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Qualifications of School Principles in Terms Corporate Communication[2]

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Abstract

Management of schools as institutions, that save required skills in order to keep pace with the changing and evolving world, is a critical concern. So school principals are accepted as one of the most important and effective primary elements in fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to schools. Principals play an important role in motivating teachers, students and parents; in merging them around organizational goals and most importantly in improving the teaching-learning process. While ensuring that motivation and coordination within the school, skills of principals related to managing corporate communication process are accepted as a decisive factor. Because in organizations, coordination is only possible through communication. In this concept, the importance of corporate communication skills of principals is referred in this study. This study was made based on qualitative research model and designed to evaluate communication skills of school principals' according to teachers' opinions. Teachers from 11 schools in 6 cities of regions were included in the sample.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, School Management, Administrator's Qualifications

1. Introduction

Changes that makes educational systems more complex and competitive is also causes a change on expectations and needs of educational organizations. Therefore, educational organizations, like all organizations, also want to have active principals who can meet these requirements. School principals are very important in terms of school effectiveness and efficiency. Because school principals' skills and knowledge are decisive in planning and directing the change for school's future (Garies ve Tschannen-Moran,2005). At this point, the principals' qualifications are focused on and their effects on school achievement come on the agenda.

Until the 1970s, the principal's job was quite clearly, although narrowly, defined: principals served as building managers and student disciplinarians. During the 1970s, their roles began evolving, in large measure, because of emerging research on effective schools (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Over the past 40 years, the importance and the scope of effective instructional leadership has continued to expand. Peterson and Deal (1998) contend that principals are the key to shape positive school culture. So effective principals skillfully engage stakeholders, e.g., students, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, other support personnel, families, business partners (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). To engage these stakeholders, school principals are typically responsible for communicating with teachers, families, and other members of the school community (Pankake & Fullwood, 1999). There are studies that support that effective principals are good communicators. A study conducted by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) found that effective principals establish strong lines of two way communication throughout the school community (Ärlestigi 2008, p.8)

[2] This paper presents a little part of the results that are reported by scientific research project of Anadolu University. This scientific research project, which was carried out in Turkey, represents a part of an international project. International Successful School Principals' Project-ISSPP was started in 2001 by getting together of 15 concerned partners from Austria, America, China, Canada, Denmark, England, Norway and Sweden. Turkey became a partner of the project in 2007. This paper is a part of second phase of the same project which's application process was completed in 2013-2014 academic year. Also, a different version of this study is presented in International Conference on Education (ICEDU2015).

Researchers like Brun (2010) and Summers (2010) mentioned that the study of communication is important, because every administrative function and activity involves some form of direct or indirect communication. Whether planning and organizing or leading and monitoring, school administrators communicate with and through other people. This implies that every person's communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness. Accoording to the Lutgen-Sandvik (2010), it seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to organizational effectiveness is a lack of effective communication. Moreover, good communication skills are very important to ones success as a school administrator (Lunenburg, 2010, p.1). Lack of effective communication between the school principal and the other participants, including teachers, students, and parents, impedes the school's performance (Wahed, 2012, p.5)

In organizations, managers have constant interaction with their junior and senior colleagues; also employees have constant interaction with their peers. From this point on, Başaran (2004) mentioned that school -as an organization- is a structure that based on human relationships. Therefore, the realization of organizational objectives depends on the competency of managers' communication skills; in other words their ability to create a favorable interaction tissue within the organization is determinative for the success.

