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CONTINGENCIES IN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS / SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the contingency approach in the application of management of teachers in participating in School Development Associations / School Development Committees in Zimbabwean schools. The approach emphasizes a situational approach in the participation of teachers in SDA/SDC affairs. The paper reveals that some of the determinants for successful implementation of participatory decision-making for teacher efficacy may lie within the teachers themselves. These include independence needs, desire to participate, risk taking attitude as well as intelligence and knowledge. Contingency models of participation were also discussed which include the Vroom-Yetton leadership model as well as the Path-Goal theory.

The contingency approach is based on the premise that the application of management principles depends on the particular situation that the management faces (Robbins et al, 2010). This means that here are activities where SDCs and SDAs may want teacher participation and where they might not want it. It also shows that it does not necessarily mean that each and every teacher has to be an active participant in decision-making processes in the school. The schools committee and school association may be at liberty to determine who should participate as well as determining when, how and where to participate in certain decisions. The contingency approach therefore emphasizes a situational approach because in the end it is the head teacher and the school committee or school association that will be accountable if things go wrong in the school.

KEYWORDS: Contingencies, teacher efficacy, management principles, decision-making process, situational approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

The complexities of modern organizations require that decision-making processes be carefully selected with an eye to the probability of effectiveness in view of contingencies in the respective situations. Hellriegel and Slocum (1982) had earlier on alluded to the issue of the organizational complexities of the modern world by asserting that participative leader behavior can have positive effects on job satisfaction and performance but it is based on contingency factors. The problem of the school administrator is to analyse the contingencies in each situation and then take the most decisive effective action. The central issue in transformative leadership is optimum teacher participation in decision-making.



Some of the determinants for successful implementation of participatory decision-making for teacher efficacy may lie within the teachers themselves. Below are some of the determinants as propounded by Beach (1980):

- Independence needs;
- Desire to participate;
- Risk taking attitude;
- Intelligence and knowledge;

1.1 Independence needs

In schools, like in any other organizations, there are teachers with independence needs. Hannagan (2008) argues that people in organizations have independence needs which differ in levels. Some have stronger needs while others might have weaker needs. The ones with stronger independence needs are those who are ready to express themselves, to exercise their own judgement, assert themselves and figure out things for themselves. These are the teachers who would benefit and would be of benefit to the development of the school. If such teachers are made part of the decision-making bodies, the probability of gaining sound decisions is higher than where teachers with lower independence needs are included. It is therefore important for the super ordinates to identify these qualities among teachers and take advantage of teachers who possess the required attributes in effective participatory decision making for teacher efficacy.

1.2 Desire to participate

It must be acknowledged that teachers are different individuals. This affects the levels of desire within them to participate. To achieve teacher-efficacy through participatory decision making, the teacher himself or herself must want to contribute. This is in line with the view of Smit et al (2007) who posit that a common misconception is that managers can motivate their subordinates to perform better. They argue that nobody can motivate another person to perform successfully: motivation comes from within. It is an inner drive to satisfy an unsatisfied urge. This view is however highly debatable because several researchers on motivation of employees in work places seem to suggest that in some cases, a positive urge towards participation has to be cultivated. The process of cultivating the urge is not a one day event. It has to be cultivated over a period of time by the school authorities. Once the effort to cultivate the participatory approach to decision-making becomes visible, teachers would become convinced that the efforts are genuine and would want to contribute. The process of participatory decision-making therefore, starts and is dependent on confidence building on the part of the super ordinates.

1.3 Risk taking attitude

Longenecker (1977), states that the personality and values of decision makers affect and tend to limit rationality in decision-making. Longenecker's view is that some individuals have greater aversion to risk than others. As a result of this, their decisions are naturally different from those of decision makers having greater preference for risk. Schools, just like other organizations, exist in an environment that is always changing. This means many decisions in schools have to be made in the absence of complete knowledge. The absence of complete knowledge might indicate that there would not be full facts to know the consequences of the alternatives in a given situation and therefore not possible to maximize on the decision taken. This means that decisions that may be taken might involve certain risks that might need to be defended in future. The implication is that, the head teacher; SDC and SDA members should involve risk takers among the teachers in the decision-making process if the school goals are to be met. Without risk taking some successful projects in certain schools would never have been embarked on out of fear of possible failure and losses.

1.4 Intelligence and knowledge

In order for participatory decision-making to succeed, the participation should possess a certain minimum amount of intelligence and knowledge. The need for intelligent decisions cannot be over-emphasised if a school is to develop. In addition to being capable of contributing, the contributions should be worthwhile. The need for intelligence and knowledge justifies the importance of conducting



information and training programmes in schools so that teachers could be equipped with the necessary knowledge and intelligence to make them useful participants in decision-making process.

