An Evaluation of Strategic Leadership for Organizational Change Management in Higher Education

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Abstract: Strategic leadership and organizational change management are becoming increasingly important in literature and practice. However, there is little literature on the relations between the two. This paper based on research from literature aims to answer the following questions: what is the role of strategic leadership in terms of organizational change management? What are the challenges for institutions of higher education in the implementation of strategic leadership? How to deal with these challenges? It is argued that strategic leadership helps to form learning organization which is an important aspect in organizational change management. Leaders conducting strategic leadership are proficient in strategic thinking and planning and creating shared values, common goals, etc that are central to staff commitment. However, it is difficult to implement strategic leadership for organizational change management comprehensively in a micro-level. Recommendations include the improvement of leadership self-efficacy, creation of positive and collaborative culture and awareness of organization citizenship.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership; Organizational Change Management; Learning Organization; Leadership Self-efficacy; Organizational Citizenship; Institutions of Higher Education

1. Introduction

Nowadays higher education institutions are faced with mounting pressure of change for educational sustainability and international competitiveness with the fast development of information and communication technology. Just as Atasoy (2020) put that it is inevitable for organizations to meet the needs of the information age of the 21st century and adapt themselves to educational changes, if not, there would be devastating affects on education[1]. Thus it is crucial for educational organizations to overcome the pressure and survive in the fierce competition based on an effective leadership approach. Strategical leaders with strategic thinking and planning shills could have an influence on organization culture and contribute to the formation of a learning organization aspect that serves as the most important factor in terms of organizational change[2]. It is argued in the paper that strategic leadership is an effective leadership approach when it comes to change management in higher education institutions. It is beneficial to form learning organization that is an important aspect in organizational change management. Leaders conducting strategic leadership possess the traits of strategic thinking and planning and they pay attention to creating shared values, common goals, etc that are important to staff commitment in organizational change management. While the challenges are that it is difficult to implement comprehensively in a micro-level. Recommendations for dealing with the challenges include the improvement of leadership self-efficacy, creation of positive and participative school culture and awareness of organization citizenship. Therefore, the paper is divided into four parts. The first part is introduction, followed by a literature review that provides an explicit analysis of strategic leadership and organizational change management in terms of their basic concepts including definition, characters, etc so as to lay a theoretical foundation for the following discussion of relations and challenges of implementation in institutions of higher education and tentative strategies about how to deal with these challenges are presented. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategic leadership

Leadership is frequently discussed in management. According to Yildirim & Kaya (2019), its definition is quite diverse and the most common one is "moving an organization's members towards determined goals"[3]. With the development of educational reform,

various leadership theories and practice are developed. For example, the distributed leadership and instructional leadership. Strategic leadership is the leadership approach that was developed from supervisory leadership after the 1980's. Budros (2022) argued that strategic leadership refers to top leaders of an organization who make strategic choices that could push the organization on a strategic and right track. There exists a presupposition that leaders could shape an organization. Specifically, the psychological and social orientation of leaders could have an influence on organizational outcomes. Thus it is obvious that strategic leadership emphasizes on psychological and social attributes like values and strategic and structural change with respect to organizational outcomes. Pisapia's scale provides empirical studies on strategic leadership that consists of five dimensions including bartering, managing, bonding, bridging and transforming. Specifically, the scale puts an emphasis on leaders' high-level spirits, motivation and performance within an organization. Managing leaders are capable of coping with short-term and long-term goals at the same time and they are problem solvers while bonding and bridging mainly aims to build up relationships internally and externally. The former five elements belong to the organizational capability while the latter is the component of individual characteristics. Leaders should apply the elements in their practice of strategic leadership.

2.2 Organizational change management

Change is an on-going process. Organizational change can be divided into planned or non-planned, urgent or staggered changes. With the fast development of information and technology in the 21st century, higher education institutions are confronted with increasingly fierce competition within both the internal and external educational marketplace. Leaders need to conduct change management strategically for education sustainability. The first one is the Lewin's three-step model including unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. Unfreezing means unfreezing the organization stuck at a level and then move it to the desired new level, followed by new measures to codify and consolidate the new level. The second model is introduced by Greiner and it is a six-phase model which summarized the elements of Lewin's model. The five-phase model created by Harris include "planning and initiation, momentum building, responding to new problems created, turning point and termination". Kotter expanded Lewin's three-step model into eight-step model that includes "establishing a sense of urgency, creating a coalition, communicating the change vision, consolidating gains and anchoring the new approaches in the organization's culture which amounts to refreezing". There are close interrelations among the four models mentioned above and the change models provide framework for leaders in organizational change management.

