

Who is a school leader?

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Abstract

School leadership models in India are hierarchical and either vertical or Horizontal. The power flows from top to bottom. This approach hinders the autonomy of the Teaching fraternity and creativity of students. Leadership role of the Indian school ought to be transformed to a 'synchronizing' force and expected to act as 'facilitator' of change. School leader, should have a silver lining of academic leadership who can really contribute in Curricular and Co-Curricular activities of the Educational Institution rather than playing the role of Manager or Administrator. Let us understand the perspectives and paradigms of school leadership in India and develop a pragmatic, proactive and result oriented unconventional academic leadership for Indian schools.

Keywords: Pragmatic, Participatory, Ownership, Collective Wisdom, Academizing, Collaborative

Introduction

Often we see birds in flock flying in the sky and we find it difficult to identify the Leader! The Leading role among the flock very often changes by the ablest racing bird. Did we ever acknowledge shifting or transferring of leadership roles whenever we are in such roles? We ought to strategize the same while we prepare to become a Leader and less defined about Leadership theories is better. An attempt has been made through this paper to understand existing School Leadership models in India and to further expound a paradigm shift in School Leadership models from the rich experiences of a practicing School Leader.

Gateway to world knowledge

India is becoming young as it is a home to 19% of the world children and holding largest number of youngsters with a population of 356 million in 10-24 years old. The scenario is like never before and never again likely to be huge potential for economic and social progress. In India Secondary education is considered as a gateway to world knowledge and vital link between elementary and higher education[1]. Increasing access to quality School education has assumed the priority of the Union government with the bringing the Right Education Act. The RTE act is intended to build strong foundation in education. To nurture the vast human potential to human excellence the government of India through one of its flagship programme, *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)* pushed a whopping target of achieving Universal access to Secondary Education by 2017 and scaling universal retention by 2020[2]. RMSA was launched in March, 2009 with the objective to enhance access to secondary education and to improve its quality[3]. Further it proposed to focus on improving the quality of Secondary Education by strengthening the School Leadership. National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA) on close collaboration with National College of School Leadership, Nottingham, United Kingdom launched, India Education & Research Initiative (UKIERI) programme for developing National Centre for School Leadership (NCSL) at NUEPA for capacity building of School Leaders on mass scale[4]. The NCSL is engaged with "capturing the existing gap in the Leadership development and evolving a framework on School Leadership to be institutionalized by different states". It is a repository centre in the area of Leadership and governance in School education.

Leadership practices

Leadership plays a vital role in initiating, maintaining and improving the effective School. Predominantly Leadership models in India are a mix of contemporary world Leadership practices. They are neither evolved nor developed from its age old Indian ethos, values and conventions. The Leadership practices in India are adopted or adapted from the various governing models of developed countries. Such models are broadly catering to the needs of only corporate or private educational institutions. These models are profoundly market driven and not fulfilling

the true educational values, ethics and goals. Broadly there are three Leadership models; authoritative, participative and laissez-faire. We find in India authoritarian models of governance or top down approach of bureaucratic hierarchy in Union and State governments percolated to School organizations. As such top down approach is detrimental to Indian Schools at large. Participatory Leadership model is appropriate to Indian School system. The participatory Leadership is a paradigm based on respect and engagement. It harnesses diversity, builds community, creates shared responsibility for action. It is a bottom up approach and management by trust. It is a motivation through engagement and ownership and everybody acts as a Leader because they are motivated to do so by feelings of personal responsibility and it gives promising avenue to explore.[5] People are less competitive and more collaborative when they are working on joint goals. School Leaders need to adopt participatory forms of Leadership that are more consultative open and democratic involving stakeholders.

Dimensions of leadership

There are six dimensions of **Participatory Leadership**. They are as follows:

1. "Participation in work decisions: Characterized as formal, long-term and direct participation. The content in this dimension focuses on work, e.g. task distribution, organizational methods of the task.
2. Consultative participation: Same to the previous one except it has lower level of influence in decision-making.
3. Short-term participation: Employees' participation is temporary, ranges from sessions of several hours to campaigns of several days. It is recognized as formal and direct.
4. Informal participation: Could happen in interpersonal relationships between employers and employees. Usually no fixed rules and specific contents are decided in advance.
5. Employee ownership: Formal and indirect participation. Although subordinates have the chance to participate in decision-making, usually the typical employees cannot.
6. Representative participation: Measured as formal and indirect. In organizations, the degree of the influence is medium as representatives playing a role that mediate between typical employees and superior"[6].