Mullins (2010) supported the need for intelligent participants in the decision-making process. The argument advanced was that, intelligence is important in the sense that, the participant should have the intellectual capacity to think and direct his or her thought processes at what is expected to be thought about in a given task. It is also important for the participant to be aware of the operation involved. He or she should be aware of what kind of thinking is required of her or him, whether it is towards problem solving or evaluating an outcome. In addition to these, thinking of the expected product or outcome that is required is also important. A person who lacks these intelligence is not likely to be beneficial in the participative decision-making process.

1.5 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is another important kind of intelligence that is necessary in successful participatory decision making process. The fact that participants are humans means that each of them needs some emotional intelligence in the interactions with other members. Mullins (2010) advances the assumptions of the Emotional Intelligence Competence Model.

2. SELF-AWARENESS

The model assumes that in an emotionally balanced individual, there should be self-awareness which comprises:

- Emotional self-awareness;
- Accurate self-assessment;
- Self-confidence.

This indicates that a participant in group activities should be aware of what he or she can and cannot achieve and must be someone who is not easily discouraged. A teacher who is self-assured is more likely to focus at goal achievement than one who is not.

2.1 Social awareness

Another assumption is that, a participant in participatory decision-making should be one who has social awareness (Donnelly and Gibson 1995). This means that the person should have empathy, have organizational awareness and be service oriented. A teacher who has these qualities is likely to work towards achieving the common goals because he or she is already motivated to perform the task for the good of the school and the society as a whole. Such a teacher is also likely to be more understanding and sympathetic to the school committee or school association and challenges they might be facing in their operations and be willing to help.

2.2 Emotional intelligence

The third assumption of the model is the self-management one. In this component of emotional intelligence, a participant is expected to have emotional self-control and should be a transparent person in the way they operate (Robbins, 2003). They must be persons who are adaptable and achievement oriented. They also have to be optimistic people, who have initiative. The indication of these intelligence requirements in participative decision-making is the need to select teachers who are tolerant of other peoples' views and contributions. Participants should not be persons who easily get offended at any criticism that might be leveled against them. Lack of self-control has led to fist fights in certain schools resulting in disharmony among the members. Adaptability is important considering that schools operate in an environment whose demands are ever-changing. Changes in environmental demands mean that teachers, as participants in the decision-making process, might have to change roles now and then for the development of the school. A self-managed person is also likely to achieve or want to achieve the goals of the school. The same is true of an optimistic person. A defeatist cannot see the outcome of any plan the school development committee or school development association might have on the table. Such a person is therefore not likely to benefit the school in operationalising decisions successfully.



2.3 Relationship management

The forth and last component of the model is relationship management. Relationship management refers to desire to develop and inspire others. It also includes being a change catalyst and to be ready to influence and collaborate with other team members (Griffin, 2002). Teachers are basically leaders not only in the school but also within their local communities. As they participate they should be seen to be developing others, especially parents who are members of SDCs and SDAs. Through successful relationship management, they are likely to be successful change catalysts in their schools and the local environment.

The discussion of the Emotional intelligence Competence Model serves to show the extent to which a person's emotional state determines his or her success in participating in the decision making process for teacher efficacy in SDCs and SDAs activities. For the above contingencies to be successfully operationalised, the schools must nurture a conducive environment in the form of supportive organisational climate.

2.4 Organizational climate

As stated earlier in the review of related literature, SDCs and SDAs should project good faith in participatory decision making. This is part of organizational climate. It has to be practiced on day to day basis starting from less important and progressing to more important decisions. The assumption is, such as approach to participation in decision-making, would encourage or motivate teachers to want to participate and progress higher on the decision making ladder.

2.5 Appropriateness of the problem

The nature of problems which seeks solution through participative decision-making is also related to how it affects teacher efficacy. Beach (1980) emphasizes that participation should be utilized for those situations and problems that are important and that have a material impact upon the people involved. If the decision has no impact on the participants, they might end up feeling exploited. This observation suggests that it is no longer adequate for teachers in schools to be told about how successful their school is when they do not feel that they had a part in bringing about that success. Teacher-efficacy would not be achieved because the success, though it might be there, remains "theirs" not "ours".

2.6 The concept of "spirituality" and teacher-efficacy

Workplace spirituality should be part of a school's culture. Robbins (2003) asserts that the concept refers to a work environment that recognizes that members have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work and tasks. A school that is spiritual promotes and acknowledges that teachers have both a mind and spirit, seek to find meaning and purpose in their work. They therefore seek to connect with other human beings and be part of the community. In a spiritual school, teachers are encouraged to learn and grow through participation; there is trust and openness in decision-making practices as well as toleration of self-expression. Robbins (2003) however warns against over-indulgence in the concept of spirituality as the main purpose of teacher participation is goal achievement or teacher-efficacy. Currently, in some Zimbabwean schools, parents have complained that there is now too much focus on teachers' welfare through the provision of financial incentives at the expense of goal achievement.

