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## THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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### Abstract

*The success of every organization or institution relies heavily on the skillfulness of the leaders and managers anchoring the administration of such entity. Leadership is quite a herculean task which requires special trainings and updated skills in order to effectively govern both human and non-human resources of the institution. The school system, especially secondary schools, in the twenty-first century is quite different from the past centuries. Trends such as technology explosion, globalization, demographic changes, rising enrolment, knowledge-based economy, pressure for accountability coupled with call for value-based learning and financial constraints necessitate diversification of management strategies from the principals to administrators in order to achieve the stated goals and objectives of the school. The school is not an end in itself and purposely established to serve the society, principals have to brace up to acquire new strategies, and update their skills so that the schools will cope with the need of the contemporary society. For this reason, the principals have to be informed and updated on what they need to do in the school as the 'father' of the house. This paper, therefore, tries to reposition school*



*leaders' role from traditional notion to a more holistic and innovative conception in order to enhance the stratagem of both practicing and aspiring principals.*

## **Keywords**

Principal, Secondary School, Leadership, Learning Community

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of leadership is a very vital component, and an important factor in an organization not only because it determines the culture and climate of the institution, but the progress and success of the organization revolves around its functionality. Different studies have confirmed the fact that the leadership of an organization determines employees' organizational commitment, behavior, culture and value as well as performance and job satisfaction. Tsai (2011) finds out that there is relationship between leadership behavior, employees behavior and job satisfaction. Krapfl, J.E. and Kruja, B. (2015) also affirm that leadership culture has direct influence on organizational culture. This is corroborated by (Madanchian, Hussein, Noordin, & Taherdoost, 2017) who discover that organization outcome is subject to leadership effectiveness. Thus, the primacy of leadership in the organization is established.

In a citadel of learning especially secondary school, the roles of the principals cannot be undermined. Principals serve as the 'captain of the boat' or 'father of the house' in the schools. Their functions centre on all aspects of the school system; that is why they have been described with different names and accolades. They are referred to as strategic problem solvers, educators, leaders, managers, politicians, cultural leaders, supervisors, barterers, advocators, servant leaders, learning leaders, etc. (Sergiovvani, 2014; Mathew & Crow, 2010; Norton & Kelly, 2013, Moodly & Toni, 2015).

Preponderance of principal's job titles stems from the responsibilities or roles that are expected from him as a school head and administrator. It also arises from the expectations that the society places on the school as an institution as well as a preserver and transmitter of societal norms and values. Thus, the word 'principalship' is viewed and defined in two perspectives: traditional and modern. The traditional approach of describing principalship sees principal as the administrator, whose function is to run the school activities smoothly and effectively (Sergiovvani 2014). Hence, the effective principals perform POSDCoRB functions (Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Coordinating, Reporting and Budgeting). The function of a principal from this traditional perspective is practically bureaucratic, managerial and leader-centered.



The modern view of principalship is somehow different from the traditional conception. Principalship is defined on outcome-based, value-based and standard-based perceptions. It is all about what the school or students achieve. By this gauge, the process towards achieving the outcome is less considered, but the utmost priority is the outcome. The school principal's function is to meet the stated values and standard set for the school through different indicators. The standards expected from the school then become the yardsticks, criteria and benchmark upon which the school success is determined.

The modern (post modernism) definition then reminds the principal that their functions and responsibilities are determined by the outcome of their school in fulfilling the needs of the society. The contemporary society of twenty-first century is different from the nineteenth and twenty centuries. It is a society that is experiencing waves of changes such as information and technology explosion, globalization, cultural and demographic diversity, postindustrial challenges, egalitarianism and democracy. Hence the demands, needs and aspirations of the society regarding what the outcome of the school be, have changed. There is now a total shift from the industrial to a postindustrial, production to knowledge-based economies in the world; hence, the school is expected to change from theoretical-based to practical based learning and regional or national to global inclination.

The world of work is now more substantially complex, denies extremely formality, isolation and stringent division of labour. It rather demands non-routine, collaboration and multiple role work. Thus the society does not longer reckon with 'excellent bookish students' but rather innovators, problem solvers, collaborators, critical, creative and entrepreneurial students.

Based on this, for the school to surmount these challenges, the roles and functions of principals in this century cannot be the same like the past decades. The principals 'can no longer function as building managers, tasked with adhering with rules, carrying out regulations, and avoiding mistakes' (Wallace foundation, 2012, p.4).

