

Chapter Five

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the survey was to determine the relative importance of the Principal's interpersonal relationships with her teachers, especially in terms of eliciting their responses to their own perceptions and expectations or preferences of certain dimensions of the Principal's areas of responsibilities and specific-focus activities.

The research survey was administered through the cooperation of the Principal and management of a private institution of higher learning in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. In this survey, the questionnaire method was used to establish the responses of both the Principal and her teachers to two sets of similar seven questions, one for the Principal and the other for the teachers. It recorded a total of 27 responses out of 30 teachers, representing 90 per cent of the total survey population. The Principal was administered a separate questionnaire. The responses, with demographic data elicited, focused on perceptions and expectations of the Principal and the teachers on the following areas of the principal-teacher responsibility: staff and student welfare, course management and promotion, ministerial requirements, and income, expenses and profitability; and areas of human relations including discussion and communication, motivation, personal matters, and staff consultation.

Despite the limitations of this study, particularly in terms of its limited sample size, the private higher education institution in Petaling Jaya can be seen as a typical private

education organisation in Selangor and the Federal Territory that is often plagued by issues and problems related to the professional and organisational interactions of its Principal and teachers. These issues and problems may be real or contrived, existing or emerging, and small or big. But, as this study has shown, the differences in principal-teacher perceptions and preferences or expectations of selected dimensions of the Principal's areas of responsibilities and involvement in specific-focus activities suggest the need for improvement in principal-teacher human relations. This is especially so in the context of improving communication, repairing deficiencies in some areas of communication, and enhancing the positive areas of effective communication at work and in the organisation so that amicable and cooperative principal-teacher relationships can be translated into effective and productive results in the interest of students in particular and education in general.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of the study have already been presented in the preceding chapter. This section merely summarises the major findings.

Most of the respondents concurred that the Principal's main areas of responsibility are staff welfare, students' welfare, course management, and college income. They were less concerned about the requirements or the Principal's dealings with the Ministry of Education. In short, their concerns are mostly student-oriented and organisation-oriented.

Like the Principal whose task is not really to decide which of her duties are most or least important, most of the teachers agreed that it was difficult for the Principal to decide which one responsibility was more important than the other. In short, they were not unduly disturbed by the Principal's reluctance or/and inability to set priorities for her areas of responsibility.

Most of the teachers were vocal about the importance of the Principal remaining unbiased and fair when dealing with issues such as problematic teachers. Apart from this, they were also emphatic about the need for the Principal to consult them before implementing any new ideas and policies. They supported the ideas of fostering staff motivation, encouraging caring dispositions or attitudes, promotion of greater accessibility to the Principal. They prefer to keep personal or family matters private. In short, when the Principal and teachers interpersonal communications improve among them, a favourable and friendly climate of work can prevail for more productive activities and eliminate wasteful resources. And at the end of the day, the principal-teacher interpersonal relations become more professional.

The teaching staff on average prefers the Principal to spend 40 percent to 60 percent of her time on human relations. This increase in Principal involvement can lead to greater accessibility of the Principal to the teachers.

Most of the teachers observed that the Principal was moderately involved in attending external official functions, liaising with government bodies, and conducting training

sessions. They held the view that the Principal have a moderate to major involvement in conducting staff meetings, motivating staff and informing them of the latest college updates, meeting senior staff , having one-to-one discussions with problematic teachers and attending college functions. However, they prefer the Principal to be involved in issues of staff training and skills upgrading for effective classroom teaching, including motivational sessions to improve interactions at work and meetings. In short, the general expectation is for the Principal to be more involved in interacting with teachers, especially when the latter is seen as the “intermediary” or “conduit” through which the “business” of the college is affected in terms of students’ welfare and college income and profitability. Also, the platform for effective and productive communication is, after all, the group. In this instance, the principal-teacher constellation is an essential group in the functioning of the college, and group affinity suggests teamwork, co-operation, shared concerns and experiences, and empathy for better and productive results for all involved in the daily, routine operations of the college.

Among the main hindrances that most teachers indicated which obstructed the Principal from executing her tasks and activities more effectively are the need to complete more urgent activity and the failure to see the activity as important. This suggests that, most of the time, many teacher welfare-related matters such as skills and technology upgrading, and other college-related matters affecting teachers may be ignored. And this has affected morale and the quality of interpersonal relationships at work.

It is observed that the female staff accounted for slightly below 60 percent of the teachers population. This finding tends to confirm the popular belief that the teaching profession is female-dominated for various reasons, including the common belief that there is a lot of time available to manipulate between “the home” and “the office”.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, a few recommendations may be made. It is recommended that the college surveyed uses the findings of this research to help its Board and management plan appropriate strategies to improve the principal-teacher interpersonal relationships, especially in the areas where there are perceived and preferred or expected differences.

From the survey findings, most of the teaching staff indicated that one of the Principal’s main areas responsibilities is in the area of staff welfare. In light of this, it is recommended that the Principal focus her efforts and plans in ensuring that staff welfare is looked into more thoroughly and constructively. From the findings, the teachers also indicated that it is important for the Principal to consult them before implementing any new ideas and policies. Teachers may be able to provide valuable feedback on certain issues and policies, and policies should not be “shoved” upon them without consultation. It is observed that presently the Principal has been looking into staff welfare. However, because of the Principal’s busy schedule, it is recommended that a personnel

administrator or a human resource department be set up to assist the Principal to formulate a comprehensive staff welfare policy.