3. Discussion

3.1 Relations between Strategic Leadership and Organizational Change Management

Strategic leadership and change management are closely related with each other. Specifically, leadership remains to be vital to an organization. Strategic leadership deals with direction setting and implementing strategies of an organization. It is beneficial to school development in terms of forming learning organization that is an important aspect in organizational change management. Learning organization refers to an organization that encourages learning of its members and constantly transforms itself. Schools should be re-conceptualized as "learning organizations" that can adapt themselves to changing external environments, promote innovations internally and finally achieve the improvement of student outcomes, which is in accordance with the requirements of change management. In other words, leaders who apply strategic leadership are able to anticipate and react quickly to the internal and external changes , adjust related strategies in time for fulfillment of organization objectives. Besides, Leaders conducting strategic leadership possess the traits of strategic thinking and planning and they are proficient in creating shared values, common goals, etc that are central to staff commitment that is significant to organizational change management. Specifically, strategic thinking and planning are significant to organizational sustainability. This requires leaders to anticipate organization's future in the long run and could be capable of evaluating and controlling the strategies implemented or to be implemented within an organization. Strategic thinking and planning are considered to be crucial means to prioritize school resources and provide leaders a systematic, structured and cooperative approach for current issues and future trends. In addition, strategic leaders are able to create shared valued and common goals that are important to organizational development. For one thing, shared valued and common goals determine an organization's overall culture. With a common goal employees within an organization can know in which direction they should work and work hard. For another, the shared values and common goals bond staff together psychologically, which is significant to staff commitment while staff commitment serves as an important factor in the success of organizational change management given the fact that organizational change could only be successful when every single component changes based on the system theory regardless of the nature of a system, i.e. the open or closed system. Therefore, it is clear that strategic leadership is quite critical to organizational change management and it is necessary for leaders in higher education institutions to apply strategic leadership in change management..

3.2 Challenges in Higher Education Institutions

Faced with ever-evolving environment and intensification of globalization, rapid development of information and technology and fierce competition, higher education institutions need to achieve transformative development with strategic change management. However, the challenges lie in that the implementation of strategic leadership for organizational change management tends to be in a macro-level and it is difficult to implement comprehensively in a micro-level. As discussed above, strategic leadership helps to form learning organization which has a high capability to learn, adapt, and change. However, it is difficult to achieve this in a micro-level. In other words, teachers, as one of the most important components in schools, may be unwilling to learn and change, which increases the difficulty in the achievement of organization goals and the success of organizational change management. Besides, schools as learning organizations need to create and support continuous learning opportunities for all staff and promote team learning and collaboration among all staff.

3.3 Strategies

Recommendations for dealing with the challenges include the improvement of leadership self-efficacy, creation of positive and participative school culture and awareness of organization citizenship. Firstly, leadership self-efficacy based on the self-efficacy theory means that leaders are confident of themselves in the achievement of certain goals with effective actions. It can be improved through personal experience or other's. Schools could provide related leadership training to broaden leaders' theoretical and practical knowledge so that they can exemplify a high level of self-efficacy that leads to effective actions. In addition, the cultivation of a participative and supportive culture is still important to higher education institutions in that it not only contributes to collaboration among staff that is crucial in organizational change management, it can also help to increase staff's job satisfaction that can be influenced by the working environment. If all the staff work in an environment of support and encouragement, there may be more communication, cooperation and collaboration, which is beneficial to change management especially in terms of important issues. Finally, all the staff within higher education institutions should improve their awareness of organization citizenship. This can be strengthened by shared vision and common goals that are influenced by strategic leadership. With a high awareness of organization citizenship, teachers tend to be supportive and active in terms of relevant change management for educational sustainability.

4. Conclusion

This paper based on research from literature discussed the relations between strategic leadership and organizational change management and it is argued that strategic leadership is vital to the success of organizational change management when it comes to learning organization and shared values and common goals. However, it is difficult to be implemented in a micro-level and thus several strategies including improvement of leadership self-efficacy, creation of positive and participative school culture and awareness of organization citizenship are presented so as to throw light on the research and practice of leadership and change management. This study may be limited in terms of analysis of qualitative and quantitative study, which will be improved in the following research.

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