

The Craft
of
**Educational
Management**



Edited by

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CHAPTER 5

DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Decision-making is an integral part of the management of any organization. As such, educational managers at all levels make decisions in establishing objectives, planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the education process. School administrators cannot administer without making decisions- decisions for themselves and for their groups and institutions. The quality of school administrators' decisions is the yardstick of their effectiveness and of their values to the schools. Thus, the art and science of decision making are frequently associated with managerial expertise. Consequently, in every organization such as the school, decisions must be taken at one time or another, for the organization to survive.

The Decision -making Process

A decision is a choice of one from two or more alternatives to achieve an objective. Decision-making is thus a process of identifying alternatives and choosing one of the alternatives to solve a problem or address an opportunity. Decision-making starts with the initial recognition of a problem or an issue that is worth-while making decision about, through the collection of data, the identification of the real situation, the development of alternatives and the evaluation to the final choice that is implemented and controlled.

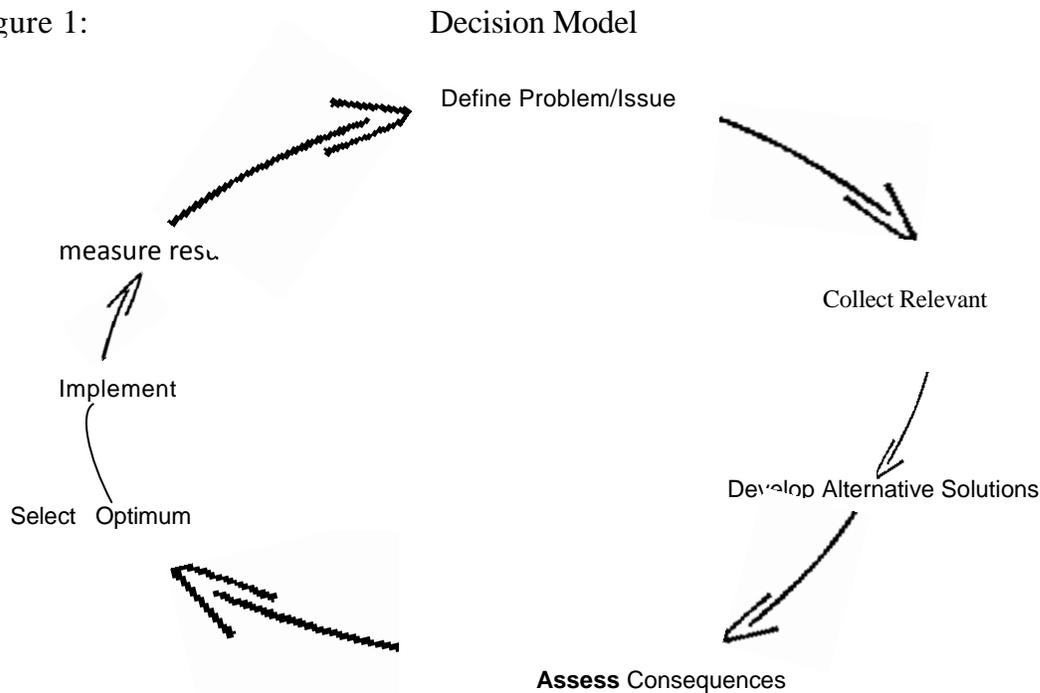
From the context of a manager's view, Thierauf (1987) defined decision-making process as:

a series of steps that start with an analysis of the information and ultimately culminate in a resolution -a selection from the several available alternatives and verification of this selected alternative (now and at some time in the future) to solve the problem under study (p. 117).

Thus, as elucidated by Donnelly, Gibson and Ivancerich (1995) the sequences of events that lead to effective decisions include:

- i. Problem identification - the problem to be solved is properly Identified and clearly stated. This requires correct information; otherwise the decisions made are directed towards solving the wrong problem.
- ii. Developing alternatives-once the problem is diagnosed and defined, feasible alternatives (actually potential solutions) to the problem should be developed. The potential consequences of each alternative should also be considered.
- iii. Evaluating alternatives - the developed alternatives are compared and evaluated, towards the set objectives.
- iv. Choosing an alternative -the best alternative is chosen, based on the gathered and analysed data and guided by the previously established goals and objectives.
- v. Implementing the decision - any decision is a little more than an abstraction if it is not implemented. Implementation often includes the allocation of funds and other resources.
- vi. Control and evaluation - after implementation, results must be monitored and evaluated, using the built-in information. This sequence of events in organizational decision-making is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1:



Source: Cole G.A.(1996).*Management:: Theory and practice. (5th ed.)*London: DP publication(p.151.)

Element of decision-making.

There are at least four element necessary for effective decision-making . these element according to copbell, corbally and Nystrand(1983) are:

1. Sense of purpose –decision-making cannot be effective in the absence of specific objective to be achieved and the strategies for achieving them.
2. Existence of a need for a decision—the existence of an indentified problem that could con statute a barrier to the achievement of an institutional objective is an important first step in decision –making .the second step is the need to ensure that the problem or situation is properly understood.
3. Review alternatives—consequent upon the identification and understanding of the problem, a list of all the available alternative is developed, availability of relevant data is important to the development of the set of alternative ways to important to the development of a set of alternative ways to deal with an understood problem. The creative abilities of the decision-maker also have an important role to play.
4. Selecting a course of action - the best alternative is chosen for implementation. The selection process can be made through voting, consensus or simply by a responsible administrator alone. Organizational and personal considerations are also taken into account in arriving at the best alternative. Among the factors that affect choice are personal style, values, beliefs and skills; available resources (people, materials and funds); and timing - the speed of the. choice in solving the problem.

