



Developing Creative, Lifelong Learners: A Study of Singapore School Leaders

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Abstract

In 2009, speaking at the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee explained the island nation's emphasis on education. "Given our limited natural resources, our human capital is of paramount importance." (Business Times, July 8, 2009, p.8). Singapore has focused on education as its key competitive advantage since its independence 60 years ago. Since then, the nation has shifted from a focus on the 3Rs and keeping children at school, to becoming a world leader in many aspects of education. In the latest phase of transformation, the Singapore government has announced its determination to build a nation of creative, innovative, and lifelong learners who can rise to the challenges of a constantly changing global future. Studies investigating the factors which promote creativity and innovation have identified leadership as being one of the most, if not the most, important factors that influence employees' creative behaviours and performance (Jung, Chow and Wu, 2003; Amabile, 1998; Jung, 2001; Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). In reviewing the leadership models available, transformational leadership is shown to have a positive impact on levels of creativity (Jung, Chow and Wu, 2003; Tierney et al., 1999). Transformational leadership is follower centric, that is, the leader is able "to engage the follower in true commitment and involvement in the effort at hand" (Bass & Riggo, 2006, p.4), emphasising longer term and vision-based motivational processes thereby motivating the follower to a higher performance than expected (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Several studies have found that transformational leaders can have a positive impact on levels of creativity by engaging employees' personal value systems and encouraging them to think creatively, thereby catering to followers' intrinsic motivation and higher level needs, (Jung, Chow and Wu, 2003; Tierney et al., 1999). In order to investigate the relationship between innovation and transformational leadership in Singapore schools, a substantial study has been undertaken of principals, vice-principals, department heads and teachers. The study uses two recognised and validated measures 1) the Transformational Leadership Scale (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990) and 2) the Climate for Innovation Scale (Jansen, 2006). This paper presents the preliminary findings of the study and discusses the implications of the research outcomes for Singapore's strategic imperative of developing an education system which fosters creative lifelong learners.