

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IN SCHOOLS

Cepi Triatna¹

Abstract: The phenomena of low managerial capacity in the schools that have occurred recently cause the main educational service to not operate as effective as having been expected. The study then would like to find the answers regarding the question of how to develop the school's managerial capacity in order to improve the educational quality. The study was conducted by using the qualitative approach through a case study in two senior high schools. From the results of the study, the researcher would like to conclude that the school's managerial capacity that had been developed through the professional learning community that focused on: the leadership role modelling, the learning activities with the educators and the educational staffs from the managerial process, the creativity development in the problem-solving activities and the provision of healthy working environment conditions might improve the educational quality. In order to improve the school's managerial capacity, the researcher would like to recommend: 1) opening the involvement of multiple parties in order to assess the school's success; 2) managing the flow of information better to all of the related parties; 3) moderating the ill-functionality of certain parties that have problems in performing their duties and functions or that have problems in the problem-solving activities; 4) strengthening the sense of being a family as a community; 5) performing reflection toward the involvement of each educator and educational staff; 6) enriching the process of dialogue, reflection and evaluation; and 7) creating a comfortable school atmosphere away from the burnout (mental tiredness). The results of the study would fill the empty space in the process of developing the school's managerial capacity especially in the context of Indonesian schools.

Keyword: school managerial capacity, professional learning community, and education quality

1. INTRODUCTION

The schools' managerial capacity in the multiple Indonesian regions suffers from serious problems in terms of nowadays operational process and educational results (Bappenas, 2009; Reflection of school supervisors; Wayan Koster, 2011). The results of

¹ Department of Educational Administration, Faculty of Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

a preliminary study conducted toward 5 elementary schools, 5 junior high schools, 3 senior high schools and 2 vocational high schools in the Cimahi City 2011 showed similar results. The preliminary study also showed that the schools suffer from many problems in terms of managerial capacity especially in relation to the ill-functionality of educators' and educational staffs' roles and functions in accomplishing their duties and solving the problems faced by the schools; whereas, the school's managerial capacity is integrated (inherent) to the duty and the function of each educator and educational staff.

The actual condition shows that the schools have not been able to meet the professional working demand as the educator and the educational staff and the demand of the schools' stakeholders. In detail, the problem is the appearance of behaviors exposed by the principals, the teachers and the school staffs who have been difficult to provide the best service for the learning participants, to solve the problems that they encounter and to meet the stakeholders' expectation. The two problems that have been mentioned above also show that the school's managerial capacity suffers from a serious problem, namely the schools have been unable to provide the main service in a qualified manner to the main customers in the form of well-qualified learning facilities for the learning participants. The efforts of solving the problems in the low school's managerial capacity within the operation of well-qualified educational service demands the development of school's managerial capacity that should be integrated with the school's daily activities (Lambert, 1998:11) and should be pursued continuously instead of being accidental activity for the educators and the educational staffs.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theory of "school's managerial capacity" is a concept that has been developed in multiple scientific perspective in order that the theory will be more established (Morgan, 2006:4). For the sake of the study, the researcher would like to reconstruct the theory of "school's managerial capacity" based on the concept of school management (Gold & Evans, 2005; Everad, Morris, Wilson, 2004), organizational capacity (Horton et al., 2003) and school's managerial capacity (Bryan, 2011). The school management is understood as the efforts of empowering all of the school's resources in order to produce a well-qualified learning (Gold & Evans, 2005). Organizational capacity has been the organizational potential to perform certain functions or the organizational capability to apply the skills and to use multiple organizational resources in order to achieve the objective and the satisfaction of the interested parties (Horton et al., 2003). In that context, the school's capacity is intended to meet the expectation of learning participants, parents, teachers, principals, government and wide society. The form of school's managerial capacity appears in the form of school's strength and capability to empower all of the available resources in order to produce the well-qualified learning (Bryan, 2011).

The substance of the managerial capacity from the schools that have been studied is reflected in a concept proposed by Bryan (2011:19): the ability of an organization's management to effectively utilize the infrastructural capacity and available organizational resources to achieve organizational goals. The concept explains the substance of school's managerial capacity as the ability of school's management to effectively benefit the available infrastructure capacity and organizational resources in order to achieve the school's objectives. Bryan (2011:15) clearly uncovers two components of an organization's managerial capacity namely: 1) focus of management on the leadership that provides vision and action as the integrator of the managerial system; and 2) management as the strategic actor for identifying and implementing the dynamic capabilities that will affect the organization's performance improvement.

