

# The Role Of The Leader In Formatting Culture In A School Unit

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## **Abstract:**

*The leadership in school and especially the school leader are very important for the school unit's success, because they provide high school education. The literature review has demonstrated that the culture is also part of this success and constitutes the school's identity. Additionally, the culture can be formatted by the school leader. So, this review aims to investigate the factors of culture formation in a school organization and how the leader can act catalytically in its formation.*

**Key Word:** culture; leadership; leader, school.

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## **I. Introduction**

Leadership in a school is the cornerstone of creating a successful school unit. This is because successful leaders play an important role in providing high quality education (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The leader occupies a key position in a successful school (Reynolds, etc.) and its successful leadership has significant positive effects both on the quality of the school organization and on the learning process (Leithwood et al., 2006). Culture constitutes the school's identity (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), the point that differentiates it from others (Mintzberg, 1979).

The leader occupies a key position in a school (Reynolds, e.g.) and the successful leadership has significant positive effects on both the quality of the organization and the learning process (Leithwood et al., 2006). Through a systematic review of the literature it has become clear that one of the characteristics of the successful leader, emerges through various researches (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006 et al.) is the formation, creation and management of culture in a school unit.

Culture constitutes the school's identity (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), the point that differentiates it from others (Mintzberg, 1979). The smoother these conditions are, the more work we get from the teachers and the more performance from the students. As long as there are problems and divisions are encountered in subgroups that are mostly competitive with each other, the other two factors, the performance of the work by the teachers and the result by the students, are excluded and we encounter problems.

## **II. Culture**

Culture is a driving force for the better functioning of organizations, because it contributes to shaping the character of the organization and the way of thinking of its members, simultaneously influencing the effectiveness of teachers and the academic performance of students (Passiardis, 2004). The concept of culture is complex, complex and much discussed and has often been used as a synonym with other concepts, such as the school climate. Also, its definitions are superfluous.

Culture is the symbols, rituals, and myths that convey the organization's values and perceptions to employees (Ouchi, 1981). Culture is the organization's ideology, which includes its perceptions and habits and differentiates it from other organizations (Mintzberg, 1979). Culture is a system of shared perceptions that distinguishes one organization from another (Robbins, 1998). "Culture is a system of shared orientations that hold the members of the organization together and give it a distinct identity. "Orientations are values, norms, myths, attitudes and tacit assumptions" (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p.177). A definition of particular interest is that of Schein, who has greatly influenced research on organizational culture. He believes that culture consists of basic assumptions, values and beliefs that are accepted and transmitted to new members of the organization (Schein, 1992). Essentially, then, culture refers to the individuals, within the organization characterized by the ways in which values, beliefs, prejudices and behavior are manifested through specific processes of the life of the organization (Day, 2003). Therefore, the school culture essentially reflects the beliefs, values and beliefs of the

people who work within the school. It also relates to what is actually done in the school, increases the commitment of the people who work in it and the stability of the school system, acts as a link in the school organization and creates levels of behavior. It also improves camaraderie and cooperation activities, builds the identification of student staff and administrators with the school and enhances the energy, motivation and vitality of staff, students and the community. Also, increases interest in daily behavior and performance of greater attention to those of real importance and value to the school.

When there are many shared values, patterns of behavior and practices, and where the levels of culture are sufficiently interrelated, then a strong culture results, where it is an important asset to the school organization and encourages the participation and involvement of members of the organization, providing employees with important purposes to work. Thus, on the one hand, their loyalty to the organization and the cohesion of the organization increases, while on the other hand, the tendency to leave the organization decreases.

A theme that appears quite often in the literature is the confusion that exists regarding the concepts of culture and climate in an organization. "These two concepts had their historical roots in different sciences. Climate comes from social and industrial psychology, while culture from anthropology and sociology" (Kythraiotis, 2006, p.52). Climate is a group of internal characteristics and is defined by the shared perceptions of organizational members. Culture consists of shared values and norms of organizational members. Both concepts are used to describe the character of the organization, with climate describing the personality of the organization and its culture, its atmosphere.

