LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

By

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ABSTRACT

In life, one will come across diverse types of leaders. While each leadership type has positive and negative qualities, each style fits appropriately in distinct situations. Supervisors must determine how to manage their staff in constructive ways, engaging and motivating them to learn more and do more within their specific professional area. The purpose of this research is to define the various types of Educational Leadership and their pros and cons, compare and contrast various ways to manage educators, how to engage others, and to identify best practices in Educational Technology. The writer will also define professional learning networks/communities and identify their purpose. Questions involved with this research include: What are the various kinds of leaders and the pros and cons that apply to those leadership styles? How can Educational Technology superiors effectively manage their staff? How can they motivate their staff? What are PLNs/PLCs and why are they important? The conclusion of this work will highlight the importance of technology leaders within the educational realm.

Keywords: Technology, Technology in the Classroom, Educational Technology, Professional Learning Networks, Best Practices in Education, Leadership Best Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Steve Jobs once said, "Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected." A leader must expect excellence; however, (s)he must also display excellence. In life, one will come across diverse types of leaders. While each leadership style has positive and negative qualities, each manner fits appropriately in specific situations. Supervisors must determine how to manage their staff in constructive ways, engaging and motivating them to learn more and do more within their specific professional area. The purpose of this research is to define the various types of Educational Leadership, along with their pros and cons; compare and contrast various ways to manage educators; how to engage others; and to identify best practices in Educational Technology. The writer will also define professional learning networks and communities, as well as identify their purpose in order to promote leadership within educational organizations. Throughout this work, the writer will highlight the importance of technology leaders within the educational realm.

Leadership and Its Roles

Hall (2008) describes three types of leaders: Sage, Sensei, and Oracle. Sage leaders appear to be task-driven, delegating specific duties for members of the team to complete (Hall, 2008). They take ownership for decisions that must be made and are generally perceived as egocentric, as they take personal credit for the work of the organization (Hall, 2008). Oracle leaders focus on building relationships within the organization (Hall, 2008). They often see the big picture, but fail to focus on the route to complete the task (Hall, 2008). Oracles take pride in their work, but do not focus solely on their individual contributions. Instead, oracles concentrate on the achievements of the group as a whole (Hall, 2008). Hall (2008), finally, describes a sensei leader as a combination of a sage and oracle, combining the positive attributes of both into one leadership type. The sensei is a "mentor and facilitator", trying to build the team as well as attempting to develop future leaders (Hall, 2008, p. 14-15).

To be an effective leader in Educational Technology, one must identify what type of leader (s)he is. This type of identification requires sincere reflection (Hall, 2008). While each type of leader has pros and cons (whether too egocentric or not focused enough on the big picture), true reflection can allow advisors to build upon their leadership

abilities in order to become truly effective supervisors (Hall, 2008). Hall (2008) asserts that the best reflection is to ask oneself, "How can I benefit from the experience of others" (p. 17). Observing what works and does not work for other leaders and then applying that to one's own practice allows for professional development. This goes hand in hand with becoming a better leader (Hall, 2008).

Technological leadership, however, seems to almost lend itself immediately to a Sensei leadership style. There must be clear definitions of what technology integration consists of and what expectations of its uses are. A leader in educational technology must be decisive and directive, as Hall (2008) points out. While these are characteristics of a sage leader, a technological supervisor must be willing to coach, model, and mentor. Finding a balance is important, as a leader in the educational realm must also motivate and appropriately manage a staff in a realm where technology plays a key role. These characteristics describe a Sensei Leadership Style.

Best Practices

Hammack (2011) describes best practices as techniques that have been researched and tested, and ultimately lead to desirable outcomes or achievements. Filigree Consulting (2012) completed research that noted Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and knowledge sharing as two best practices for technology leadership. Just as Vyogotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) works for students, it also works for adults (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). Educational leaders who allow their staff to discuss and observe what works and does not work with technology implementation in other classrooms will have better results with teachers' attempts to integrate technology in the classroom. Other best practices include: Teacher Efficacy, Flexible Learning, Holistic Practices, Reflection, Collaboration, and Engagement (Filigree Consulting, 2012).

Motivation

Picciano (2011) describes professional development as the most common effective element implemented for technology training. If the professional development is beneficial and meaningful to staff, they will be motivated and engaged. Picciano (2011) states that professional development provides "a threshold or level of technical confidence that is reached in most organizations, which acts as a driving force from within for further technological enhancement and development" (p. 219).

Coaching, as described by Hammack (2011) and Picciano (2011), allows for personalized professional development. This meets the specific needs of educators, based on their technological proficiency. Coaching is a type of mentoring that can be found in many professions, but especially in the education field. As new concepts are introduced, staff members are granted individualized assistance based on the area of struggle (Hammack, 2011). When distinct needs are met, individuals are more motivated to participate as they feel less incompetent in given areas (Hammack, 2011; Picciano, 2011).

Nothing is more frustrating than being trained in an area, but not given the tools to practice what knowledge has recently been acquired. Ensuring that teachers are given the equipment to implement quality technology in classrooms is highly motivating, according to Picciano (2011). Whether allocating funds to purchase equipment for individual classrooms or assigning space for equipment to be shared among staff, having necessary technological paraphernalia which is essential for superior multimedia integration (Picciano, 2011). As teachers are able to locate needed devices, they will be more motivated to experiment further with them in order to gain ease.

The biggest motivator for anyone is an incentive. Picciano (2011) asserts that "both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards need to be considered for staff who become substantially involved with developing other staff and implementing technology in their school" (p. 222). Incentives suggested by Picciano (2011) include: "Extra compensation, release time, or gifts of equipment" (p. 222). Picciano (2011) also suggests incentives of recognition and professional appreciation in order to motivate staff. When staff members feel accomplished and appreciated, they are more inspired to continue with the work they are doing and eventually incorporate new things into their regime.

