The Relationship between Teacher Participation in Decision-making and Organisational Commitment

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ABSTRACT Job commitment refers to the willingness of the teachers to go beyond the expected levels of participation so as to achieve school-based goals. This is partially achieved by involving them in critical school based decision-making areas. This study examined the relationship between teacher participation in decision-making and organisational commitment. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative research methodology and a case study research design. A purposive convenient sample of 5 school heads and 20 secondary school teachers formed the study. Data was collected through face to face interviews, documentary analysis and observation of two staff meetings per school. The study began the process of data analysis by transcribing verbatim audio taped interviews. The results were cross-checked with the participants. The study established that teachers were not significantly involved in decision-making. Most of the decisions were made by school heads and passed on to teachers for implementation. The study observed that insignificant teacher participation in critical school issues resulted in low commitment and low job satisfaction. It is therefore important for school heads to consider other people's concerns because if people are angry regarding the way decisions are taken, such decisions will not proceed smoothly. Their feelings and perceptions account for the success or failure of the decision.

INTRODUCTION

Decision-making refers to teachers' participation in critical decisions that directly affect their work, involving issues related to budgets, teacher selection, scheduling and curriculum. To be effective, teachers' participation in decision-making must be genuine, and the teachers need to be confident that their decisions actually impact real outcomes (Bogler and Somech 2004). Employee participation is, therefore, a process in which influence is shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchically unequal (Wagner 1994; Bhatti and Qureshi 2007). A study conducted by Wadesango (2011) showed that there is a positive relationship between participation in critical school based decisions and commitment. Hence, teacher commitment could be viewed as the psychological identification of the individual teacher with the school and the subject matter or goals, and the intention of that teacher to maintain organizational membership and become involved in the job well beyond personal interest (Graham 1996). According to Graham's view, the higher the teacher's psychological identification is, the higher his or her sense of commitment will be.

Bogler and Somech (2004) citing Steers and Porter (1979) defined organizational commitment as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. According to Bogler and Stomech (2004), this concept is based on three factors: the acceptance of the organisation's goals and values (identification), the willingness to invest effort on behalf of the organization (involvement) and the importance attached to keeping up the membership in the organization (loyalty). These characteristics according to Bogler and Stomech imply that the members of the organization wish to be active players in the organization, have an impact on what is going on in it, feel that they have high status within it, and are ready to contribute beyond what is expected of them. This is especially true (Bogler and Stomech 2004 citing Yousef 2000) when the leaders of the organization are perceived as adopting consultative or participative leadership behavior, where shared decision-making is prevalent.

Importance of Commitment

According to Bogler and Somech (2004) citing Aranya and Ferris (1984), employees who are highly committed to both the profession and organisation were found to perform better than the less committed ones, a behaviour which results in improved overall effectiveness of the organisation. In this case, when leaders are perceived as participative, employees feel more com-

mitted to the organisation, express higher levels of job satisfaction, and their performance is high. These views concur with Graham's (1996) research on teacher commitment which indicated that teachers with high levels of commitment work harder, demonstrate stronger affiliation to their schools, and demonstrate more desire to accomplish the goals of teaching than teachers with low levels of commitment. More importantly, students of highly committed teachers are more likely to learn material and develop a positive attitude towards school than those of teachers with low levels of commitment.

