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ABSTRACT
        This paper argues that many site-based management
practices do not represent true empowerment and are not founded on a
consensual framework of values, goals, and priorities developed by
educational stakeholders. In addition, they often lack clearly stated
operating principles. The paper distinguishes between site-based
management (SBM) and site-based leadership (SBL). SBL rather than
SBM, for the most part, provides opportunities for the meaningful
inclusion of teachers, parents, and others in achieving consensual
school-improvement objectives. The paper offers a brief overview of
SBM as currently practiced in many school districts and compares the
dynamics of SBM and SBL. Barriers to successful SBL include the
unwillingness to abandon traditional methods of operation, lack of
time, role ambiguity, changing relationships, and lack of requisite
knowledge and experience. Including stakeholders in the
decision-making process while maintaining organizational focus
requires agreement among stakeholders on long-term goals and purpose,
open communication, district-level support and consensus, and
site-based planning. (LMI)

Site-Based Management: Avoiding Disaster While Sharing Decision Making

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Site-Based Management: Avoiding Disaster While Sharing Decision Making

Participatory management, that is, placing the locus of decision making at the school site, is at the heart of many present school reform efforts across the country. Attempts to implement participatory management are legion. In forty-four states site-based decision making models are permitted and, in Texas and Kentucky, State legislatures have mandated the participation of teachers, parents and students in school decision making (Herman & Herman; 1993). Models of such efforts range from those with carefully prescribed processes to processes unencumbered by rules. Although the inclusion of teachers, parents and others in decision making is popular in public schools, researchers have described this involvement as an activity that does little to truly decentralize authority (Clune and White,1988; Malen, Ogawa and Kranz,1990; Wholstetter and Odden (1992).

The author of this work, asserts that many site-based management practices do not represent true empowerment and are not founded on a consensual framework of values, goals and priorities developed by educational stakeholders. Usually, these attempts to broaden input into decision making lack clearly stated operating principles that are essential if power and authority are to be shared while organizational

stability and focus are maintained. The author differentiates between site-based management (SBM) and what he terms site-based leadership (SBL) and asserts that SBM, for the most part, only provides opportunities for teachers and others to become superficially involved in operational, day-to-day decisions, many of which, for the sake of efficiency, probably should remain the purview of administrators. Alternatively, site-based leadership, as described by the author, provides opportunities for the meaningful inclusion of teachers, parents and others in the more important work of achieving long-term, school improvement objectives, about which consensus has been obtained.

This paper includes a short history of SBM as it is now practiced in many districts and a comparison of SBM and SBL. In addition, suggestions are made as to how educational stakeholders can be included in decision making while maintaining organizational focus on school improvement priorities.

SBM: Empowerment or Tokenism?

Educators in the United States are struggling to improve the quality of schools in response to growing public criticism of student preparation. In school districts throughout the country, site-based management (SBM) has been touted as a vehicle to improve schools with no evidence to

support such a conclusion. The efficacy of site-based management has been predicated on the assumption that teacher effectiveness and productivity can be positively affected by providing them opportunities to participate with administrators in school governance. Proponents of SBM describe it as a departure from traditional forms of school management in that it portends to meaningfully involve those within the system in decision making who have traditionally been considered subordinate to such activities.

For many decades, sociologists and organizational theorists have cited the inclusion of employees in decision making as a way to improve employee job satisfaction and productivity. Glickman (1990) suggested that "...when given collective responsibility to make educational decisions in an information-rich environment, educators will work harder and smarter on behalf of their clients: students and their parents" (p.69).

Including those who have been traditionally considered subordinate in decision making, in order to maintain or obtain organizational stability and political equilibrium, is not new in education. During the 1970's, school boards and superintendents provided subordinate administrators limited access to school policy decisions through what was termed team management (Sorenson, Conners, Gmelch, Harder & Reed, 1982). The

quality and utility of this example of inclusion was described in the

American School Board Journal, as a means of diffusing the imminent

crisis of dealing with yet another adversarial collective bargaining group.

The article, entitled, "It's late, but not too late to give your principals a

real say in management," stated, "...averting an outright revolt of

principals will entail some quick and decisive action by school boards and

superintendents" (The American School Board Journal, February, 1976,

p.32). The political intent of this invitation of inclusion was poorly

camouflaged and after studying school districts that purported to be

"team management districts", Sorenson (1985) found that, despite this

claim, no real change existed in the decentralization of decision making

authority between the superintendent and other administrators.

