

Leadership Strategies of Administrative Heads in Shaping a Conducive Work Climate: A Case Study of SMAN 12 Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the strategy of the head of administrative staff in creating a conducive work climate at State High School 12 Pekanbaru and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors. A descriptive qualitative approach was used with the head of administration as the key informant and the principal and administrative staff as additional informants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed thematically through data reduction, data presentation, and concluding with triangulation techniques of sources, techniques, and time. The results showed that the head of administrative staff implemented open communication strategies, routine rewards, division of tasks according to competence, and strong team collaboration. Supporting factors include effective communication, appreciation of creativity, team commitment, and availability of work facilities. Inhibiting factors include limited resources, weak interpersonal communication, and lack of understanding between staff. This study concludes that participatory and communicative administrative leadership plays a significant role in creating a positive work climate. These findings provide implications for strengthening school administrative governance in the context of effective education management.

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1. INTRODUCTION

School administrative staff are educational staff who play an important role in supporting the smooth operation and quality of educational services in schools (Oikonomidou & Konstantinidis, 2020; Arina et al., 2022; Siregar et al., 2024). In educational institutions, the existence of administrative staff is not only administrative-technical implementers but also educational staff who participate in creating a conducive and efficient work environment (Adam et al., 2017; Gunawan et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening the competence and role of administrative staff, especially the head of administrative staff, is crucial in supporting the achievement of national education goals.

Legally, Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 24 of 2008 concerning School Administrative Staff Standards stipulates that school administrative staff are divided into three groups, namely the head of school administrative staff, business implementers, and special service officers (Regulation of the Minister of National Education, 2018). The head of the school administration staff has managerial responsibilities, including planning, organizing, coaching staff, decision-making, and creating a conducive work climate (Marmoah, 2016; Mulyasa, 2022; Pisriwati et al., 2024). A good work climate is believed to increase work productivity, loyalty, and employee morale (Lau et al., 2017; Moslehpour et al.,

2018; Sufriadi, 2024) and is the foundation for creating quality administrative services in schools. However, in practice, various challenges are still found that hinder the creation of an optimal work climate by administrative staff. Several studies have shown that the success of school administration management is largely determined by the quality of leadership and the built work climate (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Virgana & Suradika, 2022). Although there are many studies on principal management, attention to the strategies of administrative staff in creating a conducive work climate is still very limited, especially in Pekanbaru High Schools, Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to explore in more depth how the strategies used by administrative heads to create a conducive work climate.

Previous studies tend to focus on aspects of technical competence and workload of administrative staff (Shafie et al., 2017; Gunawan et al., 2023; Putri & Rusdinal, 2024; Salsabila & Salsabilla, 2024; Khalida, 2024), while strategic aspects related to work climate and human resource management have not been widely studied. A healthy work climate is a determining factor in creating a comfortable, harmonious, and productive work environment. This kind of environment impacts the effectiveness of administrative staff work and the overall Performance of educational institutions.

Based on the results of initial observations at State High School 12 Pekanbaru, several symptoms were found that reflect the suboptimal work climate of administrative staff, such as lack of adaptation to the work environment, low employee discipline, and lack of experience and adequate number of administrative staff. This phenomenon indicates the need for a more effective managerial strategy from the head of administrative staff to create a conducive work environment and support the achievement of institutional goals. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the strategy of the head of administrative staff in creating a conducive work climate at State High School 12 Pekanbaru.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand and describe in depth the strategy of the head of administrative staff in creating a conducive work climate. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena holistically through direct interaction with informants and context analysis (Ortiz & Greene, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hermawan, 2019).

The location of the study was SMAN 12 Pekanbaru, Riau Province. The subject of the study was the head of the school's administrative staff, while the object of the study was the strategy of the head of the administrative staff in creating a conducive work climate. The informants were selected by purposive sampling, namely based on considerations of who knows best and is directly involved in the managerial process of administrative staff. There were three main informants: one key informant (head of school administrative staff) and two supporting informants (administrative staff and principal).

