

PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF GEN X PRINCIPALS ON MANAGING CHANGE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study explicates the nature of change management in the school level where school principals of a common generation, Generation X (ages 37-54) have similar roles in responding to local needs and building unique strengths of schools and its staff. It has been evident that there have been a number of major administrative reforms intended to respond to the administrative challenges of the Department of Education in the Philippines to cater the needs of schools in the country. Change implementation has become challenging in the school level in the advent of continuous reforms in the systems, policies, programs and projects mandated by the Central, Regional and Division Offices in the basic education sector. This study elucidates the practices that Generation X school principals perform in their level to equip and support people to successfully adapt change, create success and achieve desired outcomes. School heads as change managers are expected to offer advice and practical support in areas such as arrangements, communication, processes and work ways, along with creative means to share resources to maximize the impact of changes on the school community, including those of teachers and learners.

Keywords: Change Management, Education, Generation X, Phenomenology, School Principals

INTRODUCTION

All educators must play key roles in change in schools, the burden is even greater for those in leadership positions. School leaders must respond to change appropriately and show others the way (Dagget & Jones, 2010). A school principal is expected to be both a leader of change and a manager of change. Managing organizational change is perhaps the most critical issue most principals especially those in public schools have to face.

Change management supports a range of change projects, including the implementation of new processes, new systems, updated structures, or technology in the establishment of a new working culture or set of values in any particular area (Burnes, 2004). In the Philippines, government organizations such as the Department of Education (DepEd) try to improve with the help of change efforts, such as new system implementations, change programs and change managers. Arising from the unique character of DepEd in terms of its constitutional mandate and the resulting size of its budget and bureaucracy, its geographic spread, constant reforms and the public expectations, which are few of the equally distinct administrative challenges.

According to Neal & Wellins (2018), the generation that assumes the majority of leadership roles today in schools is the Generation X, also called Gen X or Gen Xers. These people are those born between 1965-1981. There has always been tension between the generations, especially in the workplace (Trapp, 2015). There are differences in values, culture, lifestyle and technological know-how. This creates a big challenge for leaders such as school

principals to manage changes and teams. Bourne (2009) also stated that managing workforce with different generations is a challenge since their reaction to change differs.

This study aims to cover the change implementation perspectives and best practices of the Generation X school principals, their organizational change challenges, the establishment of the change culture in the organization, and the impact of the change management to the organizational performance.

There have been a number of major administrative reforms intended to respond to the administrative challenges of the Department of Education. According to Malipot (2015), reforms from basic education level have been constantly shaping the state of Philippine Education. In response to this, it remains steadfast in the hope to produce competent caretakers of the nation, the learners.

Education Sector Reforms

Few of the major leaps in organizational leaps in the Department of Education (DepED) include the implementation of the Rationalization Plan in 2015 which focused on the principles of decentralization and shared governance to ensure accountability and relevance to the context, and development needs of the learners and stakeholders of the various organizational levels (Department of Education, 2015). The school heads play a crucial role in extending this mission to the school and the community. The Department also accelerated the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM), a key component of Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda or BESRA. SBM is a DepED thrust that decentralizes the decision-making from the Central Office and field offices to individual schools to enable them to better respond to their specific education needs. (DepED, 2015). SBM was officially implemented as a governance framework of DepED with the passage of RA 9155 otherwise known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 as legal cover (Abulencia, 2012).

Another milestone in DepED as a government organization is the implementation of the Results Based Performance Management System – Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers in 2017, an adaptation of the Civil Service Commission’s Strategic Performance Management System. In this system, the teacher’s/employee’s performance is based on the evaluation of the Office or Individual Performance Commitment Report (OPCRF/IPCRF) aligned with the functions stated in the rationalized structure. These reforms are aligned with the Department’s mission, vision and core values. School heads are the champions in the implementation of these reforms in the Department.

The advent of technology also brings about 21st century tools of Educational Management Information Systems fully implemented by DepED across schools. This paved the way for the introduction of various information systems in DepEd like the Learners Information System (LIS) and Enhanced Basic Education Information System. These new web-based tools and platforms require facilitation, data collection, storage and analysis to keep track with the real-time data from the schools to the central office and vice-versa. School heads are the key persons in making sure that these new technological platforms are adopted and utilized in the school level.

