

Factors to Consider in Decision-making

Whether a decision is made by one person or a group of people, prior to making a decision it is wise to consider a number of factors that might influence the decision-making process. Each decision or issue that must be addressed will involve a unique set of factors; however, being aware of the following factors and taking them into consideration when making a decision can be a useful leadership practice.

Time: In emergency situations, it is crucial that decisions be made immediately; hence, the timeline is clearly defined. At other times, the time available is constrained by the need to meet important deadlines; for example, when budget, student admissions, or staffing issues are involved. Another factor that influences the amount of time required is the degree of ownership that must be developed within a group or organization to ensure that sufficient support is available for the decision to be implemented. Thus, determining the amount of time that is available in relation to the nature of the decision being made is a relevant factor to consider (Nye & Capelluti, 2003; Schein, 1999).

Impact of the Decision: At a very general level, it is essential to consider the potential impact that implementing a decision will have on an organization, whether it is at the department, cycle team, or the entire school or centre level. Taking the time to consider how the decision will affect individuals or groups of students, teachers, support staff, or other key stakeholders has proven to be a sensible practice. The greater the degree of impact that a decision will have the more care must be taken in the process that is used to make it (Nye & Capelluti, 2003; Schein, 1999; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958, 1973).

Ethical Considerations: Given the moral purpose of education, it is essential to ensure that appropriate ethical guidelines are followed in the decision-making process. As noted above, issues of personal confidentiality are a major concern as they touch on basic ethical guidelines and human rights legislation. At the same time, legal requirements can be involved that require consultation with professionals who have experience and expertise in this area. Most importantly, as noted above, if the moral purposes of education are to be attained, then it is important to ensure that the students, teachers, parents and support staff have an opportunity to have input to the decision-making processes that will have an impact on them (Fullan, 2002; Ghosh & Wall, 1999; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Nye & Capelluti, 2003; Schein, 1999).

Policy Constraints: In educational settings, a variety of factors will influence the decision making process. For example, government policies, union agreements, Board of Governors and School Council guidelines can all constrain when, why, and how a decision will be made. External stakeholders such as community groups, professional associations, or lobby groups, can also directly or indirectly influence the decision-making process. Again, taking the above policy constraints into consideration has proven to be very useful when planning how and when a decision will be made.

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Readiness and Culture of the Group: Several factors need to be considered in relation to the readiness and culture of a group or organization to make collaborative decisions. In educational settings, it is important to remember that professional teachers expect to have considerable input into decisions that will affect their working environment.

At the same time, professionals are expected to work together in a collegial and cooperative manner; but at times they are not willing or able to do so. Hence, it is essential to consider the climate and culture of a given school or centre in terms of its readiness to accept responsibility and make decisions that are in the best interests of the students and the school community as a whole. Thus, it is very important to take the time to reflect on the readiness of a group to make collaborative decisions, especially when the issues under consideration are controversial (Maier, 1963, 1967; Nye & Capelluti, 2003; Schein, 1999; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958, 1973).

History of the Issue: It is also important to reflect on the history of the issue. If there has been considerable controversy related to an issue, then it can be very useful to review who took a particular position and why they did so. Determining the degree to which an issue has divided people into opposing groups is especially important in educational settings where collaborative action is so important (Schein, 1999).

Availability of Information: Transparency is a crucial factor in the decision making process; hence, it is wise to try and share as much information as possible about a particular issue. At times, it may be difficult to access appropriate information related to a particular decision. For example, sometimes financial information is difficult to gather or it is information that cannot be generally shared with others. Moreover, in some situations, especially those that involve particular students, teachers, or support staff, confidentiality guidelines may prevent the sharing of a certain amount of relevant information. Therefore, when preparing to make a decision, it is important to inform people about the availability of information and the factors that might limit it (Schein, 1999; Vroom & Jago, 1973).

Follow-up Action Required: In educational settings, a particularly significant factor to consider is the amount of support that will be required to implement a decision. As noted earlier, all professionals, including teachers, expect that they will be consulted on decisions that affect their professional practice; hence, it is important to select a decision making process that will gain the personal and professional commitment of as many people as possible so that the likelihood of implementing a decision successfully will be increased (Nye & Capelluti, 2003; Schein, 1999; Vroom & Jago, 1973).

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