

School Leadership from the Opinion of Higher Education Teachers

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Abstract

Educational leadership has been studied over a long period of time; It has determined characteristics, models, strategies to develop and implement an appropriate leadership; The profits of an organization have been guaranteed if a leadership is properly developed, however, the educational leadership is not deepened as broad with a more naturalistic view and seen from the opinion of teachers. A study was conducted under the qualitative approach, specifically a case study at a university in southeast Mexico. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations and content analysis were used. In this study aims to establish the opinions that teachers have about what should be a school leader, as well as their feelings in the daily work. It seems that teachers feel that humility and good treatment, as well as awareness towards others makes a leader successful and accepted in a school organization.

Introduction

The accumulation of research related to the topic of leadership has resulted in a greater interest in understanding in detail the implications of its practice. In educational space this situation is not far behind, since it is more often possible to note the arguments derived from studies that affirm the importance of leadership in the continuous improvement of organizations.

For a complete preliminary analysis of leadership, it is necessary to consider different aspects inherent to it, such as its own conception, who exercises it, the styles and characteristics. In the same way, its presence in education can not be lacking, as well as the different studies carried out around this theme. It is important to bear in mind that leadership is a fundamental element for understanding micropolitics, since micropolitics, being a representative dimension for school change in general, requires a special consideration for this process.

Conceptual Approach

Social organizations require the connection of all the elements that are part of them, the purpose being to do more with individual efforts, make appropriate decisions, generate equitable participation and implement actions relevant and timely for the welfare of the institution. To achieve this connection requires the effective exercise of leadership. Leadership is an issue that has been fascinating and interesting since ancient times, not only for those who hold a high position, but for the entire group or group of people who are directly affected by the actions of a leader.

For a complete study of this theme it is convenient, firstly to mention the meanings used for leadership, with the purpose of identifying which are the related elements in each one and integrating those that indisputably characterize it, although it should be emphasized that there is no universal definition of leadership because it is a complex subject and because each research requires the use of a conception according to the interests of the same.

According to Hollander and Julian (1969) cited by Johnson (1979), leadership consists of a relationship of influence to achieve mutual objectives in a group situation, that is, the influence exerted beyond the routine fulfillment of the organization. It is also considered as a process of influence in which the leader motivates the voluntary participation of followers, with the intention of realizing the objectives of the organization (Schriesheim, Tolliver and Behling, 1978, cited by Kreitner, Kinicki, Gelles, Levine And Myers, 1998). Both conceptions allow to identify that the leadership is characterized by the influence in search of the achievement of common objectives.

Auerbach and Dolan (1997) propose that leadership is a process in which it is induced and encouraged to achieve certain goals that represent values, motivations, needs and expectations of the leader and his followers (Bennetts, 2007). Lussier and Achua (2002) also consider it as a process aimed at achieving goals through organizational change. These authors also point out that it constitutes an important but non-exclusive element of the administrative work, since there are those who are not administrative managers to influence their colleagues and even their superiors.

Leadership is defined by Lorenzo (2005, p.371) as "the function of dynamizing a group or an organization to generate its own growth based on a shared mission or project." The most important elements identified in this definition are the growth and the shared project, because it allows to have a clear idea that it will only be possible to improve if there is a mission accepted by the whole organization. In relation to organizational objectives, Lussier and Achua (2002) point out that effective leadership will seek the achievement of group ideals, leaving the particular interests of the members and the leader for later; In addition, they affirm that the influence consists in a process of communication of ideas between the leader and the followers, so that they feel motivated and convinced to defend them and execute them to make the change (Lussier and Achua, 2002).

It is important to consider that in an organization, individuals with little authority can influence considerably, either because they have access to information and resources or to perform key tasks (Bardisa, 1997). In this way, it is clear that leadership may not necessarily and must be performed by the highest positions in an organization, but that each member may be a leader in the roles that he or she is responsible for.

In the same way as leadership, the term leader acquires diverse conceptions that are not far from each other. In short, for Kreitner et al (1998) a leader is a person with the ability to face a situation and make a remarkable difference, which will be reflected in his triumph. Martínez (2008) points out that authentic leaders are characterized by being ethical, prepared, determined, energetic, reliable, sensible, modest, passionate, pleasant and, above all, predisposed to learn. The latter is one of the most important features according to Burns (1978) cited by Trujillo (2004c), since leaders must learn even from the lower or lower levels, based on the ability to listen.

It is possible to perceive the leader as an executor of the organization that is characterized by directing, acting, making decisions, anticipating and realizing different avenues of realization; Likewise, he possesses breadth of vision, potential personality, charisma before the institution, group dynamizer, problematic solver, among others (Trujillo, 2004b).

Different authors have proposed a great amount of characteristics that must own a leader, being some similar and others not so much; However, it is difficult to think that a single individual is the owner of all of them. For this reason, it is more reasonable to consider, like Cáceres (2007, 54), that leadership is represented in different people, who are not "born" as leaders, but are "made" in different situations or contexts.

