DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS: HOW TO ASSURE A QUALITY LEADER?

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to obtain information from education leaders regarding the means of identifying potential leaders and the methods of developing quality future leaders. This is a qualitative study where the in-depth interview method was employed to gain data. 24 informants – Directors, Deputy Directors and Heads of Departments from four colleges in Malaysia – participated in the semi-structured interviews and all were digitally recorded; verbatim transcription were done and verified by informants. Following that, data analysis is based on themes classification and comparison. This study discovers that the current leaders are responsible in identifying potential candidates. These potential candidates, in turn, are those with the ability and willingness to lead. This study has identified the four aspects to be considered in identifying the potential leaders which are giving priority to existing Deputy Directors, making early identification, identifying competencies and declaring these potential leaders. Similarly, the study has also discovered that current leaders must also undertake three steps in developing quality future leaders – giving trust to potential leaders, sharing of knowledge and identifying suitable leadership development programmes. Finally, the study also manages to identify the development programmes to nurture leadership competencies among the lecturers, Heads of Departments and Deputy Directors. This study has contributed in leadership succession planning for educational institutions and has managed to highlight leadership development programmes needed by the successors.

Field of Research: developing future leader; development programme; educational leader; leader identification; succession planning

1. Introduction

The future of educational institution lies with the existing current leaders who must produce numerous leaders to ensure continuous excellence. This is achieved when there is continuity in vision (Hargreaves et al., 2003; Garchinsky, 2008; Tan, 2009) and culture (Garchinsky, 2008) of the institutions. This has been proven by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) who posit that teachers from institutions with clear visions, when trained as leaders, will have high level of innovation and effectiveness as well as more involved with the students. Thus, current leaders are responsible in producing as many future leaders as they can to ensure institutions’ excellence.

Excellent leaders are not only capable in managing their schools but also successful in motivating and producing many leaders from their institutions. Though not innate, effective leadership can be trained among the staff (Horner, 2003). Bush and Middlewood (2005) also state that successful leaders are those who not only strengthen schools’ systems and structures but motivate and
develop staff as well. Similarly, Collins (2001) and Fullan (2005) argue that an effective Principal is not only judged by the students’ achievement but also by the number of leaders produced. Hence, educational institutions leaders must have strategic planning to produce as many leaders as possible in their institutions.

According to Charan et. al. (2001), leadership competencies can be developed through training and knowledge and experience attainment while in the service of organisations. However, there never has been any comprehensive and systematic study on school leadership preparation (Mc Carthy & Forsyth, 2009). A study done by Gmelch (2004) found that only 4% out of the 2,200 education leaders has had experience going through leadership preparation programme. Studies done on United Kingdom higher learning institutions showed that 70% of these learning institutions did not have systematic leadership development programme (Spendlove, 2007). In his study about leaders’ appointment in ten universities in England and Wales, Howson (2005) discovers that most of these universities do not have any specific methods in identifying potential leaders or providing leadership developing programmes. Thus, this study aims to obtain information on means of identifying potential leaders and methods of developing quality future leaders.

This study was carried out in four colleges under the supervision and management of a statutory organisation in Malaysia. Appointment of leaders for these colleges is centralised by the Human Resource Division of this organisation Headquarters. As a statutory organisation who plays an important role in developing the human capital in Malaysia, this study is deemed important in ensuring that educational institutions under its supervision and management remains relevant through the appointment of quality leaders. This study, then, is done to answer these following questions:

i. How are these potential leaders identified?

ii. How are quality future leaders developed?

2. Literature Review

Potential leaders are prepared to succeed current existing leaders. Leadership succession plan is much more that just appointment of leaders in an organisation. According to Development Dimensions Incorporated (DDI), United States, succession plan is not take-over plan; it is identifying individuals with high potentials, identifying development programme needs, deciding solutions, ensuring implementation of developing programmes and reviewing progress of succession plans (Brittingham, 2009). It is a strategic planning of vital positions’ emplacement in an organisation (Fulmer, 2002; Rothwell, 2010; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Brittingham, 2009; DuBrin, 2013). This is to ensure leadership continuity in organisations’ critical positions, strengthening and developing intellect capital and knowledge for organisations’ future as well as individuals’ progress (Rothwell, 2010). Critical positions meant by (Rothwell, 2010) starts from manager or supervisor to the highest position in the organisation.