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely: (1) Direct observation, to observe the dynamics of interaction and work atmosphere in the administrative staff office; (2) Semi-structured interviews, to explore the views and strategies of the head of administrative staff; and (3) Documentation study, to obtain supporting data in the form of work programs, activity reports, and school policies. The data were analyzed using an interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) concluding/verification. The analysis was done thematically by identifying patterns, meanings, and tendencies from field data. Triangulation was used in this study to ensure the validity of the data. This included (1) Source triangulation, which compares data from the principal, staff, and head of administrative staff; (2) Technique triangulation, which compares interview results, observations, and documentation; and (3) Time triangulation, which collects data at various times to reduce temporal bias.

3. RESULTS

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and participatory observations of the head of administrative staff, staff and teachers at Pekanbaru State High School 12, three main strategies were obtained which were used to create a conducive working climate, namely: (1) building harmonious working relationships, (2) developing interactive communication and (3) valuing the participation and opinions of colleagues.

3.1. Building Harmonious Working Relationships

The head of administrative staff actively fosters a harmonious working atmosphere through an interpersonal approach that accommodates the diversity of staff characteristics. This approach reflects an awareness of the importance of diversity in the work environment regarding age, educational background, and work experience. One staff member stated, *"He always understands each person's character, which makes us comfortable working together."* This statement confirms the high social sensitivity of the leader, who can adjust the communication style and decision-making according to the character of each individual.

In addition, the division of tasks is carried out proportionally and based on competency. This process considers formal educational background, practical skills, experience, and individual preferences. This model of task division is believed to be able to increase work efficiency while strengthening the sense of responsibility in staff.

Monitoring logistics stock, as part of administrative responsibilities, is carried out routinely with staff involvement. The head of administrative staff gives instructions and participates in checking and evaluating logistics with the team. Thus, this activity is not seen as a burden but as a form of collective work that strengthens work ties. One of the staff said, *"When the stock of equipment runs out, he does not blame us. However, he gets involved and looks for a solution."* Leadership practices like this show an orientation towards teamwork and participatory leadership.

Furthermore, conflict handling is carried out directly, openly, and oriented toward solving problems without cornering certain parties. The head of administrative staff usually facilitates a discussion space and listens to complaints from both parties before making a decision. This attitude is important to prevent the accumulation of tension that can disrupt team Performance. One of the teachers said, *"He is fair. He does not take sides when there is a problem. We are calmer."*

Not only that, the head of administrative staff also encourages a culture of appreciation in the work environment. He often provides positive reinforcement to staff who show initiative, punctuality, or thoroughness in their work. Although simple, saying thank you or praise in front of colleagues can increase intrinsic motivation and strengthen team solidarity. This inclusive, supportive, and appreciation-based work culture is the foundation for creating harmonious working relationships in the school environment.

3.2. Developing Interactive Communication

Two-way communication is done face-to-face through digital media such as WhatsApp and mobile phones. The head of administrative staff uses this technology to maintain closeness and clarity of information. A teacher said, *"Our coordination is fast because the headmistress always updates the WA group. We feel appreciated."* This communication is informative and educational, with regular feedback on Performance. The strategic use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups allows for real-time information delivery, reduces miscommunication, and increases efficiency in decision-making.

More than just a medium for conveying information, communication carried out by the head of administrative staff also reflects responsive and open leadership. He not only sends instructions but also opens up discussion space, receives input from staff, and provides direct clarification if a misunderstanding occurs. The interactive communication developed is also dialogical, where there is an exchange of ideas, suggestions, and clarification, not just one-way communication. The head of administrative staff routinely uses this communication to reinforce staff achievements, deliver weekly evaluations, and provide reminders of important tasks. For example, in one of the WA group conversations, the head of administrative staff uploaded a photo of office stationery stock that was almost out, then asked, *"Are there any additional needs this week from friends?"* This approach builds a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for administrative tasks.