The most successful leaders have been studied to determine what are the characteristics that have allowed them to transcend and achieve success in their respective organizations. It is for this reason that throughout the history have been proposed diverse theories to explain the leadership, the function of the leader and the followers.

Issue

Carrying out a detailed analysis of leadership in educational institutions implies a superior effort compared to another type of organization, since the particularity of the schools makes them differ in a great sense, since they are usually categorized according to Weick (1976) as "structures weakly Articulated "(Trujillo, 2007).

Fernández, Álvarez and Herrero (2002) state that the exercise of pedagogical leadership is basic for the maintenance of educational organizations; Adding that from an evolutionary perspective, effective organizations have to be a faithful reflection of the goals and objectives that they aim to achieve. Therefore, leaders must adapt to the environment and the model of society that they intend to reflect in the educational center.

Universities, like any organization, are governed not only by the expressions of those who direct the institutions, but also by the relationships between institutional leaders and the rest of the actors, particularly academics; In addition to the fact that globalization processes lead universities to choose between change or marginalization (López, 2003). It is before this that the need to give due importance to the leadership exercised in the universities arises, since they constitute the areas in which are formed many professionals, scientists and researchers, who through their performance in the labor field reward the efforts made During their education.

In university teaching and learning there are several factors that generate processes and results of high quality, one of them is the nature of relationship built between institutional bureaucracies and academics, which can help build strong leadership based on moral authority. This authority is achieved through participatory scenarios, presenting permanent renewal initiatives and, with greater importance, being sensitive to adapt and transform institutional strategies (López, 2003).

Despite the great efforts made to lay the foundations for effective leadership at the university level, there are several situations that reveal the great needs that arise from the exercise of this one by the authorities or those in power.

One of the problems or situations that call attention is the arrival of the authorities in the positions that hold them accountable for the different actions and processes that are required in the operation of the university or the departments that comprise it. Bennetts (2007) mentions that the great majority of public university directors in Mexico are elected by the university community, and generally, their performance has been as teachers in any area of knowledge, with little or no formal education. Therefore, the experience that provides the persistence and the commitment in the position, constitutes practically the only way for the development of the academic leadership, or, the professionalization of the academic management. It is clear that trial-error does not favor the current organizational demands of the university.

Given these situations, Fernández, Álvarez and Herrero (2002) point out that in the near future the leaders will have to face the following challenges that will pose the vertiginous changes to which their organizations are subjected.

The absence of leadership produces a feeling of distrust, a predisposition towards the decomposition of the sense of community, a vindication of identity with the university space and, therefore, signs of their dissatisfaction with the daily relations that power imposes on them (López, 2003).

Objective

1. Determine the opinion of higher level teachers regarding the meaning of leadership in education.

Methodology

The research was a qualitative study and was conducted using a case study design. As Kerlinger (2002) points out, qualitative research is a type of social and behavioral research based on discrete field observations. Based on the objective of the present study and for its effects, the cases were developed according to the instrumental mode of study of cases raised by Stake (2010), since the case study is an instrument to achieve something different from Understanding of that school organization. Semi-structured interviews (15), observation (3 working meetings), document analysis (5 minutes) and focus groups (4) were used. The case was a top-level educational organization located in southeastern Mexico.

Results

The teachers interviewed expressed a series of comments regarding their understanding of leadership in the institution, including their role in the school leadership. There were situations of great interest, among which it is shown that these teachers consider that leadership should be an inherent part of the work of any education professional, and more of the manager of the center.

First, it describes what these teachers consider that every educational leader should possess without necessarily having a managerial position.

P: "... have initiatives for students to get to know each other, get to know the school, have a vision of how many are going to go to graduate school, how many are going to work and how many are going to stay in the same technology, Promote the connection with the research centers linked to companies, participate in congresses, give researchers facilities with other producers... ".

The teachers coincide in describing an educational leader as all that subject that seeks the integral development of the student, and more in university students; It is also pointed out the need for every professional of education to promote in the students a human spirit and visionary, with the desire to succeed and overcome. A constant updating is expected for the benefit of their professional performance, creating and allowing spaces for the participation of young people in their different activities or projects.

Based on the appreciation of the interviewees, it seems that an educational leader must firmly seek and achieve a change in university students, these being the future of society. It is said that students are always looking for opportunities for growth, and that depends on the encouragement they can get from their trainers in higher education. A teacher should be an integral individual, with coherence between what he promulgates and what he performs, since his pupils always have their eyes fixed on them, and in the end they consciously or unconsciously use some model that identifies more in order With their interests or personalities.

With the above, it becomes clear that for teachers, leadership is not necessarily linked to a managerial position, and that for higher education institutions to achieve the expected impact for the country, these organizations should be made up of leaders who wish Transform the lives of people who pass before them in classrooms. Let not only professional work be seen as a pretext to be enriched by compliments, work levels, or increasing income.

P: "... to be a leader you have to achieve differences in your way, not only interests you, not being selfish; Being a university professor is a great responsibility that society entrusts to you".

