The Reality of School Development

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Educational administration is a continuously evolving and complex methodology that is designed to assist schools to link bureaucratic policy making with theoretical management practices. In examining educational management theory, we explore the myriad possibilities involved in management processes and its practical application within educational planning. Within this paper we will be addressing educational management theory and its practice within a local schooling context. This will be achieved in two ways. Firstly, by identifying the traditionalised management theory following the works of Bush (2006), Coombs (1970), Humes (2000) and Pollit (1997) and examining how this theory has changed and developed into a modern context. Secondly, we examine the struggles and difficulties inherent in the change process.

Method

Participants

The school chosen is a Reception to Year 12 private school. The school context is in a low socio-economic area in South Australia which services a mixed community of working class families. There is a range of cultures at the school including families from refugee and migrant backgrounds from the Sudan and Afghanistan. The school has a high level of special needs students with just fewer than 40% of the total high school population being identified as either ESL or special needs. The area the school is situated in has a high level of unemployment which has often been carried on from one generation to the next. The parents who send their children to the school desire a safe and supportive education for their children. For the purpose of this paper, the schools' identity and those the studies participants have been removed.

Method of data gathering

A qualitative case study allows for both valid data collection as well as an effective evaluative process from a place of experience with the data (Stoecker, 1991, p.89; Thomas, 2004, p.129). Within the research phase of the case study, data was gathered from personal experiences and written reflections. Surveys and feedback was gathered from school teachers and middle leaders.

The Reality of Management Theory

A critical examination of the school in this study indicates that the formal model of management has been utilised within this schooling context (Beare, Caldwell & Millikan, 1989, p. 183; Bush, 2006, p.1; Gaynor, 1998, p.3). The formal model is purely hierarchical in nature with the power base existing at the apex of the pyramid (Bush, 2006, p.6; Collins, 2001, p.68; Humes, 2000, p.41). This traditionalised bureaucratic styled system relies upon the power base of the system to shape and regulate the culture of the school and to pass this knowledge and positive climate onto teaching staff and faculty managers (Bratton, Grint and Nelson, 2005, p.147; Gaynor, 1998, p. 4; Humes, 2000, p.37; Pollitt, 1997, p.68; Sybouts, 1992, p.13). This formal management system when implemented in schools, tends to lean towards an autocratic system where senior management dictate and direct the school decisions and this then filters down through the hierarchical system

towards teaching staff that are then responsible for the actual implementation (Collins, & Porras, 1996, p.66; Collins, 2001, p.68). The limitations of this system and the reasons why schools are beginning to move away from formal management are that the creation of school decisions is far removed from the actual implementation. As it filters down through the system the discourse of school decision-making is interpreted and then re-interpreted several times as it works its way into actual classroom practice (Ball, 1997, p.17; Busher, 2006, p.135). Unless checks are implemented along the way this process of interpretation can often be misconstrued or misinterpreted allowing for a skewed perception of goals and school vision.

The Reality of Restructuring

School restructuring and development is a complex and often confusing process where the ideals of leadership and the practicality of administration do battle on the field of education. Principals have a desire to incorporate a distributed leadership model in the workplace; however, this often conflicts with the more conservative formal management ideology followed in most schools since the 1970's (Anacona, 2005, p. 8; Collins & Porras, 1996, p. 66; Collins, 2001, p. 68; Malone, 1997, p. 23). This leads to a range of dilemmas, where a Principal and other school leaders attempt to restructure the school, but at the same time come face to face with the difficulties inherent in collaborating within a complex school community.

Leadership in the selected private school is mostly entrepreneurial in nature, like most private schools Principals run their administration more like organisations or businesses, rather than as separate and unique educational institutions (Boyle, 2000, p. 7). The school has a leadership system which shares some responsibility amongst the Senior Executive. The Principal delegates responsibility to the Deputy and financial and pastoral executive members. The Executive coming from an autocratic system of leadership find it difficult to share responsibility more widely amongst the members of the school community. Major decisions are made only with the delegates involved in the "inner circle." (Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge , 2007, p. 96) While collaboration is desired in some instances efficiency is valued more highly by the Executive. Decisions are expected to be made quickly and with the least waste of time and energy (Wildy & Louden, 2000, p. 181). When a meeting starts with "*we really want to keep this brief,*" it is clearly indicating the value of *efficiency* over the collaborative process. In fact, most decisions are made by the Executive prior to arranging a "collaborative" meeting with the staff. An example of this is when middle leaders were asked to come up with a name for themselves as a unit. When opened up to discussion the Executive members mentioned several times the titles they preferred. When staff disagreed with the titles the collaboration ended and the decision was made by the Executive. While the decision was only small and unimportant in the grand scheme of things it merely reinforced to staff the lack of collaboration and choice. This reinforced *efficiency* over relationships, an autocratic system of leadership over collaboration.