Katz (1956) mentioned that principals' qualifications are classified as technical, conceptual and humanistic (Akt: Bursalıoğlu,1981). Technical qualifications cover planning, coordination, consultation and supervision. Conceptual qualifications means understanding the role and importance of the institution for the universal and the local community; having the ability to follow developments in theoretical education; evaluating educational situations from theoretical and conceptual perspective. In other words, conceptual qualifications emphasize knowledge and skills associated with the services of the institution. Finally, the humanistic qualifications are associated with human relations, motivating and uplifting skills. Education administrator in order to reach their objectives and develop educational organizations should be developed in these three basic qualification categories. However; within these three main areas of competence, a school principal must firstly be equipped to humanitarian competencies. Principals, who are in close contact with groups both inside and outside, should have humanistic qualifications firstly (Celep, 2000). School principals need to fulfill the technical, conceptual and humanistic duties and responsibilities as the managers of one of the largest institutions that shape the future of communities. In particular, it is expected that principals to have high level of humanistic proficiency as the managers of educational institutions whose raw materials is also human (Özdemir, Tekin Bozkurt and Aydın, 2015, pp.153-154). So we can say that communication is the manager's most basic tools used in the process of taking business as the axis of the organizational process and the heart of organization. Managers can affect the behavior of others and merge them into groups by using the power of communication. As Pradhan and Chopra (2008) stated, "organizations cannot exist without communication, as it is one of the significant aspects allowing organizations to be what it is."

Communication activities are usually targeted to the organization's internal and external audiences, employing various methods of communication appropriate for each. All these activities which actually correspond to corporate communication shape the organization's internal and external image. However, it has been observed that most of organizations focus more on producing communication plans for external use. Oftentimes, internal communication is not addressed in the same way. Some communication specialists claim that internal communication is more significant than external communication. One unhappy or misinformed employee can undermine or destroy a million dollar campaign pretty easily" (Grensing-Pophal, 2006). This situation is also acceptable for organizations like schools. Both internal and external communication activities which are managed by the school managers are effective on the perception of the school and also in meeting the educational goals and success. So it can be said that corporate communication is a critical factor and an important task for the school principals.

2. School Principals and Corporate Communication

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. The general idea is that the sustainability and success of a company depends on how it is viewed by key stakeholders, and communication is a critical part of building, maintaining and protecting such reputations (Cornelissen, 2014, p.5).

Corporate Communication is the orchestration of all the instruments in the field of organizational identity (communications, symbols and behaviours of organizational members) in such an attractive and realistic manner as to create or maintain a positive reputation for groups with which the organization has an interdependent relationship (Van Riel, 2003, p. 53).

Frandsen and Johansen (2013) have been synthetized the common features of some of the prevailing definitions of corporate communication in three points: First, corporate communication is a strategic management function that takes a strategic approach to communication activities and is tied the overall strategy of the company. Second, it integrates external and internal communication activities spread among a series of organizational practices to build, maintain, change and/or repair one or more positive images and/or reputations. Third, all these activities take place inside relationships with the external and internal stakeholders of the company. Corporate communication focuses on the organization as a whole and the important task of how an organization is presented to all of its key stakeholders, both internal and external (Cornelissen, 2013, p.10)

3. Qualifications of Successful School Principals in Terms of Corporate Communication Within The International Successful School Principals' Project

International Successful School Principals' Project-ISSPP was started in 2001 at Nottingham University in England by getting together of concerned partners. The project, firstly, has been started in countries such as Austria, America, China, Canada, Denmark, England, Norway and Sweden and then it has spread to some educationally advantaged and disadvantaged countries in time and has started to examine them. In the first part of the project it has been decided to organize case studies, to define similarities and differences among countries, to analyze, organize and manage the results of surveys conducted on lots of school principals, and lastly to observe successful school principals. The second part of the mentioned project includes searching same schools after at least three-year break. Turkey became a partner of the project in 2007 and the mentioned project has been carried by 15 partner countries. The studies related to successful school principals in Turkey are designed to carry out in 7 cities of regions; Çanakkale, Aydın, Malatya, Çorum, Gaziantep, Mersin and Eskişehir. Between the years 2007-2012, studies carried out in secondary schools situated in Çanakkale, Aydın, Malatya, Çorum, Gaziantep, Mersin and Eskişehir. The results of these studies are reported by way of project which is run as scientific research project of Anadolu University.

By this way, it was completed the first stage of International Successful School Principals' Project. With this project, it is aimed to complete the second part of International Succesful School Principals' Project which is re-research stage. Within the scope of the project, it is planned to research the secondary schools in Çanakkale, Çorum, Gaziantep, Malatya, Mersin respectively, which were studied in the first stage of ISSPP. In this study, succesful school principals' qualifications in terms corporate communication were analyzed.

