

Intra-School Conflicts and Ways of Effective Communication

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Abstract: The effectiveness of school units is a broad concept and concerns both their staff and the relationship of the unit with the context in which it operates. In the present work, the concept of school effectiveness is investigated, through a bibliographic review. Next, an attempt is made to outline the profile of the effective teacher and to highlight the importance of effective management in shaping the effectiveness of a school unit. Following is an extensive record of the models that have been developed to assess the effectiveness of a school and, finally, issues of increased importance are identified which have a decisive impact on the degree of effectiveness of school units.

Key words: intra-school conflicts, ways to resolve the intra-school conflicts, effective communication in school units, the role of principal in school

1. Introduction

Research on school effectiveness and the subsequent synthesis of research results are at the core of pedagogical research and science (Creemers, 1997). The purpose of this paper is initially to highlight through a literature review the characteristics of the effectiveness of the school unit. As it is found, efficiency is a broad concept and concerns both the staff of the unit (mainly director and teachers) and the relationship of the unit with the context in which it operates (Mortimore et al., 1995). The role of the principal who acts transformative is highlighted (Hoy & Miskel, 2013) and he is interested in staff development and also he plays the role of a vehicle for the transmission of school culture to those involved, with the school bodies (Res, 2005).

2. The Concept of Conflict

Robbins (1974) defines conflict as a process in which Subject A deliberately seeks to prevent, or in some way limit, the subject action of Subject B. Alternatively he states that all kinds of reaction or competitive interaction could be considered as conflict. For Deutsch (1973) conflict is the pursuit of incompatible or at least seemingly incompatible goals in such a way that the benefits of one side are to the detriment of the other. Burandas (1992) defines conflict as the situation where the behavior of one individual or group deliberately seeks to prevent the achievement of the goals of another individual or group. Montana & Charnov (2002) defined conflict as the disagreement between two or more parties or between two or more positions on how best to achieve the organization's goals. Saiti & Saitis (2011) define conflict as the synergy of an individual or a group that consciously aims to prevent or limit the desired action of another (individual or group) to achieve its goals.

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3. The Concept and Categories of Intra-school Conflicts

The school unit is a microcosm of the society, which means that it operates according to the rules and the respective legislation. Its primary goal is to transmit knowledge to students. Under this concept, the conflicts are present in the school environment in terms of the behavior of one individual or group of individuals that are present in a specific school unit. This means that conflicts in a school unit may occur between students, teachers, administration and parents, and in all possible combinations. Conflict resolution is a difficult task, and it concerns all the involved parties in the educational process and especially the teachers, who often spend a lot of their valuable time on that every day.

In every educational organization live and socialize people of different cultural and social strata, different sex, different age and with different interests. These individuals are characterized by the behavior of groups of individuals, and they may be categorized such as students, teachers, managers, parents, local community actors, etc. (Fasoulis, 2006). These educational organizations are called daily to deal with a variety of strategic and conception matters, such as decision-making on educational issues, improving logistics, cooperation with authorities, the role of the parents and the wider local community (Anthis & Kaklamanis, 2007). Conflicts, disagreements and controversies naturally occur during the decision-making process for the solution of the above problems. According to Saiti (2002), intra-school conflicts can be divided into the following categories:

A) Interpersonal

These are differences between individuals that belong in the same group, for example, between two teachers.

B) Grouped

It concerns conflicts between subgroups of the school, e.g., i) between two groups of teachers ii) between teachers and parents iii) between teachers and students,

C) Between an Individual and a Group

Specifically: i) between the school unit director and the teachers, ii) between a teacher and the teachers' association, iii) between a teacher and a group of teachers,

D) School Community

These are conflicts between the school and the local bodies, for example between the school unit director and the parents.

4. Sources and Causes of Intra-school Conflicts

As mentioned above, the school is a part of the society and it is logical that various issues arise on a daily basis which leads to rupture and conflict between the parties involved. Therefore, the school principal should be able to handle these conflicts and deal with them in the best possible way, in order to bring about the least possible negative consequences. But in order for him to be able to manage them, he must know the causes that create them. At that point, we would like to present some of these causes, as follows:

A) Poor Communication

One of the most common causes of conflict in schools is the communication problems. Such problems can result from poor coding or translation of the message by the transmitter and receiver due to semantic differences.

These differences are mainly depending on the lack of information which consequently leads to the result of one person being unable to understand the other's point of view and decisions. We have to underline that the poor human relationships are an additional factor of semantic differences. As a result, there is a prejudice of one party towards the other. Sometimes, even the presence of noise during the transmission of the message is giving the result of the misinterpretation of the words of the other which lead to friction and conflicts (Bourandas, 2002; Saiti & Saitis, 2011; Zavlanos, 1999; Montana & Charnov, 2002).

