

Cultural Leadership in Educational Organizations

¹Turgut Karakose and ²Ramazan Erdem

¹Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education,
Dumlupinar University, Kütahya, Turkey

²Department of Health Sciences, Firat University, Turkey

Abstract: The aim of the study is to discuss the importance of cultural leadership for educational organizations and to present some suggestions to school administrators about the management of school culture. For this purpose, the notion of “cultural leadership” is analyzed in connection with “school culture” and the roles of school administrators in cultural leadership are emphasized. As in all other organizations, there are some cultural values in educational organizations as well to lead their staff to institutional success by merging them around the mutual objectives. These values which are shared by both the staff and the students shape the behaviors of the individual. Every school has its own culture that distinguishes it from others. Schools with a strong culture, at the same time, secure a high regard in the society too. The strength of school culture is closely related with the leadership behavior of the school administrator; however, the primary prerequisite for administrators to undertake the cultural leadership is that the organizational culture should be manageable. Some management scientists argue that the components of culture are changeable and thus manageable. Since, culture is a system of changeable and manageable values, school administrators can achieve mutual objectives by merging the staff and the students around the cultural values of the school.

Key words: Cultural leadership, school culture, school administrator, school management

INTRODUCTION

In today's information age, there is a close correlation between the facts that societies can reach up to the level of civilization and that they become developed economically, technologically, socially and culturally. Societies can only raise their prosperity through such an attitude. Nevertheless, being developed only economically and technologically in today's world might not guarantee the happiness of an individual. There are some crucial cultural values that lead the individuals in a society to mutual objectives by enabling a civic spirit and these values carry out vital roles in attaining these objectives. The more strong the norms and cultural values in a society are, the higher the spirit of unity will be among the members of the society, which will enhance success. Therefore, no one can ignore the importance of cultural values and norms in the development of societies.

As in all other societies, there are some cultural values in educational organizations as well that affect the institutional success by merging the staff around the mutual objectives. While cultural values are affected by the behaviors of the staff at school, they also affect their behaviors in return. Therefore, every individual at school

have to behave according to cultural values and norms. If there is a solid organizational culture at a school, it will be easier for the staff and the students alike to act upon the objectives, because organizational culture contribute not only to achieving mutual behaviors in every individual and an environment of confidence, but also to an increase in the loyalty of both the staff and the students. If there is cooperation between the staff and the students at school depending on confidence, a concrete organizational culture is secured. It is at this point that the cultural leadership role of school administrators, who play the first fiddle, appears. As a cultural leader, a school administrator should strive for a strong organizational culture, for which an organizational culture that is not in conflict with social culture and accepted by both the staff and the students is crucial. In order for educational organizations to attain their objectives, the importance of cultural leadership should be grasped by school administrators. Here in this study, the importance of cultural leadership for educational organizations is emphasized and the strategies to be followed by school administrators while carrying out their leadership roles are discussed. It is hoped that it will be beneficial for school administrators and will contribute to the relevant domain.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Among the major factors constituting the social structure of an organization is cultural dimension. Every organization is shaped by the values and characteristics of the society it exists in; however, in time, it changes and develops these values and creates its own culture. In this respect, culture is a whole set of a nation's religion, moral values, law, intellectual and economic lives. It is the beliefs, learning styles, behaviors and mutual outcome of individuals who are also members of a society and thus it provides them with shared organizational thoughts and feelings (Naylor, 1996; Basaran, 1982; Moran and Vokwein, 1992).

On the other hand, everything people have had and done collectively and mutually can be considered within the frame of culture. However, it should also be accepted that every culture has different values and norms; that is, culture might show discrepancies among societies, because it is the basic characteristic distinguishing one organization or society from another. For example, something considered right or nice in a society might be considered wrong or rude in another (Eastwood *et al.*, 1999; Turan *et al.*, 2005; Bento, 1999).

When "organizational culture" is mentioned, a system of norms, behaviors, values, beliefs, habits that direct the behaviors of and are shared by the members of the organization, in short a collective outcome of its members, is understood. According to another definition, "organizational culture" is a whole set of norms and values that are supposed to be respected by the members of the organization willingly and that give the staff an opportunity to realize themselves and determine their beliefs, thoughts, perceptions and attitudes accordingly (Dincer, 1994; Tutar, 2000; Celik, 1997; Karsli, 2004).

"Organizational culture" is also defined as a system of values consisting of characteristic behaviors and norms that distinguish one organization from another. It is a tool that directly affects the operations of the organization, its relations with the environment and its success or failure in the market. Every organization is set up to realize certain objectives and in order to attain those objectives determined in advance, the staff is used as a tool. Therefore, if the motivation and job-satisfaction of the staff are affected negatively by the organizational culture, it will be hard to reach for ultimate success.

