

Reforms in the Educational System—Change as Part of Cooperation in Decision-Making

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Decision makers at top management level are those who determine and push forward reforms (Grimmett & Wideen, 1997). There is an agreement amongst researchers who deal in organizational change that there is particular importance to inclusion of employees in a process of change and in execution of a reform. Kurt Levin in his description of the change model, emphasizes the stage of decision-making as one of the critical stages for accepting and implementing organizational change (Shahar & Magen-Nager, 2010). In the Israeli educational system, the model of cooperation of teachers is expressed in self-managing schools. Current paper reviews the subject of reform in Israeli educational system and discusses inclusion of teachers in decision-making in school as well as the extent of importance and positive and negative aspects in existence in inclusion of teachers in a school decision-making system.

Keywords: reform, educational system, self-managing school, inclusion in decision-making, pressure

Introduction

Reforms are a survival necessity of organizations as well as a way of the system to keep the subject in focus of public interest. They constitute a level for constant renewal and express longing for changing the face of education. By the fact of its occurrence as a process of change in a democratic society, reform invites stepping outside a routine, undermining the existing, activity of identification of needs, opportunity for public discussion regarding needs, examination of alternatives, constructing agreements on priorities, enlisting interesting parties, coping with objections, development of action strategies, etc. The declared purpose of reforms in education is raising the achievements of more and more pupils and allowing them for a better integration in the society.

A reform in education is defined by Grimmett and Wideen (1997) as a process of planned change aimed at achieving objectives that are praiseworthy from the perspective of their initiators. Therefore, reform in education is a change driven usually from the top down, meaning, from formulators of policy to the executing echelon (school principals) upon which pressure is put to perform changes in the system and adjust it to the expectations of superiors and the environment.

Inclusion in decision-making was defined by Locke and Schwaiger (1979) as division of influence

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between managers and workers. A later address to the term is by Wagner (1994) which expanded the definition and maintained that inclusion in decision-making creates a similar rate of involvement of a manager and of workers in the process of transfer of information, decision-making, or problem resolution (Wagner, 1994, p. 321).

Within the educational system, in a school, the term of inclusion in decision-making is not always clear. The common perception is that activities in school are divided into two separate fields: the extended school field, which includes management, coordination, planning, and allocation of resources; and the class field, which includes teaching and pedagogical educational activities. Traditionally speaking, the general school management field is perceived as more important in the gradient bureaucratic field, and the right to make decisions in this field is reserved to school management. However, according to the innovative perceptions, teachers, who are the most important school resource, are to be given more power and real partnership in school management, through their inclusion in making decisions relating to formulation of its policy (Shahar, 1997).

Cooperation of Teachers, a Self-managing School

As part of the general trend, in many countries around the world, a tendency has developed to transfer authorities to schools and allow for managerial autonomy for them (Winkler, 2005), although the reasons and motives for it might change from one country to another, for example, the desire for more democratization in India, the interest of Argentinian government to include the public in problems of educational funding, or the intention of Brazil to promote local autonomy (Cohen, 2004; Winkler, 2005). Beyond the difference in motives of various countries, there is a common motive for the idea of decentralization of authorities and awarding a possibility for self-managing in schools, which is the belief that self-managing will lead to improvement in quality of education. The opinion that investing in quality of education is the most worthwhile investment of public funds, recently received enhanced validity when the findings of longitudinal study conducted in 63 countries over 40 years, indicated a definite correlation between quality of education and between the Gross National Product and improvement of a country's standard of living (E. Jamison, D. Jamison, & Hanushek, 2007).

In Israel, the idea of self-managing evolved in the face of a reality that required solutions for administrative problems, such as burnout and absence of teachers (Gaziel, 2002) and pedagogical problems, such as low study achievements, pupils' dropout from school, prominent study gaps, and cultural variance amongst groups of pupils. Another central difficulty was a significant reduction of budgets and teaching hours. An increasing difficulty of the Ministry of Education is to accept responsibility for educational achievements in a situation of budgetary reduction on one hand and on the other hand a trend of decentralization which gained speed in many countries around the world (Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010). Additionally, the recognition of a difficulty of a centralized system to provide a variety of educational needs of a pluralistic society has led the educational system to a new stage, in which the educational center of gravity was transferred from the system to the community and the schools. "Five points" of self-management (Figure 1) are presented in the next path:

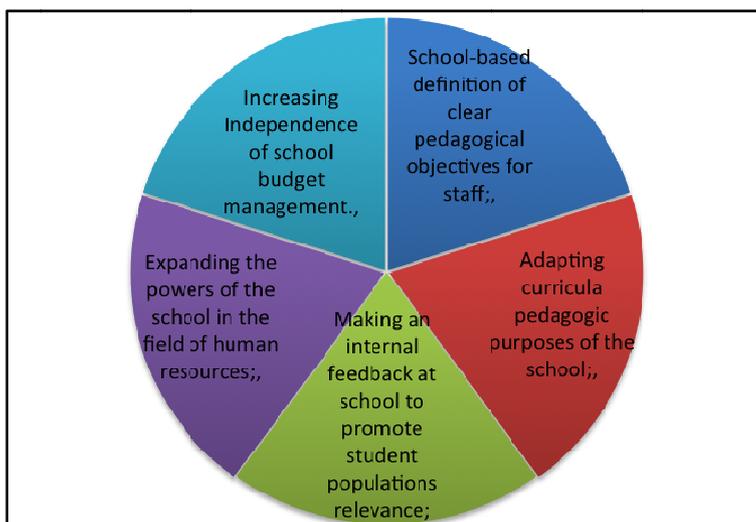


Figure 1. "Five points" of self-management. Source: self processing.

