

## **Evolving School Management Responsibilities to Meet New Challenges<sup>1</sup>**

**Chandra P. Dulare**

The Chairman of the School Managers Association of Fiji, Mr Govind Singh, invited guests, school managers, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you to the University of Fiji and this historic School Managers Association of Fiji Workshop co-sponsored by SMAF and UniFiji.

I am delighted to see a large number of school managers present here today to take advantage of this unique opportunity. Your presence in large numbers here indicates to me that school managers in Fiji are serious about their responsibilities.

A school manager plays a vital role in the leadership and management of a school. Almost everyone will agree that the success of a school in terms of the quality of education provided depends to a large extent on the quality of leadership in the school. If the quality of management and leadership is poor, facilities will remain poor, teachers would be stressed out, and students would not have adequate or up to date resources. The effect would be extremely poor teaching and learning, and poor quality students.

We are all concerned about the quality of students we produce. We always think about how many children from each school pass exams. We try to keep a record of how many students who have gone through each school have done well in life.

To ensure that our school is the best we focus our attention on Principals or head teachers, on assistant teachers and the assistance provided by the Ministry of Education. If the school has a problem we either ask

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for the removal of the Principal or Head Teacher or other teachers or we send them to workshops and retrain them as part of their professional development exercise.

However, there is hardly much focus on the skills of school managers in ensuring that the quality of education provided to our students is the best.

But what is the role of school managers? To understand the role of School Managers, one has to understand the context and organization of school administration in Fiji.

In Fiji there are over 900 schools comprising about 750 primary schools and 160 secondary schools. Only a handful of these schools are run by the government. The vast majority of schools are owned and managed by religious and non religious committees headed by school managers. School committees own the buildings and facilities. The government assists through grants and staffing, and owns the curriculum, assessment and the results.

On a very simple level, the role of the trustees through the school committee and manager is to provide the buildings and facilities while the Ministry of Education provides the curriculum and staff. In other words, the owners of the school let the buildings and facilities to the Ministry of Education in return for zero rent. But the relation between management and the Ministry of Education is not a tenant-landlord relationship. It is much more than that; school management is a crucial stakeholder in the education process. It is not just a provider of facilities and buildings.

When different communities in Fiji established schools the founders were by and large simple people with either no formal education or very little formal education. They had a very simple mission: to provide formal education to children in the community. This was based on the belief that education would lead to some sort of prosperity. The initial mission or vision to provide education may have been a simple one but the ownership of that vision lies with the school management for posterity. Therefore management need to have a say in what is taught, how it is taught and to whom it is taught. As such, school managements are not mere owners of real estate, they are partners in what happens in that real estate.

Most school managements might not have a written mission and vision statement to guide them. But over the years the simple mission of just providing education has evolved and become refined. There is a need to state these new missions explicitly if school managements are to ensure that they are able to meet new challenges.

For example, if one of the missions is to provide high quality education, then management will have to work out and put in place strategies to achieve this. To ensure high quality education in their school, the strategies adopted would, for example, be to ensure good quality staff, good quality IT resources, good quality library, rooms conducive to study, and the like. If this mission and its strategies are written explicitly, in its meetings the school committee will begin to focus on these strategies to ensure quality and not digress to talk about things like who the Head Master drinks kava with.

Another written mission could be the provision of education to all. Education to all does not mean education to both gender and all races only. Education to all means more than this. If one of the missions is to provide education to all, management should also ask questions like how friendly is the school to those with disabilities and what are the avenues for those who cannot complete primary school or high school. Are there technical and vocational instructions available for all?

There are new challenges in the world; equally, there are new challenges in the field of teaching and learning. As such there is a need for the vision and responsibilities of schools managements to evolve.

The founders of schools demonstrated unique leadership in their communities by establishing schools. After the founding of these schools, successive managements have just managed these schools. In these current changing and challenging times there is an urgent need for managements to show leadership.