With little more than an intuitive sense of its value, SBM has been

embraced by school leaders across the country as an effective way of

improving the quality of decision making and ultimately improve schools.

Although this connection is tenuous, at best, SBM may provide other

important political utility and viability. Malen (1994), found that SBM did

have considerable value as a means of reducing conflict within the

district and providing legitimation for organizational members, that is:

"...that special form of support rooted in reservoirs of favorable dispositions regarding the 'rightness' of actions-and accumulate symbolic reserves to diminish or deflect criticism." (p.250).

SBM: Like a box of chocolates.

In addition to the question of political intent, another issue confounding the debate over the relative utility of SBM in schools is the variable manifestations of SBM found in school systems around the country. Some systems reflect a limited level of participation (Clune and White,1988; Malen, Ogawa and Kranz,1990) while others are more open. A study of several school districts caused Wholstetter and Odden (1992) to conclude that "...nothing has really been decentralized - SBM is everywhere and nowhere" (p.531). According to Wholstetter and Odden, SBM models not only vary significantly from district to district with regard to the amount of power shared, but usually lack clearly articulated goals, accountability systems and in most cases, SBM is little different than traditional principal-centered models of decision making.

Getting it right at the top: An argument for inclusion.

Dolan (1994) describes the traditional, Weberian idea of organizational hierarchy as being predicated on the premise that leaders must be capable of"...getting an answer or strategy 'right' at the top and arranging all other components to hold it steady and carry it out" (p.29).

School leaders have been struggling to deal with the ever increasing complexity of schools. Clearly, expecting school administrators to possess superior capability and knowledge on all matters is an unreasonable expectation and one to which neither administrators or teachers would probably subscribe. In the face of growing pressure from internal and external environments, how can a school leader meaningfully involve others in decision making without the result resembling chaos? The answer may be contained in providing empowerment to educational constituents by providing opportunities, for those traditionally considered subordinate to administrators, to participate in redesigning the school organization through site-based leadership.

The elements of empowerment.

The term empowerment saturates the educational literature and evokes a variety of operational definitions. Sergiovanni (1990) stressed that before empowerment can be meaningful there must be agreement within the organization or a shared covenant. A covenant, that is the product of consensus among a representative group of school stakeholders, helps defines the organization's collective values, vision, mission, educational objectives, organizational priorities and operating principles. This comprehensive review of the system, beginning with the fundamental

issue of purpose, represents a significant step in the redefinition of the learning community by its members.

Sergiovanni (1992) asks us to consider some important questions in defining the learning community. First, "what are the shared values, purposes and commitment that bond this community together?" Second, "what relationships among parents, students, teachers and administrators are needed for us to be a community?" Finally, "how will we work together to embody these values?" (p. 211). A collective and balanced response to these questions requires a form of participation in school policy much more inclusive than that which is offered in traditional school governance or by the limited participation in day-to-day, operational decisions provided by SBM.

The quality of empowerment.

How does one judge the quality of participation in decision making? The willingness of a school board or administrator to involve others in critical decisions is complicated by a variety of issues. Lutz and Merz (1992) described the behavior of school boards as elite, acting as trustees of the people but separate from the people, gaining consensus privately and informally. "Arena boards, on the other hand, think of themselves as 'community in council' ...dedicated to enacting policy the people demand"

(p.57). Arena school boards are much more likely to share decision making than those boards operating in an elite fashion. For superintendents, the level of participation provided to others varies depending on the topic at hand, the time available in which to make a decision and the size of the organization (Sorenson, 1985).

What types of decision making processes could provide some insight into the depth and quality of participation? Hanson (1990) provides a descriptive continuum of empowerment that includes:

Deconcentration:	The transferring of tasks and work to other units with no redistribution of authority.
Participation:	Increased input into decision making by subordinates but decision making done by superordinate.
Delegation:	The actual transfer of decision making authority to a lower level in the hierarchy within a firm policy framework.
Devolution:	The shifting of unretrievable authority to independent autonomous units.