The assumption is that school is closely familiar with the needs of the community of pupils and teachers and therefore, it will be more effective to let it make a decision suitable for it (Chubb & Moe, 1988). All these are amongst the reasons for the fact that in 1996, the Ministry of Education and Culture decided upon an experimental operation of Primary schools in self-managing. From 1996 until 2006, 801 schools were added around the country which operated in self-managing. Therefore, school autonomy is a result of decentralization policy, according to which, part of the authorities of the Ministry of Education are transferred to a school. Usually, this would mean that a school receives an authorization of self-managing of budgets and self-plotting of its pedagogical policy. The extent of self-managing depends upon the extent of decentralization of authorities of the Ministry of Education, while this extent might change from one place to another, from one time to another, and from one type of school to another (Nir & Miran, 2006).

Extent of Inclusion of Teachers in Decision-Making

Inclusion of teachers in decision-making is theoretically represented in the model of management partnership (Apodaca-Tucker & Slate, 2002). Management partnership is organizational strategy based on a number of hypotheses: (a) Social—inclusion and democracy as central values in the culture; (b) Organizational—inclusion is a necessary outcome of purposes a school sets for itself in present era; (c) Psychological—inclusion contributes to satisfaction of needs of belonging, meaning, identification, and personal growth (Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010). Despite the fact that quite a number of criticisms voiced against the idea of mutual management and inclusion of teachers in decision-making, it gained a momentum and set roots mainly in professional thinking, more than in professional doing of the educational system (Rosnoser & Shimron, 2010).

In light of this, it would be appropriate to ask in which fields in practice it is desirable to include teachers in decision-making so that on one hand the process will be effective and award teachers with a sense of inclusion, and on the other hand would not overburden them. As a response to this question, Hoy and Tarter (1993) divided the variety of decisions in school into three fields: "field of acceptance", which includes all the subjects and matters in which teachers make the decisions of management (such as: budget, personnel); "field of sensitivity", which includes the subjects in which teachers perceive themselves as experts pedagogically and

they can and should be partners to decision-making (such as: managing a class, evaluation of achievements); “filed of margins”, which includes subjects in which some teacher has a unique specialty and they can and should be a partner in decision-making (such as: information management, planning of science laboratory, esthetic design of school spaces). In their opinion, the model might assist a principal to include teachers in making decisions effectively and economically.

The range of subjects a principal is to deal with daily is enormous. Starting with proper utilization of resources, moving to response to local school events, and ending with finding current solutions to the pupil populations differ from one another in language, culture, and religion (Peters, 2000). Therefore, it can be assumed that inclusion of the staff in decision-making might facilitate a principal enormously. However, at this point a dilemma arises in many a principal between the need and intention to include teachers in making decisions and between the fact that principal is assigned the exclusive responsibility for success or failure of making decisions in each of these fields, even when they are made by other staff members or in collaboration with them (Shahar, 1997; Winkler, 2005). It appears that it is within the power of this dilemma to affect significantly the style which a principal would employ in including the team in making school decisions, even when a school is under self-managing. And indeed, studies on self-managing schools found that the schools encountered multiple obstacles, such as low responsibility of teachers, lack of expertise of decision-makers, deficient communication, and lack of trust between teachers and management (Shahar, 1997; Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010). The researchers indicated the fact that the authority of teachers was limited as the extensive educational system of a school is subject to bind it with laws and regulations relating to a wide range of their activities. Conclusions of the studies were that real inclusion of teachers in management and decision-making necessitates a renewed definition of all position holders and allocation of time and resources. Therefore, even when a school declares a process of inclusion of teachers in decision-making, it is of importance to find out to what extent it takes place in practice and in which fields (Shahar, 1997; Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010).

Inclusion in Decision-Making: Positive and Negative Aspects

Many an empiric study examined the subject of inclusion in decision-making in industrial working environments, for example the study of Lam, Chen, and Schaubroeck (2002) as well as in educational environment. In educational context, a study which examined over 600 teachers, found that inclusion of teachers in decision-making is positively correlated to school effectiveness (Taylor & Bogotch, 1994), in addition it improves the quality of decision-making and contributes to the quality of a teacher’s work (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). In addition, there are those who consider its central component in the fact that it allows for introducing changes into school. Recently, inclusion in decision-making is often discussed as a tool for introducing reforms and positive changes in the work processes in schools, an example of a positive change can be seen in the study of Somech (2005) who found that inclusion in decision-making improves pedagogical quality and achievements of pupils, indirectly, through improvement in ways of teaching. She additionally states in her paper that inclusion in decision-making contributes to the turning of school into a more democratic workplace.