The components of organizational culture are the history of the organization, interaction within the organization, attitudes of its members, legends and myths that tell about the organization, traditions, ceremonies, customs, heroes and heroines, beliefs and values. These components transfer the beliefs and values of the organization to its members and, in time, form a pressure

on them to carry on according to the mutual objectives. Organizational culture changes in every organization, but it always performs crucial functions within the organizational environment by boosting the self-devotion of the members, securing healthy relations among them and thus by maintaining the continuity of the organization (Schein, 1992; Ouchi, 1989; Owens and Steinhoff, 1989; Basaran, 1982).

The objectives and rules of an organization, its relations with its shareholders, the opportunities it provides for its staff and its customers are some of the components of its own cultural structure. The results of the application of these will make the organization reliable and developed. Those organizations that have formed a concrete foundation for its organizational culture and have defined themselves clearly will be regarded highly by their members and their customers alike.

SCHOOL CULTURE AND MANAGEMENT

It is, without doubt, the cultural values that keep the members of a society united and lead them to mutual behaviors. The more they are adopted by its members, the more solid its unity, integrity and success will be. At the same time, cultural values are a means of social pressure and they also exist in the widest base of social structure: educational organizations (Yildirim, 2001).

In this context, school culture can be defined as the beliefs, norms, traditions and relations that arise from the relations of individuals at and out of school and that shape their attitudes and thoughts. In other words, it is a different kind of reflection of social culture onto the school. Every school has its own distinctive culture and it is a mirror for the mission and vision of the school (SEDL, 2000; Stolp, 1994).

In short, school culture can be expressed as concept made up of the values, norms and behaviors shared by the staff and the students. The culture that is dominant at school directs the attitudes and behaviors of the staff and the students and draws a line to determine the duties of individuals in the institution, thus enabling them to develop a mutual vision and act upon it. For this purpose, the school staff and the students should be managed and directed effectively to organizational aims.

Just as the cultures of societies might be different from one another, so might those of the schools; that is, every school has its own culture which differentiates one from another. Moreover, it can be argued that school culture is affected by social culture. The roles of administrators are vital in developing and managing the school culture as well as establishing it. As a cultural leader, school administrator should establish and manage a school culture that is parallel to the culture of the society he lives in.

For the teacher, whose basic duty is to transfer social culture to the student and to make him social, to perform his duty successfully, he should be well-acquainted with the cultural characteristics of the society he lives in. He should also know the characteristics, lifestyle, values and norms of his neighborhood (Erden, 2001). School culture is affected by the behaviors of its staff and students because social culture also shapes school culture. All the members of the school come out of the society, come to school and take part in this institution with all their characteristics; they affect school culture with their judgments and they are at the same time affected by the school culture by adopting it. In other words, there is a mutual interaction between social and school cultures.

For the school culture to be strong, the leadership attitude of the school administrator is crucial. The attitudes of the staff and the students might also be considered as a reflection of school culture. In those schools whose school culture is strong, there is strong respect and colleague-conscious among teachers (Furtwengler, 1986). In educational organizations, there are some cultural values that guide the behaviors of the staff and activate the individuals in accordance with the objectives of the school. The dominant culture at school captivates all the staff. The staff, after being affected by the cultural climate of the school, then becomes obliged to adapt its own behaviors to the behavioral mould and value judgments of the school. If the staff and the students counter-behave the school culture, they will naturally be excluded from the school community and, in a sense, be penalized. In order to make school culture functional, it should primarily be adopted by the school administrator and other staff members; otherwise, it will be very difficult to realize the objectives of the school.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S CULTURAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

In order for the administrators to undertake the role of cultural leadership, the prerequisite is that the organizational culture be manageable. Certain management scientists define culture as a natural system built through shared beliefs and values. Therefore, culture cannot be controlled; however, some management scientists argue the opposite. They claim that the components of culture are changeable and changeable components are manageable. In this context, the management of culture involves the process of re-establishment, transformation and perpetuation of a culture. In this sense, a leader can form, develop, manage a culture in an organization and guide the organization with cultural values through his individual characteristics (Sisman, 2002; Schein, 1997).

Since, culture is a system of changeable and manageable values, school administrators can achieve mutual objectives by merging the staff and students in the cultural values of the school. They can also guide their staff to the ultimate objectives by making use of the cultural values of the school. Here at this point arises the cultural leadership of school administrators who also perform the art of affecting and guiding people.

The major factor in the establishment of organizational culture is the leadership of the organization manager. The duty of the leader is to lead the staff to mutual objectives by adopting organizational values; that is, to merge the values with the organizational system. Indeed, leadership means effect; that is, the ability to affect the ideas and actions of the watchers (Peters and Waterman, 1995; Zaleznik, 1997; Matviuk, 2007; Albrecht, 1996). Again, one of the most important roles of a leader is to reassess the symbols and symbolic activities in order to make the organization more dynamic and to allow creativity and encouragement (Deal, 1995). When considered in terms of educational organizations, the school administrator, as an effective leader, should achieve mutual objectives by managing the available human and material resources in the light of the dominant culture at school.