Teacher- a second rank leader

School head is prime mover and adds value to the resources of the School. There is a huge Leadership appeal among Indian School system. The state run Schools in India are considered to be less productive as their roles are not defined, no accountability, no sense of Leadership and no targeted achievement. Schools are organized hierarchically and organization centric with rules, procedures and structures that facilitate certain kind of Leadership and inhibit others. We find School administrators or functional managers coming either through a formal recruitment process or by promotion. There is no any other mode of developing School Leadership within the Indian School system. In a School system teacher is a Leader while in the classroom but they are put outside the ambit of School administration as long as he continues to be a teacher. Apart from the School Leader the hierarchical front line Leader is only the senior most teacher on the roll. A leader in waiting awaits for his turn to exercise power and position! There is no any mechanism to do away such traditional preference where school head is only considered as school head and all his team members as followers. There is hardly any attempt by the school head towards his/her team and teacher by himself/herself on the concept of learning to lead. Only few sensible and proactive Leaders out of their commitment and faith in democratic Leadership extol and empower the entire team for making frontline Leaders. It is observed with regret that the teachers' talent is less explored and hardly experimented by the School Leadership in institution building process. They are confined to the academic or curricular activities of teaching-learning and evaluation. As such their potential and exposure has been systematically dwarfed. A teacher role cannot be limited to classroom transaction or teaching-learning domain. Equally important is his/her role for integrated development of the entire School plant. School to become a learning organization, there is a need to put in place a system and process to remove the mental blocks and mindset of teacher. Thus the term 'teacher' needs to be designated as Academic Leader. A built in system at School level has to be developed by giving wide exposure in School management cycle where a teacher can imbibe Leadership skills effectively and efficiently. Thus there is urgent need of paradigm shift and elevation of teacher from academic instructor to School Leader.

School autonomy

Presently School heads are trained or equipped to the level of operational planning of their schools i.e. an *ad hoc* planning for 1-2 years. They are hardly conversant with strategic plan which would last for 3-5 years and not to talk of their ability in futuristic plan of their school for a span of 5-15 years. School is expected to plan educational philosophy of the School. It is often said; “vision without action is day dream, action without vision is nightmare”. Indian School Leadership is known for horizontal development where competencies are transmitted. Ordinarily Schools’ vision, mission and goals are formulated by the School heads or executive heads of the organization. Such, vision at best command compliance but not commitment. We see typical Leadership styles in Schools where institutional planning, execution and evaluation are carried by the School head or school organization and the role of the teacher is to implement the framework in letter and spirit. The irony is that so far curriculum frame work and National program design is on system level attention not at School level. Increased School autonomy and greater focus on Schools have made it essential to reconsider the role of School Leaders. Institutional plan has to be prepared through participatory methods. Leader of the institution has to develop frontline Leadership through delegation of powers and inducting them in decision making process. Institution can prepare shared vision and Kaizen goals (short term goals) with phase wise review and follow up actions. A year calendar with action plan can be prepared with direct participation of Students, teachers and parents and such plan has to be kept on display on the very first day of academic year to avoid any eleventh hour instructions and directions from the Leader for the rest of the academic year. A comprehensive participatory academic plan will help the institution to optimally utilize the potential, interests and collective wisdom of teachers for acadamizingthe School.

Best School comes from diversity. Futuristic School respects all kinds of life reforms, Valuing people and freedom to be able to live without fear. School Leader of 21st century must be well equipped in crisis management, articulate in re Schooling and de Schooling logistic, digitally associated with network society, entrepreneurship models, and virtual Schools. A major thrust of School Leadership is to transform School into a productive learning organization. To meet the dynamics of complexities of 21st century School culture, the School Leader ought to be people oriented personality and believe in child uniqueness. The Schoolhead must be capable of learning to build and lead teams to organize effective School. School improvement is a long-term, incremental, evolving and painstaking process. A vision of a School in 2025 looks like; where the roles of all the parents and teachers are defined. Teachers are facilitators and are facilitating from home virtually by activities based on learning by doing. Space and time are no longer constraints to learning. The student of 2025 is a global citizen and ready to face the world. Hence School as an organization has to consider the changes taking place in the socio-economic context. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the School Leader to affect the requisite change [7]. It is aptly said, “some of the most important innovations of coming decades will not be new technologies. But new ways of working together that are made possible by these new technologies” [8].

Conclusion

A country of its size a single Leadership model would be counterproductive. Better Schools are evolved when best practices are followed. Successful models of School Leadership need to be synergized or subsumed and School Leadership models representing Cultural, geographical diversities of India are to be developed. [9] New Curriculum framework, need to be designed, on autonomy & Accountability for aspiring School Leaders. To meet the emerging challenges of 21st century i- generation or digital naturals, the Leader of the School must be well trained on the art of participatory Leadership. The government may plan capacity building to School Leaders on mass scale with a greater focus on collective Leadership which can be network centric, participative and collaborative models including transfer of developmental ownership to the individual. There is a scope for innovation in Leadership development methods and shift of focus from system level reform to School level activities. Indianness both in uniqueness and identity harmonizing Indian Culture and Tradition with Information and Communication Technology would give high-end results. While accepting development and change let us not impose old frameworks on new realities.

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