

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE FOR THAI CATHOLIC EDUCATORS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a *Leadership Framework* for Thai Catholic educators. This study has been developed on the basis of significant concern for the Church as it faces contemporary challenges in the form of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. The Church needs to respond to these contemporary challenges in a manner that is relevant and effective. The Church calls for Catholic educators to develop and implement new content, new capabilities, and new educative models as an integral part of contemporary Catholic education. The proposed *framework* comprises four components: relevant types of leadership, vision, values congruence, and school culture. All four said components are complementary and integrated; they 'work together' to develop and maintain Catholic schools as authentic educational communities.

Introduction

The Catholic Church is acutely aware of the challenges facing Catholic education in the contemporary world. In Her address to the Seminaries and Educational Institutes, She asserts:

We have a crisis of values which, in highly developed societies in particular, assumes the form, often exalted by the media, of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. The extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society leads to behaviour patterns which are at times so opposed to one another as to undermine any idea of community identity. Rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations, and the globalization of the economy, affect human life more and more throughout the world. (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millenium*, Article 1.)

In this period of a crisis of values, the Church calls us, Catholic educators to not only understand these phenomena but also to effectively respond to the needs of society with a sense of great urgency and great responsibility. She further states:

The Catholic Church has continued to share responsibility for the social and cultural development of the different communities and peoples to which it belongs, participating in their joys and hopes, their sufferings and difficulties, their efforts to achieve genuine human and communitarian progress. (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millenium*, Article 5.)

The Church calls Catholic educators to earnestly be committed to, and genuinely carry-out, our duties as Catholic educators; the basis of such genuine commitment is a strong motivation to model the life of Christ as the Great Teacher. The Church asserts:

The project of the Catholic school is convincing only if carried out by people who are deeply motivated, because they witness to a living encounter with Christ, in whom alone the

mystery of man truly becomes clear. These persons, therefore, acknowledge a personal and communal adherence with the Lord, assumed as the basis and constant reference of interpersonal relationship and mutual co-operation between educator and student. (*Educating Together in the Catholic School*, Article 4.)

The Church implies that we, as Catholic educators, need to pay due attention to the widening scope of our educational functions. Our educational services need to become more sophisticated and specialised in order to effectively respond to the said new challenges in the contemporary world. A new leadership framework is in vital need in order to develop and maintain relevant and authentic Catholic education; a framework that will comprise new content materials, new capabilities, and new educational models that reflect the distinctive characteristics of a Catholic educational community vis-a-vis school. Catholic schools must be based on Catholic educational foundations that reflect an operational structure that is a genuine instrument of the Church. The Catholic school must be a place of effective and dynamic teaching and learning, and a place of authentic and specific pastoral ministry.

The paper will now discuss the perceived notions of leadership that are relevant to the changes in schools and how to exercise our leadership in invocation of the Church. The paper will also discuss some key elements that contribute to the issue of school 'change'. The paper has an ultimate objective of presenting to the reader a conceptual framework for those Catholic educators who desire transforming their educational organisations into places of 'real' learning; places of teaching and learning in which our young people can grow and develop efficaciously in a Catholic pastoral environment.

Scopes of Examination

Many authors have examined leadership practices that foster sustainable change in education. Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach (1999) proposed the transformational model of leadership. Their model could be likened to an 'umbrella' model comprising many separate components of educational leadership. These included mission/vision, school culture, and valuing human resources examined within the light of a Catholic education mission. The transformational model, proposed by Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, will be used as the basis for a conceptual framework to organise the insight of others on the question of educational leadership in a Catholic context.

In order for a school to change a change process needs to be internalised by key stakeholders in the school organisation. The process necessarily involves the creation of a culture of change. For dynamic change to take place, a leadership framework needs to exist which places significant focus on the importance of the vision of the leader, values congruence, and culture transformation. The writer of this paper proposes that the transformational model represents a deliberate and harmonious orchestration of the various components of a particular leadership framework model aimed at achieving the ultimate goal of school change.

Leadership

Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach (1999) devoted considerable attention to clarifying the concept of leadership, referring to the works of Yukl (1994), and noted that most conceptions of leadership discussed the significance of 'influence' to some degree. Diversion from clearly defined models or concepts can be attributed to the individual leader, along with her/his rationale, purpose and intended goals of such influence.

Transformational leadership is that which "...facilitates a redefinition of a people's

mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment. It is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. Hence, transformational leadership must be grounded in moral foundations (Leithwood, as cited in Cashin et al., 2000,p.1).

The transformational model of leadership described by these authors assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of organizational members. Power is attributed by organizational members to whomever is able to inspire their commitments to collective aspirations and the desire for personal and collective mastery of the capacities needed to accomplish such aspirations (Leithwood et al., 1999,p.9). Hopkins (2001) indicates that the chosen model of leadership should reflect and respect the culture of the organization, which includes the various individuals within and their interactions, while striving to alter existing beliefs and attitudes. This notion, postulated by Hopkins, recognizes that change in education is more likely to occur when a ‘grassroots’ approach is embraced.

