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SOME TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES AND SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

There are always barriers to teacher participation in School Development Associations or School Development Committees and most of these barriers might emanate from the traditional mindset with regard to the roles and functions of supervisors and supervisees which are conventionally viewed as separate. The barriers that inhibit teacher participation in SDCs/SDAs activities include authoritarian personalities and tendencies, pseudo participation, manipulation of subordinates, the power position of supervisors among others. Teachers should participate in SDA/SDC issues because they constitute a very critical constituency. Various techniques should be used to promote teacher participation in SDAs/SDCs.

Keywords: Techniques, effective participation, supervisors, formal groups subject committees

1. INTRODUCTION

Most schools have structured and formal groups which constitute subject committees. The unstructured, non-evaluative, supportive groups are not so easy to establish. Mitchell (1983) suggests the following techniques can be used by group members to access all the individual ideas.

2. BRAIN-STORMING TECHNIQUE

It is designed to deal with situations where new innovative ideas are required. The Brain-Storming Technique affords everyone a chance to be heard. It does not allow certain people to dominate the discussion and settle for a solution prematurely in the problem-solving process. The general procedure for a brain-storming group to solve a given problem is as follows:

- Ideas are invited and generated by group members to encourage everyone to contribute;



- Evaluation of the ideas or suggested solutions takes place only after all ideas has been given so that there is no inhibition of a free flow of suggestions;
- Group members are encouraged to elaborate on the ideas of others. Mitchell (1983) says group members have easy access to all the individual ideas that might not be thought of alone and ideas that were triggered by other group members. Brain-storming technique can led to more and higher quality ideas being generated than when people feel constrained. This technique is usable in school development committee and school development association meetings.

3. THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

This technique is designed for a group meeting and includes the following procedure:

- Individuals silently and independently generate their ideas about a given task or an identical problem;
- Then each group member in turn presents one idea or possible solution to the group, and the ideas or suggested solutions recorded on the chalkboard or flip chart;
- When all possible solutions to the problems have been presented they are carefully analysed, discussed, clarified and evaluated for cost-effectiveness and efficacy.
- The meeting concludes with an independent vote on the possible solutions presented.

At his stage group consensus is determined through calculations using the input from the final votes.

The four stages followed in implementing the nominal technique, on the surface appear to be time-consuming and superficial. In effect, each member of the group is afforded opportunity to generate ideas or provide solutions to the problems. It is an effective technique of collecting ideas in school development committee and school development association meetings.

Hellriegel and Siocum (1982) also supported the Nominal Group Technique arguing that it is a technique that is designed to stimulate creative decision-making which could be used where participants lack agreement. They also argued that the technique is also useful where individuals with varying backgrounds must pool their talents to come up with a satisfactory course of action. Hellriegel and Siocum (1982) also emphasised that the purpose of this technique is to increase sense of involvement and responsibility in making contributions. The two authorities also asserted that people should express conflicting and seemingly incompatible ideas and that all participants should participate equally in sharing ideas and contributing to the group products. Robins (2003) also supports the concept of subordinate involvement in decision-making process saying that the practice increases their autonomy and control over their work which will in turn make them more motivated, more committed, more productive and satisfied with their jobs. It is clear that these ideas are strongly in the same line of thinking as the beliefs underlying participatory decision-making.

4. THE DELPHI TECHNIQUE

The Delphi Technique is similar to the nominal group technique in many ways but one. It requires the physical presence of the group members as in the nominal. The procedure is more or less the same as in the Nominal Group Technique.

- A questionnaire is designed for soliciting information and ideas on a problem and is distributed to a group of people who do not know one another;
- The responses from the respondents are tabulated, summarized and a report of this information is returned to the respondents along with a second questionnaire designed to probe further any issues that need further clarification or consideration;
- The feedback report is evaluated, and respondents vote or rate the various ideas that have been presented;
- These data are tabulated, a decision is made, and a summary of these data and consensual decision are returned to the respondents for ratification and implementation.



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Teacher-participation in SDCs and SDAs is quite an effective and efficient approach in generating ideas to solve a problem. The three techniques alluded to, if well implemented, can yield desired results for any given school. As a general procedure, all the individuals' ideas are treated equally the same and are pooled together to give an overall response.

Brainstorming as an idea-gathering technique, could be implemented in schools. A frequent use of this technique can make school committees and associations very effective and efficient. This technique lends itself very usable in schools as both the head teachers, school committees or associations and the teachers can easily hold meetings or workshops where ideas can be generated in like manner if all requisite resources: human, material, time and buildings are readily available. Nevertheless, brainstorming is time-consuming and it call for good planning, good organization and sound analysis of data. On its own the Brain Storming Technique might not immediately produce a solution.

The other two idea-generative techniques: the Nominal Group and the Delphi techniques, utilize quite independent work for idea generation and evaluation. They both separate the idea generation and the evaluation stages and both use computation procedures to arrive at collective decision. The techniques are designed to get maximum idea generation, equal treatment, separate evaluation and consensual decision derived from pooled responses.

According to Mitchell (1983) the seldom used creative idea-generative techniques that can promote teacher participation are The Nominal and The Delphi. There are minor differences between them. In The Nominal Group Technique, members know one another, meet face-to-face in a group and their communication is direct and verbal. In The Delphi technique members are anonymous, and physically dispersed. They only communicate by written messages. The choice of one of the other of the two techniques depends on the case with which people can be assembled or on the sensitivity of the issue that calls for the preference of anonymity.

Sibanda (2011) has found that the Nominal and the Delphi processes generate more superior ideas that satisfy the people concerned. On one hand, brainstorming calls for an interacting group that seems to waste a lot of time on interpersonal relationships and premature evaluation of ideas. A few individuals have a tendency to dominate the group, too much time is wasted on tangential discussions and group conformity tends to inhibit idea generation.

On the other hand, Nominal Group Technique and the Delphi Technique seem to ensure that everyone is heard, each idea is evaluated and everyone has a say in the decision made. SDCs and SDAs can increase their effectiveness and efficiency by using any one of these decision-making techniques at any given time. As pointed out earlier on in this study, the choice of a technique is largely dependent on the availability of requisite resources.

Kreitner and Kinicki (2010) also support the techniques above as effective ways of overcoming disadvantages and capitalizing on advantages of participatory decision-making. Some of the justifications for using the techniques are that decision-making is rendered faster and more flexible in the rapid changing environment and that the decentralistaion of authority fosters a competitive climate in the school among teachers. However, the caution expressed was that there is danger of loss of control on the part of the chief decision maker, if the process of selecting participants is not well thought out. There is also the danger of duplicating tasks. This happens when teachers have been assigned to participatory roles and function that overlap, a situation that usually ends up in unhealthy conflicts which end up counter-productive to the original objectives of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

The importance of promoting teacher participation in SDA/SDC activities can not be over emphasised, and yet most of the time they are excluded. There are many techniques that can be used for effective participation of teachers in SDAs/SDCs. These include brain storming technique, nominal group technique, the Delphi technique among others. If properly utilized, these techniques would greatly promote the participation of teachers in SDAs/SDCs.

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