Furthermore, digital communication is also used to build a positive and family-like work atmosphere. Sometimes, the head of administrative staff also delivers motivational messages, birthday greetings, or shares information about staff social activities. This practice strengthens social relations between individuals, creates emotional closeness, and fosters organizational loyalty. Interactive communication that is consistently built by the head of administrative staff not only functions as a means of technical coordination but also as a strategic instrument for building a collaborative work culture, strengthening interpersonal relations, and increasing overall work productivity.

3.3. Valuing Colleagues' Participation and Opinions

Each team member is given space to express their ideas and problems, create an inclusive atmosphere and encourage active contributions from each individual. Different opinions are seen as a wealth of perspectives, not as obstacles. The chief administrative officer understands that differences in perspective, experience, and expertise can enrich decision-making and improve the quality of the solutions. In every internal meeting, the administrative head encourages open discussion and allows staff to speak freely without fear or worry of being ignored. This open attitude creates an environment that supports trust and collaboration among team members. One staff member said, *"We feel valued when our opinions are heard, and decisions taken reflect input from all members."*

This approach strengthens mutual respect among team members and supports more democratic and consensus-based decision-making. The head of administration listens carefully and ensures that every opinion, whether in line with or against the majority view, is given equal attention. Furthermore, the head of administration also shows respect for different opinions by openly acknowledging individual contributions. This attitude creates a work climate that values differences and encourages collaboration between individuals

with diverse backgrounds and experiences. This is seen in how the head of administration celebrates the diversity of ideas and solutions from various parties and recognizes staff who dare to express constructive views or suggestions.

Handling differences of opinion openly and based on appreciation also helps reduce tensions that may arise in the work environment. Conflicts that arise can be faced with a more rational and positive approach, remembering that the main goal is to find the best solution for mutual progress. The attitude of the head of administration, who values the participation and opinions of colleagues, not only creates a harmonious work atmosphere but also plays an important role in increasing staff involvement, motivation and productivity. This strengthens the sense of togetherness and commitment to the organization's goals.

The strategy is supported by several factors, such as (a) team solidarity between staff and teachers, (b) open communication, (c) Performance appreciation, and (d) high commitment in the administration team. In addition, the availability of an adequate work environment also contributes to the creation of a healthy work climate. However, several obstacles were also faced, including (a) limited physical resources and personnel, (b) lack of interpersonal communication among some staff, and (c) potential misunderstandings in interpreting instructions. These obstacles can potentially hinder the continuity of the strategy if not handled systematically.

4. DISCUSSION

The first strategy identified is building harmonious working relationships, which is reflected in the adaptive interpersonal approach of the administrative staff head-to-staff characteristics. This approach reflects the application of inclusive leadership, which emphasizes the importance of accommodating individual differences in the work environment. The administrative staff head at SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru, for example, not only considers the formal educational background of staff but also pays attention to their work experience, needs, and personal preferences in the division of tasks and daily communication. This shows a proportional leadership practice based on interpersonal understanding, where diversity is not an obstacle but a strength to form solid team synergy. This strategy is based on the theory of diversity-oriented leadership, which emphasizes that leaders sensitive to individual differences can create a positive and collaborative work climate (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Homan & Greer, 2013). Recent research also shows that inclusive leadership positively correlates with increased team effectiveness and job satisfaction because members feel valued and empowered (Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Javed et al., 2019). Findings from Gandascita and Asy'ari (2024) and Irma et al. (2024) also strengthen that leadership strategies considering individual staff characteristics can strengthen team cohesion and facilitate work coordination in educational institutions in Indonesia.

Furthermore, participatory logistics monitoring reflects a leadership model that is instructional and collaborative in completing organizational tasks. This participatory leadership model shows that leaders act as order givers and facilitators who encourage active involvement from all team members. This is in line with the findings of Ahn and Bessiere (2022), which state that strategic employee involvement in the decision-making process increases participation and commitment to the projects being carried out. Research by Somech (2010) also confirms that teacher participation in school decision-making positively increases organizational commitment and team performance effectiveness. The results of a study by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) show that transformational leadership can encourage individual creativity but also increase follower dependency, reducing their creativity. Thus, participatory and democratic leadership practices not only contribute to operational efficiency but also to the creation of an inclusive, supportive, and sustainable work culture.