Leithwood et al., (1999) have identified seven dimensions of transformational leadership: building school vision; establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decision-making (Leithwood, 1994 as cited in Leithwood et al., 1999).

In order to effectively apply the concept of transformational leadership in Catholic schools we, as educational leaders, must believe in the power of rationale, purpose and intended educational goals integral to the teachings of the Church. We therefore must assimilate our particular school educational goals with the core value that underpins Catholic education. The core value that underpins Catholic education is to evangelize; to approach men and women, wherever they are, and to prepare them to receive the blessed gift of salvation. To effectuate our leadership we will exercise our leadership with inspiration, commitment and aspiration. Through our practices, we aim at altering the existing beliefs and values of our teachers in congruence with ecclesial values and encourage teachers to genuinely participate in school decision-making processes.

Our Vision

Transformational Leadership is intentionally aimed at influencing the behaviours, attitudes and inter-personal interactions of individuals within an organization.

Leithwood et al. (1999), in *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, provides an authentic example of transformational leadership that describes the application of such a practice and the importance of the vision that underpins such a practice.

Creating a formal vision statement cannot be the first step; it must be considered a serious and purposeful process. A process that follows a great deal of collaborative discussion, planning and preparation, for the prospect of school change. Rather than a ‘canned’ statement, to be rattled-off without appropriate internalization, a truly Catholic school vision must reflect the needs of the society intertwined with the core values of Catholic educational values and pedagogical foundations. The Catholic school is to be a place of teaching and learning for the human person and of human persons.

The person of each individual human being, in his or her material needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school. (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Article 9)

In order to form a comprehensive and authentic vision statement for a Catholic school we require

teachers, and other relevant stakeholders in the school to commit to dedicated, purposeful, deliberation. It is certainly not an objective – determining a comprehensive and authentic vision statement – that can be completed in one or two staff meetings. The process for determining and maintaining such a vision is dynamic and needs to be abundantly evident in the day-to-day operation of the school throughout the various activities that form part of its daily operation. Decision-making, and problem resolutions, will be inextricably connected to the vision that underpins the very life of the school – a real and evidenced vision. If the vision is not clearly articulated, and authentically evident, as the fundamental operational reality of the school, the process of commencing the formulation of a school vision statement becomes futile and, indeed, may result in the development of personal and professional insecurities amongst members of the school community leading to cynical and resentful attitudes and behaviours. It is through the deliberate, consistent and carefully planned and purposeful effort of school leaders that the process of setting operational directions for the school become possible, manageable and joyful.

Values System Congruence

In order to materialize our Catholic school vision a deep understanding of the concept of ‘values’ is needed. According to Rokeach (1973:5) a value is “...an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct, or end-state of existence, is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence...”

Values are an integral component of organisational culture according to Rokeach. “...Values are the most distinctive property of defining characteristics of institutions...” (1979:51). We learn that values form the very core of personality, and values influence the choices that people make during the course of participating in everyday activities and work-based activities. Posner & Schmidt (1992) postulate that it is individual, and collective, values systems that underpin the manner by which people choose to devote a certain amount of time and energy to particular activities of daily living and professional pursuits. Values assume even more importance in the case of transformational leaders, since transformational leadership results in changing particular needs and values of both leaders and subordinates. Burns (1978) postulated that transformational leadership is based on the role of conscious purpose; conscious purpose drawn from values. Transformational leadership involves the uncovering of contradictions among values and between values and practice, and the realigning of values held by teachers

The alignment of the values of teachers, values that conform to and complement the desired values of the Catholic school, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the role of values in organisations. Meglino & Ravlin (1998) outline the importance of values systems in the culture of an organisation reminding the reader that values in organisations serve a similar purpose to their function in society at large. Schein (1985) explains that values allow internal and external adaptation. Shared values enable efficient interactions within the workplace and assist in establishing internal integration of practice, while, externally, the values that contribute to an organisation’s culture can affect its external survival. It is interesting to note that it is possible for an organisation to have strong internal integration, however, externally, the organisation fails to thrive. It is therefore imperative that values that are internally and externally appropriate be adopted and developed.

Values congruence affects employees in a range of occupations. In the nursing profession Tzeng, Ketefian & Redman (2002) found that employee (health care profession) satisfaction and patient satisfaction were related. In the contemporary business world, Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins (1989) observed a similar relationship between employee workplace satisfaction and commitment to workplace duties. In the teaching profession/vocation, Joffres & Haughey (2001) observed that

values incongruence appeared to increase the teacher's feelings of alienation, undetermined collaboration, reduced efficacy and commitment to duties, all of which have a detrimental impact on student outcomes. Thus, we, as leaders in Catholic school communities should take the time to gain a sound understanding of, and develop, values congruence in our educational communities. We need to develop purposeful processes that enable such 'congruence' for the benefit of our students, faculty of teachers and the broader community in which our schools are located. Teachers need to develop a sense of 'servant leadership' and be satisfied with the tasks that they are assigned by those in more senior positions of responsibility at the school. As educational leaders we need to unashamedly strive to achieve demonstrable educational goals that we claim to aspire to.