The importance of the organization's culture can also be seen through its functions, which are according to Robbins (1991):

- It differentiates one organism from another
- It gives the organism a sense of identity
- It creates conditions for the development of a sense of commitment in the organization
- Strengthens the stability of the organism
- It creates cohesion in the organization
- It shapes the attitudes and behaviors of the members of the organization

The above functions of the culture create an organization that is strong and creates fiscal conditions for the members, limiting the cases of their flight (Mowday, Porter & Steers, op. ref. in Christofidou, 2011). The culture of a school is analyzed in three factors: content, homogeneity, strength (Kilmann et al, 1986; Maslowski, 1993; Soeters, 1988). Content concerns the meaning of the basic assumptions, norms, values that exist in a school and are embraced by the staff. Content is determined by individual dimensions (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1988; Johnson et al, 1996) or typologies (Handy & Aitkin, 1986; Staessens, 1993). Homogeneity is related to the degree to which the basic conditions, values, norms are shared and adopted by the school staff. In schools, the development of a subculture is observed, which also leads to relative homogeneity in the culture of a school.

The third dimension, power, reveals the extent to which teachers' actions are influenced and changed according to the basic premises, values and norms of the school. In other words, power is linked to the social control of staff compliance with the school's culture. It is readily understood that the study of culture means focusing on the values, "beliefs," and meanings derived from the interaction of members. This is also shown by Schein's definition, which refers to a standard of basic assumptions, which are transmitted to new members.

The first level of culture includes visible characteristics of the physical environment of the organization, but also in norms of behavior that help individuals in an organization to perceive the various aspects of the life and functioning of the organization (Passiardi, 2004). It is the unwritten and informal expectations as expressed through the visible structures and processes of the organization. So, they are on a superficial and concrete level.

At the second level is placed a system of shared values that could be characterized as the pursuits of the organization. According to Schein, values are a justification of the behaviors exhibited by members of the organization at the most superficial first level mentioned. So, values are the strategies, goals and philosophies according to the desires of the members of the organization which are at a less superficial level. So, the existence of common values influence the behavior of members in an organization, who, knowing what is desired, try to transform the values into behavioral norms.

At the deeper and more abstract third level are the non-conscious, abstract beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the members of the organization related to human nature, human relationships, truth, and the environment. At this level is the essence of culture and it is stated that the internal dimension of culture that concerns human relationships, but also how exactly the unit perceives itself and shapes what it ultimately becomes and what it represents for others (Athanasoula – Reppa, op. ref. in Res, 2007).

Cameron and Quinn (as cited in Passiardi 2004), proposed the competing values model, which suggests four types of organizations. Each of these types has its own indicators, which present people's assessments of the

organization's performance. These values are the values and assumptions that apply to each individual organization and according to which the organization's performance is evaluated.

Hierarchical culture: emphasizes stability, control, predictability and harmony. The goal of the organization is to operate within the framework of traditional bureaucracy, where control is exercised internally and the focus is on the efficient operation of the organization.

Market culture: determined by stability, differentiation, control and the effort to adapt and respond to changes in the environment, so the organization survives in competition. Survival also means expectation of victory and success in achieving the goals of the organization. Market culture is commonly found in private schools.

The "party" culture: has as its core values cooperation, participation, cohesion and dedication. The purpose of the organization is good interpersonal relations and usually the culture of the company is found in rural school organizations.

The culture of conditions: pursues distinction, creativity, risk. The organization aims to develop new products and services and undertaking innovations is a characteristic of the organization.

In a school organization the existence of various groups implies the coexistence of many kinds of culture in the school unit. A way of separation is done according to the two main groups of the school, the teachers and the students. So there is the culture of the teachers and the culture of the students. These two groups represent two different cultures, as the culture of the teachers is a culture of work while that of the students is a culture of learning. But a key characteristic of the general culture of the school is the degree of coherence between the separate types of culture. The greater their degree of cohesion is, the stronger the school's culture is.