Corollary to this, DepED as an organization sees that education reforms can only materialize if the school heads are hands-on leaders. The school head, having the principal role in leading and managing change is a key component of a school community gearing toward implementation of improved outcomes for better instruction, improved teachers’ practices, inclusive school culture for students, and resource management systems (Minnesota

Department of Education, 2016). Change is always challenging, and principals play a crucial role in guiding their schools through the process.

Because of the shifting ideology in the advent of the aforementioned changes where the schools shifted from autonomy to accountability in community building, there creates the gap that educators hang on to considering the traditional viewpoint of schools and others who are looking at 21st century education platform. Changes in the DepEd affect all levels of governance in the department. The school heads being those occupying leadership positions in the educational system are expected to lead schools in the transition from another state brought about by the need for change. For this reason, the researcher became interested in the change and how it is implemented successfully by the school-level leaders in response to the changing times.

Leadership and Management Strategies to Adapt to Change

Based on the study, Gen X school principals employ various strategies in change implementation which could be described by the different interventions they use in making sure that all reforms, administrative changes, new policies and programs cascaded from the Central Office down to the schools are well-understood by teachers and are properly and appropriately realized in the school level. Based on the interview, the strategies can be identified as 1) establishing community of learning, 2) providing mentoring and coaching, 3) communicating the need for change, 4) embracing positivity, 5) leading by example, 6) motivating employees to adapt changes and 7) providing close monitoring.

The principals ascertain that all reforms, administrative changes, new policies and programs cascaded from the Central Office down to the schools are well-understood by teachers and are properly, as well as appropriately implemented in the school level. It becomes imperative that everyone understands the need for change and its benefit by establishing a community of learning. They nurture a supportive culture for change by promoting professional development through teacher collaboration. By sharing their successes during faculty meetings and common planning times, teachers cultivate self-efficacy in their peers by serving as role models and credible sources of feedback. Experienced teachers who are considered leaders also exert influence over their colleagues in the adaptation of innovations. This peer pressure combined with peer support is most effective in developing a culture of change in schools.

Moreover, mentoring and coaching in the schools are believed by school heads as means to support organizational learning. Both mentoring and coaching can promote changes in thinking about and doing one's job and developing an innovative mindset. Aldeman (2011), as cited by Hollywood (2016), underscores the importance of coaching as the facilitation of learning wherein there is engagement that promotes people to think for themselves and generate solutions to issues and challenges in the workplace. Coaching supports new thinking which can lead to a continuous improvement change process. Gen X principals in the Division provide effective coaching and activities to address people's needs during change. Some school heads seek the technical assistance of teachers with technical know-hows, that is for instance, the designated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) coordinators, on how to use tools, equipment and existing technological innovations as in the case stated one interviewee who mentioned how coaching is done with the help of peers. The school principals' skills in communication, listening and coaching will be pivotal in identifying how to support the teachers, both as individuals and as a group, so they can move through the phases as quickly and effectively as possible. Providing room for the impact of mentoring opens the door for a better understanding of change management success in the field. School

leaders value mentoring and coaching as not only a mechanism to improve performance, but also a means to facilitate personal and professional development as well as the motivation to excel.

Gen X public school heads make sure that the objectives and purposes of the DepEd reforms they are tasked to implement in school levels are well-communicated among teachers. As mentioned by one principal, some create forms of information dissemination during meetings and school gatherings by discussing the change in details with their teachers to value its significance and understand how the new processes benefit the learners and the community. Principals in the Division also make sure that the workforce has a common understanding of the need for transition from old ways of doing things to new ones by creating two-way communication channels where they can ask questions, express their concerns and get answers to realize the necessity for the implementation of the new DepEd initiatives.