Types of Decisions

The three major categories of decisions are strategic, operating and administrative (Cole, 1996).

1. Strategic decisions are the basic long-term decisions which set the major goals, objectives and policy statements of the organization.
2. Operating decisions are short-term decisions concerned with carrying out programmes of the organization.
3. Administrative decisions arise from, and are subject to, the conflicting demands of strategic and operational problems. Such decisions set the organization's structure such as lines of authority and communication. Decisions could be programmed or nonprogrammed. Programmed decisions are those that are routine and repetitive and are capable of being worked out by a computer. The variables are quantifiable and the decision rules can be clearly stated. For example computerization of students' examination results. Nonprogrammed decisions, on the other hand, are those that occur so infrequently and are unique, with no established procedures for handling them. This would be the case for all strategic decisions. Griffith (1985) as cited by Peretomode (1996) classified decisions into intermediary, appellate and creative decisions.
 1. intermediary decisions refer to decision that do not originate from the school administrator, but are delegated to him/her by a superior in the organization hierarchy. For instance, decisions made in response to a request or directive from Ministry of Education or at Ministry of Education and passed down to the schools.
 2. Appellate decisions - are those made at the lower level such as a school and passed upwards for consideration or acceptance on how a problem should be handled. For example, a request by a school administrator to the Ministry of Education on measures to be taken against a student that beat up a teacher; an appeal to the Ministry for the supply of certain resources - teachers, teaching materials etc.
 3. Creative decisions –refer to certain arising from any point on the hierarchy based on a certain awareness of a problem or situation that needs to be decide upon. Creative decisions are concerned with significant improving some aspects of education. A creative decision involves breaking away from the policy to suggest alternative courses of action to bring about the desired change.

Effective Decision-making in Schools

Decisions are made by people Thus, at the school level, a school administrator must frequently make decisions regarding the appropriate steps to take in achieving the stated educational objectives. The decision-making process wolves the school head, and at varying degrees, other categories of people within the school such as the assistant(s), heads of dc(> s t Bents, teachers and even the students. These groups of people are sources of alternatives for solving identified problems. However, the final t responsibility for decisions taken rests with the school head.

Implementing any important decision requires some skills.

These include:

- i communication skills to makes SURE THAT the right people have the right information at the right times;

- ii. social skills to ensure that these people are properly prepared to willingly receive the idea of change; and
- iii. technical skills to make sure that the recommended changes are correctly carried out. The implementation of decisions is usually carried out by staff and students within the school. The school head assumes a monitoring position. In collaboration with the staff and students, the school head evaluates the effectiveness of the implemented decisions. The degree of involvement of other people within the school¹ in evaluating decisions varies as in decision-making process. Within the school, evaluating the success of decisions already taken has to do with measuring how the implemented decisions have resulted in the expected changes. These changes may simply be in people's ways of looking at things (opinions) or may require changes in behaviour or needed skills as in the case of innovation in school curriculum.

For a decision to be effective therefore, it must have quality (capable of solving the identified problem), as well as acceptance by the people to be affected by its implementation.

The following hints are important for school administrators in effective decision-making:

- i. examining as many sides of an issue as possible, leading to many alternatives. The more the alternatives considered before making a decision, the more the likelihood that an appropriate decision would be made;
- ii. ensuring a conducive environment for decision-making. That is the right time, place, level of organization and appropriate process;
- iii. employing those directly affected by an action in the process of making the decision (Participatory or Group decision-making),-
- iv. employing the most effective channels and media in communicating the decision to all those to implement it; and
- v. providing adequate control and direction to ensure effective implementation of the decisions and evaluation of the results and the process.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Participatory Decision-making

Participatory decision-making refers to the involvement of all personnel in all organizational decision-making.

Advantages.

1. Participation leads to improved decisions. More knowledge, experiences and broader perspectives are made available, resulting in more alternatives.
2. Group discussion rigorously evaluates alternatives for a better choice.
3. Group participation broadens support and acceptance, necessary for implementation.
4. Decisions now appear less as irrational directives from management and more as an attempt to solve identified problems.
5. Easier co-ordination. Interaction in the group session develops into a sense of belongingness which helps to achieve the needed co-ordination and co-operation in the implementation of the decision. Moreover, the morale of the people improves as a result of their contributions to policy making.
6. Easier communication. Decisions made by a group reduce the amount of communication necessary to implement them.

Disadvantages

1. Group deliberations are time-consuming.
2. Group compromise decisions may not produce the required Actions.

3. Individual ownership of the decision(s) is lacking.

In conclusion, the ability of a school administrator to *make a good decision-making* is crucial to the success of the school system. A good school administrator should bear in mind people under him/her (or their representatives) in decision-making process, if good and effective decisions are to be made.

This is so because participatory decision-making allows cross-functional teams to flourish within the school.

Tutorial Questions

1. (a) What is a decision?
(b) Why is it necessary for school administrators to make decisions?
2. (a). What are the three major categories of decisions within the school system? (b) Explain any one of these.
3. Participatory decision-making involves people to be affected by a decision in the process of making the decision. Explain three advantages of participatory decision-making.
4. Discuss five measures of ensuring effective decision-making in schools.
5. At the school level, explain the relative roles of the school head, teachers and students in:
 - a. making decisions
 - b. implementing decisions; and
 - c. evaluating decisions.

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