Culture in an organization, which is considered an open system that sends and receives influences, cannot be considered immutable. It accepts changes and changes constantly, depending on the goals set by the organization. Usually, changes are made with the aim of improving efficiency by affecting both the structures and the norms of behavior that prevail in the organization (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Changing culture is complex and neither easy nor quick. Any transition from one culture to another is painful, regardless of how beneficial the new culture may be (Putman & Burke, 1992). It requires a systematic effort and the contribution of all those directly involved. The culture change process contains five stages. At the beginning it is necessary to determine the priorities of the school unit and immediately after that the strategy to be followed is defined. Then, follows the period of destabilization and the modification of the internal conditions of the school, with the ultimate goal of reducing the consequences of the destabilization. Finally, the change in culture is achieved (Kythraiotis et al., 2010). Change in a school is as much about changing the culture as it is about changing the structure of the school. Most changes in schools are almost exclusively related to changing their structure, overlooking the need to change their culture as well, which will strengthen the drive for change. In the effort to improve it seems that change, culture, reconstruction are directly connected.

### **III. Leadership-Leader**

The concept of "leadership" occupies an important position in the theory of management science as well as in the daily operation of modern organizations. Many scholars have tried to define the concept so that the phenomenon "leadership" becomes more understandable. According to Passiardi (2004), leadership is the nexus of those behaviors you use with others when trying to influence their own behavior. More simply, a leader is someone who has the ability to influence some people to do something he wants. Leadership is a multi-dimensional but also multi-level concept, since it is exercised by various people who hold various positions at various levels, such as the principal, teachers, students and parents (Kythraiotis & Pasiardis, 2006, p. 414). The leader in context of the school unit is the person who acts as a beacon, guiding the teachers towards a common vision or goal for the benefit of the students (Kondaxi, 2008, p.7). According to Chomers (1997), leadership is a process of social influence in which a person manages to secure the help of others to achieve some common goal. According to Yukl (1998), these definitions are more rational and do not meet the contemporary needs for charismatic and transformational leaders. More modern definitions speak of the importance of emotions. Leaders based on these definitions use their emotional influence to inspire their subordinates (Beatty & Brew, 2004). Leadership according to Saitis (2005) is an important aspect of management. However, it is not identical with it. It is part of it and mainly aims at the necessity of change in the way of behavior and mentality of the people, when the circumstances dictate it. Also, Passiardis (2003) has made a distinction between management and leadership. In his view, the term administration has to do with the day-to-day, administrative, routine handling of the daily tasks for the functioning of the organization as a bureaucracy. The leader gives direction to the organization within a time horizon. The term leadership includes both management and direction. In leadership there is a vision, a direction for where the organization is heading in the long term, giving strategic orientation. Thus, Passiardis considers that leadership is above the other two, but at the same time he considers that in order to be a good leader, one must also be a good administrator and a good manager.

Some scholars (Skoulas, op. ref. in Christofidou, 2011), consider that leadership ability is acquired, that is, it is taught, while others (Zaleznik, 1988, op. ref. in Christofidou, 2011) argue that leadership cannot be taught. The latter view applies only to individuals naturally gifted with leadership skills and in relation to interacting variables such as followers' goals and situational activities (Kourtis; Brown; Vernardaki, op. cit. in Christofidou, 2011). As far as the best leaders are concerned, it seems that they are the ones who utilize people (Saitis, 2005). Thus, various research-based theories of leadership have been developed to explain the nature of leadership.