The organisation’s leader is responsible in devising an effective succession plan. Management of an effective succession plan directly involves the Chief Executive or the executive level of the organisation and uses competency model to develop potential leaders (Fulmer, 2002; Rothwell, 2010; DuBrin, 2013). Effective succession means developing a plan of leadership movement flow for coming years involving many people (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). According to DuBrin (2013), existing leaders are not only responsible in identifying suitable development programme to nurture leaders-to-be, but also responsible in identifying and stimulating them. This succession plan allows lateral movements within the organisation to ensure that experienced staffs are given opportunities to upgrade their skills and contribute to the organisation (Rothwell, 2010; DuBrin, 2013). DuBrin (2013)
argues that a good succession plan is one that allows for effective leadership development in the organisation, thus, having a direct impact on the organisation.

New leaders can be developed through various ways. DuBrin (2013) proposes that leadership development programmes can be carried out through education, experience and coaching. According to him, education means acquiring knowledge either through formal education or self-learning. Learned leaders are able to assist in decision-making and problem solving. Experience, on the other hand, allows leaders to become effective leaders. He also strongly argues that leadership experience helps developing skills and vision which cannot be learned through formal learning. A mentor, someone with experience in developing leaders should be appointed to do the coaching. According to DuBrin (2013), leader candidates or protégé can be developed through giving instructions, coaching, giving guidelines and providing emotional support. Protégé observes leaders’ work activities directly by shadowing them for a specific duration, for example a day or a month. DuBrin (2013) also suggests that protégé observes how leaders manage certain situations, and mentors are to share why certain techniques are used. Leadership preparation programmes should be holistic, giving real contexts experience and need to be managed by experienced leaders. Besides emphasis on the selection of accurate candidates for programmes prepared, the curriculum for leadership preparation programmes should be well developed and related to set leadership standards. This is to ensure that the programmes implemented have real impacts on the leader candidates.

Leadership preparation programmes must be continuous. Leaders must be trained and continuously injected with the latest knowledge to enhance their confidence level. These programmes allows leaders-to-be to understand leaders’ functions, boosting confidence level and willingness to become leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007). Cherif et al. (2009), sharing the same opinion, states that the objectives of leadership programmes are to produce leaders with the following qualities i) high level of confidence, determination and integrity; ii) able to provide innovation, inspiration and vision iii) desire to see organisation’s success and iv) have the capacity to coach and produce excellence among the organisation’s staff. Browne-Ferrigno (2007:21) says that “…The making of principals is an on-going process”; this means that leadership preparation programmes must be on-going so that leaders are always highly motivated in carrying out their jobs. Gray and Bishop (2009) provides some guidelines in leadership development which are i) programmes must be aligned with set leadership standards; ii) integrated with succession plan, employment, induction and assessment; iii) collaboration with universities or experts in developing education leaders; iv) appointment of experienced education leaders as mentors and acknowledging the mentors’ contribution; and v) provide adequate training for mentors and assessing mentors’ performance. Leadership development should begin early so as to allow success from bottom up and top down (Spendlove, 2007). Therefore, leadership preparation programmes should not only be a focus during the selection of a new leader, but must be done continuously during the tenure of a leader.

The successful organisations are those that implement leadership development programmes continuously. Successful foreign organisations such as Dell, Dow Chemical, Eli Lily, Pan Canadian Petroleum and Sonoco Global Products manage their succession plan continuously (Fulmer, 2002). According to Fulmer (2002) these organisations best practices are i) continuous use of the potential leaders identification process; ii) have set leadership competencies in managing succession; and iii) focus on specific development programme for every staff. The study Grove (2007) did on 15 successful organisations discovered that these organisations integrate both the leadership development programmes with the succession plan. Their management personnel are directly involved in the leadership development programmes i) as mentor; ii) identifying highly potential staff; iii) as facilitators in experience sharing programmes with the potential staff; iv) establishing flexible succession plan process; v) networking with stakeholders in promoting potential
organisation staff. Both (2002) and Groves (2007) findings clearly demonstrate that organisations must implement leadership programmes continuously and that organisation leaders play a vital role in ensuring the organisations’ continuous excellence.

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions forwarded by this study, the qualitative approach was used as suggested by Creswell (2007), Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009). The case being studied is about leadership development in four colleges of higher learning in Malaysia. Participants of study are from various leader categories of Directors, Deputy Directors and Heads of Departments. The usage of various experience data sources is for triangulation purposes and to strengthen study validity as well as ensure quality of study findings (Klenke, 2008).