Management

Fulk, Bell, and Bodie (2011) assert that it is highly important to have meaningful conversations with staff as part of a

management style. Individual goals should be set and professional development should be granted based on those goals, whether on- or off-campus (Fulk et al., 2013). As the year progresses and goals should begin to be met, evaluation and feedback should arise between administration and individual staff members, based upon the objectives originally developed (Hall, 2008; Fulk et al., 2011). Hall (2008) agrees with this management by objectives style of supervision in educational technology. Fulk et al. (2011) claim that management by objectives gives a clear set of expectations for what a leader is looking for from its staff. It also allows for reflection, which Picciano (2011) greatly emphasizes. This reflection is an imperative part of growing future leaders and can commonly be found within professional learning networks and communities.

PLNs/PLCs and Their Roles

A Professional Learning Network (PLN) or Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a group of people who come together for a similar purpose. According to Trust (2012), a PLN is a system that allows professionals of similar occupations to connect to "offer support, advice, feedback, and collaboration" (p. 133). These connections allow for professionals to stay knowledgeable of up-to-date information through various avenues, such as websites or social media (Trust, 2012). PLNs are designed to promote communication, collaboration, and learning (Trust, 2012). Technological leaders in education not only join PLNs, but they also promote these communities within their workplace in order for their staff to grow professionally as well. Professional Learning Communities are helpful to digitally motivate professionals as well as to help with motivation, reflection, and mentoring.

Inspiration

According to Trust (2012), individuals who become involved with PLNs are motivated to grow professionally. They are not belittled for areas where they lack knowledge, but are encouraged to learn more. 'Edmodo' is one particular PLN that educators can join. This particular network "provides up-to-date insights" and "motivates members to share helpful resources and build their own libraries" (Trust, 2012, p. 137). This is particularly helpful when trying to learn how to integrate technology into the classroom or, simply, becoming more technologically savvy (Trust, 2012).

Reflection

As previously mentioned, Fulk et al. (2011) assert that reflection is a key component to success in any profession, but especially in education. Hall (2008) agrees with this emphasis, noting that reflection requires educators to reflect on what has worked and not worked on a given measure. Often, individuals will not do this if they are not intrigued to do so by some other factor. Twitter is one example of a PLN where reflection is often piqued by various professions, especially in the education field. While Twitter, to a layman, may seem as a gossip site, much like Facebook, many professionals use it to link up with one another and discuss (or "chat") various topics regarding their professions. Based on the experience of this writer, these chats typically lead to deep reflection. Often, questions posed through Twitter chats ask how or why something worked within a profession. This type of reflection allows educators to view their strategies used within the classroom to determine whether they are beneficial. As stated previously, Picciano (2011) emphasizes the importance of reflection in order to improve oneself professionally.

Mentoring

Lloyd (2012) expresses the importance of mentoring. Many new in-service teachers do not get the support they need to keep them in the profession. Hammack (2011) concurs with this sentiment, stating that coaching (as previously mentioned) provides individualized attention to what beginning professionals need. As more professionals lean towards PLNs, they are able to attain virtual mentors through communities such as Twitter, where there are groups who meet together to offer mentoring support. As more and more technology leaders promote Professional Learning Networks for mentoring, educators will become increasingly at ease with various technological avenues and will be more willing to implement them into the classroom. This action will afford students more opportunities within the classroom to gain the technological experience, profiting their 21st century learning skills.

Discussion

Good leaders are able to motivate and manage their staff through the use of best practices. They are able to implement PLNs and/or PLCs in order to grow the staff in technological implementation. There are factors, however, that can hinder the effectiveness of an educational technology leader. The reader will be able to identify limitations that can hinder a technological leader within the educational realm.

Limitations

There are limitations that could influence the efficacy of educational technology leaders. These limitations may be in result to teacher training and teacher perception. Following are the details of each limitation, as described.

Teacher Training

Lim, Pellett, H and Pellett (2009) discuss the important role that technological use can play. In order for it to be beneficial in the classroom, however, educators must be properly trained in what capacity certain technological devices can be used (Lim et al., 2009). Jenkinson (2009) agrees with this assertion, discussing the necessity for proper teacher instruction, declaring that teachers attempt to integrate technology into the classroom without fully comprehending the concept or context in which it should be utilized. Educational leaders must understand the need for beneficial professional development in order to properly train teachers in diverse technological devices to successfully implement technology in the classroom. Burns (2013) asserts that an appropriate vision and proper training can lead to a highly enabling technological classroom.

Teacher Perceptions

While educational technology may be exciting to some, to many educators it is highly stressful, as it is uncharted territory. Because there has been a recent boom in the technology world, many educators refuse to move forward with these upgrades, causing their students to miss out on learning 21st century skills required by the recently implemented Common Core Curriculum State Standards (2012). Clarke and Zagarell (2012) document that numerous educators are unwilling to integrate technology into their classrooms, stating that this resistance "seems not to be a barrier itself; instead it is an indication that something is wrong" (Bingimlas, 2009, p. 238, as quoted by Clarke & Zagarell, 2012, p. 137). Many seasoned educators are hesitant and therefore indifferent with the implementation of technology because they have not experienced the same encounters with technology use as many of their peers (Clarke & Zagarelle, 2012). Those who strive to be instructional technology leaders must attempt to motivate those who struggle with its implementation so that all students receive the advantages offered by technology.

Conclusion

John Quincy Adams said, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value, others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest but each of you to the interests of others." Leaders must determine how to manage their staff in constructive ways, engaging and motivating them to learn more and do more within their specific professional area. By implementing best practices to motivate and manage staff, supervisors within the educational sector will be able to take scholastic technology to a whole new level.

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