The second strategy found is the importance of interactive communication in building effective working relationships. The head of administrative staff at SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru actively utilizes digital communication media such as WhatsApp to ensure clarity of information, responsiveness, and consistent connectivity with staff. This practice reflects a form of two-way communication that allows the exchange of ideas and feedback, thereby strengthening staff participation and involvement in the administrative process. This finding aligns with the organizational communication theory by Daft (2016), which emphasizes that open and two-way communication can increase transparency, accelerate the flow of information, and support more inclusive and accurate decision-making. Digital communication carried out by the head of administration is not only instructive but also contains affective dimensions, such as delivering motivational messages, paying attention to the personal conditions of staff, and sharing social information relevant to their daily lives. This aspect is very important in building emotional closeness, strengthening trust, and fostering a sense of togetherness in the team. This is in line with Ryan and Deci (2000), who explain that positive interpersonal relationships are one of the basic psychological needs that can increase intrinsic motivation, work involvement, and organizational loyalty. A study by Mikkelsen et al. (2015) also showed that a

supportive and open leader communication style can strengthen employee engagement and encourage work effectiveness in modern organizations.

The third strategy found was rewarding co-workers' participation and opinions. The head of administrative staff encouraged open discussion in every work meeting and ensured that all opinions—both supportive and dissenting—were given equal attention. This approach demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of diverse perspectives in an inclusive and collaborative decision-making process. This strategy reflects the implementation of the participatory decision-making model as proposed by Vroom and Yetton (1973), which states that decisions involving team members in the process increase acceptance of the decision results and improve the quality of the decisions themselves. Leadership that facilitates team members' cognitive and affective involvement in decision-making has fostered a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the team's work results. In addition, rewarding individual opinions also strengthens an inclusive and supportive work climate. Maslach and Leiter (2016) state that recognizing employee contributions is key to creating a psychologically healthy work environment and increasing motivation, engagement, and productivity. This strategy can foster mutual trust, strengthen solidarity, and create a sustainable collaborative work culture in educational organizations.

The administrative staff head's leadership strategies are supported by several supporting factors that play an important role in creating a conducive work environment. These factors include team solidarity, openness in communication, appreciation for individual performance, and high commitment from administrative team members. These four elements form a healthy and collaborative work climate, ultimately strengthening interpersonal relationships, increasing trust, and driving organizational productivity (Zohar & Hofmann, 2012; Carmeli et al., 2009). This condition aligns with findings in human resource management studies that emphasize the importance of team cohesion, organizational communication openness, and recognition systems in improving organizational performance (Aubé & Rousseau, 2005; Men, 2014). An emotionally and structurally supportive work environment strengthens intrinsic motivation and facilitates the achievement of common goals more effectively.

However, this study also identified several obstacles that have the potential to hinder the sustainability of the strategy. Among them are limited physical resources and personnel not comparable to the workload, minimal interpersonal communication among some staff, and the potential for misunderstanding in interpreting instructions open to multiple interpretations. These obstacles can trigger coordination dysfunction and reduce the effectiveness of administrative task implementation if not handled systematically. Therefore, corrective measures are needed, such as increasing interpersonal communication training, optimizing task distribution, and strengthening the feedback system to prevent these obstacles from implementing the designed strategy (Hackman, 2002; DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

Strategies that prioritize harmonious interpersonal relationships, interactive communication, and appreciation for individual participation are needed to create a conducive work climate. These concepts align with management theories emphasizing participative leadership, open communication, and team collaboration. This study provides an important contribution to the development of human resource management in the education sector, especially in the context of secondary schools. As a suggestion, schools can consider developing communication and leadership training to support the success of these strategies in the long term.

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