

Leadership Analysis in K-12 Case Study ": Divided Loyalties & Quot

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Abstract

This report mainly aims to provide a critical and in-depth analysis of the K-12 Case, “*Divided Loyalty*” by Holy and Tartar (2004). The case recounts how the manifestation of inadequate leadership skills in a school setting could affect negatively the performance of students.

Keywords: Leadership, Suburban High School, Principal, Assistant principals, and performance of students

1. Overview of Case

The actions and events presented by Hoy and Tarter (2004) in their case study take place in a small community known as Suburban Center. This section presents the setting, key players, and situation at hand.

Setting

The events in the case study take place in Suburban Center, a small community located in the outskirts of the large Midwestern city. The community has a population of 30,000 people, which consist of a mixture of the old guard and new guard. In addition, the community has one high school, the Suburban High School. The arising leadership issues and events are being witnessed at Suburban High School.

Key Players

Several key players are notable in this case. The first is *Ted McGann*, the current principal at Suburban High School and a member of the old guard. McGann is of Caucasian race; also, prior to becoming the principal at Suburban High School, he had worked as a teacher for 20 years. Since he was an undistinguished teacher, during his teaching days, his appointment to the position of the principal came as a surprise to many including other youth professionals who were shortlisted for the position. Currently, he has a difficult task of making decisions that would help improve the performance of the school.

The second notable key player in the case study is *Patrick Brown*, the current superintendent of the Suburban Center. Similar to McGann, he is Caucasian and a member of the new guard. Prior to taking his current position, he was a teacher who had left the Suburban community to pursue a career as a school administrator. Although he has observed that his aspirations are professional, his hiring decisions has been characterized with political machinations, as was seen in his decision create a new to a point Darlene Baker as the second assistant principal.

The third key player is *Carl Forza*. Recently, he was appointed to the position of the assistant principal at Suburban High School following the decision by the former assistant principal to take another job in the neighboring district. Forza is Caucasian and a member of the old guard, and he was the social studies administrator at the middle school. His appointment to the position seems to be legitimate because he was a hard worker who had worked hard for his election to the board. Forza, as the assistant principal, believes in a leadership style characterized by discipline, loyalty authority, and obedience.

The fourth key player in this case study is Darlene Baker. Darlene Baker is the current second assistant principal, who was appointed to the position by Superintendent Brown. Baker is of Hispanic origin, and she is one of the minority groups in Suburban Center. Prior to the appointment, she had also applied for the position of assistant principal but lost to Forza. Her leadership style differs significantly from Forza’s style, as she believes in autonomy, cooperation, initiative, and professional responsibility as the effective approach to leading the school. Consequently, the differences in ideologies between the two assistant principals have resulted in significant conflict between them.

Situation at Hand

In brief, Suburban High School is currently witnessing several challenges. Although Principal McGann and his two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza, had promised to work together to help improve the school’s performance, they currently seem to be having conflicting ideologies in matters concerning in the school. Their differences in tactics and plans have caused a significant drift between the teachers, with some teachers accepting Forza’s tactics and the remaining of teachers accepting Baker’s tactics. In turn, this has created tension at the school and; consequently, the performance of students at Suburban High School has started to drop significantly in the last one year. In tandem to this, there have been increasing issues of cyber-bullying cases at the school. So, the principal is now faced with the difficult challenge of addressing these issues.

2. Analysis from Multiple Perspectives

Accurately, as noted in the previous section, Principal McGann had daunting and difficult task of addressing the emerging issues at the school. Since there are two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza, the atmosphere at the school has become extremely intense. Teachers at the school are currently divided into two groups; those who support and follow Forza's tactics, and those who support and willing to follow Baker's tactics and leadership style. The principal; however, is torn between supporting either of the assistant principals. While the principal believes that Baker's leadership approach is the most appropriate approach that the school should implement, he fears removing Forza from the situation because the board president would not like that. To this extent, it seems that the situation at the school has become very political because external forces are influencing the ability of the principal to make a decision at the school. This section will examine some of the leadership perspectives/approaches that could be used to analyze the case. The three leadership perspectives relevant to the case include: Structural Perspective, Human Resource Perspective, and Political Perspective.

