



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOLS: THE ZIMBABWEAN EXPERIENCE

Philip Gazimbe and Regis Fanuel Gutuza

Zimbabwe Open University,
National Centre Box 1119 Harare,
Faculty of Arts and Education,
Zimbabwe.

ABSTRACT

The paper presents challenges posed by organizational politics in decision-making in schools. Participatory decision-making is key to the development of schools. The paper establishes that the presence of coalitions that seek to protect their own interests and positions of power, unequal distribution of power, organisational politics and defensive behaviors, behaviors for avoiding action, over conformity, buck pass, misrepresenting information all contain fully fledged participatory decision-making. There is need for heads to be fully aware of these phenomena so as to address them first before implementing participatory participation in their schools.

Keywords: Organisational politics, decision-making, schools, implementing, participatory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools as organisations are not spared from organisational politics. Mintzberg (1989) argues that politics has to do with power in an organization. Participation in certain school activities by certain teachers usually gives them a certain amount of power and influence over other teachers though only for the period they would be participating. Cherington (1989) observed this link between organisational politics and power by asserting that organisational politics refers to activities within organizations designed to acquire, develop, or use power in a conscious way to obtain one's preferred outcomes or to manipulate a situation for one's own purpose. Below are some of the political realities of schools as organizations as given by Luthans (1995):

- The presence of coalitions;
- Coalitions that seek to protect own interests and positions of power;



- Interests and positions of power;
- Unequal distribution of power;
- Exercise of power at school level lead to exercising power at social level;

1.1 The presence of coalitions

Schools like any other organizations are composed of coalitions. These coalitions compete with one another for positions of responsibility, acquisition of resources as well as influence. The head teacher, as chief advisor to the SDC or SDA needs to be aware of such coalitions and must be intelligent enough to separate healthy from unhealthy coalitions. If a coalition is considered as useful in ensuring the success of an agreed decision then the SDC or SDA should take advantage of it. If on the other hand the SDC or SDA recognizes that a certain coalition is unhealthy to the development of the school, there might be need to neutralize the strength of the coalition. The coalition can be neutralized in various ways like not asking the members of that negative coalition to participate in an activity they want to thwart or dividing them by selecting the less radical among them to be participants leaving out the more radical ones.

1.2 Coalitions that seek to protect own interests and positions of power

The head teacher should be aware of the fact that amongst teachers including himself or herself there might be some aiming at pursuing self-interests in whatever activities they participate in. It is important for these characters to be identified and educated on the importance of cooperation and oneness in pursuit of common schools goals. Some people fight tooth and nail to remain in certain positions even if their performance is sub-standard. Some head teachers might also retain non-performers in their positions of responsibility just because they might be friends or relatives. Such biased and selfish attitudes do not facilitate successful participative decision-making approach. These are malcontents who should be weeded out in order for the approach to work. Participants should be effective persons who are certain to achieve organisational goals.

1.3 Unequal distribution of power

This is another political reality in school organisations. Head teachers and SDC and SDA members should avoid situations where the same tend to dominate participation in the decision-making process. This breeds resentment among other staff members because it might give the impression that they are considered as irrelevant or ineffective. As many teachers as possible should have a taste of leading in the various activities that the school engages in. The management needs to be aware that there are now various sources of power within organisations apart from the traditional position power. This is important to know so that, when teachers ask for more power through the participative approach, their needs for power could be met from powerbases such as expert power, knowledge power and several other power bases. They would not be asking to take over complete running of the school, Sally Helgesen in Nyamuda (2002).

1.4 Exercise of power at school level leads to exercising power at larger social level

Grooming someone through participatory decision-making equips the person to be productive or effective not only at school level but in the larger society. Once equipped with decision-making skills, a person feels empowered to participate in higher decision making platforms. It is part for individual's growth. As such, there is bound to be competition among those teachers who want to be exposed to the experience of making decisions with impact.

2. ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS AND DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOURS

Studies in organisational behavior have shown that there is a relationship between organisational politics and member performance. Robbins et al (2010) assert that the politics performance relationship appears to be moderated when individuals in the organization understand the 'hows' and 'whys' of organisational politics. The authorities argue that people in organizations should understand who makes decisions and why certain people amongst them are selected in the decision-making process. The indication is that there should be transparency in the selection of teachers involved in certain school activities.



Robbins et al (2010) postulates that when politics is viewed as a threat rather than an opportunity, members of the organization usually respond with defensive behaviours. Robbins et al (2010) define defensive behavior as reactive and protective behavior to avoid action, blame or change.