B) Opposing Objectives

They are called those for whom the achievement of one leads to the inability to achieve the other. If, for example, an individual or a group has a goal that interferes with the goal of another or a group, trying to achieve it to the detriment of the other will likely lead to a conflict between the two parties. There is, however, the possibility that problems in the organization may create conflicting goals. If for example two or more people have the same goal but according to the organizational structure only one can achieve it, automatically these people are in a situation of opposing goals (Burandas, 2002; Montana & Charnov, 2002).

C) Limited Resources

Some of the resources in an organization are limited and not enough for everyone, with the result that their acquisition by a group or individuals implies deprivation from others and at the same time becomes a cause for controversy and conflict. Such limited resources may be: i) Funding ii) Office space iii) Use of facilities iv) Project opportunities v) Data processing methods (Burandas, 2002).

D) Individual Differences

Schools are staffed by many people with different values, beliefs, culture, and in general different philosophy of life. It is therefore natural to have conflicts in an environment where people that are characterized by these individual differences coexist and interact.

E) External Environment

The actors of the external environment, the competition from their existence and the uncertainty are elements that contribute to the creation of conflicts within the organization (Saiti & Saitis, 2011).

5. Positive and Negative Impacts of Conflicts

The traditional management argues that conflicts have somehow a negative effect on an educational organization. Nevertheless, advances in the social sciences have led to the conclusion that conflicts can have also various positive effects, such as:

- 1) Generation of new and more intelligent ideas in the effort of individuals to justify their decisions or choices.
- 2) Development of creativity,
- 3) Problems become apparent and therefore easier to deal with, thus restoring a positive climate in the organization,
- 4) The possibility of increasing productivity,
- 5) Making more accurate decisions after both sides of the issue have been presented and analyzed by the conflicting parties.

Apparently, some negative effects may affect the respective school unit. Some of them are presented, as

follows:

- 1) The negative climate and the difficulty in communication within the organization that is created due to the distrust and prejudice that is developed in the involved parties,
- 2) The existence of disruption due to the lack of cooperation,
- 3) The use of legal means as a reaction to the changes of the development of innovative programs and other type of actions as a kind of punishment from the opposing party involved in the conflict,
- 4) The unjust or unfair waste of effort in the sense of defeating the opposing parties in the conflict,
- 5) The reduction of the productivity,
- 6) The creation of stress and an accelerating burnout to the individuals participating in the conflict.

6. Types of Conflicts

Conflict is a dynamic process and a conflict grid can be thought of as the gradual culmination of events leading to a state of disorder (Apelbaum et al., 1999). Each episode: i) begins with conditions that produce a possible confrontation, ii) proceeds to the production of cognitive states, iii) causes conflicting behavior, iv) ultimately leads to an increase or decrease in performance.

The following are the four stages of the conflict:

Stage I: Latent Conflict

In the first phase, a state of latent conflict occurs in which the members of the organization feel that something is “wrong”. Pondy (1967) cites three main sources of latent conflict: i) competition for insufficient resources, ii) the pursuit of autonomy, and iii) incompatible goals.

Stage IIa: Perceived Conflict

At this stage people begin to understand the existence of a problem and the intensity and anxiety is obvious. Perceived conflict can be caused by misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of the facts (Saitis, 2002). Creating a misconception or irrationality of a situation that can lead to stage III (Obvious Conflict)

Stage IIb: Conscious Conflict

At this stage an emotional dimension is added to the problem. This is considered as the most important parameter that will determine the manifestation and outcome of an impending apparent conflict. Personalized situations create tension and anxiety as at least one side now feels threatened and judged negatively. Non-personalized situations alone lead to the resolution of the issue as they describe the behavior or characteristics of the relationship that are responsible for the problem.

Stage III: Obvious Conflict

At this stage the conflict has exceeded a critical threshold of intensity and the members of the organization have perceived it, experience it, react and adopt a specific way to deal with it (Rahim, 2002).

Stage IV: Results of the Conflict

The last stage is related to the results of the conflict that was implemented and which will determine the future relations between the two parties (Milton, 1981).

7. Ways to Resolve Conflicts

Various models of how to resolve conflicts have been presented. Here are three of them: Burandas (1992), Rahim (2002), and Saiti & Saitis (2011).

The first two models refer to businesses in general terms, while the latter mainly concerns school units. Burandas (1992) considers that there are three basic strategies for resolving a conflict depending on who gains the most benefit. According to the above division the strategies are the following: a) Methods where one team wins and the other loses; b) Methods where both teams lose on some issues but win on others and c) Methods where both teams win.

Below is a brief analysis of conflict management techniques.