Developing consensus on a shared covenant and reshaping school culture requires open and honest communication among the stakeholders and an honest assessment of organizational strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the preparation of students. It could be argued that

discussion of this importance and depth requires that decision makers

operate, most of the time, within processes described by Hanson's

"deconcentration" and "participation".

The high involvement organization.

Lawler (1988) described three models providing for the involvement

of employees in decision making in business organizations representing

varying amounts of participation. They were:

Parallel-suggestion involvement: This system does not represent a
major shift in the authority structures or how processes are used to
resolve major issues. Information that is shared regarding decision
making is shared with only a few and the organization is not
restructured.

Job-Involvement: Tasks are created which give individuals feedback
about the organization and a greater say on how the work is done.
Work teams may also be created. Workers are limited to immediate
work decisions and tend to preclude involvement in strategic
decisions.

High-Involvement: This system goes the furthest in moving power
and authority to the lowest levels of the organization. Employees
have information and can influence production and be rewarded for
their action. This model requires that the organization be
redesigned from the traditional hierarchical structure to one that is
flatter.

SBM v. SBL.

Providing true empowerment for educational stakeholders,

that is, the inclusion of others in important decisions about the

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future of schools, is not only a potentially powerful force in school reform, but also an essential consideration in successfully implementing school improvement plans. Expanding the number of decision makers, as in some of the more superficial forms of SBM, without involving them in the development of a vision for the future, is merely tinkering with the old, administrator-centered system. Glickman (1990) stated, "Without long-term goals, schools focus on the immediate, the expedient - and often, the superficial. They succumb to the pressure of mortgaging the future for the present." (p.73)

Wholstetter and Odden (1992) pointed out the need to use some type of inclusion model for decision making as part of a comprehensive school improvement plan. They felt these plans should address curriculum and instruction, decentralized power to school sites, staff development focused on and relevant to the plan, a comprehensive school data base and new teacher compensation systems. In addition, the authors saw meaningful inclusion in school decision making as a potential resource in creating a new organizational culture if used as a part of this comprehensive planning process.

According to Wohlstetter, Smyer and Mohrman (1994), the

terms site-based or school based management,

> "...may be a misnomer. Instead, what we probably want are
> mechanisms that foster high levels of involvement by school-
> level participants in decision related to the school's
> performance and in finding new approaches to improving
> performance". (p.284).

A comprehensive planning process for school improvement that

involves teachers, parents, administrators and students in setting a

vision and that reinvents the school's culture and redefines the learning

community, should more properly be called site-based leadership (SBL).

Site-based leadership involves staff in decisions far more important to

the future of schooling and school reform than the more operational

decisions of allocating annual budgets, personnel selection and

establishing the school calendar. When used in conjunction with a

strategic planning process, SBL creates clarity of educational purpose and

offers opportunities for true empowerment.

Avoiding Disaster While Creating the Covenant

The provision of access to decision making and policy generates a

number of confounding issues that require explanation. What follows are

some of the variables that can ensnare those of good intention and

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commitment to site-based leadership. An analysis of the following issues

may be useful in anticipating problems.

The issue of readiness.

Meaningful change in educational governance and the incumbent

shifts in decision making authority require the abandonment of traditional

methods of operation.   The fear of being unable to maintain

organizational stability and meet the obligations for which you were

elected or hired are reasonable cause for reluctance and apprehension.

Dolan (1994) described the steady state or status quo, containing a

formidable force that "...translates into a powerful drive to retain its

[organizational] equilibrium" (p. 5). Dolan goes further to explain the

disappearance of pilot programs

> ... "as long as the pilot makes no difference at all, the home system
> leaves it alone. But as soon as the small pilot starts to change
> things significantly, the larger system takes a good hard look. And
> then quickly, with a force you cannot imagine, it reaches out and
> pulls that little experiment back to itself. Sometime later, it is as
> though nothing ever happened." (6).

Are those within the organization willing to persevere when anxiety

is generated and the level of ambiguity rises? What is the quality of the

relationships among all the stakeholders? Do the emotional bank

accounts, described by Covey (1989), contain sufficient reserves of good

will, among players, to carry participants in the change process through
the most difficult times? Are board members, superintendent and
teacher's union willing and capable of resisting the urge to return to the
status quo? Dolan (1994) advised that at no level are the risks to change
more profound than at the level of the board, superintendent and union
leadership. Clearly, if new governance methods are to be tried, a
commitment from these important players is essential to the success of
change. Without the support of the school board, superintendent and other
administrators and their willingness to take the required risks, the
successful implementation of any systemic change process is in jeopardy.