The defensive behaviors are categorized into three groups such as those for avoiding action, avoiding blame and avoiding change. Below are the categories in their respective categories as provided by Robbins et al (2010):

2.1 Behaviors for avoiding action

2.1.1 Over conformity

This is a situation where a participant in participatory decision-making emphasizes the need to follow guidelines provided by the responsible ministry. In the same scenario, some participants might resent any introduction of new ways of doing something by emphatically stating that things have to be done the way they have been done in the past. Such behavior does not augur well with the participatory approach.

2.1.2 Buck passing

In certain cases when a participant has been assigned a task where he or she realizes that the probability for success is low, he or she might resolve to transfer responsibility for executing that problematic task or decision to someone else. It is surrendering a role in a given task to others. This is a sign that the management would have wrongly assigned a task.

2.1.3 Playing down

During the process of assigning tasks, some teachers might adopt the strategy of avoiding participating in a particular task by falsely pleading ignorance and inability to perform the given task. The reason for adopting such behavior may be linked to the politics of the school.

2.1.4 Stretching

School development committees and school development associations should desist from heavy dependence on a few individuals in participatory decision-making. This might lead to the individuals feeling over-burdened. Once someone feels over-used, one might engage in the stretching tactic. This means that the teachers involved might take more time than required to complete a given task because they would be afraid of being assigned another new task while others are not working.

2.1.5 Stalling

Sometimes when teachers do not fully understand the politics within their schools, they might pretend to be supportive or less supportive of certain decisions in public while doing little or even nothing privately. This does not help in confidence building because the teachers would just be acting but not believing in the set goals or tasks. The result is that the tasks would fail.

2.2 Behaviors for avoiding blame

These are the behaviours in the second category of defensive behaviors emanating from organisational politics as asserted by Robbins et al (2010). The behaviors include the following:

2.2.1 Buffing

This refers to the practice of rigorously providing a documentary analysis of an activity so that an image of competence and thoroughness is displayed. In reality very little or nothing would be happening. This is likely to happen in donor-assisted projects. Such behavior does not lead to successful accomplishment of objectives.

2.2.2 Playing safe



In this tactic, some teachers, due to not understanding and appreciating the political environment with the school, might evade participative decision making situations that might reflect their performance unfavorably at the end. They might do so by committing themselves to activities or projects where success is definite and avoid activities where there is risk of failure. This behavior might have the effect of over burdening the management in making decisions which might have been made by some competent teachers.

2.2.3 Justifying behavior

When teachers participate in several school activities and projects, it does not necessarily mean that they are always successful. Depending on how failure is regarded in the school, some teachers might try to justify their failure by giving excuses or explanations that exonerate them of the responsibility for the negative outcome or result. This because no one wants to be associated with failure.

2.2.4 Scape-goating

This behavior is still related to negative outcomes of the participative approach. Some participants in a certain activity might place blame for failure on external factors rather than on themselves. This is not good for participatory decision-making because it does not make room for self-evaluation so that the participants concerned can realize areas where they might be in need of staff development.

2.2.5 Misrepresenting information

Openness and honesty are critical in successful participatory decision-making. Organisational politics might cause some participants to manipulate information by distorting or providing deceptive reports. In other cases they might be selective in what or what not to present. This is not good for the approach because of the lack of adequate information on the progress or lack of progress in the activities.

2.3 Behaviors of avoiding change

2.3.1 Prevention behavior

This refers to behavior where the participants might try to prevent a threatening change from occurring. Any decisional change needs the participation of teachers in the school in order for it to be a success. If proposed change is viewed with suspicion; some participants might try to block its success using various tactics.

2.3.2 Self-protection

Due to organisational politics, some participants might behave in ways that protect their self-interest. Some of them do so by guarding information and resources so that they are the only ones in a position to achieve the desired out comes. This is an undesirable behavior because a school as an organization is supposed to operate as one. The success of the school is viewed as a whole rather than in parts.

The discussion on defensive behaviors has served to show the value of having teachers who fully comprehend the internal politics of the school so that they do not need to resort to using these defensive behaviors that might have a negative effect on participatory decision-making.

3. CONCLUSION

Participatory decision-making is a very important part of running schools and other educational organisational effectively. However, there are many issues that may inhibit the smooth operationalisation of participatory decision-making emanating from organisational politics. There is need for heads of schools to be aware of these obstacles in order to avoid their negative influence on participatory decision-making.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Cherington, Y. (1989). *Innovation in education*. London; MacMillan Education.



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

- [2] Luthans, B. (1995). *Share the power*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- [3] Nyamuda, P. (2002). *Organisational leadership*. Harare: Zimbabwe Open University.
- [4] Robbins, S. P., Judge, T. A. and Campbell, T. T. (2010). *Organisational behavior*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.