfect tool for conquering the changes that occur in rapid and massive mode. Learning Organizations will be able to continue to thrive if their female leaders can encourage the entire capacity of the assets that exist in it to collaborate for the sake of creating an innovative, competitive and sustainable organization in the digital age.

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