    The precious resource of time.

Participation in site-based leadership provides great potential for
organizational improvement and may improve staff attitudes about school
reform efforts, job satisfaction and productivity. However, such
involvement demands large quantities of an educator's most precious
commodity, time. Extraordinary demands on time create stress, causing
organizational members to be less efficient.

    One's enthusiasm for inclusion in the difficult job of school reform
is probably directly proportional to the time available to the individual.
Wynn and Guditus (1984) conclude that, "For many teachers, involvement

in decision making related to support functions or the larger community constitutes an unwarranted misapplication of their time and energy" (p. 40). Wohlstetter, Smyer and Mohrman (1994) found those going through active restructuring "...did not want to manage the daily operations of the organization beyond that which is needed to effect change in teaching and learning" (p.284). One of the most difficult resource issues to resolve is the provision of adequate time in which to plan for school improvement. Some learning communities have begun to address this issue by rearranging the school day, the yearly school calendar and the provision of release time for teachers.

In addition to the considerations above referring to the limitations on personal time, one must give careful consideration to the time available to the organization collectively. The adoption of an overly ambitious implementation schedule, due to the enthusiasm of individuals, may lead to their disappointment because the system was unable to bring ideas to fruition quickly enough. Disappointment in results causes members to question the utility of the effort they have put into the project but more disturbingly may generate cynicism in the participation process.

Having everyone involved in every decision is clearly impossible. Agreement must be reached on the decisions and with whom the decision should lie and what communication is required to keep other members of the organization informed. Operating principles can be constructed that identify the respective role of organizational members.

Role ambiguity.

Typically, when shared decision making has been applied to the school setting, there has been considerable confusion about the respective roles of the participants. Lack of role clarity is not unexpected given that, traditionally, access to participation has been shown to be highly situational. In addition, when dealing with county, state and federal regulatory agencies, school officials operate under a bureaucratic, hierarchical paradigm that assigns authority and responsibility to individuals, not committees.

The role of the school administrator, at every level, is significantly altered when SBL processes are implemented. Under the mantle of empowerment the term educational leader is much more difficult to define. The function of administrators changes from that of being the ultimate authority to becoming the keeper of covenant. Bredeson (1993) found that administrators working in schools where decision making had

been decentralized experienced varying degrees of anxiety over loss of

control, fear of failure and loss of identity depending on their ability to

"...reinterpret the nature and meaning of professional work roles and to

embrace transition processes..." (p. 60).

Changing relationships.

Reaching consensus on important issues often tests the strength of

interpersonal relationships. Teachers often develop a strong social bond

with one another and, although conflict between the teacher and students,

parents or administrator is not unusual, disputes among colleagues are

less frequent. The process of building consensus often requires

participants to confront and resolve conflict and candidly express

divergent opinions. The relationship among teachers is no longer simply

social (Weiss, Cambone and Wyeth, 1992). A principal-centered, decision

making structure provides security and comfort for those who leave the

decisions to someone else, usually an administrator. It is easy to be

critical about the quality of a decision if you're not involved. Glickman

(1990) states "Life is simpler when we have an enemy to circumscribe our

actions...if there is an enemy in empowered schools, the enemy is

ourselves. No one tells us what we can't do; instead they're asking us

what we wish to do...this situation can be frightening" (p.72).

The quality of decisions reached through consensus can be impaired because of "groupthink" as we try not to offend each other. According to Whyte (1956) group decisions are sometimes predicated on conformity to the least common denominator at the expense of creative thought and productivity. To avoid the pitfalls of groupthink, Wynn and Guditus (1984) recommend the establishment of ..." a climate in which the expression of dissent is non-threatening" (p. 119).

Lack of requisite knowledge and experience.