The real dilemma is that the Principal and Executive are *autonomous* and therefore also ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the educational institution (Wildy & Louden, 2000, p. 180). Not only is this empowering for Principals it is also frightening, and so when given the challenge of collaboration and the complexity that this entails (especially when trying to develop and restructure the school), the Executive has instead created a system of token collaboration which attempts to share responsibility by providing middle leaders and teachers with options rather than equal participation in the process of decision making (Camillus, 2008, p. 100). An example of this is when the middle leaders were asked to discuss how they (middle leaders) could improve overall student

outcomes. Instead of an open forum of discussion, data collation and both student and parent perspectives being included the Executive presented three proposed objectives and staff were instead asked to discuss and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. I suspect that this was undertaken to try to direct the staff and limit disagreement and therefore possible stagnation; however, rather than staff seeing a set of strong leaders, the attitude of staff was cynical in relation to the way that decisions are made, rather than focusing on the real issue of what is best for the students. In this instance, the Executive completed only limited collaboration with middle leaders and other staff.

This lack of collaboration with middle leaders and teaching staff can be summed up quite easily. The Principal and their delegates are ultimately *accountable* for the schools' success or failure (Wildy & Louden, 2000, p. 181). The Principal has been given the authority to self-govern but must adhere to government enforced mandates, national curriculum and socio-economic pressures (Hoerr, 2005, p. 106). In the case of curriculum development, however, there is no choice but to trust middle leaders and teachers to implement and monitor curriculum. It is expected that staff are autonomous professionals, experts in their field who are aware of the latest educational trends and the socio-economic climate to which our students belong (Busher, 2006, p. 133; Sybouts, 1992, p. 9). The trust demonstrated here is a strained one, as the Executive oversees at random intervals classroom practices which can at times make staff feel uncomfortable and not trusted. The Principal in this case has shared responsibility for curriculum development with teaching staff but, the dilemma is that the Principal is ultimately accountable for the outcomes and so feels that monitoring classes and being a visible presence to students and staff is showing care, interest and authority.

The school restructuring movement has added a range of pressures onto the Principal who is expected to be democratic, collaborative and participative within the schooling system, at the same time as being an *efficient, autonomous* leader who is *accountable* for all school decisions and student outcomes.

The Reality of Teachers Work

Teachers' work in today's society is constantly in flux. Schools have become less educational institutions and more quasi-bureaucratic industries seeking their share of the educational market (Welch, 1996, p. 1). Teachers' work has been relegated to dutifully conforming to the over-politicised monitoring devices designed more to control education in schools, rather than improving student outcomes (Smyth, 2001, p. 35).

In the last decade or so the Australian education system has seen a succession of developments led by state and federal governments. On the one hand we see schools being handed so called *power* to control themselves termed *self-management*, but is this really a shift in power at all or a bureaucratic magician's trick, of giving something with one hand while taking something away with the other? The self-managing school idea has created a higher level of competition amongst not only private schools but also public schools (Apple, 2001, p. 2). Schools vie with each other for their part of the educational market (Ball, 1998, pp. 122; Smyth, 1993, p. 1). I agree with Smyth; schools are part of this frenzy of educational competition (Smyth, 2001, p. 35). The School in question despite being a private school now not only has other private schools to contend with, but also public schools that are now competing for clients in the same way that private schools previously did. The mechanism used as a major part of this competition is the national testing (NAPLAN) and ranking system (My School website and ACARA) used to keep parents informed of how their school is going

in comparison to other schools (Smyth, 1999, p. 9). The testing mechanism is now permeating every facet of the school's curriculum in order to enhance student scores. Within the school studied we see programs being created with this national testing in mind. Students are being guided on how to take the national tests, time given over to practices of past tests and students being prepared and pre-ranked according to how they have performed in a range of "like" tests. Teachers have been encouraged to examine students' past scores, and this has been used as a tool to monitor and analyse student performances in a range of areas across the school.