4. Methodology

This study was designed according to the case study model based on qualitative research. Data were collected by focus group interviews and were analyzed with descriptive analysis based on the content analysis method. Analysis of the data was presented as frequencies and percentages for each item. Analysis were obtained and interpreted in relation with the qualitative data provided by focus group. In this study, determining the corporate communications skills of successful school principals is aimed.

4.1. Population and Sample Group

The population of the study consist the schools which were selected according to the University Entrance Exam (OSS) success. Schools (from the first phase of the project) that increase student achievement levels for at least three years are defined as the study group of the study (Table 1). As indicator of student achievement in the research context, the university entrance exam (OSS) success is taken as reference.

Study group is composed of 70 teachers in 11 schools in 6 provinces. 15 teachers from Çanakkale; 14 teachers from both Malatya and Mersin; 13 teachers from Çorum; 9 teachers from Kuşadası and 5 teachers from Gaziantep are involved to the project.

4.2. Data Collection and Analyses

Data was collected by using a semi-structured questionnaire which was developed by the researchers. Questionnaire, which depends on the conceptual framework, has been prepared in accordance with the relevant literature review and observations made by the researchers. The data obtained during the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder.

Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques (categorical and frequency analysis). Primarily the data was transcribed and then interview coding key was created. The generated codes and themes are:

1. **Communication:** nonverbal communication, oral communication and social activities, written communication.
2. **Motivation:** special events and organizations, participation in decisions, visits, appreciation and rewarding, social activities, assistance and support, personal interviews
3. **In-house problem solving**: negotiations, individual decisions, wait for the resolution over time, deliver to higher authority, collective work and cooperation
4. **Requests and Expectations**: high motivation, belonging and commitment, reduction in conflict, adaptability to change, exam-oriented education, authoritarian and liability management

Coding of the data was carried out by two experts in accordance with the themes generated. For the reliability of the study, coding process has been terminated by comparing the two coding keys.

5. Findings

Findings are discussed in line with the themes determined as communication, motivation, in-house problem solving, requests and expectations. Firstly, the themes and frequency values for "How in-house communication is provided?" are given in Table 1.

Table 1. How in-house communication is provided

	f	%
Oral communication and social activities	21	38
Nonverbal communication and Empathy	16	28
Written communication	19	34

When Table 1 is examined, most of the teachers (%38) think that principals usually prefer oral communication and social activities to provide internal communication. Secondly, they prefer to use written communication (%34). Finally, the lowest percentage belongs to the non-verbal communication and empathy. But especially teachers focus on the empathetic characteristics of the principals and indicate that principals need to be empathetic not only to teachers, also to parents.

Being a model with his behaviors as a nonverbal communication method is much more effective than other communication techniques. But it is remarkable that nonverbal communication is the least observed communication method of school directors in this study. Concretization of school rules on behavior gives effective results than written or verbal explanation. If written and oral messages are not consistent with nonverbal communication messages, their credibility and impact will be low. At this point, it is expected that the manager should support his written and oral messages with non-verbal communication elements. In this context, informing the principals about non-verbal communication practices come to the fore. Even the school principals accepted as successful also have lack of nonverbal communication abilities -like empathy, keeping quiet and use of body language- draws attention.

Lunenburg (2010, p.9) focuses on active listening ability of principals. To become more active listeners, principal must try to hear exactly what the teachers are saying in the message. Then, he must try to identify how the teachers feel in terms of the message content. Also he must be sensitive to the nonverbal messages as well as the verbal ones. If he identifies mixed messages, he may ask for clarification. Finally the principal may restate or paraphrase the verbal and nonverbal messages as feedback to the others.

On other hand, 34%of the teachers stated that implementing the rules that are not expressed in written format causes problems or delays in the processes. Therefore teachers mentioned that managers prefer written communication because of these delays or problems. This case highlights the school's predominant formal structure.