Every school has its own distinctive organizational culture. Different cultures affect the function of organizational process, lifestyles and behaviors of the staff. There are some rules and behavior patterns that direct the functioning of the school and that are expected to be paid attention to by all the staff and students alike. These behavior patterns are accepted as tools in achieving organizational objectives and thus form the fundamental structure of school culture because they affect the feelings and thoughts of the staff.

It is difficult to define cultural leadership clearly. However, it can be expressed as the management of organizational culture that exists due to the effects of dynamic cultural values and the thoughts of individuals by a leader. Moreover, cultural leadership is the formation and perpetuation of the missions and objectives of the organization by a leader; it is the process in which the staff is affected by cultural values and norms (Tierney, 1992; Furtwengler, 1992; Beyer and Browning, 1999).

When considered with respect to educational organizations, cultural leadership can be defined as such: a process in which the staff is activated in line with the mutual objectives through shared ideas, beliefs, traditions and norms that form the school culture (Biggerstaff, 1992). In short, cultural leadership is to analyze the cultural values of the school meticulously and then to activate these values to enable the staff to realize both their own objectives and those of the school's.

Like the value judgments, moral rules, traditions and customs of the society, cultural values also affect every individual in every environment. Since administrators and teachers at educational organizations are also members of the society, they reflect the cultural values of the community they live in to the school (Unutkan, 1995). The perspectives, beliefs and value judgments of the individuals at school are all different from one another. As a cultural leader, the school administrator has a duty of integrating value judgments of individuals who are different from each other physically and psychologically with school culture and thus motivating them to the objectives.

A school administrator should be the best representative of school culture. Cultural values formed at school develop in the hands of school administrators who have the legal authority and are transferred to the other members. It is crucial in terms of cultural aspects that the school administrator should form values, norms and rules that will involve all the members will comply with the social culture and will not be in conflict with the legal functioning of the school. Whether a cultural leader will achieve success at school depends on to what extent he develops and perpetuates the cultural values at school. Therefore, as a cultural leader, the school administrator should pay attention to be a role model for his staff by presenting behaviors appropriate for the organizational culture dominant at school.

The cultural leadership of a school administrator is very important. The development of a dominant culture at school is directly related with the cultural leadership role of the school administrator. As an efficient cultural leader, the school administrator should strive for satisfying the individual and professional expectations of his staff and his students while taking certain ethic standards in to account in his behaviors. Indeed, the school administrator should turn the school into a learning organization by leading his staff and his students in individual learning. For this purpose, he should first encourage his staff to improve their knowledge, skills and abilities and motivate them in this regard.

There is a close relation between the formation of organizational culture at schools and the cultural leadership of the school administrator. As a cultural leader, school administrators should reshape his own school's culture in order to satisfy the needs of his teachers and students. They can manage the organizational culture by bringing about innovations and applications that are meaningful for their staff. For an efficient cultural leadership, a vision should be established that will affect everyone; a positive school climate should be formed through a fair system of reward

and punishment (Biggerstaff, 1992). As a cultural leader, the school administrator should urge his staff and his students to be well-informed about the history of the school and he should also enable school culture to be shared and perpetuated. In addition, in order to establish a strong organizational culture, he should also prepare and enforce a functional communication plan that explains the rules and behavior patterns at school. Thus, the staff and students at school can easily learn, adopt and follow these patterns.

Schools with a strong culture will at the same time be regarded highly in the society. For schools to be successful, school culture should be understood, improved and perpetuated. School administrator, as expected from them, should develop a culture that will boost the success of his staff and his students and integrate them around this culture (Cunnigham and Gresso, 1995).

The main objective of educational organizations is to bring up individuals in line with their own skills and to make them beneficial both to themselves, to the society they live in and ultimately to the whole humanity. While performing this function, educational organizations are affected directly by the culture of the society because schools, while educating the individuals in the society, also shape the society itself. Schools also have the responsibility to transfer the social culture to new generations. In order for the school administrator to perpetuate the cultural values shared in the society by adapting them into school environment, he should form a school culture that is consistent with the social culture. Here at this point, the cultural leadership role of the school administrators emerges. They should represent the school culture perfectly by adopting the social culture and universal values because this will urge the staff to act this way and thus contribute to the development of school culture. Therefore, it is crucial that school administrators carry out their cultural leadership roles successfully in educational organizations.

CONCLUSION

As a result, the primary responsibility for the establishment and development of school culture is the administrators'. A school administrator should form a functional school culture consistent with the social culture. He should also lead to developing and perpetuating the available cultural values in the organization and pay attention to motivating the staff towards the organizational objectives. Moreover, he should try to adapt the cultural characteristics of the society to his school. In this context, he should make his

staff and his students acquainted with the cultural characteristics, values and norms of the society. The staffs who are furnished with the cultural values of the society, by grasping the relation between the social values, norms and the cultural structure of the school will act accordingly. Besides, as a cultural leader, a school administrator should be able to turn his institution into a learning organization, which is only possible via learning individuals. Therefore, he should be a good role model in individual learning for the whole staff and his students.

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