The importance of teacher commitment cannot be under-estimated. According to Hellriegel et al. (1998) cited by Bhatti and Qureshi (2007), high performing, effective organisations have a culture that encourages employee involvement. Therefore, employees are more willing to get involved in decision-making, goal setting or problem solving activities, which subsequently result in higher employee performance. Furthermore, literature on genuine participation reveals that direct participation in decision-making is related with organisational commitment and organisational commitment is positively related to more favourable outcomes such as effort, coming on time (Wallace 1995; Bhatti et al. 2011). A study conducted by Bhatti et al. (2011) revealed that when an employee is not committed with the company, there are multiple effects. The first is the loss of that person's skills and knowledge. The second is the loss of productivity of the organisation. The third is the financial impact of replacing that individual. The fourth is the impact on employee morale. Their conclusion also suggested that management might be able to increase the level of commitment in the organisation by increasing contribution of employees within the organisation. One way of addressing this according to them could be by increasing the interactions with employees in staff meetings and increasing guided discussion of topics related to the issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research approach. The study concentrated on the qualitative form since this research aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to decision-making in their natural settings. In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop "from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed" (Creswell 2002:35). The problem identified in this study demanded that the participants themselves be allowed to freely express their feelings, views and opinions. To this end, Sherman and Webb (1991 in Ely 1991:4) provide the following definition "…qualitative implies a direct concern with feelings, experiences and views as lived or felt or undergone…" This study adopted a case study research design. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001). Purposive sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher looked for rich, detailed information of a qualitative nature. The methods that were used to gather information for this study were concerned with seeking participants' written and verbal information on the way problems are solved and decisions are taken in their schools. Therefore, the strategies used produced descriptive data based on insights rather than statistical data where hypothesis testing is involved. Three types of strategies that were used to provide the data for this study included the following: Individual interviews, document analysis and observation of school staff meetings.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. The interviews involved five principals and twenty staff members of the five selected secondary schools. This method was preferred because data was gathered systematically and the researcher was assured that no data was omitted. Through the use of interviews, the interviewer was able to elaborate on issues and questions as well as clarifying the meaning of statements, answers or questions that may not have been clear to the interviewee. Semi-struc-

tured interviews were conducted because the researcher wanted the respondents to give their detailed views, opinions and perceptions with regard to: the type of teachers that normally participate in decision- making; areas in which teachers participate in decision making; the nature of teacher participation in decision- making and the outcome of teacher participation in decision making. Through use of semi- structured interviews, respondents were able to express themselves freely since the main purpose of this study was to let respondents narrate their experiences with regard to teacher participation and involvement in decision- making. In the process the study was able to get rich thick data from participants and this increased the validity of the findings of the research. During the interviews, certain issues respondents tended to leave unexplained were effectively probed. By so doing the study was able to gain a detailed understanding of the respondents' opinions rather than would be the case when using mailed questionnaires.

Documentary Analysis

Various documents that were related to the shared decision making process were examined. Such documents included public records, personal documents and physical material already present in the research setting. Documents helped the researcher to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights.

Observation of Staff Meetings

In this study, the researcher adopted the simple observation method to collect data from schools on the extent of teacher participation and involvement in decision making. The researcher listened and observed proceedings of school based staff meetings (two per school) by sitting in their meetings. The researcher recorded observations on a specially constructed data sheet. The researcher had a firsthand experience with participants since he got the information direct from them. The researcher was able to record information as it was revealed.

Validity and Reliability

All participants were informed about the research study in a way that was assumed to be clear and understandable to them. The research questions were formulated clearly and presented to the respondents in written form to avoid ambiguity.

Ethical Issues

Subjects in this study participated voluntarily. Names of participants remained anonymous and all the information received from participating students was treated as highly confidential. The significance of the research study was clearly explained to the participants. The participants were also afforded an opportunity to ask questions. In this research study, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw if they so wished. The established agreement did not place participants under the obligation to continue participating in the project if they were no longer interested. All participants in any kind of research should have the right to confidentiality. The researcher assured the participants that sensitive data was to be held in the strictest confidence in order to protect their anonymity. The research was therefore conducted with respect and concern for the dignity and welfare of the informants. The individual's right to decline to participate was respected in this study. The researcher ensured that the purpose and activities of the research were clearly explained to the participants. The author of this document ensured that promises and commitments were honoured by safeguarding participants' identities.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF RESPONDENTS

In order to get insights about the quality of the respondents, the researcher established their professional qualifications. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Highest professional qualifications (N=25)