Q: "... you should not only think about producing, you have to think about what to expect from you. The boys are noble, and they would expect the best from each one. "

It is noteworthy and interesting that the same teachers would expect them to serve as agents of change, knowing that it is not easy but with daily commitment and a human spirit, they could turn the higher education in the hope of forming also Leaders who change society.

After approaching the teachers' understanding of their leadership, this understanding will now be analyzed, but towards leadership of a school manager.

P: "... the directors must have a good type, a leadership... half... we need a person with more leadership, I do not know what kind of leadership is the one who is maintaining it precisely does not show leadership...".

It can be understood that the manager stays focused more on the work group that surrounds him, neglecting the others that are not found in that organizational circle. Interviewees openly express this feeling that their manager can not disguise their inclination or preference for those who serve or work closely. For them, there is some discomfort when the director has to coexist with their area sub-directors; In some informal meetings, the principal hardly comes close to the teachers or other employees of the center.

With this we can see the urgency of professors regarding the director's closeness to them; Seems to be a daily necessity, because not because this personage occupies a privileged place does not have this presence towards the teachers.

P: "... that takes people into account, is based on their small work group... reduces the impact on the decisions they make and that makes many teachers as indifferent, do not take into account their work".

Apparently, professors say that everything is translated to the absence of humility in the director, being this one of the main values that should be present so that every individual, who leads others, can achieve confidence and, thus, walk without problem towards any objective. Humility is understood as the whole behavior of the individual without regard to his position Hierarchical to treat others with more or less attention; Also a humble manager is one who does not expect a special occasion to interact with others, without this attention being seen as feigned or compromised because others observe.

It is interesting to know that the teachers expect a humble director, hoping to see him in any hall of the school talking to any student or employee, without any problem, and that this talk is not necessarily school or work.

When an interviewee comments that the manager should "get out of his cloud" it seems that this subject refers to the fact that these leaders are located in unreachable positions, and that for that reason the others have no reason to approach until this authority wants it. This behavior is the least desired in a manager.

Analyzing the comments emitted by the interviewees, another factor of great importance appears, being the case of a necessary commitment that the director should have. It seems that the director is dissatisfied when planned does not go as he wishes, but unfortunately the actions are carried out by indications that the director himself takes, which suggests that this is not included in the processes that occurred in the organization, and more When their presence would support the understanding of mistakes made or repair of some others.

ANUIES, in its vision towards 2020, expresses the need for a professionalisation of higher education institution managers, stressing the need to have leaders who have a professional preparation required for the role played, as well as a comprehensive action that contemplates A series of values that can be founded in your body that directs.

The teachers acknowledge that they comment some faults in their work, that in some occasions in spite of the indications or decisions that have been taken by the directive area, they are mistaken, but in spite of these situations and to recognize these errors, the manager Is totally alien to the school, and behaves like an external agent who only devotes himself to judge without remembering that he is part of the organization.

Conclusions

It seems interesting how teachers conceive of an educational leader as that subject who achieves a change in the students' lives; This point reflects the value that a teacher could have in university education. It was found that if a teacher encourages and engages the students in the activities that this trainer performs, it is very likely that the young person will glimpse with a promising future, be interested in continuing actively in their preparation, and make him an active citizen , In search of better opportunities.

On the other hand, and without seeming redundant with what was explained in previous paragraphs, it is interesting to note what the manager describes as his adepts as leader. This personage affirms to work with a constant openness and a humanism, obtaining with this a nearness and confidence of its personnel. In the same way, an element appears that the director translates as a skill of great importance to achieve its purposes, it is spoken of the suspicion that every manager must develop to identify his subordinates who could oppose this authority.

In concrete form it seems that this openness and humanism that the director comments as qualities that he possesses are closely some characteristics that teachers would like their organizational leader to possess. And although it is an irony, each actor has his own posture and built image, being unfortunate that in reality, it still is because that similarity is true.

The inquiry concerning leadership, suggests that despite being a subject studied and addressed in social research, there are innumerable questions that remain without a clear enough answer, although, it is known that leadership styles are Varied and all of them have a *raison d'être* and a utility and transcendence according to the purposes of the organization, as well as the events and events that correspond to them. In this way, as some authors affirm, each of the leadership styles is useful and effective according to the characteristics of the subordinates, the leader and the needs according to which the organization is working. Much has been said about the importance of directors of educational institutions having a certain set of leadership competencies for the effective functioning of the organization; It was also about the diversity of styles that impact on management or management and that is linked to the establishment of a culture and the generation of a characteristic climate. However, it is necessary that through each theoretical proposal the educational researcher asks questions that contribute to deepen and value the degree of understanding regarding the subject studied. That is why questions arise such as: How effective would it be to consciously and intentionally train managers to exercise leadership in accordance with the needs of their own organization? Speaking in terms of the ethical behavior of organizations How ethical would it be? If we are fully aware that there is a strong emphasis on creating harmonious relationships between managers and employees, would the leadership styles that do not adhere to this highly valued feature be completely ruled out?

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