This paper, therefore, peruses what the roles and functions of principals should be in the twenty-first century in order to actualize the aspirations and yearnings of the contemporary society.

### **1.1 Evolution of Principal Ship**

The history of formal administration and management of organization, including school administration, can be traced back to 19<sup>th</sup> century and this was at the beginning of classical management theory (Knott & Miller, 1987). Organization, administration and supervision of

education prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically 18<sup>th</sup> century were saddled under professionally unskilled men in the community. The term *principal* surfaced around 1838, but was not formally used as the name of school guardian until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brown, 2005).

It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the term ‘principal’ was used in America for the supervisory head of the school. The reason for its recognition was due to increase in the number of students attending elementary and secondary schools, rapid growth of cities, grading of the schools, and designation of school activities under a single head (Berry & Beach, 2009; Pierce, 1935; Whitehead, Boschee & Decker, 2013).

The advent of scientific management theory in 1920 by Frederick Taylor changed the outlook of school organization and management practices. Instead of management based on intuition, experience and common sense that pervaded school and organization administration, Frederick Taylor suggested scientific way as the best way to ensure efficiency of work (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). In order ‘to effectively manage record keeping, teacher meetings, plant management, and curriculum, among others, principals were expected to provide the leadership utilizing methods of scientific management’ (Whitehead et al., 2013, p.35).

Taylor being an engineer observed that most workers performed below their ability and capability, he then suggested *soldiering* in term of setting rules and standard, functional supervision, management cooperation and incentive systems as the best way to correct the anomaly.

Like Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Luther Gulick and Max Weber also believe that effective administration is the best way of enhancing workers’ performance. Hence, Fayol (1916) identifies seven administrative functions of every manager which are: Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, Budgeting (POSDCoRB). Max Weber as well postulates bureaucratic system where there is strict chain of command, hierarchy of authority, division of labor, rules, policies and procedures, and absence of impersonality or favoritism as effective management technique (Boone & Bowen, 1987). By implementing these theories, the principal then acts as an executive, a supervisor, an organizer, a boss, a professional (Whitehead, et al, 2013).

However as lofty as this theory and strategy, it could not achieve a maximum outcome for the school. The reason for this is that by using this theory, the principal commands obedience and demands maximum performance by exhibiting bureaucratic and personal authority. By applying bureaucratic authority, there are set of rules, regulations, instructions and guidelines

that teachers in the school are strictly expected to abide by, and any attempt to deviate from such procedure will lead to negative consequences for such a teacher. The bureaucratic authority strictly requires formality, standardization and strict convention in the school.

Personal authority, on the other hand is exhibited when the principal commands obedience and compliance through human relation but in form of fulfilling teachers' needs when they fully meet the work demand. Both bureaucratic and personal authorities only endear extrinsic motivation from the staff. The teachers respond and perform as expected and no extra performance and commitment are put into the service. This is because the principle only causes teachers to respond to external stimuli not internal stimuli. They are only responding to rules and as a result turn to *subordinates* not *followers*.

Subordinates respond only to external authority whereas followers respond to ideas, values, beliefs, and purposes (Sergiovanni, 2014). The principle also fails by comparing interaction in the school with industry which mostly deals with machines. Hence, the strict standardization and formality advocated could not lead to efficiency in the school as there is bound to be a closer inter relationship between the administrators, teachers and students to achieve school multiple goals.

As 1920 to 1930s passed with the classical theory being applied in the organizations and school as well, the 1940s world war brought a dramatic change to the management systems.

War production pulled America out of the great depression, and women were needed to replace men who had gone off to war, and so the first exodus of women from the home to the workplace began. After the war, the men returned, having seen the rest of the world. No longer was the family farm an ideal: no longer would blacks accept lesser status. The GI Bill allowed men than ever before to get a college education. Women had to give up their jobs to the returning men, but they had tasted independence (Whitehead et al., 2013, p. 37).

Thus, freedom or independence was the mantra of the day during this period; hence leaders could not continue to hold on to 'the Great-man theory' or autocratic rule of the past. There was a demand for a management who is not only 'job oriented' but also 'human oriented'. Based on this, human relation approach to organizational efficiency came on board. Theories such as Elton Mayo of the famous Hawthorne studies, Kurt Lewin's field theory, Charles Barnaba's theory of authority, Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation, Douglas McGregor's

theory X and Y, Herzberg's motivation and hygiene factors theory etc. which consider human factor in administration emanated.