The above findings also revealed that the teachers are emphatic about the need for the Principal to be unbiased and fair. They want the Principal to avoid favouritism and discipline staff who are problematic so that the reputation of the college will not be tarnished. In this regard it is recommended that a Joint Disciplinary Committee be set up. The members should comprise some management staff and a few teacher representatives so that issues can be handled more objectively.

From the findings, teachers were relatively less concerned with the Principal's time spent on governmental matters. It is recommended that the Principal delegate such duties to the College Registrar. It is also recommended that the Principal will only handle such matters where the Registrar requires further assistance.

Another recommendation is for the Principal to be visible in engaging in more relevant interpersonal communications. The teachers perceived that the Principal devoted 20 to 40 per cent of her time on human relations activities and preferred her to spend 40 to 60 per cent of her time on it although the Principal herself perceived and preferred to spend 60 to 80 per cent of her time on it. Therefore, it is recommended that the Principal spend more time interacting with a larger group of teachers. More teachers must feel the impact of her interaction. In this respect Irmsher (1996) emphasised in that there is a need for leadership to be more accessible and approachable. The Principal must not only get

involved in such activities but must also be seen to be involved. It is recommended that the Principal be present in more staff functions, group discussion meetings, staff meetings and practice, and whenever possible, practise 'management by walking around' (MBWA) suggested by Peters (1982). Another suggestion advocated is for the Principal to widen her leadership base so as to reduce her bottleneck on paper matters, enabling her to spend time on "people" matters. This may be a good opportunity to train young managers from within so that the substantial part of the paper work can be delegated to young managers.

The findings also revealed that the teachers considered it to be moderately to most important for the Principal to publicly recognise excellent work done by teachers and their achievements as part of building human relations. It is recommended that the college should have special award meetings for teachers who are high achievers. However, care should be taken that this will in no way isolate teachers who are consistently maintaining moderate or good performance at work. Therefore, it is suggested that the Principal should at all times be mindful of giving sincere appreciation and gratitude for staff who worked hard. The college may want to try an 'Employee of the Month' campaign. This recommendation is in line with what Irmsher (1996) observed that 'for every interaction the Principal should be aware that the employee usually seek acknowledgement and a sense of esteem from their work.' Moreover, communication experts normally recommend the use of sincere praise whenever possible.

Further findings also revealed that teachers prefer the Principal to be involved in staff training, skills upgrading, including motivating and informing them of the latest

achievements and problems. It is recommended that the Principal organise more training and development programs including motivational programs. It is suggested that Analysis of Training Needs be done to assess what the college actually needs. In addition to this, the college may wish to start an internal newsletter and a New Bulletin Board in the staff room to keep staff informed of happenings. In this regard, this recommendation is congruent with what Lawler (1989) observed that the sharing of information is one of the easiest and most effective ways managers foster employee involvement and interaction with the organisation.

The above findings also revealed an interesting observation in the Principal's work, that is, it is difficult to set priorities of the many Principal's responsibilities as it is made up of parts, which are interrelated, interdependent and yet sometimes independent. Therefore, it is recommended that the Principal develop the skill of assessing and prioritising each task in the light of the circumstances at hand, to enable her to address the issue accordingly. In this respect, some form of short in-service training for the Principal may be appropriate.

As mentioned earlier, effective human relations, especially effective communication, is important for the success of an organisation. Efforts to improve human relations in an education institution such as the one involved in this study will likely bring about greater staff satisfaction, commitment and efficiency thereby leading to better quality education and institutional profitability.

5.3 Conclusion

Education is changing. So, too, the institutions, both public and private, are changing. The rate of change, however, seems to be faster in the private education institutions than public ones because the former necessarily responds to fast changing “market” demands. The reason is that as the “market” demands change, in terms of parent-students choice of education “packages” for certificate, diploma and degree programmes that often come with a range of prices, depending on the duration and location of the programme, private education institutions have to innovate quickly in response to these changes. In this process, the contents and quality of education are often sacrificed. The latter is significantly affected by many factors, including inadequate facilities, make-shift buildings, compromised standards, and lack of committed principals who have become “jack-of-all-trade”, lack of trained, qualified and committed teaching staff.

The consequences of compromised standards, questionable operations, lack of dedication and incompetent professionalism of principals and teachers can and do adversely affect private institutions of learning and their delivery of quality education. In this regard, it is imperative that principal-teacher human relations, among others, be in “ship-shape” condition so that conflict-prone situations and tension-generating circumstances are minimised to enable efficient and effective delivery of education products and services to their paying customers. Unless, their organisation is in order, their interpersonal relationships amicable and productive, and their communication network problem-free and clear, the best of intentions of the Principal and teaching staff may not be practised. Their

professional and organisational image will continue to be over-shadowed by incessant parent-student complains and public criticisms.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned earlier, the study has several limitations. To overcome some of the limitations, it is recommended that future research in this area include a large sample of respondents from more private institutions of higher learning, either in Petaling Jaya or/and the Federal Territory.

A more ambitious research project along similar interest can concentrate on a comparative study of principal-teacher interpersonal relationships based upon areas of responsibility and specific-focus activities related to college management, management-principal-teacher interaction, including perhaps the dimensions of teacher-student formal exchanges inside and outside the classroom or lecture rooms.

It is also recommended that in larger studies in the future, a more sophisticated statistical analysis should be used.