#### **IV. Leader and culture formatting**

When we study the culture of a school we must refer to its special characteristics internally and externally. Internal ones concern human relationships and emotions (Anthopoulou, 1999), but also the manager (Res, 2005). All members of the school participate in shaping the culture, but the role of the leader is decisive. But how does it shape this culture within the school organization? Defining and shaping culture is one of the first goals of a leader who tries to develop a healthy culture in the school unit, since culture has been shown through research to be vital to the development of high academic levels among students (Barth, 1990, Campo, 1993).

The role of the principal regarding the issue of culture in his school is multifaceted (Christofidou, 2011). It transmits shared beliefs, values and attitudes. It achieves this, for example, by giving teachers time to collaborate and learn from their experiences, when it promotes the training and cooperation of teachers with teachers of other school organizations and encouraging feedback through teacher discussions and when encouraging teachers in times of crisis. Also, the role of the leader in shaping culture lies in the fact that the leader integrates within the school the philosophy, values, beliefs and beliefs of the local community with the ultimate goal of activating society and creating ties with the local community, implements programs and innovative actions with the participation of teachers, parents and the local community, recognizes the successes of students and the school, thus giving meaning and identity to the school, creating a positive climate and high expectations for both teachers and parents and to the students, so that they become efficient and innovative (Kontaxi, 2008).

The manager - leader has a vision, a mission, so he chooses the people of his team, so that his goals are achieved. This, of course, is done in fully or partially decentralized educational systems, where the leader can choose his team. It can also apply to centralized systems, since the main goal is the education of students (Nikolaidou, 2012). The manager has a work system, in which most members of the organization are involved through the assumption of responsibilities and delegation of authority. Through his behavior and the way he approaches his teachers, he directs the culture of the organization towards efficiency.

At the same time, he must know the formatted school culture and the degree to which it encourages or hinders the progress of students and the achievement of the goals of the school unit (Barth, op. ref. in Christofidou, 2011). So you have to receive and utilize its elements, communicating the vision and goals of the school. Furthermore, it must encourage the creation of those conditions that will result in the process of change in the school, through the formation of ways of behavior, as well as the spirit of collegiality, cooperation, trust, common goals, values, common vision (Passiardi, 2008). In more detail, the principal is the one who understands the existing school culture, focuses on maintaining stability, while promoting the necessary changes based on the needs of the local community and society, has individual values and beliefs the same as the values and beliefs of the school organization, communicates with the other members (teachers, parents, local community), is a model for the promotion of culture and finally expresses his personal satisfaction for the successes of the school unit (Kythraiotis & co., 2010). In addition, the school principal plays an important role "in creating reflective practice for the process and in shaping a collaborative climate in the school" (Tsafos, 2006, p.4). It uses symbols and rituals that express the values of the culture, while "cultivating a positive environment, guiding the collective planning, evaluating the educational staff, always trying to have the required logistical infrastructure and the most efficient operation of the school" (Passiardi and Passiardi, 2006, p.22).

The leader, therefore, has a catalytic role in the way the group solves problems of the external environment, but also of internal manipulations. He has confidence, determination and opinion. He manages the culture of his school by transmitting values and beliefs consciously and unconsciously (Schein, 1992), he is interested in the work of his school, but also the satisfaction of the social needs of his staff (Hoyle, 1986).

#### **V. Conclusion**

School culture reflects the beliefs, values and beliefs of the individuals who work within the school. These elements hold the school organization together by giving it a common identity and contributing to the formation of its character (Passiardi, 2008). School culture is not static but dynamic in nature. The process of changing the school culture and the consequent improvement of the school is a process that requires a lot of effort and cooperation of all those involved in the educational process (Passiardi, 2008).

The enormous importance of culture lies in the fact that it is related to the process of changing and improving the educational unit, the effectiveness of the school and the educational process in general, as well as the effective management of human resources. The importance of leadership in shaping culture is unquestionable (Shein, 1985, 1992; Nias et al., 1989). The main responsibility of the leader is to understand the culture of the school that will help to overcome obstacles, to introduce innovations and changes (Sarason, 1973; Schiffer, 1980). Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin (Schein, 1985, p.21).

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