By applying human relation theory, the principal of the school then became a democratic leader and public relation representative. Up to 1970, the principals' major role centred on human relation but in conjunction with being community leaders. The principal, during the period, was expected to strengthen relationship between the school and the community. This was because post war America saw communities trying to rebuild themselves, often around their schools (Matthews, 2010). Leadership, therefore, was seen as a service rather than other thing else. With this, moral and ethical leadership such as Green leaf's (1970) servant leadership, Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theories portrayed leadership as a service to humanity.

The function of the principal in 1980s shifted from managerial and administrative to instructional function. The reason being that there appeared to be poor performance in American education, hence, there was the need for improvement of both teaching and learning in the school (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The principals' major role in the school was to improve teachers' efficiency with a view to achieving excellent school performance. The school principal then became an instructional leader, a change agent, a problem solver and resource provider.

1990s was postindustrial era when school was looked upon to bridge the social injustice in the society. The school was expected to provide education to all children no matter their socio-economic background or academic abilities (Mathews & Crow, 2010). The principals could then be described as a social architect, moral agent and an educator (Whitehead et al, 2013).

## **2. The Principalship in the Twenty-First Century**

The twenty-first century is the era of globalized world which ushers in a dramatic change in the society and the world at large. It is era of technological explosion, which affects every facet of human life and endeavor. It changes the way people think, talk and relate. It also affects every country's outlook and aspirations. Most countries shift from being production-based (P-economy) to knowledge-based economy (K-economy). The shift then calls for acquisition of knowledge through the new technologies and innovations in order to facilitate economic growth. Thus, the society demands for soft skills from the school which are the requirements of available jobs.

In addition to this, the twenty-first century is an era of 'human right' where 'right' becomes slogan of all and sundry. The schools are, therefore held accountable for student's

excellent achievement ever than before. Based on this, it is incumbent on the school to look for a way of tending to the societal needs at this period. To do this, principals need to be aware of what is expected of them in this era in order to successfully administer the school. Their roles in the school cannot continue to be like the past. They have to make a shift.

### **2.1 There is a Need for Paradigm Shift in Administrative Strategy**

The successful principal in the twenty-first century will be the one that shifts from being ‘principal leader’ to ‘servant leader’. Instead of adopting bureaucratic and psychological authority, the principal should employ moral authority. By being servant leader, the principal sees his position as a service to humanity. He sees himself as a servant to his followers. In doing so, the principal will be highly committed to the shared values and purposes of the school rather than his own personal ego. He renders selfless service to the students, teachers and parents. In return for this, he will get total commitment of his staff.

Likewise, twenty-first century requires a paradigm shift from ‘power over’ to ‘power with’ management strategy. Power over is the traditional method used by the principal in the past which necessitates dominance and coercion to achieve compliance. However, things have changed. Instead of ‘power over’, there is need to employ a ‘power with’ strategy. By the latter, the principal encourages collaboration, participation, co-creative power and distributed leadership. The former turns the staff to subordinates, who only have to comply with the leaders’ prescription and rules, and the jobs get executed while the latter turns the staff to followers, who respond to leader’s ideas, initiation, and the jobs get well executed. In essence, the complexity of today’s society where freedom is at the fore front, it is required of a principal to turn staff to followers who only respond to ideas and ideals. This will lead to sharing of leadership or distributed leadership. Principal can do this by adopting the principle of enablement and investment. By enablement, the principals provide training as well as supportive skills for the staff, while by investment the staff are allowed to act as leaders and practically through effective delegation.

### **2.2 Paradigm Shift in Pedagogical Strategy**

The twenty-first century is an era of information technology breakthrough. The school cannot be oblivious of the importance of technology in the instructional process. In order to make school cope with the current trends regarding technology, the principal has to infuse the use of technology in the vision and goal of the school, use technology in his administrative process by communicating staff, parents and students through e-mail, WhatsApp, listserv,



websites and other social media. The principal can also use google-app calendar for the school, and this will make it easier for the staff to post information and make comments as well.

As principal effectively uses technology in the school, staff and parents' meetings, the culture will be gradually transferred to other stakeholders in the school. Apart from this, principal should also support technology by providing necessary technological tools for the staff. The principal as technology leader should supervise how the teachers use technology to teach students, monitor and access students' data and key in students' grade. To effectively perform this function, the principal has to ensure he attends and presents papers in local and international technology conferences, participates in training sessions on the use and application of new educational technology, and finally provides technology training opportunities for the staff.