The themes and frequency values for "Does the demands and expectations of the employees is overrated?" are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Does the demands and expectations of the employees are taken into consideration?

		f	%
Yes	High motivation	21	26
	Belonging and commitment	17	21
	Reduction in conflict	15	18
	Adaptability to change	13	16
No	Exam-oriented education	11	13
	Authoritarian and passive management	5	6

In Table 2, 81% of teachers expressed that the demands and expectations of the employees is taken into consideration. As a result of this consideration; motivation increases (26%), sense of belonging and commitment increases (21%), conflicts reduces (18%) and adaptation to change becomes more easier (16%). Taking expectations of the employees into account is also associated with the democratization property of the principals. Most of the teachers stated that their principal is a modern leader who is open for discussions or different ideas. One of teachers (T1) mentioned his ideas as below:

> *"Most of us are coming to school happily. In the past, there were some schools I worked in that I did not want to go. Here, I don't feel like that. I feel that the principal care about my opinions. He takes our ideas into consideration most of the time, for example about the setting the courses and schedules (T1)."*

Also, majority of the teachers especially focuses on the democratization property of the principals. Collaborating with teachers and asking for their ideas during the meetings are considered as an indicator of the principal's democratic approach. On the other hand, teachers stated that taking ideas into account is also related with the development of a sense of belonging. They see themselves as a team, not only within the school; also outside the school. One of teachers (T2) mentioned his ideas about the democratization property of their principal as below:

> *"In the morning when I got up, I came here with peace of mind. We even stayed after class whether it was salaried or not. Most of the time, discussions aimed to improve the effectiveness of training or problem solving. If opinions and expectations are not taken into account, there is no need to debate."*

Based on this ideas, it can accepted that the principal's effective communication with others (teachers, students, and parents, etc.) creates a unique educational vision based on democracy in decision making instead of dictatorship and despotic views (Ärlestig, 2008, p.34)

On the other hand, some teachers who think the education system is so examination-oriented (13%) and the management is so authoritative and passive (6%) emphasized that their demands and expectations are not taken into consideration so much. These ideas can be related with the management structure of Turkish educational system. Özdemir (1998) stated that the education policies of the schools as well as the decisions regarding the school management are made by the Ministry of Education. These decisions are passed into law through legal arrangements. The school principals are than ordered to implement them. In summary, the school principals do not decide on educational policies regarding their schools and cannot make basic decisions regarding education and training. In addition to this, the lacks of resources as well as the operational and structural problems that are brought forward by the hierarchical structuring are all obstacles in the path of effective education being implemented (Eres, 2011, p.5).

In this context, principals can face with some several problems that can cause just because of the general structure of the Turkish Educational System or based on different reasons. The themes and frequency values for "What is being done to solve the problems faced in the school?" are given in Table 3.

Table 3. ***What is being done to solve the problems faced in the school?***

	f	%
Negotiations	23	33
Deliver to higher authority	5	7
Wait for the resolution over time	7	10
Individual decisions	14	20
Cooperation	21	30

As seen in Table 3, the most preferred method for problem solving is negotiations with 33%. Negotiation is a very important and effective way, perhaps the first act to be given priority, in identifying and understanding the reasons of the problem. Steps taken before determining the cause of the problem cannot bring along the solution as it can make it more complicated. Therefore, preferring negotiation is quite reasonable for the principals. Also it is perceived as a democratic way for problem solving. Secondly, principals prefer to cooperate (30%). Also the preference for cooperation in solving the problems should be accepted as a constructive approach. Preferring the way of negotiation and cooperation also makes a positive impression in terms of school climate. Solving problems by this way helps managers to create an atmosphere based on communication, equality and cooperation.

On the other hand, taking individual decisions (20%) points out more authoritarian management. But it depends when and how the principal take these individual decisions. Individual decisions can be taken after a negotiation and depends on the idea of majority. If the decision process works like this, it is so far from the authoritarian approach. But the final individual decision also can be different from the idea of the majority. In such cases, the decision indicates an authoritarian approach and the negotiations are perceived as a showpiece. As a third perspective, some teacher thinks that taking individual decisions is one of the characteristics of being a leader. Finally some of teachers perceive taking individual decision as a positive feature; some think as a negative attribute.