2.1 Perspective #1: Structural Perspective

Bolman and Deal (2013) defined structural leadership framework/perspective as a leadership style that focuses on strategy, structure, implementation, adaptation, environment, and experimentation. Leaders who follow this framework often tend to think clearly and logically, particularly when it comes to developing goals and policies (Kline & Saunders, 1998; Tough, 2013). Contemporary theorist of this framework, such as Bolman and Deal (2013) noted that leaders who exhibit structural leadership framework often do not hesitate to hold people accountable for results. Therefore, in light of this theory, Principal McGann should assess and identify individuals responsible for the declining performance at the school as well as the emerging tension between the two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza.

However, as demonstrated in the case study, Principal McGann is incapable of holding his assistants accountable for the rising political atmosphere in the school. He seems to agree that Forza's tactics are unnecessary as they are causing unrest at the school. Many teachers object Forza's close, authoritarian supervision, arguing that he is too strict, particularly to the teachers he considered disloyal to the old guard. To this extent, it is justifiable to observe and appear that Forza is partly responsible for the increasing tension at the school, which has resulted in teachers forming sides. Therefore, as a leader principal McGann should hold him accountable; nonetheless, McGann fears taking a harsh decision against Forza because "the president of the board would not like it" (Holy & Tartar, 2014, p. 3).

Structural leaders always provide an important role in providing suitable technical support for planning, organizing, coordinating, and implementing policies in school (Sheninger, 2014; Sutton & Rao, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). To this extent, the emerging conflict at the school could be best explained using the model developed by Henri Mintzberg (1994), known as the Mintzberg's model of organizational structure. Mintzberg's model of the organizational structure is a flexible version of traditional organizational chart capable of aiding in the illustration of the structural frame.

Mintzberg's model of the organizational structure demonstrates that leaders should be capable of ensuring that various individuals in an organization are dedicated to the overall objective of the organization. Precisely, the model demonstrates that a good leader should be capable of fostering coordination among staff members as well as ensuring effective management of core operations. Besides, a leader must ensure that the objective of the organization is in line with its technostructure (Stone & Heen, 2014; Sutton & Rao, 2014). In line with this case study, as the principal and leader of the school, McGann was supposed to provide a suitable and consistent framework for the two assistant principals in order to facilitate good working environment for all the teachers in the school. Nevertheless, his failure to provide practical and technical support to ensure effective coordination and implementation of effective strategies resulted in conflicts between the two assistant principals. In essence, in line with structural model, if McGann believes that Forza's tactics are unsuitable for running the school, then he should hold him accountable and remove him from the position or tell him to change his tactics, regardless of the potential reaction from the president of the board. The main limitation of structural frame, however, is that it is over simplistic and does not incorporate important variables, such as human and political variables (Bush, 2011). In light of this limitation, the model may not be appropriate for addressing the resulting conflict between Forza and Baker.

2.2 Perspective #2: Human Resource Perspective

Human resource perspective/frame is a leadership style that focuses on supporting, advocating, and empowering people. Human resource frame could also play a significant role in solving the emerging conflict between the teachers as well as addressing the increasing poor performance and indiscipline cases at the school (Gladis & Goldsmith, 2013; Schmoker, 2011; Schein, 2013). Contemporary supporters of this perspective such as Burns (2010) and Bush (2011) indicated that human resource leaders believe in people and communicate that belief. Human resource model of leadership appears that the organization is an extended family that comprises of

individuals with their own needs, styles, needs, and preferences. Therefore, as noted by Burns (2010), it is the work of the leaders to listen, motivate, coach, develop strong interpersonal relationships, and empower people.

As demonstrated in this case study, the school's staff, such as teachers and, particularly the two assistant principals, seem to be lacking of adequate support and empowerment from their principal. Precisely, McGann seem to be very passive when it comes to overseeing the management of the school, as he has left the responsibility to his assistants. This has resulted in each individual demonstrating and appearing different tactics, which, in turn, has resulted in a conflict between the two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza, and the teachers as well. Consequently, the increasing conflicts within the staff seem to be affecting the school negatively, as the performance of the school has declined significantly, and the cases of cyber-bullying among students have increased since the appointment of the two assistant principals. Although the principal is incapable of supporting and empowering both the tactics by the two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza, he should strive to identify the best tactic and plan that best reflect the interest of the majority of staff members at the school. Besides, he should also ensure that the chosen approach is capable of improving the performance of the students, as well as reducing the indiscipline cases in the school.

