

Best Practice of Individual Competences in Strategic Leadership among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools, Malaysia

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Abstract- The aim of the study is to investigate the best practice of Individual Competences in strategic leadership among principals of excellent secondary schools. The Model of Individual Competences of Strategic Leadership have been developed by Davies and Davies (2005, 2010), Preedy, Glatter & Wise (2007), Quong & Walker (2010), Nazifah (2012). The respondents of the study were thirty-six principals of excellent secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. The principals were asked to rate their practices using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - not at all, and, 5 - frequently. It is interesting to discover that the most frequent practices for the component of 'Restlessness' were represented by two items 'I always motivate members of the school organisation to continuously work hard for school excellence' and 'I always enlighten my desire to continuously increase my school development together with all members of the school organisation towards better level of excellence' with same mean score of 4.7778. The most frequent practice of Absorptive Capacity was 'I am always concerned with the latest information to increase my school excellence' with mean score 4.6111. The component of Adaptive Capacity highest score was item 'I am always ready to receive new ideas that can enhance the school excellence' with the mean score of 4.7222. The most frequent practice of Wisdom item 'I can tolerate the implementation of period of strategy but I am strict towards its achievement' with mean score of 4.7222. It is hope that the research conducted amongst the excellent secondary schools principals would provide valuable insights into the strategic development processes and approaches towards the realization of Vision 2020 and Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Index Terms- principals of excellent schools - organizational ability

Brief Biodata: The researcher is an Associate Professor at the Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. He possessed BA Hons. (Malaya), MA Education (London), and, PhD Education (Birmingham). His area of specialization and interest are Educational Leadership & Administration, Teacher Professionalism, and, History Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent years of globalization, most of the developed and the developing countries have put a deep focus in enhancing the education systems and institutions as these are seen to be the main contributor to their nation's development and wellbeing. The enhancement plays a pivotal role not only in allocating adequate and continuous manpower to different sectors of businesses and industries but more importantly in nurturing human capital with a wide range of knowledge and skills contributing to a quality output and productivity in every sector of the country. This is evident from the fact that educational institutions and system around the world continue to play significant roles in providing people with knowledge and skills through various academic programmes, modules, courses and curriculum with the objective of preparing sufficient workforce to support their nation's development agenda.

II. MODEL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCES OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The dimensions of Individual Competences in Strategic Leadership have been developed by Davies and Davies (2005, 2010), Preedy, Glatter & Wise (2007), Quong & Walker (2010), Nazifah (2012). The model suggests a framework for identifying the components of the strategic dimension for leadership development towards the successful programmes, activities, and, behaviours.

The following discussion identifies characteristics of individuals who are successfully undertaking a strategic leadership role or skill, based on individual competences:

2.1 Restlessness

Senge (1990) describes 'restlessness' as 'creative tension' which emerges from seeing clearly where one wishes to be, one's vision and facing the truth about one's current reality. Strategic leaders are able to envision the 'strategic leap' that an organisation wants to make, while acting as passionate advocates for change. Besides, strategic leaders have the ability to live with the reality that the organisational culture may not be as forward-thinking as they are. They have the ability to live with the ambiguity of not being able to change the organisation fast enough, with the ability to maintain the restlessness for change and improvement. In addition, individuals who are able to do this challenge current ideas and processes to seek better ideas and processes.

2.2 Absorptive capacity

According to Cohen and Levinthal (1990), absorptive capacity can be defined as the ability to absorb new information and assimilate it, learn from it and importantly, to apply it to new ends. Meanwhile, Hambrick (1989) argues that strategic leadership occurs in an environment embedded in ambiguity, complexity and information overload. It is important therefore for strategic leaders to recognise new information, analyse it and apply it to new outcomes; leaders need the ability to learn. In other words, strategic leaders should create an organisational context in which learning can take place. It is also important for the strategic leaders to filter out the unimportant and make sense of the important for themselves and their organisations. The critical nature of their position often means that their interpretation of reality determines patterns of action within the organisation.

2.3 Adaptive capacity

The 'adaptive capacity' has been defined by Black and Boal (1996) as the ability to change. Furthermore, Sanders (1998) supports this view that strategic leaders need the ability to change and learn through asserting that 'mastering chaos, complexity and change' requires new ways of 'seeing and thinking'. At the same time, Whittington (2010) suggests that 'leaders need an enduring sense of purpose and a continuous sense of motivation'. In an era of innovation and continuous learning, this is particularly important and may favour the emergent strategy or strategic intent approach. In addition, leaders position themselves to take significant opportunities as they adapt to new information in a responsive and proactive way. Leaders can adapt and lead new strategic directions for the organisation if they have cognitive flexibility linked to a mindset that welcomes and accepts change.