The total number of participants in this study is 20. According to Patton (2002), there is no specific set number of samples required in a qualitative study. Selection of participant is done until data analysis reaches saturation point in which there is no new information gained (Merriam, 2009). In-depth interviews were carried out with the participants to gain data using the semi-structured protocol as the instrument. The semi-structured protocol resulted in higher confidence level for the researcher who was able to fully focus on subjects’ responses during the interviews as proposed by (Charmaz, 2006). The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and verified by the participants before being analyzed. Themes and sub-themes were established for every unit data found in the transcriptions as was suggested by Merriam (2009) when analyzing constant comparison.

In this study, the researcher employs three methods to ensure study reliability which are using interview protocol (Yin, 2009), reviewing interview transcriptions (Kvale, 2007) and doing inter rater reliability analysis (Creswell, 2007). Three evaluators were appointed to assess the study themes. The evaluators’ average agreement index (Kappa) for the established themes in the study is 0.87. This index value shows that the established themes and sub-themes in the study are highly agreed by all evaluators and highly reliable (Landis & Koch, 1977).

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1 Identifying Potential Leaders

Identifying potential leaders means identifying leaders-to-be among staff with the ability and interest to become leaders. The current leaders are responsible for this task, as mentioned by an institution’s leader, leaders know their staff best:

Being our subordinate, we already can assess, we can differentiate in a way. The difference between A and B, B and C. So from there, we already can analyse who we think we can groom. By doing this, we will be more focus with courses that are relevant to leadership.

The institution leaders are responsible in identifying and grooming potential leaders among the staff. This is as agreed by Brittingham (2009) study finding which is leadership succession plan requires commitment from the top management of the organisation. Generally, to identify the potential leaders, the current leaders just need to study the performance of the candidate when given a task, as mentioned by a college Director below:
That's based on what we say, the analysis made by the Director on the work that has been done all the while. Maybe we can see in terms of his commitment, dedication, responsibility, his vision, the way he worked... That will give us initial information.

The candidates’ performance is reflective of their commitment and responsibilities in undertaking certain tasks. Current leaders are able to identify these potential leaders based on their performance and willingness to accept responsibilities. This means that potential leaders are able and willing to assume responsibility as leaders. The interviews with the subjects revealed four aspects to be taken into account in identifying potential leaders. These are giving priority to current deputy leaders, making early identification, identifying competencies and declaring leaders-to-be.

4.1.1 Giving Priority to Current Deputy Directors

This finding shows that in identifying potential leaders, current Deputy leaders should be given priority. Those to be considered are those demonstrating effective leadership and willing to accept the post of the institution leader. Institutions should not take the risk of appointing individuals without leadership experience or individuals from outside of the institutions who do not understand the institutions’ culture. This finding is parallel with Rothwell (2010) study’s finding stating that the personality and skills of the current leaders are already known to those within the institution. Appointment of respected competent leaders from those in the institution will boost staff’s morale (Rothwell, 2010). Thus, competent Deputy Directors and willing to lead KPM should be given priority to be appointed as KPM Directors.

4.1.2 Making Early Identification

Candidates for leadership have to be identified early as leader grooming programmes could be started from the beginning. According to participants, early grooming allows for better experience and knowledge building for these potential leaders which indirectly leads to even better institution management.

To be a leader, you have to develop them early. Like say, to be a Director at the age of 50; it will be difficult to develop a person at the age of 40 or 50 as he already familiar with what he practiced for decades. But if we start early, starting from the Head of the Department; show them how to lead and assist them whenever needed. This means that from the beginning he might have become such a great leader, from the Head of Department, then on until he became a Deputy Director or a Director. Eventually, this will help the organization runs smoothly.

Late grooming, on the other hand, will result in candidates not being ready as they are no longer as responsive to new knowledge. Participants argued that once individuals are in the comfort zone, they are no longer willing to accept new responsibilities.

People do not want to get out of the comfort zone. They prefer to teach and to work from eight to five. That’s why we have to identify from the beginning. From my experience, those who are already in ten years of service, they already are in comfort zone. These people who are in comfort zone, when we want to appoint them, they always refused.

