Four Pillars of an Educational Institution: Why are they Important?

Chencho Wangchuk[1*]

[1]*Gedu College of Business Studies, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Opinion Article

ABSTRACT

An educational institution is a home to thousands of inquisitive learners, and the quality of their learning, upbringing, and nurturance are predictive of our futures. To ensure that they are skillfully trained, progressively fostered, and compassionately nurtured, there are four pillars – leadership, workplace culture, physical structure and human resource – which are both foundational and indispensable to an institution. Only supportive interrelationship among these pillars can guarantee cognitive, emotional and behavioral progresses among or between learners, educators, administrators, and managers.

Keywords: Educational institution; infrastructure; human resource; workplace; leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

An educational institution is a seat of learning, growth and transformation. It is where we - tall or short, strong or weak, rich or poor - build our dreams, plan our futures, and determine our fate. It is also a place where most of our formational and transformational phases begin. Therefore, it must provide an education that nurtures good behaviors and transmutes learners' heads, hearts, and hands. Otherwise, we may achieve targeted literacy rates but not fulfill educational aspirations. We may witness graduates graduating with certificates but not learning,

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*Corresponding author: Email: chenchow15@gmail.com;

skills, and talents with which they can proudly penetrate the world of work. Simply producing graduates who are neither prepared for opportunities nor trained to face challenges would be unthinkable for any country. Amidst the likelihood of such a situation, there is a need to relook at four pillars: leadership, workplace culture, physical infrastructure, and human resource, which are indispensable for providing quality education that ultimately engages learners' mind, body, and spirit as many an education policy envisions.

Leadership is the engine of an institution because of its foundational influence on the institution's organizational conditions. Although it may not alone affect the institution substantially, it can possibly regulate workplace climate within the institution. One such is its power to stagnate, corrupt, or transform the institution because of administrative and managerial authority a leader has on its systemic functions [1, 2]. For example, while an authoritative leader adversely affects the system and workforce [3,4], a visionary leader, on the other hand, revolutionizes and systematizes its functionalities, often catapulting it to success within a short period. The former is either self-centric or specific group-centric as it relies on conformity, cronyism, and favoritism. The latter is everyone-centric. Its workings are based on collaboration and partnership [1, 5], for instance. This leader is not only emotionally intelligent [6,7] and religiously compassionate but also a "clock build[er]" [8]. S/he celebrates diversity, nurtures collaborative culture [9], cherishes dynamism, ensures collegiality, and promotes organizational learning [1, 4]. At the same time, s/he also dismantles individualism and balkanization [9] because s/he knows that they are threats to empathic relationships, institutional growth, and collective advancement. As a result of his/her synergistic leadership, the institution would experience organizational learning and growth, industry and professionalism, and action and feat. Due to such exemplary leadership, the subordinates would also determinedly demonstrate loyalty, develop competence, and show credibility. And as in many a case, through the convergence of the leader's personal magnetism and subordinates' aptitude and attitude, the institute will become a center of excellence. However, a leader of the other type would not only do a lot of inspirational, functional, interactional, cultural, and institutional damages but also cause employee turnover [10, 11, 2]. Such trend risks ". . . possible compromisation of student learning"

[12]. In short, selecting an applicant in a leadership position based only on cognitive and technical abilities may be a blunder as these abilities are said to become secondary [3] while managing humans. Therefore, more than the qualification should other attributes of a prospective leader must be considered in the selection procedures as an educational institution deserves someone who can humanely manage humans and muster their potentials and skills.