The competition has created a monster. Rather than the school being able to focus on their core business of educating young minds it is being driven to creating programs that are designed to get the score, to improve the grade, all for the purpose of the school getting a higher ranking. This creates extra pressure on teachers who are directed to implement these programs and to justify them educationally, not only to themselves but also to parents and the community. Teachers feel that their important works are being redirected into a more sinister and underhanded practice, where teaching becomes an act associated with running a business; balancing figures, examining the market and making a grab for their market share, rather than being concerned with classroom practices and educating young minds (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 78; Woods, 1997, p. 145).

The broad scale reforms which have occurred in education over the last 15 years have seen many changes. Most recently the introduction of school ranking and nationalised testing has seen a major change in education. Not only has this impacted on schools that have had to change practices to match a highly competitive market, but the greatest development has been upon the day to day work of teachers. In the school examined we see a major shift in education from teachers selecting content and skills based upon their expert knowledge, to educators teaching to a test in a *new teaching world* where competition and marketing have overridden the principles of education and the importance of teaching young minds.

The Reality of Educational Change

> *"You have to believe, in this business, that you are making things better and moving things on. If that particular spark is not there – it can be a very destroying occupation."* (Woods, 1997, p. 145)

Conflict is an essential engine for change. As human beings we desire to feel included, our views valued and our perspectives considered. Teachers can often feel that they have a lack of choice which breeds dissatisfaction and apathy with the schooling sector and can often lead to reticence and sabotage (Woods, 1997, p. 144). Leaders instead, need to recognise that to lead involves a *team* and that teachers are in fact members of a professional community who desire to participate in a collaborative decision-making process (Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge, 2007, p. 94; Hargreaves, 1997, p. 118). The aim of any professional organisation should be to create a shared commitment to development. The key is to create amongst the organisation a process of change which includes inquiry, critical thinking and innovation (Camillus, 2008, p. 102; Anacona, 2005, p. 11). A major way that change is created, is via conflict or more correctly, cognitive conflict or as Senge terms it "creative tension" (Senge, 1999, p. 12). This is based upon a critical thinking process which involves disagreements over assumptions, ideas, views and future directions (Garvin & Roberto, 2001, p. 111; Senge, 1999, p. 12). Conflict which is constructive and professional in nature challenges conceptions, identifies weaknesses, and can allow innovative ideas to be examined (Argyris, 1997, p. 307).

An example of where cognitive conflict has been used effectively to be an engine for change is when the English Faculty was discussing improving overall student outcomes. This is a very difficult subjective concept which is often avoided in schools but is an essential aspect of our professional field. Within these discussions the (English Faculty) identified one main area of conflict. This was the idea of using NAPLAN (national testing) as a means of monitoring middle school students. On one side we had teachers who were very anti-NAPLAN and who did not want to consider the value of this data and on the other side we had teachers who believed that this data should be used to our advantage. This conflict was of great benefit to the team. Following the ideas of Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge (2007, p. 94), Duffy (1996, p. 227) and Garvin and Roberto (2001, p. 111) we used the two perspectives to create a list of strengths and weaknesses involved in the topic and then utilised evidence to then support or negate the points presented. This allowed the team to not only feel fully informed on the topic but also feel listened too, valued and empowered (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 75).

Once all points were considered, the team made a decision based upon the *evidence* presented (Argyris, 1997, p. 307). This key concept allowed teachers to then switch sides without losing face, and also developed further areas of discussion (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 412). The end decision which was in favour of using NAPLAN data then allowed the team to create a fairly comprehensive program which had a clearly identified agenda along with a detailed scope and boundary for the program. This has led to positive feedback from all staff and has included a process of ongoing review and evaluation which will be used as evidence for future development.

Not only is the process of conflict and resolution essential to change but building strong professional communities are also important for change. Through the process of conflict, a deeper understanding was reached. Not only were the staff members able to, as a collegial team, come to a solution together but more importantly, they were able to build strong interpersonal relationships which will allow for this process of change to be continued into the future. One of the largest faults of leaders can be that they feel that they have to have all the answers. This can be a disempowering process for teachers who are often sidelined and relegated to implementing decisions made without their consent (Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge, 2007, p. 94; Woods, 1997, p. 145). As Smyth suggests, "teachers [need to] feel valued, their views listened to," this change process where cognitive conflict is encouraged allows this to happen as teachers feel highly empowered and valued (Smyth, 1999, p. 9).