The review upon the development of school's managerial capacity leads to the school members' learning process from the program implementation and the school activity. In the perspective of organization's managerial capacity development, schools are viewed as a learning organization with the following characteristics: (1) facilitating the school members to learn in order to increase their competence; (2) supporting the application of learning results into the job practice; and (3) creating a conducive and comfortable organizational environment in order to stimulate shared learning process for the sake of improving the organization in the future. The shared learning process is called as professional learning community. The term is defined as the school members' shared efforts in: 1) increasing the learning participants' learning process; 2) promoting and supporting the learning process of learning participants in the schools; 3) establishing knowledge by means of invention; and 4) analyzing and using the data for the actions of reflection and improvement.

3. METHOD

The study was conducted by means of qualitative approach through a case study in two senior high schools namely 2 Kota Bandung State Senior High School and 2 Kota Tasikmalaya State Senior High School. In gathering the data, the researcher performed: 1) observation toward the daily school process both inside and outside the classrooms; 2) interview to the learning participants, the principals, the teachers, the librarians, the laboratory offices and the administrative employees; and 3) study toward multiple school documents namely the development plan, the annual working plan, the working and budget plan, the teachers' assessment, the school activities, the learning administration and alike in relation to the school operation. The field data gathering activities were performed for 12 months in the two schools that had been selected as the case study.

4. FINDINGS

The study found several patterns in the process of strengthening the school's managerial capacity by means of professional learning community. The patterns were as follows:

- The school's managerial capacity was manifested in the form of potentials, resources and management of school's potentials and resources that supported the school objectives achievement.
- The school members' involvement that had been based on the commitment in the process of school's managerial capacity development was manifested when the educators and educational staffs or the school members directly became the part of school activities.



Figure 1: The range of school members' involvement in the process of school's managerial capacity development

Category-1 was characterized by the following behaviors: (1) not minding the activity process; (2) considering his or her involvement in the school activities as a meaningless aspect; and (3) feeling not to be the part of overall school group/click or of school organization.

Category-2 was characterized by the following behaviors: (1) sometimes being involved in the process of an activity and his or her involvement was transactional; (2) assessing his or her involvement irregularly; and (3) sometimes feeling not to be the part of overall school group/click or of school organization.

Category-3 was characterized by the following behaviors: (1) being often or always involved in the process of school activities and his or her involvement in multiple school activities was more of dedication and of self-satisfaction; (2) assessing his or her involvement in multiple school activities as something meaningful and his or her meaningfulness in attending these activities was considered as an aspect that would always be related to other parties which had been bigger; and (3) often or always feeling not to be the part of overall school group/click or of school organization and if he or she had certain duties or problems in the job then he or she had a tendency to be drawn in his or her problem-solving activities.

- School quality keeper in the process of capacity development was related to three aspects namely: job experience, self-commitment in job performance and critical attitude toward the school management.



Figure 2: The range on the role of school quality keeper in the process of capacity development

The educators and educational staffs who had many job experiences, who had high job commitment and who had been critical toward the school management would be considered by the school members as the school quality keeper. The school members sensed that they had learned much when they had interactions with the school quality keeper.

- The awareness in the process of developing the school’s managerial capacity had been the starting point for the growth of school’s managerial capacity process.



Figure 3. The range on the awareness in the process of school’s managerial capacity development

The A-Category educators’ and educational staffs’ behaviors were characterized by the following behaviors: (1) accepting all of the duties that had been given by the school leaders; (2) not minding the success or the team or school failure;

(3) performing simple reasoning toward the problems that he or she encountered and not thinking about the problem-solving activities; (4) having a tendency to be apatic with the new matters and even denying certain new matters in his or her life; and (5) not having consistency regarding the his or her role or existence in the community or in the school.

The B-Category educators' and educational staffs' behaviors were characterized by the following behaviors: (1) interpreting and appreciating all of the duties that had been given by the school leaders in relation to his or her interest/ involvement; (2) sometimes feeling disturbed by the team or the school failure; (3) performing simple reasoning toward the problems that he or she encountered and trying to find the solutions; (4) sometimes being apatic toward the new matters but accepting the new matters as a follower or the last follower; and (5) having consistency in his or her role within the community or the school although sometimes the consistency was not good.