The knowledge and experience required to make quality decisions on some topics that have been traditionally deferred to administrators is not necessarily possessed by others. In some site-based systems, teachers are asked to make decisions on budgets, personnel and non-instructional issues about which they often know very little. Weiss, Cambone and Wyeth (1992) interviewed approximately 180 people from 45 high schools in 15 states and found that frustration among some teachers involved in shared decision making was significant. One teacher commented..."How can I, who's never dealt with school budgets, make intelligent decisions about the budget?...So simply giving teachers an opportunity to vote, that is not the answer." (p.360). Making quality decisions on issues such as school finance, auditing, personnel and school law and collective

bargaining requires the information and training usually possessed by a specialist. The provision of staff development to enhance the requisite knowledge of those being asked to make quality decisions is essential. Everyone involved should receive training in team building skills and strategies for group decision making.

Building the Covenant Through SBL

Agreement on long term goals and purpose are essential to meaningful school reform. For Sergiovanni (1990), "The key to successful schooling is building a covenant comprising purposes and beliefs that bonds people together around common themes and that provides them with a sense of what is important, a signal of what is of value" (p.20).

Sharing information: Beauty marks or warts.

Traditional, hierarchical systems restrict the flow of information among levels of authority (Dolan, 1994). The development of school improvement plans requires that information be honestly and carefully analyzed and that open discussions be conducted about information that may not be positive. Decision makers need to share data about schools such as the quality of communication within the system, demographic information about students, test scores, community information and enrollment growth or loss patterns. Open communication among planners

must also include discussion of the strengths and the weaknesses of the district, issues of common concern and possible plans of action to remediate weak areas.

The district-wide covenant.

Clearly, one of the weaknesses of decentralized decision making as it is practiced today is the lack of support and the unwillingness of those in positions of central authority to relinquish power including school boards, principals, teachers unions, superintendents and state legislatures. Support from all educational constituents is critical to the success of a decentralized form of school governance. Therefore, a strong case can be made that the process of developing and affirming goals, values and beliefs should take place district level, under the leadership of the board and superintendent involving teachers, support staff, parents, students and the business community. Consensus is required on the educational values, priorities and operating principles that describe how members of the organization will work together to improve student learning. This process includes a thorough examination of a school district's collective belief system, purpose and performance, resulting in specific statements of priority and focus.

Site-based planning.

Under a district-wide focus that serves to create an umbrella of values and priorities, individual buildings teams, consisting of teachers, parents, administrators, support staff and students, can begin developing their own shared covenant, unique to their own needs and the needs of their clientele but subsumed under the larger, district plan. This provides individual schools the opportunity to meet the needs of their unique clientele, at the same time operating within the parameters established by the more comprehensive district-wide planning committee and within the district's identified priorities.

The opportunity for participants, educators and patrons alike, to shape their own destiny, represents what Lawler (1988) described as a high involvement method of participation. Further, the decision making processes described above reflect the participative end of the decision-making continuum described by Hanson (1990). The change process described here may begin to represent what Fullan (1994) described as a positive contagion.

Empowerment of a significant quality is achieved when each stakeholder is offered the opportunity to be part of the development of a school improvement plan that, under the global umbrella of the district-

wide, long-range plan, provides focus on individual school site needs. The district's operating principles, that are statements of the affirmations of priorities and outline how the organization would make decisions become an important element in role clarity district-wide and guide decision making through the application of rules of operation. As with the district plan, site plans require regular review to assure that consensus on the plan is sustained. At that time, the plan can be changed, providing that consensus has been attained from participants and that the plan remains congruent with the district-wide school improvement plan.

Summary

It seems clear that studies of most districts involved in SBM do not have clearly articulated goals and accountability systems (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992) and do not systematically develop consensus about organizational beliefs and values. SBM as currently practiced in many districts, does not provide organizational consensus on values, goals and priorities and, therefore, cannot be viewed as a serious tool for school improvement.

Site-based leadership, subsumed under a more global district-wide plan of school improvement, offers a productive way to involve organizational members in decision making intended to improve schools,

while maintaining a common direction for the district. Consensus on values, goals, priorities and principles of operation seems to reflect what Sergiovanni (1990) described as a shared covenant.

The considerable risks for stakeholders notwithstanding, collaboration, bold support from school boards, central office administrator and parents, and open communication about the important business of education, hold the best hope to improve our public schools in a way that is supported by all of those who value education. One must believe that people of good will, working for the common good will make good decisions.

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