Oppositely, in other studies, it was found that in those schools where there is inclusion, no improvement occurred in production of teachers or achievements of pupils (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Moreover, there are those who claim that inclusion in decision-making has negative effects due to its being a distraction for teachers

and due to its emptying of their energies (Marks & Louis, 1997), it is possible that characteristics of an organization (and in this case, a school) are what makes it difficult for implementing inclusion.

Literature dealing in study of schools indicates two main problems of school as an organization: a) schools are in the most part hierarchical, there is a clear gradient of roles—a principal is at the head of the organization, teachers are under him and there are no intermediate echelons, schools have slight diversity in roles and limited mobility; b) schools are organizations of “loose connections” between the different units (Elboim-Dror, 1987), meaning, the work of teachers is detached from that of their colleagues and a principal. These characteristics make it difficult for implementing inclusion in schools, as there is a clear division into ranks, which puts distance between teachers and the high and deciding rank, and in addition to that, the loose connections between various units make it difficult for power distribution in the process of decision-making.

Inclusion in decision-making was extensively mentioned in the research literature following its positive effect on satisfaction, improvement in performing of work by an employee and improvement in his health condition, for example, the study of Ganster and Fusilier (1989). Inclusion in decision-making is positively correlated to performing a teacher’s work, meaning that the more inclusion there is the better a teacher’s work is being performed. Further studies indicated the fact that inclusion in decision-making is positively correlated to a teacher’s health. A possible explanation to the positive effects of inclusion could be stemming from its awarding of autonomy, trust, patience, tolerance, and openness in interactions between a principal and teachers (Ganster & Fusilier, 1989).

In academic literature that deals in inclusion in decision-making, its positive effects on satisfaction and performance of an employee are emphasized, while ignoring the fact that inclusion might also be perceived as encumbering the abilities and resources of an employee. This negative perception regarding inclusion will constitute a source of pressure for an employee, that eventually will lead to harm to his welfare and health condition.

In early 90’s, researchers (Johnson & Ledbetter, 1993; Parker & Slaughter, 1995) began studying the negative aspect of inclusion indecision-making. Their main claim was that for some people and in some circumstances, inclusion in decision-making might be perceived as a stressor.

Studies that attempted to understand the negative effects of inclusion of decision-making focused on the terms of delegation of authorities, enriching the job, and complexity and requirements of the job (Landsbergis, Cahill, & Schnall, 1999). These explain how inclusion leads to pressure. In their opinion, in those work conditions where inclusion in decision-making exists, speed of work increases as well as demands from employees and therefore a situation of a rise in inclusion for decision-making can be simulated to a condition of rise in work demands. For example, there are those who state that inclusion of an employee in decision-making in a field he does not have enough information and experience in will adversely affect him—will make him feel shame and bring about a sense that he is “not good enough” (harm to self-image). Apparently, the reasons for the negative effect of inclusion stem from the fact that inclusion creates a role that requires many skills, much experience in independent decision-making and as such, leads to greater pressure than other roles. Additionally, inclusion in decision-making adds to an employee challenge, responsibility, and obligation to report (Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010).

A recent study (Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010) examined the relationship between the degree of co-teachers and their sense of autonomy and satisfaction. Sampled five schools in each school between 36-89 teachers. Forcing connections are found in the following table:

Table 1

The Relationship Between the Co-decision-making Autonomy and the Sense of Satisfaction of Teachers

	Job satisfaction
A sense of autonomy	r = 0.30*
The degree of co-decision-making	r = 0.38

The table shows that teachers' satisfaction had high medium correlation with the degree of co-decision-making and a high sense of autonomy. Undoubtedly, awarding of autonomy and inclusion in decision-making is to be conditioned by instilling a teacher with required knowledge. Autonomy means, amongst other things, an ability of a school to determine priorities suitable for its population of pupils. As teachers are those who possess the most knowledge regarding these priorities, there will be those who are partners to a larger degree to decisions regarding them. Meaning, the more there is cooperation between a teacher and the school, and teachers make decisions through their professional information and familiarity with a pupil, they will sense a lower pressure and the extent of their satisfaction with their inclusion in decision-making will increase (Shahar & Magen-Nagar, 2010). As we attempt to introduce changes in a school, it is important that a principal defines the range of change and its purposes and includes a teacher in making of decisions relating to its range. In this situation, the positive aspects of inclusion in decision-making will be expressed (Shahar, 1997).

Summary

Reforms in general are usually driven by decision-makers (Grimmett & Wideen, 1997). Nonetheless, most researchers who discuss organizational change stress inclusion of employees in the change process. The trend in existence presently, is a school autonomy being expressed in schools of self-managing. These schools raised the banner of inclusion of teachers in both organizational and professional decisions. Current paper defined what a school of self-managing is, what is the extent of autonomy existing in a school, and what are the difficulties existing in cooperation of teachers' teams, both on organizational and on personal levels. The conclusion of the paper is that there is much significance in inclusion of teachers in decision-making. However, it should be performed in a way that teachers would feel that they deal in a field of their expertise, should they encounter a difficulty in implementing the decisions and it should put burden on their work.

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