### **Difference between Management and Leadership**

What is the difference between management and leadership? A leader sets the vision for the school; a manager ensures the vision is implemented. A leader develops the strategic plan for the school; a manager ensures that the strategic plan is implemented. A leader motivates and mentors the members of the school committee; a manager makes members work productively. A leader provides guidance for new activities; a manager ensures that the activities are carried out. Leadership and management go together. If there is only leadership but no management, the organization does not achieve its objectives. If there is only management but no leadership, the school stagnates. In changing and challenging times while good management is important, good leadership is much more essential. It is essential to develop visions, to strategise, to motivate and provide guidance for new activities.

There are different kinds of managers. First, there are those managers who are very traditional, do not want to change or rock the boat and want all their staff to behave in the same way including the way they dress and the way they teach. For example, some managers in Fiji have removed teachers tables and chairs from the classrooms. They want everyone to stand up and teach. They have no understanding of the benefits of teaching both by standing up and sitting down. No, they want everyone to do it the same way.

The second kind of manager is more flexible than traditional managers; they like change. But they want everyone to conform and think alike. If any teacher has a slight difference of opinion from others pressures are exerted to get that teacher transferred.

The third kind of manager is the one who wants to be the boss. This kind of manager is hungry for power, throws his/her weight around at all times, comes marching into the school and scares the Principal or Head Teachers and other teachers. This kind of manager will do everything possible to remain in power and be heavily involved in community politics. I wonder whether this kind of manager comes from a civil service background where he/she had a hard time getting promoted or could not sustain a promotion!

The fourth kind of manager is one who is creative, innovative, dynamic, and has a vision. This kind of manager is more like a leader; it is difficult to find such a manager but if found, takes the school to new heights, heights that are not measured only in terms of the number of students but in terms of the quality and variety of education. This kind of manager is a true leader, a leader who will be remembered for a legacy left behind.

### **Trust and Respect**

A true manager and a true leader needs to have the respect and trust of his community. Did you become a school manager by pushing someone off the cliff? Did you become a manager by scaring your community, or did you become a manager by bribing the community? Of course not. You became a school manager because you understand the education system, you are respected, and above all you are trusted by your community. Because of the trust placed in you, you have an obligation to your community. You can fulfil that obligation by being a true visionary leader.

There is no reason why the Principal or Head Teacher cannot manage a school. The reason why management is vested in you is because you are the guardians of the original vision that the founders of your

school had when they established the school. Management is vested in you also because your community has placed its trust in you to provide visionary leadership.

Ladies and gentlemen, to upgrade the teaching and learning processes in our schools, teachers, head teachers and principals are provided with free professional development through instructions and workshops. Unfortunately there is hardly any training provided to school managers even though they own the schools and have the inalienable right to determine the future of their schools through their evolving missions, visions and responsibilities. Your volunteer work, your efforts and your sacrifices, and your contributions in education are underappreciated and under-valued by stakeholders who have taken you for granted for too long.

Realising this, the University of Fiji entered into discussions with the officials of the School Managers Association of Fiji to run a workshop for school managers. I am happy to say that Mr Govind Singh and Mr Satindra Deo were very receptive to the idea and have worked diligently over the last few months to make this workshop a reality. This is the first time in the history of Fiji that a University has partnered with the School Managers Association of Fiji to provide training for school managers. This is going to be a long term partnership not just this year.

The University of Fiji is offering its premises and academic staff free of charge for this workshop.

The reason for the University of Fiji to provide this workshop free is that we understand, acknowledge and appreciate the fact that you as school managers are social workers who have been providing your services absolutely free to your communities over long periods of time.

I have no doubt that this workshop will be beneficial for you, and that it will help refine your already excellent abilities as visionary and skilled managers of our schools in Fiji.

I wish you all a very enlightening and fruitful workshop.

#### **Author**

**Chandra Dulare**, was Associate Professor and Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji when he delivered this address at School Managers Association of Fiji Workshop at the University of Fiji. email: cpdulare@hotmail.com