

Case Study 4: Mr Nagaraju wins the hearts of the teachers

Mr Nagaraju was moved by the district education office to lead a small rural secondary school. The school was not highly thought of by the local community because a previous school leader had misappropriated its resources. The next school leader found the level of mistrust in the community too stressful and left the job after only two years. Mr Nagaraju realised that in taking over the leadership of the school he had a significant challenge ahead.

In his first term, Mr Nagaraju watched and listened. He walked around the school during the school day, interacted with students and parents at the beginning and end of each day, and listened to the concerns of the teachers and community leaders. He realised that people were too demoralised and disappointed to start the process of developing a vision.

He decided that the most important people to have on his side were the teachers. He listened to their concerns and tried to make their lives easier, for example by making available equipment that was in locked cupboards, offering teachers cartoons in English on his laptop for language development, and organising solar lamps for students in Class X who did not have electricity at home so that they could study in the evenings. At the end of his first year, the exam results improved.

During his second year at the school, morale improved. The teachers appreciated the support from Mr Nagaraju and the local community became increasingly interested in the school. During the first term of his second year, he held a series of meetings that led to the identification of a vision statement. He had a sign made, with the statement on, to put on the school gates. By the end of the next term, the teachers and the SMC had identified a set of priorities and a development plan was in place.

The vision statement became more than a school motto; it became a tool for monitoring. Mr Nagaraju organised a quarterly meeting with two members of the SMC. Parents were invited and older students organised much of the event. Mr Nagaraju used these meetings to monitor just how far students and parents felt included in all aspects of the school, as this was at the core of the vision. He introduced a novel way of getting parents to vote on certain matters using bottle tops, with entrance and exit polls on different issues. For example, on the way in, parents put a bottle top in one container if they were happy with the levels of homework, or in one of two other buckets if they thought it was either too much or too little. On the way out, the parents put their bottle tops (which had been counted and recorded by the students in the meantime) into one of several labelled containers to vote for the priority of the coming year.

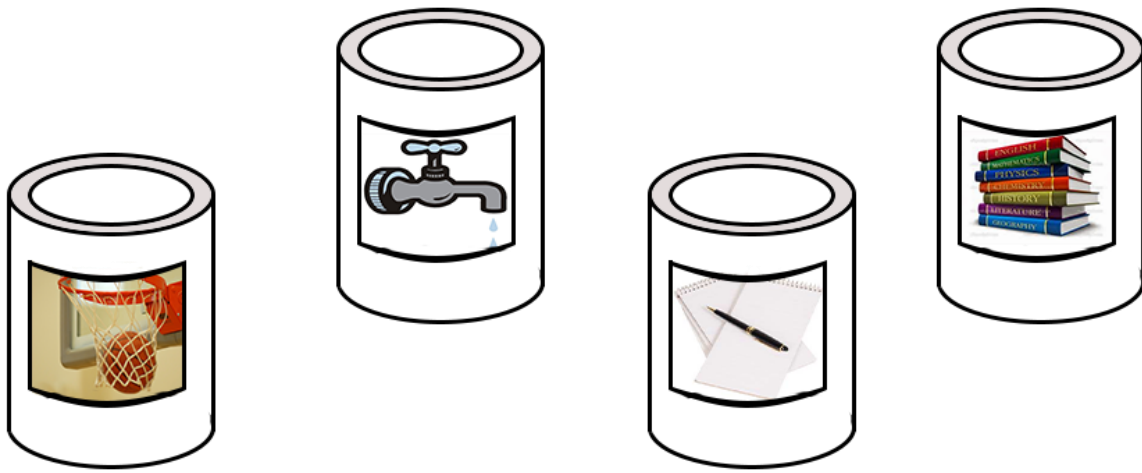


Figure 4 A voting system.