Professional qualification	Males	Females	% Males	% Females	Total
Teacher Certificate level 4	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0%
Certificate in Education	3	6	20.1	60.0	36.0%
Diploma in Education	4	2	26.7	20.0	24.0%
Bachelor of Education	6	2	40.2	20.0	32.0%
Master of Education	2	0	13.4	0.0	8.0%
Total	15	10	100	100	100%

Table 1 shows that all the respondents were qualified teachers, holding at least a Certificate in Education in an area of specialty. It was also noted that there were respondents who held university degrees. These numbered to 10 or 40% of the respondents. Among these respondents were 2 (8%) who hold a Masters' degree in Education. Again, this picture gives the impression that the respondents are likely to give valued responses given their relatively high academic and professional qualifications.

To get an even deeper understanding of the respondents, the researcher collected data on the respondents' professional experience. To this end the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' teaching experience (N=25)

Teaching experience in years	Males	Females	% males	% females	Totals
Below 5	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5 – 10	4	0	26.6	0.0	16.0
11-20	6	6	40.0	60.0	48.0
21-30	2	2	13.2	20.0	16.0
31 and above	3	2	13.2	20.0	20.0
Total	15	10	100	100	100

Table 2 indicates that 48% of the respondents have extensive teaching experience that ranged between 11-20 years. Five of the respondents had over 30 years of teaching experience. However, there were other respondents whose teaching experience fell below 10 years. These numbered 4 out of the 25 respondents. It is also apparent that no respondent had less than 5 years of teaching experience. The meaning one deduces from this data set is that the respondents were well experienced in the teaching profession.

RESULTS

The majority of the teachers asserted that in most of the cases certain decisions reached without their consultation were not successful because they were difficult to implement. Some of the reasons given are presented as follows: Most of them failed because they didn't have the backing of the teachers and it was difficult to implement something which you know you were not consulted. The participation of members would not be as active as if the head had consulted everyone. In one school teachers recalled an incident in which the head of school announced to students to come in their casual wear the next day in order to raise some funds for the school development secretary's (SDC) allowances. Teachers were neither consulted nor informed about the civvies day and they only came to know about it in the morning when they saw students in casual wear. The head then instructed class teachers to collect contributions from the students. In this case, class teachers were disgruntled and instead of them collecting the contributions, they asked the monitors to do it on their behalf and very little was realized on that particular day. It was established that teachers wanted to demonstrate to their head that they were not part of the activity.

It was established that some of the teachers were no longer committed to their work especially in four of the five participating schools. Teachers from these schools asserted that their involvement in decision- making was only limited to issues of insignificant. They, however, wanted to participate in other strategic issues such as student discipline policies, choice of curriculum and formulation of a school budget as individuals because they were not adequately represented in those committees. One of the teachers complained that most of the time, their representatives did not sit down with the whole staff in order to get other people's views but that they would submit their own views in the committee meetings even if there was time for consultation. Below are some of the responses given by the respondents (herein after referred to as R):

R7   *The commitment towards work and towards the children has been affected because you doubt yourself if you are doing the right thing. Commitment has declined. It is very low. At times teachers arrive here at 8am, they just move around the school premises. You will find that there is a class, the teacher is not there and the teacher may be with another teacher somewhere discussing their problems. So I would rather say, commitment is low. People just come to work for the sake of being seen. They don't work.*

R16   *Commitment has decreased because one does not have the room to   make decisions or at least feel he is involved*

in decision making process. The commitment towards work and towards pupils has been affected at an alarming rate. Commitment towards the broader goals has decreased because one does not have the room to make decisions or at least feel he is involved in the decision making process

There is room to believe that the low involvement of some teachers in decision- making in critical areas may have affected teachers' commitment to work. However, other factors like low remuneration in a country like Zimbabwe whose inflation rate by the time of this study was pegged at 15000% might have also contributed to teachers' low commitment to work. The fact that these four schools were located in rural areas where one could scarcely find basic food commodities might be another factor as well.