2.4 Leadership wisdom

Wisdom can be defined as the capacity to take the right action at the right time. Stenberg (2002) articulated that leaders need wisdom because they need creative abilities to come up with ideas and analytical abilities to decide whether ideas are good ideas. Apart from that, they need practical abilities to make their ideas functional and to convince others of the value of their ideas. In addition, they need wisdom to balance the effects of ideas on themselves, others and institutions in both the short and long run. Further, he established that for successful intelligence there is a need to combine practical intelligence, analytical intelligence and emotional intelligence. This provides an insightful and challenging set of criteria for leaders to develop in order to deploy strategic choices with wisdom and effectiveness. The quality of strategic leadership in the school is the central activity that facilitates and drives the strategic cycle of a strategically focused school. The framework that comprise of nine factors above is the pre-requisite for the development and enhancement of strategic leadership in schools (Davies & Davies, 2005).

Mohd. Bustaman (2007) in his paper sees a strategic leader as an individual who has organizational leadership responsibility and needs to represent that organization in the interaction with other organizations and individuals that compose the external environment. Strategic leaders must envision a desired future for

their organization and then direct the flow of internal and the influence of external events towards the goals or vision. For him, once the vision and mission has been clearly identified by the strategic leaders, the mission and vision must be communicated and transmitted accordingly to the rest of the organizations or the followers by persuasion and inspiration and not merely by the directive and policy statements. As presented by Leithwood et al. (2006), the National College for School Leadership has identified a set of four core leadership practices such as building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the teaching and learning programme.

Soucie (1994) viewed that the development and success of a school is in the hands of the school's principals, leader or administrator. In this sense, whatever they offer in terms of leadership will determine the level of success and accomplishment of the organisation. In other words, leadership is possibly the most important and essential skill that leaders in any organisation should have because they are perceived to be the causal agent for the success or failure of the organisation or educational setting.

In fact, the realization of the development plan was initiated and intimately related to the leadership competency of the schools' principals. Their roles are very complex because the changes which will be applied are various and difficult. They are required to be professional leaders who take appropriate strategies and action. In this study, the focus is on the analysis of principals' best practice on Individual Competences of Strategic Leadership.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to seek answer to the following questions:

1. What is the best Practice of Restlessness among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia?
2. What is the best Practice of Absorptive Capacity among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia?
3. What is the best Practice of Adaptive Capacity among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia?
4. What is the best Practice of Wisdom among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia?
5. What is the best practice of Individual Competences in Strategic Leadership among Principal of Excellent Secondary Schools, Malaysia?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, questionnaires have been used as a [research](#) instrument for the data collection purpose. Questionnaire was chosen because of its ability to survey a large sample in a short period of time at a lower cost is possible. Apart from that, this survey method is suitable for sensitive questions because the respondents' identity will be kept confidential and thus encouraging them to give honest responses (Sekaran, 2000). The questionnaire consists of two sections; Section A on the demographic profile of the respondents (type of school, gender, ethnic, age, position and experience) and Section B on the items

of individual competences of strategic leadership styles based on the model developed by Davies et al. (2005).

This study involves thirty-six principals as respondents who are educational leaders in the government excellent secondary schools. Prior to the data collection process, the application for permission to conduct the research was forwarded to the Director of Education, Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education, Malaysia by submitting a complete application form BPPDP 1 with the research proposal and survey instrument. Another application was also forwarded to the Selangor State Education Division upon receiving the approval letter from EPRD. Basically, it is very important to have these approvals as this study involves data collection from the selected government secondary schools.

The data collected from the survey was analysed using the most commonly used statistical software package in the social sciences which is the Statistical Package for Social Science

(SPSS) version 17.0. The data has been analysed using the descriptive analysis in order to discover the Individual Competences in strategic leadership practices among principals as perceived by themselves. The principals were asked to rate their practices using a five-point Likert Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently.

The results of the study are presented in the sections below.

V. RESULT OF THE STUDY

5.1 Best Practice of Restlessness among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia

Table 1 details out the answer scales given by the principals in responding to the practice of restlessness.

Table 1:
Principals' Practice of Restlessness as Perceived by the Principals (n=36)

Item	Mean SD	Scale	n	Percent (%)
<i>I always motivate members of the school organisation to continuously work hard for school excellence.</i>	4.7778	Fairly-often	8	22.2
	.42164	Frequently	28	77.8
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always enlighten my desire to continuously increase my school development together with all members of the school organisation towards better level of excellence.</i>	4.7778	Fairly-often	8	22.2
	.42164	Frequently	28	77.8
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always open room to all members of the school organisation to put forward their suggestion and comment in order to develop and increase efforts for school excellence.</i>	4.6944	Sometimes	1	2.8
	.52478	Fairly-often	9	25.0
		Frequently	26	72.2
		Total	36	100.0

SD: Standard Deviation

Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently

It is interesting to note that two items have similar score of mean, 4.7778 with the same value of standard deviation, 0.42164. In addition, the rating as identified by the principals also had no difference; with 77.8% (28) of them opted for 'frequently' and 22.2% (8) of them chose 'fairly-often'. From the result, it can be declared that the most frequent practices for the

component of restlessness are represented by both items *I always motivate members of the school organisation to continuously work hard for school excellence* and *I always enlighten my desire to continuously increase my school development together with all members of the school organisation towards better level of excellence*.

