



17th International Conference
December 5-7, 2024 in Osaka, Japan

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This academic article presents the characteristics of professional school administrators in the 21st century with the objective of studying the relevant concepts and theories associated with these characteristics. The administrators must adapt and adjust their visions to manage educational institutions in accordance with the constantly changing era, as evident in the 21st century. Thus, educational leaders need to be adaptable and possess professional management skills, a positive image, vision, knowledge, leadership qualities, ethical values, good interpersonal skills, effective management, professional expertise, and multidimensional abilities. These characteristics serve as guidelines for developing successful management strategies in educational institutions, ensuring high-quality outcomes that contribute to the development of learners and staff performance. The characteristics of professional school administrators serve as indicators of organizational success, aiding in adapting educational institutions to the rapid advancements in technology and fostering continuous progress.

Keyword: Characteristic, Professional School Administrator, 21st century

Introduction

The rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century, encompassing technological advancements, societal shifts, cultural transformations, and educational reforms, necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of Thailand's education system. This transformation aims to equip learners with the necessary skills and resilience to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the future. The goal is to foster holistic development in all learners, regardless of age, ensuring equal opportunities, equity, safety, and the acquisition of essential 21st-century competencies. This aligns with the National Education Plan B.E. 2560 – 2579 (2017-2036), which envisions a nation that is secure, prosperous, and sustainable. Effective school administration must be aligned with this national plan, focusing on delivering high-quality education and developing efficient management systems. It involves cultivating a workforce with competencies that meet both market demands and national development goals. School administrators, therefore, play a pivotal role, acting as key agents in shaping the direction and policies that guide schools towards success. They must adapt, demonstrate vision, and continually develop themselves and their institutions to keep pace with societal and educational changes in the 21st century.

Professional school administrators require exceptional qualities and a highly professional approach. This includes advanced technical skills and expertise, both practical and theoretical. Proficiency in technology, the ability to effectively mentor others, and a commitment to continuous professional development are essential. They must be adept at problem-solving, possess strong interpersonal skills, embrace diversity, and communicate with empathy. Self-awareness, a positive attitude, flexible thinking, the ability to learn from mistakes, and a balanced approach to outcomes (avoiding both rigidity and laxity) are crucial for building morale among staff. Visionary leadership focused on achieving results is

paramount in the 21st century. The ideal administrator transcends the traditional role, becoming a truly "professional school administrator."

This study focuses on identifying the key characteristics of a professional school administrator in the 21st century. The aim is to provide a framework for understanding the qualities of professional school leaders who can effectively address the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapidly changing global landscape, ultimately improving the effectiveness and efficiency of schools, teachers, and students.

School Administration in the 21st Century

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Charuwat Songmuang, 2016: Online) Significant changes in education in the 21st century are driven by advancements in information technology, which fundamentally alters the way people live. Education in the 21st century requires skill development beyond that of the 20th and 19th centuries. Children and youth need to develop skills in learning and innovation, encompassing the 3Rs and 4Cs: Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic (3Rs), and Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity (4Cs). Life skills, career skills, information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and new approaches to educational management are also crucial. These essential 21st-century skills necessitate effective educational management. Traditional teaching methods, focused on teacher-led transmission of knowledge, are no longer sufficient. Educational reform is therefore a critical challenge for all stakeholders. Effective implementation requires efficient management to meet the challenges of ongoing change. Successful educational reform hinges on effective management that is prepared for and responsive to these challenges.

Tools for School Administration in the 21st Century. Given the changes and challenges outlined above, school administrators require tools distinct from those of previous eras to drive their organizations toward success. Key tools include:

1. Knowledge Management: Administration must actively encourage knowledge development and innovation within the organization. The organization must become a learning organization, capable of adapting to change and becoming a leader in its field. Knowledge management is a crucial tool for achieving this. Furthermore, it fosters a sense of community, pride, and encourages employees to work to their full potential.

2. Cultivating a Change-Oriented Organizational Culture: Rapid change necessitates an organizational structure that facilitates adaptation. Organizations with inflexible structures lack the capacity to effectively manage challenges. Building a culture receptive to change is not instantaneous; it requires collaborative effort, time, and a shared vision among staff.

3. Network Collaboration: Isolated organizations automatically lack efficiency. In 21st-century education, schools must build collaborative networks to exchange knowledge and work together to promote effective education.

4. Collaboration with Businesses for Student Learning: Evolving educational needs require increased collaboration with stakeholders, including parents and employers. Schools must understand parental expectations while simultaneously preparing students for employment and further education.

Change is inevitable. Educational institutions, as the first line of defense in preparing individuals, to thrive in such a changing world, must have effective management. The information presented above is not a one-size-fits-all solution for educational institutions, but rather a challenge for educational leaders to develop strategic plans that will drive their institutions towards success in educating 21st-century learners.

Professional Educational Administrator

Through the research of various documents, research papers, and literature related to the meaning of a professional educational administrator, the following academic information has been compiled

Prasit Wichyo (2009: 28) stated that a professional educational administrator refers to an individual who possesses vision, knowledge, and exceptional administrative abilities. They are capable of effectively achieving set goals or ideals, demonstrating the highest level of both science and art in their work. They serve as role models for other administrators and have undergone standardized professional training.

Kanchananat Pankairat (2010: 45-50) defines a professional educational administrator as an administrator who is dedicated to promoting, developing, managing, and implementing high-quality learning experiences for all students. They strive to provide a comprehensive education that impacts students in all dimensions, leading to a stronger community that can be self-sufficient. A successful educational institution, as defined by this perspective, is a nurturing, attractive, and stimulating environment with high-quality teaching and learning processes that are closely aligned with real-world contexts. This approach aims to produce well-rounded, happy students and teachers who are capable of working collaboratively, ultimately leading to high-quality schools and communities. There is a saying, "It is difficult to be a leader, but it is even more difficult to be a professional leader," and "There are no bad organizations, only great leaders, and there are no great leaders without great organizations."