Accordingly, the arising conflict could be best described using the Douglas McGregor's - theory X and theory Y (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Precisely, theory Y tends to treat each worker in an organization as a mature and responsible individual. In light of this, Principal McGann should be capable of treating Forza and Baker as individuals capable of demonstrating accountability and transparency when it comes to management of school affairs. Therefore, he should summon the two assistants and advice them to work collaboratively to help the school achieve its objectives. On the other hand, Maxwell (2013) noted that it is through the human resource perspective that leaders express their emotional intelligence. In line with this, Principal McGann should not be influenced by his interest; instead, he should demonstrate his emotional intelligence by not letting his personal preference for Forza affect his decision to empower and advocate for the most appropriate leadership approach suitable for instilling discipline and improving performance at the school.

I would assume that teachers who object Baker's leadership approach are mainly doing so because she is a member of the new guard. Conversely, people objecting Forza's approaches seem to agree that they are authoritative and biased against members of the new guards. In essence, some teachers seem to object Forza's ideologies because they deem them ineffective and unsuitable for the school. Also, some teachers, particularly the members of the old guard, object Baker's leadership ideologies because Baker is a member of the new guard and not because her policies are ineffective. To this extent, as the Assistant Principal, Forza should consider advocating for empowering Baker's tactics, as they would help enhance the professional obligations of the teachers, which, in turn, would facilitate increased performance and discipline at the school. However, the main limitations of human resource perspective/frame are that it tends to ignore and neglect the power of structure as well as the realities of conflict and resources. In light of the case, it would be difficult for the principal to solve the conflict, particularly if powerful authorities, such as the president of the board and the superintendent are influencing him.

2.3 Perspective #3: Political Perspective

The political frame/perspective is a leadership perspective that mainly focuses on coalition and building (Senge et al., 2012; Schein, 2013). Moreover, the political perspective aims to bridge the communication gap between the conflicting parties with the organization (Sheninger, 2014; Sutton & Rao, 2014). In light of this perspective, organizations are viewed as places where various individuals and interest groups compete for power and scarce resources. The competition results in conflict and the formation of collations based on special interests. The competition and differences in tactics between Forza and Baker has resulted in conflict. This, in turn, has resulted in teachers at the school forming sides with some supporting Forza while some are supporting Baker.

Theorists who support this model, such as Bush (2011) noted that political leader's work is to negotiate, advocate, network, diffuse opposition, build an alliance, and influence important individuals and constituencies. In light of this, Principal McGann should consult with his assistants separately to ascertain the root of the emerging conflict and the possible solution to solving the resulting consequences such as poor performance and increasing cyber-bullying cases at the school. Since the three agreed to work together immediately after the appointment of the two assistant principal, they should be in a positions to independently discuss with the principal the main challenges they are facing in the course of their duties. In essence, talking with his assistant separately would enable him to get honest opinion from them. After ascertaining the roots of the conflict between, Baker and Forza, Principal McGann should consider advocating for a leadership approach that he believes would be successful in managing the school matters.

Stone and Heen (2014) indicated that leaders operating out of political perspective clarify what they want and what they can get. These researchers further ascertained that political leaders are realists, meaning that they never let what they want to cloud their judgment about what is possible. In line with this case study, McGann seems to prefer Forza because not only because he is a member of the old guard, but also because

favoring him would enable McGann to foster a good relationship with the board. However, McGann seems to agree that Baker's leadership approach is the most relevant approach for the school. Therefore, as a political leader, McGann should put his interests aside and summon the two assistant principals in order to negotiate the leadership approach he believes is appropriate for the school.

While this model is the most relevant for addressing the emerging issues in the case study, it has several limitations that could affect its effective use. Firstly, the model mainly emphasizes collaboration towards shared goals; however, in the case of Suburban High School, collaboration between the two assistant principals may not yield fruits, as they are constantly competing for their tactic to be followed in the school. Besides, the model tends to assume conflict and power struggle; instead, it focuses on the various ways organization could use to achieve its objectives. However, as seen in the case, the main issue is the resulting conflict between the assistant teachers.