School culture

The last component of the proposed Catholic school transformation process, discussed in this paper, is the school culture. According to Leithwood et.al. (1999:83) a school culture includes the "... norms, beliefs, values and assumptions shared by members of the school..." A pervading school culture has the potential to make or break efforts aimed at restructuring a schools values systems and corresponding *modus operandi* (way of doing things). The concept of school culture remains elusive in many respects as it is frequently discussed in subjective terms and with particular biases being put forward at a given point in time. While a positive school culture could be said to be conducive to school restructuring effort, it may actually be ignored (to some extent) – as a significant impact - by significant school stakeholders. It could, conversely, be argued (with some degree of confidence) that a negative school culture is frequently evident in schools that are struggling to implement reform processes.

The dominant, pervading, school culture depends on the nature of its leader; the extent to which the school leader supports – individually and collectively – the personal and intellectual development of the members of the school community. The leader of a school must model the values and professional practices that have been identified as critical shared values of the school community. The ability of the school leader to effectively and consistently model shared values and professional practices of the school community are a particularly important feature of school decision-making and problem-solving strategies that are part of how the school operates. Leithwood et.al (1999) discusses the professional growth of all members of a school community in terms of the adoption and evidencing of 'key values' and professional practices. A school culture is, therefore, a combining, synthesizing of a broad range of interactions of different individuals within a particular setting vis-à-vis educational community.

Leithwood et.al. (1999) provides a complete list of behaviours designed to strengthen the school culture. These behaviours include, but are not limited to, clarifying and publicly communicating the vision of the school as well as using slogans and rituals to express cultural values. Bohlman & Deal (2002:104) reinforce Leithwood's observations when stating that "...celebration and ceremony are anecdotes to boredom, cynicism and burnout. They bring groups together, strengthen bonds, and build spirit and faith..." In order to conduct school rituals, ceremonies, and other events in a rewarding way, Leithwood et.al (1999:164) suggests further that they should be designed for symbolic purposes, asserting that "...these events may be viewed by teachers as not only non-authentic but as a trivialization of both school improvement goals and teachers professional commitment to working toward these goals..."

We, as transformational leadership educators in contemporary Catholic schools, need to consider 'change' as a constant, balanced by the understanding that some modifications of more global initiatives may be necessary to accommodate present needs. However, change management needs to be implemented and developed guided through the Spirit-filled wisdom of the shared values of a Catholic school mission. We must be willing to permit adequate time for devoted efforts aimed at

strengthening Catholic school culture; the culture that transitions our Catholic educational communities to be a place of ecclesial experience, which is moulded in the Christian community. The type of culture we strive to develop must be in profound relations of communion nourished by a living, real, relationship with Christ and with the Church. This 'living relationship' is what makes the Catholic school environment an authentic ecclesial experience. Through the practice of transformational leadership, we, as Catholic school educators in privileged and blessed positions of appointed leadership, must be keen to develop authentic, relevant and meaningful ceremonies and rituals that reflect our shared values in our Catholic schools. The ceremonies and rituals that are developed must, indeed, be considered integral features of the 'whole manner' by which shared values of a Christian community are reflected in the day-to-day operation and management of the school. The success of school transformation is ultimately dependant on the authenticity of the leadership of the school and how the leadership of the school demonstrates such authenticity in the development of school policies, procedures and practices.

Conclusion

Catholic schools face new challenges in the contemporary world. The crisis of values is a significant issue for Catholic educational leaders to face and deal with in a manner that is well positioned in the Word. The contemporary crisis of values is manifest in heightened levels of subjectivism, relativism and nihilism. Catholic educational leaders need to pay due attention to the widening scope of education taking place in our local, regional and national communities. Our educational services need to become more sophisticated and specialised, and based on the educational positions of those with the Spirit indwelling. In order to effectively and efficiently respond to the said new challenges, for Catholic education in the contemporary world, a new educational framework is called for to obtain new contents, new capabilities and new educational models which must be well-founded on the nature and distinctive characteristics of a Catholic educational community.

Transformational leadership is a desirable style for school leaders that are involved in efforts aimed at improving the awareness levels of teachers on the importance of how values underpin the *modus operandi* of an authentic Catholic educational community. Teachers need to be 'educated', through a transformational leadership style, to individually and collectively value organizational goals and educational strategies that aim to produce truly Catholic educational objectives. Transformational leaders are not just 'managers; transformational leaders have the knowledge, skills and personal attributes to produce organizational innovation and substantial organizational change. Transformational leaders are a necessary ingredient in bringing about, in collaborative partnership with others, significant changes to the culture of educational communities by introducing, in a prudent and purposeful manner, new belief systems and goals. These changes take place when the transformational leader has the capacity to change how members of the educational community perceive, and act upon, their roles; roles as collaborative educators in a Catholic educational community. The success of our leadership is therefore rooted in the authenticity of our leadership and the way how the organisational policies, practices and procedures are clearly and purposefully articulated.

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