The Institute for Educational Management (2005: 121-125) has developed a curriculum for "Professional Educational Administrators" and defined six key qualities for such individuals: Ethical Leadership: This includes demonstrating personal and interpersonal ethics, practicing personnel management based on religious principles, and utilizing Thai wisdom to foster ethical development. Systems Leadership: This encompasses developing a learning organization, implementing information and communication systems, establishing networks for quality improvement, and managing the entire environmental system. Academic Leadership: This involves developing exemplary curricula, innovative learning processes, and teacher development aligned with educational reforms. Administrative Leadership: This includes strategic planning, participatory management, leading change, conflict management, effective resource management, and the application of new management techniques. Social and Community Leadership: This entails managing schools for the benefit of the community, as well as leading in a context that influences societal change. Self-Development Leadership: This focuses on personal development to become a professional administrator.

Sakdithai Surikitboworn (2009: 11-13) identified ten key qualities of effective educational administrators: 1) proficiency in information and data, 2) professional knowledge, 3) situational awareness, 4) interpersonal skills, 5) analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, 6) emotional control, 7) a proactive and risk-taking attitude, 8) creativity, 9) empathy, and 10) a commitment to lifelong learning.

Thera Runcharoen (2009: 28-29) highlighted the following characteristics of professional educational administrators: 1) leadership skills and the ability to work collaboratively, 2) knowledge and understanding of relevant disciplines, 3) credible personality, 4) strong ethics and a good reputation, and 5) practical skills in their field.

According to Couros (2010, p. 168), the characteristics of an effective school administrator in the 21st century should include the following: Effective Communicator. A successful administrator not only shares information through multiple channels but also listens effectively. It is essential for leaders to communicate efficiently with all stakeholders. Positive Energy Builder. Administrators must promote positive principles, take proactive steps, and demonstrate care. This includes making time to meet with students, teachers, and parents,

recognizing their contributions, and building genuine relationships. Leaders must also prioritize their own health, well-being, and energy levels. Confidence. An effective leader exudes confidence, is approachable, and stands out as a prominent figure. They must have the courage to face challenging situations, remain calm under pressure, and maintain morale and trust within the school community. Willingness to Learn. Administrators must continuously learn, as changes in the 21st century are dynamic and offer opportunities to enhance their leadership and school community. Lifelong learning is key for an effective leader. Entrepreneurial, Creative, and Innovative Thinker. The ability to think outside the box is a powerful asset for an administrator. Creativity and innovation are crucial for managing the complexities of the 21st century, and school leaders must cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship within their organizations. Initiator. Administrators must trust their instincts and possess the ability to be thinkers and creative initiators. They should be able to solve problems in unexpected ways, often relying on intuition that comes from deep intelligence. Humility. Administrators play a pivotal role in their schools, but their work is not about personal recognition. Instead, it is about fostering collaboration among all members of the school community. They must be respectful, engage with the community, and invite teachers and stakeholders to participate in school activities.

Contemporary perspectives on educational leadership Maxine (2015), Gerald Aungus (2012), and George Couros (2010) wrote articles titled top 10 Characteristics of Successful 21st Century School Leaders 21st Century Administrators: New Roles, New Responsibilities, and The 21st Century Principal respectively. Their ideas on the characteristics of effective 21st-century school administrators can be summarized as follows. Creative Effective administrators drive staff members to create high-quality work and continuously improve for the benefit of students, similar to the concept of “flow theory.” Communicator : Administrators must not only share information across various platforms but also be effective listeners, communicating efficiently with all stakeholders. Critical Thinker Administrators must value and consider the ideas and opinions of teachers and staff, focusing on their long-term impact on the school and students. Community Builder: They should connect people within the school and beyond, creating opportunities for collaboration and fostering leadership within the school community. Visionary Effective school leaders have a clear vision that prepares their school and students for the future and can share this vision with the community effectively. Collaborative and Connected : Administrators should openly share knowledge, understand others’ perspectives, and foster collaboration both within the school and with the outside world through social media and other platforms. Positive Energy : School leaders must promote positive principles, be proactive, and show care for students, teachers, and parents. They should also maintain their own well-being and energy levels. Confidence : Leaders must be confident, approachable, and visible, able to face difficult situations calmly while maintaining the morale and trust of the school community. Commitment and Persistence : Administrators must show dedication and commitment, inspiring teachers and students to remain persistent and never give up in pursuit of their goals. Willingness to Learn : Continuous learning is essential for administrators to enhance their leadership skills and the school community in a rapidly changing world. Entrepreneurial, Creative, and Innovative : School leaders should think outside the box, using creativity and innovation to manage the complexities of 21st-century society. Intuitive : Administrators need to trust their instincts, use their intuition to solve problems, and rely on their intelligence to handle unexpected challenges. Ability to Inspire : Effective leaders inspire enthusiasm and positive thinking in their staff, encouraging everyone to work together toward a shared future. Humble : Administrators should act with humility, engaging the community and staff, and recognizing that their role is to serve the school, not to seek personal recognition. Good Role Model : Administrators should model 21st-century skills, including creativity,

collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, while fostering an innovative, safe learning environment.

Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, an effective 21st-century school administrator should possess visionary leadership, the ability to set clear directions for the school, and the capacity to understand and adapt to technological changes. They should be skilled in utilizing technology to support learning and management. Strong leadership qualities such as team-building, problem-solving, and decision-making are essential, along with the ability to communicate effectively and foster positive relationships with staff, students, and the community. Administrators must also be innovative thinkers, capable of introducing new ideas and inspiring progress within the school.

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