The C-Category educators' and educational staffs' behaviors were characterized by the following behaviors: (1) interpreting and appreciating all of the duties that had been given by the school leaders proportionally in relation to the goodness of bigger party; (2) always feeling incomfortable with the team or the school failure; (3) performing simple reasoning toward the problem that he or she encountered and trying to find his or her role in the problem-solving activities; (4) often or always being optimistic with the new matters and even being a pioneer in accepting the new matters; and (5) having consistency in his role and existence within the community and the school and the consistency was always good.

- The school's managerial capacity development looked like a layer. The characteristics of layer-type capacity development were as follows: (1) being gradually strengthened; (2) being gradually developed everyday by means of school operation; (3) being integrated to the daily life in the school management; (4) being grown in accordance with the leadership role-modelling in the school; and (5) the already strengthened school's managerial capacity would be the DNA of school organization that would be inherent in the long term.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Developing the capacity in establishing the school's vision, mission and objective

The school members agreed that the school's vision, mission and objectives had been made for the interest of the learning participants and the design of the vision, the mission and the objectives demanded people who high sensitivity toward the school's strategic environment. The direction had been in accordance with the objective and the focus of professional learning community in the schools namely the learning process

of learning participants (Hopkins, 2010:744; Lambert, 1928:23; Hord, 2003:19; Holly & Southworth, 2005:3; Stoll & Louis, 2007:2). The process of designing the school's vision, mission and objectives strengthened the managerial capacity. In relation to the statement, one of the professional learning community characteristics was the dissemination of the school's vision and values among the school members (shared vision and values). The dissemination of school's vision should arrive on the level in which the vision would be able to encourage the individuals to use the vision as the guideline in taking decisions regarding the learning service in the school (Hord, 2003:19). Susan Auerbach (2009:25) stated that there should be involvement of the school leaders directly and collectively altogether with the parents from the beginning until the end. The results of a study by Vivienne Collinson (2008:456) revealed that the key of organizational success in the 21st century was to pursue learning and innovation. In order to support the shared learning, the organization members should perform experiments – invention, dialogue, Socrate's point of view and argumentation – that had been displayed in the age of ancient Greek. Pietersen (2010:42) stated that leadership that contained a learning process should have 5 competencies namely: insight, focus, alignment, execution and renewal through continuous learning. In addition, Stool (2010:469) stated that the school communities in which some of the members served as the school quality keeper had more intensified sensitivity toward the strategic environment while the ones in which the members served as general participants had low sensitivity toward the strategic environment. On the other hand, Hall & Simeral (2008:148-151) outlined the role of school administrator in the process of developing the school's managerial capacity as follows: 1) to serve as the school director when there had been a tendency that the school members' behaviors belonged to the level of indifference; 2) to serve as the school navigator when there had been a tendency that the school members' behaviors belonged to the level of confusion; 3) to serve as the school advisor when there had been a tendency that the school members' behaviors belonged to the level of action; and 4) to serve as the challenger when there had been a tendency that the school members' behaviors belonged to the level of improvement.

5.2. Developing the capacity in designing the school's annual work plan

The interaction of school members became the medium of leadership development whenever the involvement of educators and educational staffs in the interaction was the self-interaction or the self-role exposed by each educator and educational staff in relation to the school's interests that should be met. The educators and the educational staffs associated themselves to the missions that the school should carry out. The process of associating themselves to the school's missions was the aspect that had been considered to gradually develop the leadership capacity of the educators and the educational staffs. The recent study also found that benchmarking had been an activity that stimulated the development of creativity in designing the school's annual work plan.

The experts' review also showed similar results. Peter Jarvis (1992:71-85) outlined a category that people learned from the culturally-reproductive experiences. Not all

interaction produced the learning results. The experiences that had been evaluated, that had been investigated in terms of logic and that had been reflected would cause an individual to change and to be more experienced while the experiences that had been memorized would not cause any change. Narongrith Intanam, Suwimon Wongwanich & Nattaporn Lawthong (http://www.iaea.info/documents/paper_4d52fc9.pdf) suggested the educational providers, especially the schools, to implement the benchmarking activity for developing the professional learning communities in the school. Baker & Murray (2001:124) emphasized the importance of learning experience in a community; the learning experience in a community should not only be a valuable experience but also a valuable resource. Sandie Wong, Jennifer Sumsion & Frances Press (2012:9) revealed that multiple aspects that should be managed for establishing the professional learning community might develop the organization members' capacity. According to Morrison (2001:2) the main component of performance system in human has been the learning process that is influenced by the other organizational components. Hord & Sommers (2008:6) implied that leadership has originally been the role of a principal but, in a wider context, the leadership might be occupied by people whose behaviors have been characterized by the intensity in facilitating the school changes and the school development. Harris & Jones (2010:174) stated that the professional learning community offered a marvelous way to ensure the teachers in reflecting their performance process in order to improve their performance.