Therefore, it is necessary that current leaders make early identification to allow for grooming to start from the beginning as posited by Browne-Ferrigno (2007) where leadership preparation programmes are for potential leaders to understand leaders’ functions, higher confidence level and
willingness to become leaders. Late grooming will only result in potential leaders not ready to accept new responsibilities.

4.1.3 Identifying Competencies

Finding shows that potential leaders need to be identified to ensure that suitable grooming programmes can be given to increase needed competencies of these leaders-to-be. Competent candidates can be produced through the right grooming programmes as forwarded by both Rothwell (2010) and DuBrin (2013) whose opinion state that effective potential leaders are developed based on leadership competency model. Hence, an instrument or leadership competency model is needed to identify competencies in these potential leaders.

4.1.4 Declaring Leaders-to-be

It is evident from the interviews held that participants think that candidates are informed so as to allow them to be more prepared to assume leader posts. One participant stated below:

It will be good if we can inform the person our intention to groom him. So that he will be ready and willing to attend the development programmes. The person might say, what leadership programme, it’s not that I want to be a leader? Instead, we have to let him know, you are in the pool, our leadership pool, so these are the programmes. So he will be ready for the programme.

Declared candidates would be more willing to go through offered grooming programmes as these are preparation for becoming leaders. Candidates would also feel appreciated for having abilities to lead. Being trusted by their leaders, these leader candidates will strive to raise their self potential. In becoming leaders of institutions, candidates need time to prepare as there is much knowledge and skills to learn. Therefore, being informed early would allow them to be more ready to become leaders. Contradictory to this, according to Rothwell (2010), most American organisations do not inform their candidates. He argues that there are advantages and disadvantages to this. If informed, candidates would feel conceited and secure as they are promised higher posts. Candidates might no longer want to participate in the development programmes necessary to build their competencies. A worse repercussion is when other competent staff learning about this and feel discouraged. These competent staff most probably would seek another employment offering better opportunities. The benefit, however, according to Rothwell (2010) is that these potential leaders will become more motivated and willing to improve their existing competencies. They surely would not leave the organisations as they have been promised promotions.

4.2 Developing Quality Leaders

Existing leaders are responsible in grooming their staff. They must have the initiatives and be willing to groom future leaders with potential to succeed them. A college leader says the following:

As a capacity of a Director, as the head, the Director himself must take the initiative in the grooming process. Be it among the lecturers, heads of department, or Deputy Director; he personally took steps accordingly. In his mind, these people would replace him. He himself must be prepared.

It is existing leaders’ responsibility to develop the leadership traits amongst their staff. From the interviews done, it is found that there are three things vital for existing leaders to do, those are i)
giving trust to potential leaders; ii) sharing of knowledge; and iii) identifying suitable development programmes.

4.2.1 Giving Trust to Potential Leaders

Current leaders must trust the potential leaders; they must trust the potential leaders’ ability to lead. A college leader stated this:

You have to trust them. Credence to those who want to replace you. He must believe that these people, the successors, are capable of holding the position. So, when we have our trust, we begin to be thinking about what steps we should do to groom him, to give exposure.

Existing leaders must trust that each staff is talented. This talent is to be groomed as giving them the opportunity to lead allows them to build their leadership potentials. Talented staff with potentials must be identified early to be used as the organisation’s intellectual capital (Rothwell, 2010). In the succession plan itself, lateral movement within the organisation is necessary to ensure that experienced staff are given the opportunities to increase their skills and contribute to the organisation (Rothwell, 2010; DuBrin, 2013). Hence, existing leaders must trust talented staff for the benefits of the organisation.

4.2.2 Sharing of Knowledge

This study found out that existing leaders must share knowledge with potential leaders. As stated by a college leader who said this, “the Director himself must be ready to impart whatever skills, exposure or knowledge to the person who will succeed the post.” This finding is parallel with finding from study done by Caldwell et al. (2003) on teachers’ perception of school leadership which states that teachers favour leaders who share leadership with staff. Leaders share knowledge by coaching and training potential leaders. In coaching, experienced leaders can be appointed as mentor to new leaders (DuBrin, 2013). Knowledge sharing is important in ensuring potential leaders’ willingness to undertake leaders’ duty effectively.