School heads understand that they directly influence the behaviors of teachers in the school community. During the preparation and implementation stages, leaders understand that they most need to exhibit positive visions toward the change itself. Leading change towards a positive future develops high commitment among constituents. Change managers try to stretch whatever is possible to encourage the schools to perform better and embrace the new policies and programs introduced by DepEd. Positive change management is leading change toward a positive outcome. This idea is supported by Pryor, Humphreys, Taneja & Moffitt (2007) who highlighted that in the present domain of constant and complex change, leaders who react rapidly and responsibly are successful. The teachers' reaction to change will be influenced by situational appraisals that will reflect their cognitive evaluation regarding how a situation will affect the level of well-being. A teacher's emotional or affective experience during a change process impacts their commitment to facilitating a successful organizational change and their behavioral contributions to the change effort.

The beliefs and actions of the gen x school leaders influence the schools' collective efficacy in creating steadfast changes; the principal's actions and behavior affect teachers' motivation. School managers identified that direct principal involvement in the Department's initiatives may lead to teachers' commitment to see through the positive change.

These principals further underscored the significance of leading by example as a way to intensify the teachers' commitment to change, as well as earning respect from them which is necessary for the subordinates to increase their own beliefs in the change. This is a great opportunity for the principals in making change happen by exhibiting managing own work aligned with the desired vision for the organization. York-Barr and Duke (2004) supported this idea with his statement that if the school leaders expect teachers to take risks in learning and practicing new behaviors, they themselves must be open to change and willing to expose their own weaknesses by becoming learners.

Challenges in Change Management

With every form of change, major or minor, organizations face challenges. Organizations, regardless of size, are composed of people. The extent to which individuals within the organization can appropriately manage change represents the overall organizational capacity for change. However, there are other factors peculiar to the organizational setting that can act as barriers to implementing change.

Roadblocks to smooth implementation of change in public schools based on the interview include 1) employee resistance, 2) adapting to new system and technology adaption, 3) learning resources insufficiency, and 4) other intervening activities from DepEd and the

affiliates. At the onset of change initiatives, principals were adept at recognizing and dealing with teachers' denial behaviors. In response to the struggles of teachers, Gen Xers ensure addressing resistance through clarificatory conversations to let teachers know that they are in the know and that their opinions would matter. Communicating the reasons for change and encouraging teachers to embrace change was deemed an imperative to produce positive organizational outcomes. As evident in the responses from participants, another way to overcome change resistance is by delegating tasks. This action engages those who were opposed to change in the implementation. Through this, they are able to identify their priorities and adapt immediate solutions to problems. Resistance to change is not inherently bad. It creates pushback for the change managers to encourage planning and communication. By understanding what underlies resistance to change, the concerns of teachers are addressed.

Lewis (2006) as cited by Erwin and Garman (2009) examined the influence of communicating the change initiative on perceived resistance to constituents. It was then reported that the higher the perceived quality of implementation information received about the change initiative, the less the perceived resistance to change. Scaffolded by this view, communicating the reasons for change and encouraging teachers to embrace change is deemed to produce positive organizational outcomes.

In terms of adapting to new systems and technology, school heads provide technical assistance through the Master Teachers in ensuring prompt, complete and accurate accomplishment of the data needed. Further, by encouraging teachers to utilize technology to support instructions, teachers are led to explore ways to discover variety and to cope with the technological advancements of the digital society.

In addressing insufficiency of learning resources, principals simply guide and motivate teachers to develop materials for the delivery of instructions. Because of the insufficiency of instructional materials being faced by the teachers, they are troubled by the supply of the materials needed in their teaching so as the usability of the materials available online and from other sources so as the available materials given by the Department of Education. In the midst of this situation, instantaneous solutions are considered by the principals to address this dilemma. By encouraging teachers to innovate, school leaders take steps in making sure that this shortcoming is given immediate retort. Likewise, encouraging teachers to utilize the DepEd online learning portal posts a contextualized solution to such, however, resources that can be found here are very limited and that it needs strong internet connection to be accessed. In the process, school heads encourage teachers to reuse old learning resources, use internet resources, download from DepEd's Learning Resource Portal, among others.

