

## Chapter 9

# Leadership Style and School Culture as Perceived by Teachers in Malaysian Northern State Schools

**Ismail Hussein Amzat**

*International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia*

**Habibat Abubakar Yusuf**

*University of Ilorin, Nigeria*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the effective leadership style for positive school culture as perceived by some Malaysian Northern State school teachers. This chapter uses focus group and open-ended questions to have in-depth understanding and testing of the participants' ability of suggesting or predicting the best or most effective school leadership style for building school positive culture for best leadership practices. The participants were teachers from different schools in Northern States Malaysia undertaking master program in educational management at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The findings revealed that transformational leadership style was rated, predicted, and ranked as the best leadership style for school principals to apply in building positive school culture according to their context while distributed leadership and instructional leadership could be also considered as the second leadership styles for building positive school culture in the Northern schools of Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

School leadership is fundamental in accomplishing and sustaining of school success. School leaderships exerts considerable influence on teacher practices and instructional delivery in classroom, which makes it a contributory factor for student achievement in schools. Sustaining school success, however, rests in the ability of principals to establish clear directions for daily operations in their schools, to develop school values and to wield influence on the management of instructions in the classroom (Garza, Drysdale,

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Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014). Thus, a principal is a central feature in achieving school success (Smith, 2007). For several decades, research evidence cutting across varieties of fields has emerged about leadership and leadership styles, including the education domain. Indeed, a plethora of studies on school leadership have been conducted and consensus has been reached that school leadership is a key factor influencing learning, student achievement and school success (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Over the years, attention has been shifted to the study of educational leadership and school outcomes. Particularly, researchers in the field of educational management have attempted to identify the links between school leadership and school culture. Emerging research evidence has established the significant role that leadership plays in the initiation, development and sustaining of a high-quality school culture (Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Flores, 2004; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Berry 1997; Grace, 1995; Deal and Peterson, 1994; Roberts, 1993; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1991; Sashkin & Sashkin, 1990; Schein, 1985). School principals are ultimately responsible for the success of their schools even though they are not directly involved in the classroom.

School leadership goes beyond teacher, student or instructional supervision and is a multifaceted concept involving several components (Bonnici, 2011). Every school possesses its own attributes that often reflect deep patterns of values, beliefs and custom that have been formed over the course of its history and can be perceived upon entering (Deal and Peterson, 1990). Identifying, learning and understanding values in the daily actions of individual members of the school is an essential element in the development of a high-quality culture that will bring about continuous improvement for proper administration and sustainable development in school (Roberts, 1993; Robinson, 1996).

Hence, developing a high-quality culture in school desirable for development and improvement of learning. Similarly, Langford and Cleary (1995) postulated that a school leader to understand his/her role in sustaining a school's vision for connectedness with respect to the complete system in which his/her school operates by setting quality objectives with clear operating procedures, a developing vision for future and modelling a culture of excellence. This can be attained through continuous improvement towards perceived standards of excellence and core ethical values (Berry, 1997).

Although the concept of culture can be difficult to define, it is conceived of as the product of actions connected with the patterns of behaviours, attached values, and shared attitudes of individual members of an organization (Berry, 1997). Hoy and Miskel (2008) and Bolman and Deal (2008) conceived of culture of as a system of collective orientations that give a distinct identity that binds, unites individual members and ties the components of an organization together in accomplishment of desirable goals.

Based on this, developing a high-quality culture that will manifest itself in the norms and values of an organization requires commitment and a quality management process through leadership. Culture is an important aspect of an organization, and Maehr and Midgley (1996) noted that the culture of a school is related to the level of student engagement and the quality of student achievement and development of life-long learners. Previous research studies have suggested that, schools that value trust and have a shared vision create a positive school culture, which, in turn, influence school outcomes, as a positive school culture is associated with student performance, teacher motivation, teacher commitment, teacher job satisfaction, and collaboration with community (Cheng, 1993; Price, 2003; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010). Thus, aligning with previous research, this current study focuses mainly on school culture because it significantly affects the stability, unity, cohesiveness, adaptability and other aspect of the establishment.

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