Workplace culture is another important pillar. It is where employees employ both in-born and learned skills to further their professional competence. This pillar offers its workforce opportunities for lifelong learning and professional growth and career stagnancy or end of it. Both spring from the workplace culture. To promote continuous learning and growth through mutual professional support, the workplace should contain unconditional human connections exemplified by mutual trust, respect, and love. Such emotional bonding breeds institutional allegiance and so commitment guided by integrity and loyalty. Studies also consistently show that a collaborative workplace increases productivity [3,13] resulting in mutual professional gratification. More importantly, as an educational institution, such mutualism assures holistic transformation of learners through nurturance of [14]'s eight elements – natural, social, cultural, intellectual, academic, aesthetic, spiritual, and moral - of a green educational institution. That is why its leader and educators must responsibly create a professionally conducive, motivating, and cooperative culture around the right people who can contribute to building an institution and delivering services [see 15]. Interestingly, like plants, humans also thrive in accepting and accommodating workplace environments, not in balkanized, fragmented, and individualized settings. Consequently, these flourishing employees would make significant contributions to institutional advancement [16,17] by delivering quality education and promoting learning among learners [18]. On the other hand, lack of collegial relationships negatively affects workers' emotional and psychosocial wellbeing and so their ability to perform and achieve the set targets [19,20], often resulting in underperformance. This workplace is often characterized by compartmentalization, isolation, and balkanization [9] which adversely affect, what [21] calls, "social aspect of human life" [p. 2]. As it does not cater to human needs, no harmonious relationship [22] exists among the

employees leading to high employee turnover [see 2, 3]. Although one may argue that such a workplace augments intellectual competence [23] and increases individual productivity [24], it impedes employees' social and emotional aspects [3] that are ingredients for better on-the-job performance. In fact, lack of human connection and professional isolationism reduces emotional, psychological, social, and physical wellbeing and decrease output due to disturbances in inextricably interconnected domains of learning – cognitive, affective and psychomotor. As a result, both educators and students would likely experience living and learning hardships.

The third pillar is the physical structure, and it comprises physical infrastructure, teaching materials, and technological equipment [25]. Abundance of such structural facilities often attracts more students because these structures also facilitate good learning. However, the sustenance of these facilities might depend on the aptitude and attitude of those who manage and utilize them. It is often true that richly furnished institutions run by irresponsible people affect institutional sustenance and efficacy. It is also true otherwise. Poorly established institutions do not reinforce working conditions. They handicap the workforce, increase their workload and decelerate their progress. Studies also warn of early departures, especially among the competent ones, owing to this pillar. Therefore, no institution can afford to lose capable individuals because such losses have huge institutional implications. First, it is costly because recruiting, retraining, and staffing involve enormous financial, infrastructural, and human resources [2,3]. Second, loss of individuals also means loss of their irreplaceable experiences, skills and knowledge [26, 27] along with them. Finally, as an educational institution, the loss of experienced educators also leads to shortages of human power that eventually deprives students of experiencing impactful learning. Thus, good classrooms, comfortable workstations, and technological equipment, for instance, are essential physical structures required for fast, efficient, and effective delivery of educational services and learning.

The quality of human resources often springs from combined effects of leadership, workplace culture, and infrastructure. To produce gems, a leader has a crucial role to play. Besides recruiting the best candidates, human resource too needs careful management. Poor or mismanagement of it often causes substantial damage to the whole system. If such mismanagements continue in an educational institution, its implications may spill over to students, and cause ripple effects on many other organizations in which these graduates would later work. Perhaps, educational institutions will be partly blamed for grooming and training them poorly if those organizations fail. For this, first, all staff needs vigorous training in the areas of their specializations. Relevant in-house professional development programs, for instance, are called for as it is training that re-equip them with relevant skills and upscale their performance [28]. Besides upskilling, such opportunities provide them platforms to learn what they do not know. Unless they know what and how to teach first, they cannot meaningfully transfer them to students. If they cannot deliver the content well and assist both formation and transformation phases, others will question both learning and training. Therefore, to professionalize and revitalize teacher competence, there must be investments in teacher development programs to have significant implications on students' holistic development [18, 29], including improvements in academic achievements. Good teachers groom and nurture learners for life, while bad teachers pamper and handicap them for life.

2. CONCLUSION

In short, to transform an educational institution and promote good holistic learning among its students, it needs four interconnected foundational pillars. Only the combined effects of these pillars will significantly contribute to the nurturance of individual potentials, talents, and skills, and strengthen institutional reputation and development. Only supportive interrelationship among these pillars can guarantee cognitive, emotional and behavioral progresses among or between learners, educators, administrators, and managers.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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