Responding teachers from the affected four schools asserted that they used to start work an hour before the official starting time. They further revealed that they would leave their classrooms as late as two hours after the official knock off time. Some went on to say that they had almost turned workaholics. They would even come to work during weekends and nobody ever thought of claiming for the overtime. As a result, schools were performing very well as evidenced by high 'O' level percentage pass rates. However, teachers should bear in mind that students' performance can be affected by many variables such as shortage of textbooks due to harsh economic climate in the country. Schools were failing to sustain themselves in Zimbabwe due to unfavorable economic conditions.

Some of the teachers were coming to work late and dismissing earlier than the official knock off time. The responding teachers further indicated to the researcher that truancy, unmarked pupils' books, faked illnesses and general laziness was now the order of the day in these four schools. These are the signs of poor commitment to duty. The above sentiments were also confirmed by the head's outburst in one of the meetings attended. The head told members that absenteeism was on the increase*. "Some of you appear to be faking illnesses and conniving with your doctors. The rate of absenteeism has now reached an alarming rate. Some of you do not respect these children and imagine if it was your child whose teacher is not attending lessons regularly, how would you feel".*

Minutes reviewed indicated that the rate of absenteeism was rife in four of these schools. Some of the teachers were not even attending assembly. These were the same schools where teachers indicated that their morale was low as well as that there was low collegial interaction.

DISCUSSION

The reality of life calls for a concerted effort in decision making in schools for the benefit of the school. Therefore it was found out in this study that there may be a positive correlation between level of participation in decision making and commitment. In support, Johnson and Ledbetter (1993) observe that the involvement of implementers (teachers) in decision- making is a positive move and decisions taken after wide consultations are usually successful. Chung (1988) also identifies full teacher participation in decision- making as a key success factor. While Chung holds the above sentiment, she (as a Zimbabwean Minister of Education and Culture during her time) also failed to provide a blue print of how and to what level teachers should be involved in decision making processes in Zimbabwe. In the Republic of South Africa, non involvement of teachers in formulation of the revised curriculum (C2005) led to major challenges in implementation (Mungunda 2003).

Effective implementation of any decisions depends largely on the acceptance and support by other people. Teachers claim that imposed decisions are not always successful in their implementation. It is important to consider other people's concerns. Their feelings and perceptions account for the success or failure of the decision. Researchers tend to concur on the notion that some of the decisions made without consulting other stakeholders are not always successful (Rezabek 1999; Wadesango 2011). Chivore in his study (1995) found out that people who participated in and helped formulate decisions would support them and they would work hard to make them go because they were their ideas.

A number of factors have been put forward by a number of scholars on why heads of schools sometimes did not effect suggestions from their teachers in critical issues. Role ambiguity has been cited as one of the reasons that cause certain heads not to listen to teachers' suggestions. According to Brouillette (1997), role ambiguity

is a situation where principals play the role of coordinator as demanded of them but remain the system's most senior official in the school. It may be difficult for them to adjust since at one point they are supposed to be supervisors and disciplinarians and when it comes to the process of decision making, they are required to be colleagues. This may cause them not to take everything suggested by their teachers. Morse et al. (1997) also point out that some principals lacked proper regard for teachers. In this regard teachers were not seen as active agents who should be encouraged to be innovate and bring about change in schools. As a result principals did not want to stoop so low by implementing certain suggestions made by teachers.

It was established in this study that teachers who were allowed to participate in the decision making processes in terms of important matters such as selection of textbooks, streaming of students, formulation of student policies, teaching load allocation and many others were reported to reflect a high level of organisational commitment. Moreover, teachers who were encouraged to participate democratically in decision making process were reported to be more positive and committed to the school as an organisation. They showed enthusiasm for the school, pupils and parents. They were willing to take on projects or to work as teams and are creative and innovative as they have co-ownership of their participatory decision making. Furthermore, this is confirmed by Rezabek (1999), whose study revealed that teachers who were allowed to participate in the decision making process in terms of important matters (for example, the management of the school) were reported to reflect a high level of organisational commitment not only in the community but also in their day to day life. Therefore, greater involvement of teachers in decision making creates a framework for commitment. Commitment leads to the continuous self renewal of the organisation for the benefit of the community. A learning organisation is likely to be very effective and efficient in goal attainment.