4.2.3 Identifying Suitable Development Programme

This study discovered that existing leaders are responsible in identifying suitable leadership development programmes for potential leaders. According to DuBrin (2013), existing leaders are not only responsible to identify suitable development programmes to groom leaders-to-be, but they are also responsible in the identifying process and stimulating these leaders-to-be. Leadership preparation programmes assist leaders-to-be understand leaders’ function, boost their confidence level and willingness to become leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007). Programmes implemented must also be able to increase professionalism, competencies and personality of leaders-to-be. (Zaini et al., 2009). Thus, existing leaders must take the necessary measures to ensure that potential leaders are given the opportunity to undergo suitable programmes. This study has also identifies the development programmes that can be implemented to groom leadership among lecturers, Heads of Department and Deputy Directors.

a. Development Programme for Lecturers

Lecturers should also be given exposure to carry out leaders’ duties as this can groom their leadership potentials. As stated by Spendlove (2007), leadership development should start early so that success is built upward from below and not from the top. In the Acceleration Pool Model introduced by Byham (2002), potential leaders are given tasks beyond their scope of duties and
abilities to enable them to learn even higher skills. Leaders, however, must monitor their progress. Leaders need also to explain to lecturers the objectives of them being given certain tasks so that these lecturers are clear about leaders’ intention and not feel burdened by the given tasks.

Besides that, lecturers’ leadership can be groom by giving the responsibility to lead. They need to be given tasks suitable with their knowledge and experience. Lecturers given leadership responsibility will be more willing to assume leader posts as they have leadership experience. This lecturers’ development strategy is identical with the Succession Development Pathway introduced by Tan (2009). In this model, high performance staffs are given management level tasks such as leading certain new projects to increase their leadership skills.

This study also found out that duty rotating is another method to groom more leaders amongst the lecturers. This is aligned with Helton and Jackson (2007)’s view that organisations are responsible in developing more able successors through training and development programmes. Leaders must believe in giving opportunities to other lecturers to gain experience by undertaking certain tasks. These tasks should not always be given to the same people; sharing experience with other people not only allows for better results but also groom new talents.

b. Development Programmes for Heads of Department

Besides leading their own department, Heads of Department should be given responsibilities to lead other programmes in the institution. This finding is in line with DuBrin (2013)’s view that existing leaders are responsible in the identifying process and stimulating leaders-to-be. Experienced staffs need to be given opportunities to increase their skills and contribute to the organisation (Rothwell, 2010; DuBrin, 2013). Giving extra responsibilities to Heads of Department will allow them to lead with better confidence as they have more experience and knowledge.

This study also shows that Heads of Department require knowledge in order to be better leaders. This knowledge can be gained by taking up courses or networking with peers from other institutions. Among knowledge needed by Heads of Department is knowledge on leadership, human management and aspects of administration. Knowledge is the basis to become competent leaders as learned leaders are able to assist in decision making and problem solving (DuBrin, 2013).

c. Development Programmes for Deputy Directors

Deputy Directors must be given trust to carry out Directors’ duties. Given the trust, the Deputy Directors will be more confident to lead. They should also be given courses specific to their duties and roles as this will enable them to function even better as with the Leadership Program for Serving Heads (LPSH) programme implemented in England for existing leaders where training done in this programme focuses on leaders’ current duty needs (Bush, 2008). Financial management courses have been identified as much needed by the Deputy Directors in performing their duties well.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study shows that educational leaders play a vital role in developing its future leaders. The institution leaders are responsible for the development and formation of future leaders who can be groomed among the lecturers, Heads of Department and Deputy Directors. They must give trust to potential leaders, share knowledge and indentify suitable development programmes. Organisations’ leader successors must be continually identified in ensuring organisation’s excellence. To identify potential leaders, this study suggests that respected competent existing leaders are given the priority to be appointed as organisation leaders. Existing leaders from within the organisation knows...
the culture well and have experience leading the organisation. Similarly, organisations must make early identification of organisation leader successors so that suitable development programmes to increase their leadership competencies can be implemented. These leader successors should also be informed of the leadership development programmes’ objectives so that they are more ready to become leaders. Organisation leaders should share knowledge and give trust to potential leaders to lead. They are also responsible in ensuring that these potential leaders undergo suitable leadership development programmes. Institutions should prepare leaders’ projection needed for five to ten years ahead so that the leadership pool would be able to fill the expected vacancies. In conclusion, every organisation must have a strategic leadership succession plan to ensure a continued excellence.

References


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