3. Leadership Recommendations for Key Players

The previous section has provided an in-depth analysis of three-leadership perspectives that could be used to address the underlying issues currently being faced at the Suburban High School. This section will provide a leadership recommendation to the key players at the school in order to facilitate good work environment at the school. This section will start by summarizing the situation at hand at the school.

In summary, Suburban High School is Currently witnessing several challenges. Although Principal McGann and his two assistants, Baker and Forza, had promised to work together to help improve the school's performance, they currently seem to be having conflicting ideologies in matters concerning in the school. Their differences in tactics and plans have caused a significant drift between the teachers, with some teachers accepting Forza's tactics and the remaining of teachers accepting Baker's tactics. In turn, this has created tension at the school and; consequently, the performance of students at Suburban High School has started to drop significantly in the last one year. In tandem to this, there have been increasing issues of cyber-bullying cases at the school. The principal is faced with the difficult challenge of addressing these issues.

Based on the analysis done in the previous section, it appears that the most suitable model for addressing the emerging issues at the school is the political frame. The conflict arising among most of the key players associated with the school seem to fit in the political framework. So, in brief, the political perspective/frame is rooted, particularly in the work of political scientists, such as Williams and Dempsey (2014) who see organizations as contests, arenas, or jungles. As noted in the previous section, political frame describes organizations where different interests tend to compete for power, and scarce resources. Conflict is rampant and common in such scenarios because of enduring differences in needs, lifestyles, and perspectives among groups and individuals.

In line with this case study, it largely appears that differences in opinion among key players have resulted in intense conflict between them. For instance, Superintendent Brown, unlike other members of the school board, believes that Baker is the most suitable candidate to the position of the assistant principal. Since he is the only member of the new guard with a senior position at the school, one can assume that he is the only person who prefers Baker to the position because Baker is also a member of the new guard. Consequently, when Baker failed to get the position, Brown decided to form the second assistant position and subsequently appointed Baker for the position. Later on, it turned out that the two newly appointed assistant principals can not work together, owing to their differences in ideologies.

To this extent, based political frame, it is justifiable to ascertain that the addition position of the second assistant principle was unnecessary at that moment because it only led to the manifestation of conflict. Therefore, instead of rushing to create the position, Superintendent Brown could have first assessed as well as consulted with other professionals to ascertain the anticipated responsibilities and duties of the two assistant principals. Bolman and Deal (2013), while discussing the characteristics of leaders that demonstrate political leadership, observed that leaders should not only be persuasive but should also be effective at building supports and alliances, as well as in resolving conflicts arising among individuals in the organization.

McGann is the leader of the school; therefore, it is his responsibility to ensure that all conflicts emerging in the school setting are addressed. Succinctly, Principal McGann should demonstrate her leadership skills by effectively fostering a good working environment at the school. Currently, the situation at the school has become too political, as teachers have formed sides, with other supporting Forza's leadership style while others are supporting Baker's leadership approach. In light of this, as observed in the previous section, McGann should consider conducting a meeting between him and his two assistant principals in order to discuss the way forward. By calling a meeting, he would have demonstrated that he is not only willing to persuade the two assistant principals to solve their differences, but he would have also demonstrated that he is capable of supporting and resolving the emerging conflict between the two groups of teachers.

In respect to the political frame, Bolman and Deal (2013) observed that authority should be one power, meaning that senior members in a given organizations should follow the same authority. Currently, at Suburban

High School, it seems that the two Assistant Principals, Baker and Forza are trying to demonstrate their powers independently, meaning that there is a lack of a single authority at the school. Therefore, the principal needs to intervene in order to outline or advocate for a single authority that would help improve working conditions at the school, as well as the performance of the school.

Conversely, Burn (2010) ascertained that some of the important skills that should be demonstrated by political leaders are the ability to network and build coalitions. Principal McGann has demonstrated that he lacks this skill, as he has failed to network or work collaboratively with his two assistant principals. Therefore, as the leaders of the school, he needs to develop an interpersonal relationship with the two assistant principals to enable them implement the same strategy aimed at improving work environment at the school. From the beginning, McGann was not comfortable with the fact that Baker was appointed as his principal at the school. Consequently, based on this, he has not been able to build collision, conflict, or formed a good working relationship with Baker. Nevertheless, he believes that Baker's approach is the best approach, as it is capable of fostering good working conditions in the schools.