Absenteeism of teachers was very high in four of the five participating schools in which teachers were being excluded from decision making areas of a strategic nature. The records scrutinised indicated that the rate of absenteeism left a lot to be desired in these schools. Teachers indicated that most of them were in the habit

of faking illnesses to justify their absenteeism. They went on to attribute this unprofessional behaviour to their unhappiness with their low level of involvement in the decision making processes. These views are supported by Tailor (1994), who says that the link between participation in shared decision making and teacher attendance is supported in both the effective schools and restructuring research. Taylor (1994) further argues that higher teacher absenteeism occurred in schools where teachers were excluded from participation in decision making. Also a decline in absenteeism was recorded after teachers became actively involved in decision making.

In a number of studies, teachers' autonomy in making classroom decisions, their participation in school-wide decision-making and their opportunities to learn were among the organisational conditions that showed a strong association with teacher commitment to the organisation (Bogler and Somech 2004). In their study conducted in 2004, the findings demonstrate that teachers who had a high sense of status in their work felt more committed to the organisation and to the teaching profession than teachers who were passive in decision-making. They further asserted that teachers who perceived that they had the professional respect and admiration of their colleagues and superiors, in addition to acknowledgement of their expertise and knowledge, would be more inclined to contribute to their schools. Their contribution would be exhibited in the expression of greater commitment to the profession and the organisation that reflect helping others (students, colleagues and the organisation as a whole).

This study found that responding teachers from four of the schools were no longer satisfied and committed to their job. They commented that to some extent, their commitment and sense of belonging to the school rose with their level of participation in decision making especially in major issues like curriculum choice, teaching load allocation and such other areas that fall within their areas of expertise and experience. Respondents indicated that the more teachers were involved the better decisions would be made for students as teachers understood their students more fully than administrators and this raises their self-esteem. This notion is confirmed by Wall and Rinechart (1999), whose research found

that participation enhances job satisfaction. In support, participation could expand teacher's authority and influence in the work place, capitalise on and contribute to teachers' expertise and operate to improve instruction and all these enhance job satisfaction, commitment and improve performance (Jacobson and Berne 1993). The results of this study provide relatively strong support for the existence of a positive relationship between employee participation and employee commitment.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that most of the participating school heads made unilateral decisions in critical areas. In some instances, they consulted their management teams and either finalized the decision and took it to staff for implementation or they tabled the issue before all staff members in a staff meeting but do not take what teachers say. The study has also established that decision making had a profound impact on the effectuation of the decisions. There was a positive correlation between commitment and level of involvement in decision making. The outcome could be in the form of compromise work output. Compromised work out put could be traced to the alienation of the implementers in excluding some of the teachers in making certain strategic decisions in the school. Absenteeism of teachers was very high in four of the five participating schools in which teachers were being excluded from certain decision making areas of a strategic nature. The records scrutinised indicated that the rate of absenteeism left a lot to be desired in these schools. The teachers indicated that most of them were in the habit of faking illnesses to justify their absenteeism. They went on to attribute this unprofessional behaviour to their unhappiness with their low level of involvement in the decision making processes.

RECCOMMENDATIONS

School heads should involve all their teachers as much as possible in critical decision making areas. They should refrain from centralizing the decision making processes. By centralizing the decision making processes, school heads run the risk of compromising the chances of getting the best decisions for every situation in the school. In the main, the study recommends decentralization of the decision making to all through the HODs. Thus, departments should be semi- autonomous. The greater the magnitude of decentralization and devolution of power the greater the chances of all the teachers being involved in the decision- making process.

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