Perceptions related to individual decisions can vary according to the viewpoints. For example teachers have positive impression about the principals who never give up and keen on finding a solution to all problems. Principals use many strategies to do this like individual decisions. Due to lack of the governmental financial support, they can keep on searching for donations from affluent society members to buy some essential educational gadgets. Principals also must keep in contact with companies and businessmen in the province where the school is located to seek their help in supplying their school with the numerous needs and to overcome the obstacles that impede an effective educational process (Ärlestig, 2008, p.33). Some teachers from Kuşadası associate the fundraising skills of principal with individual decisions and cooperation. They focus on the success of the fundraising skills in particular and mentioned that teachers' and school's needs are met through the principal's interpersonal relations with individual efforts.

When we look back to the Table 3, it is seen that delivering the problems to higher authority (10%) and waiting for the resolution over time (7%) are the problem-solving methods that have the lowest participation degrees. And both of these methods are considered as indicators of passive management approach.

Finally, teachers' ideas about motivation are handled as the last theme. One of the basic factors that provide emotional commitment and increase productivity for teachers is feeling the support of management. Principal is a powerful and determinative factor for teachers in adopting the work and increasing the motivation. Allowing teachers to express their feelings and thoughts will have a positive effect on their performance and motivation. The themes and frequency values for "*What is being done to increase the motivation?*" are given in Table 4.

Table 4. ***What is being done to increase the motivation?***

		f	%
Internal	Special events and organizations	12	18
	Appreciation and rewarding	7	11
	Participation in decisions	15	23
	Assistance and support	16	25
External	Social activities	8	12
	Personal interviews	7	11

When Table 4 is examined, it is understood that internal motivation techniques (%77) are preferred mainly. Within the internal motivation techniques, the most referenced ways to motivate employees in schools are "assistance and support (25%) and "participation in decision (23%)". Personal interviews (11%) and social activities (12%) outside the school as external motivation ways are seems to be least preferred ones.

The most emphasized variable affecting the mood of the teacher is the communication process. Comprehensive approach, participatory management, considering the teachers' proposals and give them a hearing are extremely important for teachers like all the employees. And all these conditions are directly related with the communication approach of the principals. Eres (2011, p.4) mentioned that principal's attitudes related to participation in decission making and also sharing of authority and responsibility are the most important factor for the teachers' motivation. Also it is focused on school principals must be sensitive towards the social needs of teachers. A principal, who is not aware of this and does not display effort to fulfill this, will have difficulty in motivating people.

6. Results and Suggestions

As a result of the research it is determined that most of the teachers stated that principals usually prefer oral communication and social activities to provide internal communication. Secondly, they prefer to use written communication and finally non-verbal communication and empathy. When non-verbal communication and empathy is used as a supportive factor in communication process, it is believed that the effectiveness of communication will increase. In this context, it would be useful to organize trainings for principals especially regarding non-verbal communication. Orientation workshops and guidance programs should be carried out by schools' principals during summer vacation or at the beginning of the school year to foster effective communication between parents and the school.

When the results about demands and expectations are taken into account or not, it is seen that this awareness increases motivation and sense of belonging. By this way, adaptation to change becomes easier. If the positive effects of principals' awareness about teachers' opinions are considered, encouraging and informing principals about how to listen and communicate with teachers is necessary in terms of effectiveness of the educational process. On the other hand, another researched can be designed about in which subjects the principals take the teachers' expectations and in which not. The results of this research could be decisive and determinative on defining the in-service training concept for principals.

When the results related to most preferred method for problem solving examined, it is seen that negotiations and cooperation are the most preferred ones which are perceived as a democratic and constructive way for problem solving. Also they make a school climate constructive and equable. It is normal that the results are dominated by positive opinions. Because the research examines the opinions rely on successful principals. So the participation is low for the methods considered as indicators of passive management approach.

Finally, when the results relates with the motivation techniques are considered, it is seen that internal motivation techniques are preferred mainly. Within the internal motivation techniques, the most referenced ways to motivate employees in schools are support and participation in decisions.

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