2.7 Scope and authority of responsibility

It is important for head teachers and chair persons of committees and associations to invite participation from subordinates only on problems within their sphere of authority and responsibility. Hellriegel and Siocum (1982:293) posit that when subordinates have knowledge related to the decisions and supervisors do not have such knowledge, the participative approach is likely to be more effective than the opposite. The researcher also feels that it is true that participants should not feel overwhelmed by decisions they have to make. Teacher-efficacy results when teachers are involved in issues where they are optimistic that there is chance of a breakthrough for them. The head teacher, SDC or SDA should guard against involving teachers in almost every decision. If they do that, they are likely to lose their credibility as main decision makers as well as the teachers' trust and respect as effective and efficient managers of the school.



3. CONTINGENCY MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

The issues of contingencies to participatory decision-making have been of concern among researchers according to Hellriegel and Siocum (1982). There has been research into the different types of participation and the limitations with aim of developing contingency models of participation. One of the models of interest in this study is the Vroom and Yetton Model.

The Vroom-Yetton Leadership Model

The model is also known as the Decision Theory. Robbins et al (2010) regard the theory as a theory that provides a set of rules to determine the form and amount of participation in decision making in different situations and according to the theory, when choosing a leadership style, one should realize that there is need to observe or consider the following:

3.1 Importance of the decision

Some decisions may require the head teachers, SDCS and SDAs participation only as per regulation. In such a case it would be awkward to involve teachers. There are also some cases where the head teachers might be considered as the only person who should decide. The researcher is of the assumption that most teachers are aware of their boundaries in participative decision making. However, if it is a situation where a local decision has to be reached, a decision that is likely to affect the teachers, then teachers might be justified in their expectation to be included as participants.

3.2 Importance of obtaining follower commitment to the decision

The head teacher should have wisdom to identify decisions that require the commitment of teachers and those that do not. If a decision requires teacher commitment, the head teacher should incorporate those teachers who show that they are committed from the start. If these are not there, there is need to sell the decision so that teachers accept it and be ready to support it to the end. Such a decision is likely to yield success.

3.3 Whether the leader has sufficient information to make a good decision

If the head teacher has enough information to make a good decision there might be no need for the participatory approach. The approach is time-consuming and labour-intensive. It would therefore make economic sense for the head teacher to use the information he or she has come up with a sound decision.

3.4 How well structured the problem is

In cases of well-structured problems, participatory decision-making would work. In cases where the problem is not very clear, it might be better for the head teacher, committee or association to work on their own and seek for clarifications as small team rather than throwing teachers into the fire.

3.5 Whether an autocratic decision would receive follower commitment

There are situations that lend themselves to autocratic approaches to decision-making. The school management should not hesitate to continue making the decision. This is important in cases where a decision is good for the sake of school development but teachers could be resisting it for their own personal reasons or as a group. It is clear that in such a situation, the participative approach to decision making would have no chance of succeeding so why bother about trying it.

3.6 Whether followers “buy” into the organisational goals

If teachers do not buy into the school’s mission statement, including them in the decision making process might not yield much. Rather, it would be better to educate them so that they appreciate the vision of the school. Once they appreciate and understand, they will be in a position to participate productively.

3.7 Whether there is likely to be conflict among subordinates over solution alternatives



The literature review discussed at length organisational conflict. If the SDA or SDC senses that the decision making process on a particular problem is likely to lead into unhealthy conflict in the school, it would be wise to exclude some oppositional teachers in the decision making process.

3.8 Whether followers have the necessary information to make a good decision

In order for participatory decision-making to work it is necessary to have participants with the required knowledge. If the teachers do not have literacy competence, their participation would not benefit the school.

3.9 Time constraints that may limit follower involvement

Time is an important resource which when lost can never be recovered. Some decisions need to be arrived at almost immediately. It is therefore prudent for the head teacher to make quick decision. If for example it is a financial assistance offer that has to be accepted, it might be foolish for the head teacher, the SDC or SDA to waste time consulting the whole staff because before they are through with consultation, the donors might decide to move the donation to another school.

3.10 Importance of using participation as a tool for developing follower decision skills

This is when the head uses the participative approach for the purpose of staff development. This might not be for immediate benefit but the head teacher and the school committee or school association might have realized the need for the training so that in future they might have a pool of efficient decision makers to draw from.

According to this model, there are five amounts of participations that are positive as shown below. Each of the amounts in the model caters for some of the considerations discussed and exemplified above.

A. 1

This is where the super ordinate makes the decision alone with no participants. This amount of participation assumes that there are some types of decisions which might not need the input of teachers in a school organization. In such a case, it would be correct for the head teacher and other committee members to make decisions without the participation of teachers if they are convinced that the decisions do not affect the teachers or warrant their participation.

