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TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL INTO A LEARNING ORGANIZATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses various ways a school can be transformed into a learning organization through participatory decision-making. The paper argues that participants including teachers to contribute ideas towards finding solutions to problems impacting against the school. This implies that for a school to become or to be considered as a learning organization the head teacher and member of the SDC or SDA should cultivate an environment where issues are deliberated on from different angles or perspectives in order for the participatory decision makers to be able to come up with the most effective and most efficient decision.

Keywords: Transforming, learning organisation, decision-making, teachers, school.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern thinking in organizational behavior is that, organizations should develop learning organizations not only for the benefit of the members but for the benefit of the organisation. According to Nyamunda (2002) a learning organisation is one that proactively creates, acquires and transfers knowledge and the changes its behavior on the basis of new knowledge and insights. This definition of a learning organisation can easily be applied to a school that effectively engages in participatory decision-making involving teachers because participating is part of learning. The organisation as a whole learns through the ideas contributed by the teachers. Therefore it is only the teachers who learn.



Characteristics of a learning school

Nyamuda (2002) advances three key characteristics of a learning organisation as follows:

- There are new ideas;
- New knowledge is transferred throughout the organisation;
- There is behavior change;

2. APPLICATION IN PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

Participatory decision making allows many participants including teachers to contribute ideas towards finding solutions to problems impacting against the school. They are new ideas in the context that they would be coming not only from the head teacher, SDC and SDA members, but also from teachers as well if more are involved. The approach prevents the management from relying on familiar, trodden paths in trying to come up with strategies and solutions that work in the present environment (Fullan, 2009).

The participative approach would also allow new knowledge to be transformed throughout the organisation. As all the members participate, they actually share and transfer their skills to others. Each participant learns from another and this learning allows them to achieve organizational goals and also allow for teacher-efficacy.

The realization of organizational goals in the school and the achievement of teacher efficacy would be indications of behavior change. The literature review has shown how participatory decision making should be carried out in order for it to be a success. The stages have shown that they are aimed at changing the behavior of the participants to a stage where they and the school benefit from their participation in various developmental school activities or projects.

3. HOW CAN A SCHOOL BE A LEARNING ORGANISATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING?

The following are some of the factors that might facilitate the concept of, “learning organisation” through the participatory approach:

3.1 Climate of openness (debate and conflict)

It is important to acknowledge that any circumstance or task that involves several people is likely to attract debate and conflict. As teachers participate in the decision-making process there are bound to be some debates on certain issues. These debates should not be taken personally in order for the approach to work. When opinions differ, there is need to explore each rationally for the sake of goal achievement, not for the sake of pacifying one another. That would defeat the whole purpose of the participatory approach.

3.2 Continuous education / life-long learning

When participants are continually receiving, passing and exchanging information, it also means that the school is learning. The decisions they make are likely to be good ones that will see the school developing. The development of the school could be evidenced by successful developmental projects or activities as well as the positive image of the school in the community as a whole.

3.3 Advocacy

This implies that for a school to become or to be considered as a learning organisation the head teacher and members of the SDC or SDA should cultivate an environment where issues are deliberated on from different angles or perspectives in order for the participant decision-makers to be able to come up with the most effective and most efficient decision. Multiple advocacy calls for a variety of participants. This means that perhaps there is need to increase the number of teachers who participate.



3.4 Involved leadership

The need for participative decision-making involving teachers in SDCs and SDAs decision making processes and activities that follow does not mean that once teachers start participating in increased numbers, the head teachers, members of SDCs or SDAs should relinquish their responsibilities. The management is expected to keep on guiding and training those teachers who need to be developed. They might also take the role of evaluators so that the other participants get the necessary feedback.

3.5 Systems perspective

The systems perspectives in this particular study refers to the idea that schools should be considered as a system. A system is made up of interrelated parts. If each individual part of the system is performing efficiently and effectively then the whole system also performs well. This means that head teachers and school development members should consider teachers as partners in decision-making process. If they are helped to improve their decision-making skills through guidance and training in the participatory process, their proficiency would benefit the school as a whole. If on the other hand, they are not trained to be effective decision-makers it would mean that the school would not develop because of lack of exposure to new ideas (Hersey, 1989).

3.6 Performance shortfalls are seen as opportunities

The way the management views shortfalls in teacher performance during participative decision making contributes much towards the school being defined as part of organizations that could be referred to as learning organizations. In order for teachers to enjoy participating in school activities, the head teacher and members of the SDCs or SDAs should regard mistakes made as part of the learning process in decision-making. If teachers are castigated or punished for committing some errors, very few teachers would want to take the risk of participating.

It is against the foregoing arguments that schools should aim at being categorized as learning organizations through the creation of the necessary environment. School Development Committees and School Development Associations should realize that real learning for any organisation often involves a paradigm shift in how decisions used to be arrived at before the introduction of SDCs and SDAs as managers of schools. They also have to acknowledge that learning should be operationalised instead of just paying lip service (Gabriel, 2003). Last but not least appreciable, head teachers, SDA and SDC members should also consider themselves as learners so that they can be in a position to appreciate the various contributions from the teachers who will be participating in decision-making.

4. CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated how a school can be transformed into a learning organisation through participatory decision-making. Characteristics of a learning school were discussed which include climate of openness, continuous education, advocacy, involved leadership, systems perspective among others. The study argued that the organization as a whole leans through the ideas contributed by the teachers. The participatory decision making prevents the management from relying on familiar, trodden paths in trying to come up with strategies and solutions that work in the present environment.

5. REFERENCES

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