The Reality of Group Decision Making for School Improvement

Productive schools are ones where innovation and development are encouraged (Ferrara, 2007, p. 18; Polka, 2007, p. 12). Decisions are shared amongst a highly professional team of experts who work under a collaborative framework towards a pre-determined set of goals and or vision (Cranston, 2000, p. 125; Hargreaves, 1997, p. 118). While this ideology is aimed for, many schools fall far short of this utopian idea. Schools, however, should be at least attempting to head towards some notion of collaboration and collegial decision making. As a middle leader my experience has been that strategic decisions have been made only by the Executive and Principal whereas, decisions on how to implement these strategic directions become part of a collaborative process at the middle leadership level.

In the school in question the collaborative decision making processes are utilised by faculty heads for the purpose of implementing the set strategic goals of the school which include decisions about curriculum, teaching practices and technology. All of these decisions directly affect the teachers involved and it is the teachers who are expected to implement these decisions within the classroom,

therefore teachers should not only be part of the decision making process, but also part of the thinking, trouble shooting and problem solving. Teachers need to be able to examine the set strategic goals and then look at how the team can then take these broader goals and break them down into well-defined short term goals with appropriate timelines and effective evaluative processes (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 141). The most common processes that I have experienced which are designed to generate ideas include brainstorming and devil's advocacy (or advocate) which is where groups are divided into subgroups who develop a set of recommendations either for or against the idea presented, which are then explored and debated by the group (Duffy, 1996, p. 225-228). The most common processes for making decisions include lack of response (or lack of care factor), authority rule (used when the group cannot agree or when a resolution cannot otherwise be reached) and majority rule (Duffy, 1996, p. 229). To further enhance the school's overall decision making processes, it is important to create a change shift from decisions being made collaboratively only at the middle leadership level to collaboration existing at all levels of leadership and across leadership levels. Change and development need to incorporate all possibilities and more minds and expertise allows for a wider variety of ideas and possibilities for enhancement and excellence.

There are many group decision making processes, however, these processes are enhanced when they allow for equal partnership and collaboration. In order for this to occur, teachers need to feel empowered (Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge, 2007, p. 98; Argyris, 1991, p. 307). A common side effect of school development and change is that teachers are often left out of the loop in relation to school based decisions. This leads to teachers feeling disempowered and dissatisfied with decisions being made (Smyth, 2001, p. 10). Teams which allow for teachers to make effective and valid decisions for the improvement of school practices help teachers feel that they "have good ideas and are *trusted* to make good decisions" (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 136). Trust is an essential part of the decision making process, not only from the perspective of the school trusting its teachers but also developing trust amongst the members of the team. In order for ideas to be presented and debated their needs to be strong professional relationships where collaboration is expected and there is a mutual feeling of respect, integrity, responsibility and assertiveness from all members of the team (Leonard, 1999, p. 6). A strong leader who encourages *equal* collaboration is also needed. The leader cannot pay lip service to collaboration while singularly making all the decisions themselves. Instead, the leader needs to be a "servant leader" who will build a self-managing group (Evans, 1996, p. 229) and who will "monitor the work of the group by diagnosing and forecasting from available data, and ... take action to create and maintain favorable conditions for the group" (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 133).

In order to build a school which is change centred it is essential for schools to build an effective group who is able to identify and solve problems, make collegial decisions and most importantly be innovative and open to new ideas and challenges. Schools need to ensure that their staff feel valued and trusted to make good decisions, which helps to empower teachers to feel open to participating effectively in the decision making process.

The Reality of the Learning Organisation

The next essential step for the school is to change their thinking surrounding the idea of school as a business to one of a learning organisation. This is a metaphor for schools that are seeking; seeking to develop, seeking to change and seeking a new vision for education (Retallick, 1999, p. 110). The idea of the learning organisation is a unique concept that is only as innovative as the school allows (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 29). The ideology involved in this educational reform does not

guarantee success, after all, a range of factors are involved which will dictate either its success or failure. Two of the most important features are the need for a professional community of teachers and for effective school leadership. I believe that without these two factors, the learning organisation will stagnate and the overall concept of developing highly authentic teaching and learning will fall by the wayside (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 28).