As mentioned by the Gen X principals, how they may be able to carry out other additional tasks on top of their key functions of instructional supervisions take a serious challenge on their part because they are in-charge of school management and at the same time many activities to attend to. In addition, school heads emphasize the importance of time management and prioritization in making sure that every task is done depending on priorities. When a principal prioritizes, the most important tasks are considered first, which ensures their accomplishment, and then the other items on the list can be completed. Principals work with their schedule so that every item is accounted for and every assignment is finished even if there are a lot of other activities that need to be completed. Although typically overlooking time management, research in educational administration has documented the importance of how principals organize and allocate their time. Studies find that principals' time investments in some instruction-related tasks, including coaching and teacher professional development, are associated with more positive leadership outcomes. A long literature on instructional

leadership suggests a connection between principals' involvement in instructional matters in their schools and positive performance in their schools (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

Leadership Impact on Organizational Culture and Performance

In addition, based on the results of the study, Gen X school managers' leadership and management positively impacts the school performance. These are identified as: 1) increased teacher motivation and commitment, 2) improved school governance and 3) management and improved performance in competitions. A culture is shaped within the trust between the employees and the leaders of an organization. Leaders can shape good culture. Employees and leaders in the organization need to trust each other in order to shape a positive organizational culture. Leaders with strong leadership skills are able to shape a positive culture in the organization (Ionescu, 2014), due to them being able to inspire trust from their employees. Positive organizational culture does not only improve performance, but also does influence the behavior and attitude of the employees in the organization for the better.

According to Hao and Yazdanifard (2015), good organizational culture not only improves the performance and reduces the turnover rate of the organization, it also facilitates the solution of internal issues in the organization. When a good organizational culture is established, that does not discriminate based on races, religious and etc, it provides a pleasant environment to work in, thereby reducing internal conflict and encouraging discussion and cooperation in order to work through any inter- employee issues that crop up. In addition, good organizational culture encourages a sense of healthy competition, motivating employees in the organization to be more innovative. Therefore, a strong organizational culture can change the overall performance of the organization.

Principals learned to be aware of the culture of the organization, as well as individual needs, and basic underlying assumptions by considering individual differences of personnel in the organization. They are likewise challenged to provide ways to work on these differences. School heads also focus on the organization's change readiness by fostering unity amidst diversity and by creating more leaders. The leadership of Gen X school heads impact the culture of change in their respective schools by fostering unity amidst diversity and by creating more leaders, thus expanding their people and the organisation's capacity to succeed.

Proposed Sustainable School Change Management Program for School Principals

Good principals are not born, they are mentored. Clearly, in managing change, supervisors and higher authorities in the education sector may also consider the need for mentoring, coaching, and related human resource development training program for school principals. With this, school leaders become mentors in their own right, and in return will deepen the pool of experienced individuals who can train their teachers to become growing leaders.

The change management development plan is designed to provide learning and development interventions for school principals and capacitate them in managing the changes that may occur in the Department of Education, the said being a very dynamic government body. The change management plan reflects the possible initiatives to provide human resource development interventions to school heads on managing change so that they will be able to successfully accomplish the reform initiatives of the Department. The plan focuses on improving the leadership and management skills of school heads by exposing them in various change management platforms.

Proposed Mentoring Programs

1	<p>Capability Building on Instructional Supervision and Learning Action Cell (LAC) for School Heads</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To demonstrate ethical personal leadership through relationship building, effective communication, and self-reflection in times of change ii. To capacitate the school heads on conducting instructional supervision
2	<p>Honing Responsible Change Leaders and Managers of the 21st Century</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To understand what is change management ii. To empower and enable the school heads on how to deal with change in the organization, and to effectively respond to its impact on school operations iii. School heads relearn overcoming employee resistance
3	<p>Action Planning for School Heads on Managing DepEd Reforms</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To generate a plan for high performance teams to deliver peak organizational results ii. To recognize the importance of leadership in sustaining an engaged organizational culture
4	<p>Need Assessment of Schools for Monitoring and Provision of Technical Assistance to School Heads</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To monitor the Instructional Practices of School Head ii. To provide technical assistance in the change management implementation
5	<p>Gearing towards High Proficiency in Educational Technology</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To develop understanding of the 21st century educational tools and educational management information system and how they can be utilized in the classrooms /schools ii. To capacitate school heads in providing TA to teachers in utilizing technological innovations
6	<p>Enhanced School Heads Development Program Foundational Course</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To define leadership from an organizational context ii. To develop in-depth strong understanding of organizational motivation in the workplace during change iii. To formulate internal and external strategies behind organizational communication in times of change

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