5.2 Best Practice of Absorptive among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia

Table 2 presents the best Practice of Absorptive among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia.

Table 2:
Principals' Practice of Absorptive Capacity as Perceived by the Principals (n=36)

Item	Mean SD	Scale	n	Percent (%)
<i>I am always concerned with the latest information to increase my school excellence.</i>	4.6111	Fairly-often	14	38.9
	.49441	Frequently	22	61.1
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always analyse the latest information received from various sources to increase my school achievement.</i>	4.4167	Sometimes	2	5.6
	.60356	Fairly-often	17	47.2

		Frequently	17	47.2
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always attempt to learn from previous mistakes.</i>	4.5833 .55420	Sometimes	1	2.8
		Fairly-often	13	36.1
		Frequently	22	61.1
		Total	36	100.0

SD: Standard Deviation

Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently

Table 2 shows that the most frequent practice was *I am always concerned with the latest information to increase my school excellence* with mean score of 4.6111 and standard deviation of 0.49441. 61.1% (22) of principals perceived this practice as ‘frequently’ and 38.9% (14) as ‘fairly-often’. The second most frequent practice was *I always attempt to learn from previous mistakes* with mean score of 4.5833 and standard deviation of 0.55420. It was rated as ‘frequently’ by 61.1% (22) of the principals and ‘fairly-often’ by 36.1% (13) of them. In addition, there were 2.8% (1) principals who identified the practice as ‘sometimes’.

5.3 Best Practice of Adaptive Capacity among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia

Table 3 presents the Best Practice of Adaptive Capacity among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia.

Table 3:
Principals’ Practice of Adaptive Capacity as Perceived by the Principals (n=36)

Item	Mean SD	Scale	n	Percent (%)
<i>I am capable of making important changes on strategies to enhance the school excellence.</i>	4.3333 .63246	Sometimes	3	8.3
		Fairly-often	18	50.0
		Frequently	15	41.7
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I am always ready to receive new ideas that can enhance the school excellence.</i>	4.7222 .45426	Fairly-often	10	27.8
		Frequently	26	72.2
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I am always flexible in enhancing the school excellence.</i>	4.5833 .60356	Sometimes	2	5.6
		Fairly-often	11	30.6
		Frequently	23	63.9
		Total	36	100.0

SD: Standard Deviation

Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently

Table 3 reveals the result for the component of adaptive capacity, the item *I am always ready to receive new ideas that can enhance the school excellence* is the best to be considered as the most frequent practice of this component. With the mean score of 4.7222 and standard deviation of 0.45426, the item was also discovered to have been rated with two answer scales by principals. There were 72.2% (26) of them who perceived the practice as ‘frequently’ and 27.8% (10) agreed with ‘fairly-often’. This is in contrast to the other two items which were rated by the three answer scale including ‘sometimes’. Such scenario gives an extra point of strength for the item as mentioned above to be declared as the most frequent practice of adaptive capacity among principals.

5.4 Best Practice of Wisdom among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia

Table 4 presents the Best Practice of **Wisdom** among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia.

Table 4:
Principals' Practice of Wisdom as Perceived by the Principals (n=36)

Item	Mean SD	Scale	n	Percent (%)
<i>I always demonstrate my intellectual wisdom.</i>	4.2500 .69179	Sometimes	5	13.9
		Fairly-often	17	47.2
		Frequently	14	38.9
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I am reasonable in balancing the individual interest of all members of the school organisation with school interest.</i>	4.5833 .55420	Sometimes	1	2.8
		Fairly-often	13	36.1
		Frequently	22	61.1
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I can tolerate the implementation of period of strategy but I am strict towards its achievement.</i>	4.7222 .45426	Fairly-often	10	27.8
		Frequently	26	72.2
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always hold on the values created together with the members of the school organisation.</i>	4.5833 .55420	Sometimes	1	2.8
		Fairly-often	13	36.1
		Frequently	22	61.1
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I always apply my knowledge for the benefit of the members of the school organisation and for school as a whole.</i>	4.5833 .55420	Sometimes	1	2.8
		Fairly-often	13	36.1
		Frequently	22	61.1
		Total	36	100.0

SD: Standard Deviation

Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently

Table 4 identifies, the component of wisdom is obviously supported by more number of items. If others are provided with three items, the component of wisdom is represented by five items. As shown in Table 4, there are three items which share similar mean score of 4.5833 with different value of standard deviation. However, those items were not perceived by the

principals as their most frequent practice of wisdom. The highest mean score of 4.7222 was contributed by the item *I can tolerate the implementation of period of strategy but I am strict towards its achievement*. This item was rated as 'frequently' by 72.2% (26) of the principals and perceived as 'fairly-often' by 27.8% (10) of them.