5.3. Developing the capacity in implementing the school's programs and activities

The school leadership in developing the managerial capacity had special meaning namely the capability to represent the stakeholders' interests in implementing the school programs and activities. The development of school leadership capacity in implementing the school programs and activities would refer to development of educators' and educational staffs' capacity in understanding the stakeholders in the school, the stakeholders' interests that should be facilitated and how to facilitate those interests in the form of school service.

These findings had been in accordance with the results of following studies: (1) Louis & Krus (Hord, 2003:41), their study found six important issues regarding the relationship between the leadership and the professional learning community in the school and the six important issues were as follows: a) leadership at the center, b) teacher's classroom support, c) a Vision of professional community, d) a culture of high intellectual quality, e) the management of conflict, dan f) an inclusive community; 2) Harris & Jones (2010:180), their study found that the conditions that had exposed the tendency of leadership were better than the parts and the manners of distributing the leadership in a wider sense and that the opportunities to achieve the learning capacity within a school and the schools were related from one to another and might be maximized; 3) Raihani (2008:491), her study showed that the principal leadership that might be considered as a successful one would be the one that had belief and values

on which the principal based his or her practice of leadership; 4) Mulford (2010:202-203), his study found that an organizational learning involved three sequential phases and these phases became the moderating variables among the leadership, the teacher performance and the learning results of learning participants: the atmosphere of mutual trust and collaboration, the mission that had been divided and been observed and the support of professional development in taking risks and initiatives; 5) Collinson (2008:457), her study found that the leadership development and the capacity development were dependent upon the continuous organizational member development; and 6) Stoll (2010:475), her study viewed dialogue as a process of achieving the professional learning community.

5.4. Developing the capacity in assessing the school's success

The evaluation activities that had been done in a cyclical manner caused the strengthening of school's managerial capacity by means of feedback consistence toward each program and activity manager as well as the school leaders. The results of the study that had not been well-followed up caused the absence of educators' and educational staffs' involvement in the program development and the program improvement. The reason was that the educators and educational staffs considered their feedback to be in vain because their feedback had not been followed up by any improvement or development. This aspect had been considered important in the study; the school members' interaction in assessing the school's success would develop if the feedback became a shared responsibility for the sake of school improvement.

These findings had also been in accordance with the results of several previous studies as follows: (1) Emily Hassel (199:45), the results of her study showed that in the winning schools the teachers were involved in the planning of professional development and these results also implied that the information resulting from the evaluation and the feedback resulting from the evaluation became fluent; (2) Hassel (1999:61), the results of her study showed that when the educators and educational staffs became more intensed in the process of professional capacity development in the schools it would be easier for them to pursue changes toward the better direction; (3) Stoll (2010:475), the results of his study showed that dialogue had not been a matter of arguing or discussing but had been a matter of how each community member might be connected to the information regarding the members' respective experiences; and (4) Anthony J. Rhem (2006:44), the results of his study showed that the knowledge developing from the working experiences would be called as the tacit knowledge.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the researcher would like to conclude that the school's managerial capacity that have been developed by means of professional learning community with focus in the leadership role-modelling, the shared learning process with the educators and educational staffs in terms of managerial process, the creativity

development in solving problems and the provision of healthy conditions in the working environment might improve the educational quality.

Then, the researcher would like to recommend several suggestions for the schools as follows: (1) the school should open the involvement of several parties in order assess the success of the school; (2) the school should manage the flow of information in order that the flow of information would be more fluent to all of the related parties; (3) the school should moderate the ill-functionality of certain parties that have problems in performing their duties and functions or in solving the problems that they encounter; (4) the school should strengthen the sense of being a family as a community; (5) the school should perform reflection on the involvement of each educator and educational staff; (6) the school should enrich the process of dialogue, reflection and evaluation; and (7) the school should create a comfortable atmosphere that should be away from mental tiredness (burnout).

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