In conjunction with the use of technology for pedagogical process, the pedagogical method in the school as well needs to be shifted from the one which turns students to passive receivers to the one in which students are 'givers' and 'active'. To do this, Socratic method in which students are trained to think critically is important. The school learning activities also should be an interactive session between the teacher and students, students and students, where students are able to raise their view and idea without fear of being 'crucified'. This method will foster students' collaborative, critical thinking, cooperative and team work skills. Through the use of technology, the teachers have to create a learning environment which takes students out of the four-wall of their classroom to the vast world of divergent opportunities. All these are possible when the principal truly serves as a technology leader.

### **2.3 The Principal needs more Active Participation in the Community Affairs**

The school is not an ivory tower. It is operating under the influence of some visible and invisible power; the community where the school operates is inclusive. The community has both direct and indirect influences on all facets of the school activities. In the twenty-first century, the society is more serious with school accountability and progress. The principal cannot be apolitical like in the past, but must engage in social politics for the purpose of school growth and development. By doing this, it means the principal understands the influence of multiple powers outside the school which dictates and determines the success of the principal's administration.

The principal, therefore, has to bridge the power gap by ensuring that all stakeholders outside the school are carried along. The parents and the community where the school resides have to be considered in every school decision. Homogeneity and variation that exist in the community have to be also respected. The principal has to build coalition with parents by



censoring their views in the school decision making and seek their financial support for the upliftment of the school.

In the recent times, the media and professional bodies determine the image of the school; the principal therefore should maintain a good rapport with them. To garner resources for the school, the principal cannot do without the support of the ruling political system. Rather than operating closed systems, the principal should develop strategic ways of influencing the political gladiators in supporting the cause of the school. Maintaining ivory tower like the past is at the detriment of the school progress, hence the principal in the twenty-first century, has to brace up to ensure he gathers support of the society, parents, political institution, media and professional organizations.

To bridge school-community relationship, principal has to create a well-planned public relation programme. This programme will provide public education for the community, serve as image makers of the school, build school -parent relationship, communicate effectively with the community on the success, reform and needs of the school. As the principal stretches out to the community, there is a need to learn more how to handle conflict and criticism as these are bound to ensue, likewise how to initiate and implement change as the symbiotic relationship will necessitate that. Finally there should be up to date evaluation of the programme to determine the success or otherwise of the activities.

#### **2.4 There is a Need for Creation of Professional Learning Community**

In this era of administrative complexity, the school is in need of professional learning community rather than the sole instructional leader available in the past. Professional learning community school is the one where the principal and the teachers collaborate formally and informally to learn with, and from one another in order to help all students achieve and succeed in the school (Matthews & Crow, 2010).

The purpose of fostering professional learning community in the school is to achieve excellent student's achievement which can only be done in a fluid and flexible environment. Carpenter (2015) identifies the following features of professional learning community: shared purpose and values, collaborative culture, collective inquiry, continuous improvement and shared leadership. Research has revealed that principals do not have direct influence on students' learning but indirect effect and this is through the influence on the school leaders and teachers. Thus, the role of the principal as the sole instructional leader is replaced with the professional



learning community. Hence the principal also becomes a learning-leader (Norton & Kelly, 2013).

As a learning leader, the principal becomes a mentor, facilitator who provides advice, lends support and asks poignant questions, which all tend to foster a professional learning community. With this, therefore, ‘students were not considered as the responsibility of any individual, rather all teachers accepted responsibility for those students not learning by taking action to correct it’(Norton & Kelly, 2013, p. 136).

By turning the school to a professional learning community, the principal creates teams, which consist of considerable number of teachers in the same discipline or course, and these teams are responsible for the excellent performance of the students according to the benchmark. Instead of the principal being the sole instructional leader, the function is shifted to the team. The second tier of the team may comprise other members, who are the school administrative members. The latter comes in when the former could not find solution to the problems of any student or group of students in the school. In essence, supervision and monitoring of students’ academic performance becomes a responsibility of the whole teachers and administrators, while the principal just acts as a facilitator.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the fact that leading a school in the twenty-first century is quite a complex task, and different from the past century as many factors have brought a dramatic change in the contemporary society. As the need and yearning of the society change, it is compulsory for the school to change its content of study as well as process of study to match the contemporary need of the community it serves. This task lies on the principal, who leads and guides teachers towards realizing the school vision and mission.

The authors have carefully explored the evolution of principalship with the aim of scrutinizing the historical antecedent in order to arrive at the best practices that can enable the school leaders to meet the challenges of today’s changing society. Finally, the authors analyze the tasks that the principals ought to implement in order to cope with the changing society.

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