Win-Loose Techniques: Win-Loose techniques are used when there is inequality in exercising power or dominance. The use of power is the most typical case in Win-Loose techniques. Here the strongest side is imposed on the weak, through the exercise of power (Saitis, 2002).

Loose-Loose Techniques: In Loose-Loose techniques neither side achieves its goals or achieves a small percentage of them (Milton, 1981). Typical methods are: a) Avoidance, b) Repression, c) Normalization, and d) Compromise.

Win-Win Techniques: Win-Win techniques seek cooperation and trust. Methods to achieve this are: a) Consent, b) Integrated Decision Making, c) Creating Higher Goals, d) Finding Resources e) Changing the Human Factor, and f) Changes in the Organization Structure.

8. Models of Conflict Behavior

Every person's reaction to a potential conflict is different and depends on many factors. In 1926, Follet identified three key ways in which managers try to resolve conflicts: Power/Competition/Dominance, Reconciliation, and Avoidance. In 1970 Blake and Mouton mentioned two other models: Decision to collaborate and Smoothing. The collision models are listed in detail below.

8.1 Competition/Domination

In this model, the strongest imposes the way of resolving the conflict in order to satisfy his interests without being interested in any work (Saitis, 2002). The dominant side tries to secure its own supremacy by using the power it has and which can come from: a) The position in the hierarchy b) The experience and knowledge c) The specialty.

8.2 Avoidance

In this case neither side is interested in the interest of the other nor in the interests of the organization. Both sides maintain a neutral and apathetic attitude, avoiding discussions that could provoke conflicts, disagreements and quarrels. When a conflict issue arises they choose to remain silent by leaving the solution of the problem to chance, instead of activating themselves to find solutions. This tactic may arise: a) from indifference to the problem b) from aversion to the process required to resolve the conflict c) from a sense of inability to resolve the conflict (Saitis, 2002).

8.3 Smoothing/adjusting

This method is used when each of the opposing groups is interested and concerned about the interests of the

other group by showing retreat in order to have a kind of a conflict resolution and harmonious coexistence. Here the emphasis is on maintaining harmonious relations and reducing conflicts and not on finding real disagreements. The technique of adaptation has in common with the technique of avoidance in the sense that someone can use it to delay finding the real solution to a problem. On the other hand, the main difference is that in smoothing both teams work together to deal with the problem. However, when the smoothing is used repeatedly to the benefit of one side only, then some problems can arise, as one side that deliberately retreats, may ask for compensation.

8.4 Reconciliation

In the reconciliation the two sides try to find the golden section, the middle-way so that a compromise is done for no winner and no loser. This way is similar to the technique of collaboration. A superficial solution is sought without trying to find the deeper needs and interests of the two groups with the result that both sides reconcile with what they can get without fighting and demand the most logical and valid solution.

8.5 Decision to Collaborate

It is an approach in which both parties wish to satisfy to the same degree their personal interest and the interest of the other party, by preserving their personal relationships and winning both.

9. Factors Affecting the Effective Communication of the School Unit

Communication is the exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, and feelings between two or more people with the ultimate goal of achieving an objective or a specific result (Stamatis, 2005)

According to Petrovsky (1990) "communication is the multifaceted process of developing contacts between people which is dictated by the needs of joint activity". In the context of communication inside the school unit, the role of the principal is considered basic and essential. His functions are considered as a link between the senior leaders and executives of education and the existing teachers. Also, within the school unit there should be good cooperation and two-way communication with the students' parents, as well as with other local bodies.

The principal of the school unit as an exponent of its culture and dynamics is the one who is called to play a balancing role among those involved in the educational process in order to develop a positive atmosphere that will promote cooperation, understanding and respect.

According to Saiti (2005), the function of management in education is the interpersonal side of management. The principal acting as an agent of administrative development, should distribute fairly the tasks that are to be performed, should motivate the teaching staff to take initiatives and participate in the decision-making process by having open communication and fruitful dialogue with all members of the school community, so as he leads everyone to understand their roles and contribute in achieving the educational goals.

10. Conclusions

The way each teacher behaves is different and depends on many factors. In the event of a conflict if a mutual and genuine communication is created based on common understanding, mutual respect and trust, then any conflicts and controversies will be overcome. Based on all the above characteristics but also with good mood, activism, synergy, and good cooperation it is possible to ensure a positive and constructive system in the school which will be for the benefit of all. In general, it could be said that communication is the cornerstone for the more efficient operation inside a school unit. Dialogue should always be encouraged, in terms that everyone participates

in resolving serious issues, so as the differences are reduced, and the interpersonal relationships are developed and evolved. For these reasons, the school should be: “a place of cooperation, communication, socializing, teamwork and active participation” (Pasiardi, 2001).

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