A. 11

This amount of participation is where the leader, in this particular study the head teacher, the school committee or school association ask for information from teachers but makes decision alone. Subordinates may or may not be informed about what the problem is about. The advantage of this amount of participation is that it arms the decision maker with varied or in some cases adequate information to come up with an informed independent decision. It serves the leader from making uninformed decisions which would not lead to the development of the school. One could argue that it is an indirect way of facilitating participatory decision-making.

C. 1

In this scenario, the leader shares the problem with subordinates and asks for information and evaluations from them. Meetings take place as individuals not as a group and the super ordinate makes the decision. The strength of this approach is that, the leaders avoid being swayed by "groupthink". Ideas that are sourced from individual participants are more original because they are free from group influence. This strategy also helps in identifying teachers who have more constructive ideas that justify their inclusion in participatory decision-making. This amount of participation seems to borrow heavily from the Delphi Technique discussed earlier on.

C. 111

A head teacher and school development committee or school development association chairperson who use this method would prefer to meet the teachers and other committee members as a group to discuss the problem but in the end the head teacher makes the decision. This approach helps the participants to understand or appreciate the problem facing the institution. They are afforded the chance to make contributions. In the end the advantage is that, the involved teachers would be in a position to respect or sympathise



with the head teacher's, committees' or association's decision or strategy and lend support where possible because they understand the problem, the head teacher has to tackle.

G. 11

In this last scenario of the model, the head teacher, chairperson of the school development committee/association meet the whole group to discuss the problem and then as a whole make the decision. The effectiveness of this amount of participation depends and then as a whole make the decision. The effectiveness of this amount of participation depends on the capacity of all the members involved in finding solutions to that particular problem. If some of the participants lack the necessary intelligence and knowledge on the matter, the decision that would result would not be the best despite the numbers involved in making it.

4. THE PATH-GOAL THEORY

Walker (2004) regards the Path-Goal Theory as one of the most respected approaches to organisational leadership. The main tenets of the theory are that it is the leader's job to assist his or her followers in attaining their goals. The theory also emphasizes necessary direction and support to ensure that the subordinates' goals are compatible with the overall goals of the organization. The theory rests on the belief that it is the duty of a leader to clarify the path to help his/her followers to move from where they are to the achievement of their work goal. The leader is expected to make the journey towards goal achievement easier by reducing obstacles and pitfalls. Clegg et al (2008) also assert that the theory views effective leaders as leaders who motivate their followers by helping them understand that their needs and expectations can be fulfilled through the performance of their jobs. The better someone performs, the greater their need for fulfillment. The theory emphasizes the need to provide participants in organisational activities with psychological and technical support, information and other resources necessary to complete tasks.

Application of the Path-Goal Theory in participatory decision making

If the head teachers and other committee or association members want to practise participatory decision making in good faith, they must let teachers know what is expected of them, when they are asked to participate in school activities. There is need to provide specific guidance as to how the teachers involved should work so that they would not turn around blaming teachers in case of failure. The supportive head teacher shows concern for the needs of the employees. This suggests that during whatever activities teachers might be involved in, they should not be treated like machines. There are certain needs that have to be met in order for them to remain focused on the intended goal. According to the theory, the participative leader consults the subordinates and uses their suggestions before making a decision. Due to the fact that the theory is focused on goal achievement, it calls for achievement-oriented leaders to set challenging goals and expect the followers to perform at their highest levels.

4.1 Fiedlers's Contingency Theory of Leadership

The theory is also known as the situational theory of leadership. The theory argues that since there is no best leadership style in an organization, successful leadership depends on the match between subordinate and the situation (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2010). This means that a leader's effectiveness depends on how well his or her style fits the situation.

4.2 Application of the situational theory to participatory decision making

In relation to teacher participation in decision making process, the meaning is that, the head teachers, as the main advisors of the SDCs and SDAs should be in a position to determine teachers who would work better under autocratic or democratic atmospheres. This shows that some teachers would need very close supervision during participation whilst others would prefer minimum supervision and still deliver the required results. Those who require minimum supervision during the implementation of a decision might resent too much monitoring. On the other hand those requiring lost of guidance during delegated activities might not reach the desired goals if not provided with the guidance they feel they need. It is not easy to change a person's leadership style but it is possible to select a situation that fits a particular leadership style. The indication is that, the various activities teachers might participate in require participants with different leadership styles. The best approach for school authorities would be to determine which teacher or teachers would match a particular activity and assign tasks accordingly. Some activities might suit task-oriented teachers to participate while



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others might need teachers who are more humanistic in approach. Both styles could lead to successful teacher participation and teacher-efficacy if properly matched.

5. CONCLUSION

The contingency approach means that there are activities where School Development Associations or Committees may want teacher participation and where they might not want it. The school committee and school association may be at liberty to determine who should participate as well as determining when, how and where to participate in certain decisions.

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