Baker believes in autonomy, cooperation, initiative, and professional responsibility, as the best approach to running the school. I believe that Baker's strategy, especially the reinforcement of professional responsibility, would help facilitate teachers' involvement in school matters. Teacher's involvement, on the other hand, would help facilitate increased performance of the students as well as increased discipline cases. In short, if the principals forge and shape a coalition with Baker, the school would be able to operate smoothly because Baker seems to have the most suitable approach for running the school. As noted by Burns (2010) leaders should put their interests aside and focus on making decision that are capable of influencing the entire organization. In light of this action, it is recommendable that McGann put his interest aside and work closely with Baker in order to implement her leadership approach to managing the school.

The political frame could also be used to make recommendations for the two remaining key players, Forza and Baker. Precisely, the conflict seems to emerge between Forza and Baker in the ideological or leadership differences. Their differences in leadership style have affected the whole school as teachers from the school have started to form sides. Bolman and Deal (2013) while discussing the characteristics of political leadership framework, indicated that problems always arise in organizations when power is concentrated in the wrong places or is so broadly dispersed that nothing is done. Similarly, as seen in this case study, despite the fact that he is the assistant principal, Forza seems to be biased towards one group of teachers, presumably members of the new guard. Some teachers have openly complained that Forza is always "popping up all over the place" especially in a classroom of those teachers he considers disloyal to the old guard.

In light of this observation, it is practical to assume that conflicts are arising because administrative power have been placed in the wrong hand; that is, in the hands of Forza, who has proved to be ineffective, as seen in his biases towards some teachers he considers disloyal to the old guard. To this end, since Principal McGann has the power to remove Forza from power, he should consider replacing him or advising him to change his leadership style. On the contrary, Baker, seem to be having an effective leadership approach that empowers both teachers and students. Bush (2011) recommended that a leader must assess the distribution of power and interest before making decisions. In light of this, Baker should analyze how her approach to school management is conflicting with Forza's approach. From then on, she would try to collaborate or work together with Forza to address their differences in tactics. However, if this approach proves to be futile, the Baker should consider meeting with the principal in order to discuss the emerging issues and the potential solutions to the emerging conflicts.

4. Conclusion

Conclusively, based on the analysis of the case study, it is important that principal McGann should take an immediate action to help address the emerging conflicts, as well as the issue of poor performance and lack of discipline. From a personal perspective, I believe that as a political leader, McGann should make an independent decision without fear of influence from external forces such as influence from the president of the school board. In light of this, it is highly necessary that he should meet with his assistant principals and inform them how their differences in tactics are affecting the whole school. From then on, he should take appropriate measure and implement the best decisions that would help improve the performance of the school, even if that means removing Forza from his position as the assistant principal.

In brief, McGann main decision should be to come up with uniform and consistent rules and principles to be followed by all members of the staff including his assistants. Bolman and Deal (2013), while highlighting the elements of political frame noted that authority is just one power. This means that set of rules and principles should be uniform across all departments at the school. Therefore, instead of allowing his assistants to implement their tactics independently, the principal needs to demonstrate his leadership ability by reinforcing a uniform leadership approach. This would help solve the increasing conflicts among the teachers. In turn, teachers would be able to concentrate on educating the students and instilling discipline. In the long term, the

performance of students as well as discipline would improve considerably.

Overall, in regards this case study, the analysis of this case provides me a good insight into desirable leadership practices. I have learned that school leaders need to perceive a learning institution as an organization those functions as a whole through the integration of its parts. As such, effective leadership requires proper collaboration from various stakeholders/ key players.

In addition, I have learned that teamwork and learning plays a significant role in enhancing progress in an organization of education. Another important take-away from this paper is that I have learned how apply theories of leadership into practice to diagnose organizational problems, such as the ones in Suburban High School.

The knowledge from this case analysis will help me in my professional practice in future to understand the roots of organizational problems and approaches of solving them. Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention that having a common vision is a probable way of overcoming some issues in an organization. Finally, it is noteworthy that this case analysis has enable me to gain insight on how to utilize different perspectives and theories in analyzing a single situation.

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