Andrews and Lewis (2000), Newmann and Wehlage (1995), Retallick (1999), and Silins, Zarins and Mulford (1999) all highlight the building of a professional community of teachers as one of the most important aspects of a learning organisation. A professional community is defined by Newmann and Wehlage as being teachers who "pursue a clear shared purpose," who "engage in collaborative activity" and who "take collective responsibility for student learning" (1995, p. 30). Silins, Zarins and Mulford call this the "collaborative climate" where the level of collaboration is determined by the school's culture and the level of sharing and open communication utilised by the school (1999, p. 2). What is central to this idea is the concept of collaboration, where professional relationships are built and maintained, where teams are created in order to discuss all aspects of the schools' culture and organisation (Evans, 1996, p. 230; Short & Greer, 1997, p. 130). Teachers are seen as valuable professionals who have valid opinions worthy of being shared and discussed on equal terms with school leaders (Leonard, 1999, p. 6). An essential aspect of the professional community is that all voices are equally important; all views have equal merit regardless of the role that the professional plays within the schooling context (Andrews & Lewis, 2000, p. 2; Short & Greer, 1997, p. 145). Along with the importance of collaboration is the equally important aspect of a common vision. A professional community who is going to work effectively together must have a common purpose, a common vision that is agreed upon, this vision should be not only what drives the community forward but should also be used to assist the community to make decisions (Anacona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge, 2007, p. 6; Collins & Porras, 1996, p. 65; Silins, Zarins & Mulford, 1999, p. 3). The professional community must be collaborative, respect teachers, encourage open communication, allow for equality, and have all members working towards a common vision in order to build an effective learning organisation.

Short and Greer (1997), Evans (1996), Silins, Zarins and Mulford (1999), Anacona (2005) and Garvin and Roberto (2001) all specify that a school can only change and develop for the better under effective leadership. Short and Greer (1997) and Evans (1996) state that to build a learning community you need to have participative leadership where innovation is encouraged at all levels and so is not exclusively a leadership prerogative (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 141). Good leaders within a learning community allow for ideas and innovation to start at any level and decisions are made with the optimal level of involvement by the professional community (Evans, 1996, p. 243). The challenge for leaders in the learning organisation is to know when to lead and when to "give up the need to control" (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 145). Effective leadership in this learning organisation allows for equality or as Andrew and Lewis (2000) term it, "parallel leadership" where the different leaders of the school, both strategic leaders (Principal and Executive) and pedagogical leaders (middle leaders and teachers leaders), work side by side in equal partnership for the mutual benefit of the learning organisation (Andrew & Lewis, 2000, p. 2). Within this organisation, leaders are facilitators who guide the professional learning community and ensure that effective decision making processes are followed (Anacona, 2005, p. 8; Garvin & Roberto, 2001, p. 67). Leaders also promote learning that supports the school's vision, culture and links to the local community. The

leaders need to ensure that their focus is on building the learning organisation and must ensure that teachers and other leaders do not get caught up in the challenges in the administration of the school which will lead to the organisation becoming stagnant and returning to its previous habits (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 28). Within the learning organisation leadership needs to be shared, innovation encouraged, allow for equal partnership in decision making and leaders need to be facilitators rather than autocrats.

The learning organisation is designed to allow for innovation and creativity to flow (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 29). The two most essential features of a learning organisation are, building a professional community of teachers and having effective school leadership. These factors, allow the learning organisation to develop highly authentic teaching and learning that is constantly developing and evolving as staff work collaboratively to learn new things and implement new learning. The challenge for all schools is not just to change the structure and organisation of the school but to use this to drive a process of improvement which is empowering for teachers, and is for the purpose of improving student outcomes (Silins, Zarins and Mulford, 1999, p. 1).

Conclusion

Educational administration is a complex methodology that is designed to assist schools to change policy into practice. This study challenges the notion of educational management and the overly traditionalised context of most schools in Australia. While the focus of the study is on one school, this school is by no means unique in its structure and practice and as such the challenges towards change are the same in most schools. The greatest challenge for all school leaders is to drive their school forward in the change process while bringing their staff, parents, students and community along with them.

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