5.5 Best Practice of Outcome and Conformation among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia

Table 5 presents the best practice of Outcome and Conformation among Principals of Excellent Secondary Schools Malaysia.

Table 5:
Principals' Practice of Outcome and Conformation as Perceived by the Principals (n=36)

Item	Mean SD	Scale	N	Percent (%)
<i>I am confident that the school development depends most on the good collaboration among members of the school organisation and leaders.</i>	4.8333 .37796	Fairly-often	6	16.7
		Frequently	30	83.3
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I am confident that roles played by members of the school organisation help the leaders to guide towards the school development.</i>	4.8056 .40139	Fairly-often	7	19.4
		Frequently	29	80.6
		Total	36	100.0
<i>I am confident that collaboration among members of the school organisation at present has brought my school towards excellence for now and the future.</i>	4.7778 .42164	Fairly-often	8	22.2
		Frequently	28	77.8
		Total	36	100.0

SD: Standard Deviation

Scale: 1-Not at all, 2-Once in a while, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairly-often, 5-Frequently

With the purpose to give additional information on the principals' practice of strategic leadership, there were three other items rated by the principals as provided in the research instrument. As indicated in Table 5, the items are listed under 'Outcome and Conformation'. These items represent the level of confidence as practised by the principals on certain outcomes of strategic leadership towards school. As shown in Table 5, the highest mean score of 4.8333 was contributed by the item *I am confident that the school development depends most on the good collaboration among members of the school organisation and leaders*. With standard deviation of 0.37796, this item was rated by the principals as 'frequently' by 83.3% (30) and perceived as 'fairly-often' by 16.7% (6) of them.

VI. SUMMARY

From the analysis that has been presented, it can be concluded that the principals agreed that they have demonstrated all the nine components of strategic leadership with certain different levels of practice. In terms of individual characteristics, the most frequent practice is the component of restlessness with the highest mean score of 4.75. The mean scores of other components ranged from 4.537 to 4.5463. Taking the mean score as the comparison point, it is very clear that the component of restlessness can be represented as the most frequent principals' practice of strategic leadership as perceived by the principals. With more than 4.5 mean score, this is a strong indication that the component of restlessness was the most highly practised among the principals. In addition, the principals' practices are focused on motivating members in the school organisation to continuously work hard for the schools' excellence. Meanwhile, they expressed their desire to continuously increase the school development together with all the school members towards a better level of excellence. Apart from that, they were consistent in opening room to all members to put forward their suggestion and comment in order to develop and increase efforts for the school excellence.

In this regard, it is also worth to highlight that the findings of the study will trigger for further research in the field of strategic leadership, especially in discovering the component of restlessness which has been classified as the most outstanding element in this research. This is because restlessness has dominated not only most of the result of the principals' practices as perceived by the principals and senior assistants, but also in terms of the principals' effectiveness as indicated by both groups of respondents in the study.

Furthermore, for greater impact to the nation (especially in terms of NKRA for the education system) as indicated in the preceding section of the study, it is hoped that the findings of the study will serve as a crucial impetus for further research on the same subject but perhaps with a bigger sample of population such as selecting respondents from the secondary schools all over Malaysia. Likewise, for a more holistic view on the findings of the issue at hand, it is also recommended that further examination should be made in discovering the dominant components of strategic leadership practice and effectiveness among the principals in the different types of regular schools as well as the various excellent schools nationwide.

VII. CONCLUSION

The facts and the findings in the foregoing sections have brought to the conclusion that the principals' practice Individual Competences of strategic leadership in excellent secondary schools in Selangor are indeed at a very high level. The feedback given by the principals have indicated that all the components of the individual characteristics are already in place and this has contributed to the mean scores of above 4.0. It is true to say that the success of the education system, the school and the students are contributed by various parties such as the teachers, the parent-teacher association, the students efforts etc, it is still valid to say that the key success factor is also due to the strategic leadership upheld and practiced by most of the educational leaders in this field. The role of the principal is widely regarded as central for school improvement and enhanced student outcomes as a milestone towards the realization of Vision 2020 and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

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