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# DEMOCRATIC AND PARTICIPATIVE APPROACHES IN MANAGING CHANGE IN EDUCATION

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Prof Rehabeam K. Auala, Mr Erkkie Haipinge, Ms Fredrika B. Uahengo,  
Ms Julia Chaka and Ms Jogbeth Kaita

## ABSTRACT

*The objective of this study is to give a critical analysis of democratic and participative approaches in managing change in education. Pre-independent Namibia was subjected to apartheid policies that continue to have consequences for present-day Namibia. After independence of Namibia in 1990, democratic and participative approaches were introduced. The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in democratic and participatory leadership approaches in managing change in education (Auala, 1999). Fundamental to the process of democratisation is an adherence to the basic belief that people have the right to participate in the change process and decisions that affect their lives. A qualitative research method was used by obtaining information from respondents through interviews. Documents analysis through literature review was also used in this study. The study addresses the following questions: 1) Explain why democratic and participative leadership approaches in managing change in education are so important? 2) Who should be involved in the change process at schools? 3) What are the causes of resistance to change and how can they be eliminated? The data analyses and the findings reveal that one of the best methods for reducing resistance to change is to involve those affected by the change to participate in the decision making, planning, designing and implementation of the change process in order to win the hearts and minds of the stakeholders. The study concludes that democratic and participative approaches in education are the key to quality education for all.*

## INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the role of participative leadership in education and its importance in decision-making. Participative leadership is concerned primarily with the process of decision-making. The approach supports the notion of shared or distributed leadership and is linked to democratic values and empowerment of the stakeholders. It is thought to lead to improved outcomes through greater commitment to the implementation of agreed decisions (Bush & Glover, 2003). This type of leadership is still new in most Namibian schools as many principals went through the apartheid education system which promoted autocratic style of leadership. It is also imperative to understand that after independence a lot has changed in the education system, and managers in schools are encouraged to involve their staff members in what happens in schools and whole education system.

Daresh and Playko (1997) have found that many researchers have indicated that part of having effective leadership in schools is involving the parents, staff, students and community in setting goals, collaboration, and/or decision-making. It is argued that implementing site-based management (SBM) makes better use of teachers' knowledge, participants in the decision making will have more ownership and commitment to the decisions made, there will be "consumer satisfaction" in regards to the community, better outcomes, and more efficiency and effectiveness (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Participative leadership leads to delegation and communication about goals, processes of goal accomplishment, respect for diversity in team members, and a collective effort to seek quality in each task and final product. The generation of today believes in participative leadership style, provided they have the support and opportunities from upper management levels to contribute to and influence team outcomes.

Before independence, Namibia had unequal access to education and training at all levels of the education system. The curriculum and teacher education programmes were often irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of individuals and the nation as a whole. At the same time, the leadership of schools was characterised by 'top down' administration, "typically proceeding without the consultation or participation of those involved, for example the principal was the sole decision maker" (Ministry of Education, Namibia, 1999:4). After independence a lot of effort was put into introducing democratic principles through education reforms. Such principles were introduced into educational practices at all levels, including schools. Therefore the main focus of the study is a participative approach in managing change in education. It is of vital importance to understand what change is. Fullan (1993:vii) defined

change as ubiquitous and relentless, forcing itself on us at every turn. Change forces are a deliberate double entendre. At the same time, the secret of growth and development is learning how to contend with the forces of change – turning positive forces to our advantage, while blunting negative ones.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. Explain why democratic and participative leadership approaches in managing change in education are so important?
2. Who should be involved in the change process at schools?
3. What are the causes of resistance to change and how can they be eliminated?

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study have relevance for the practice of educational leadership and management in schools. Firstly, the study was motivated by one of the researcher's personal experience as a Head of Department and later as Education Officer which both involved change management and implementation. The study makes an academic contribution to educational development and raises awareness to the academic community of Namibia in relation to issues of democratic and participative leadership. The research findings can be used by educational stakeholders to improve the quality of education management. Secondly, education in Namibia has been witnessing major transformations in the recent years. Our education system is still in the process of implementing several education reforms and research is needed for improvement in the implementation of our approaches. Education is the biggest investment of the Namibian government because it results in meeting national needs for self-governance and rapid economic growth. Thus, carefully monitoring of school leadership in ensuring quality education and improved participative approaches is deemed necessary.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Concepts of Change**

Change is ubiquitous. 'Change' and its family of 'change – words', such as 'progress', 'improvement', 'evolution' and 'development', are among the key concepts of modernity ... 'Change' is not uniform, and a variety of concepts of 'educational change' compete for the attention of policy makers, practitioners and the wider public (Altrichter and Elliot, 2000) . For example, 'change' may be used to argue for more autonomy or democratization in order to allow and enhance self-management of schools or for stricter central surveillance, accreditation and evaluation, or both, it may be used to argue for more room for market forces or for more parental participation in the governance of schools. 'Change' shapes up differently in different discourse contexts, and appears to be infinitely contestable and inherently unstable (Altrichter & Elliott 2000:1-2).

The term change is used both for processes which one is aware of and also of which one is not aware of. According to Altrichter and Elliott (2000:2) there are three dimensions of change. First, change may refer both to a process and to a product (of such processes). Second, the verb 'change' may be used intransitively (a situation changes) or transitively (I change the situation). Third, we may attribute changes to intentional processes or we may see them as a result of unintentional consequences of other processes and actions (some of which may have been intentional, however, with respect to other goals). This study refers to the three dimensions of change.

### Importance of Participative Approach in Education

When evaluating the success of a school, one of the most important characteristics of the school is who is responsible for the building. That person's leadership style is also a very important characteristic that must be thoroughly evaluated when working with learners. Parents should be aware of the various leadership styles when making an intelligent decision about schools in which to enrol their children (Phillips, 2011). It is important that parents, teachers and learners are involved in education, so that they understand what is supposed to be done and make valuable contribution. Principals should make sure that they work with staff, as well as other interested parties, in identifying needs and establishing high expectations if schools are to be effective. It is also true that decision-making procedures desired by staff members depend on the perceived importance of the decision to the person's job and the level of skill an employee has to participate in the decision to be made. People are more likely to accept and implement decisions in which they have participated, particularly where these decisions relate directly to the individual's own job (Auala, Mushaandja and Amukugo, 2010). Without acceptance of staff decisions by management, problems can develop which could seriously reduce levels of performance. Employee's participation in certain work issues is needed for individuals to gain experience and skills and have an interest to participate in the more difficult areas which follow.

The most critical factor in fostering change in the organization is effective leadership. According to Schmitt & Tracy (1996:46) the structure for schools represents a major change in the way schools view themselves, as well as in the way the community views the schools. The leadership for change is a shared responsibility that affects all members of the school organization.

From the above mentioned discussion we can outline that educational reform and innovation of change is characterized with good ideas or policies that fail to get implemented or that are successful in one situation but not in another. Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2006 :9) state that

A missing ingredient in most failed cases is appreciation and use of what we call change knowledge: understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice. The presence of change knowledge does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure.

#### Good Examples of When to Use Participative Leadership

- When implementing change, so that staff members are prepared for the transition and are brought in to the change process.
- During challenging school situations that require the staff members to pull together.
- Where 'out of the box' thinking is required and risks need to be taken if the school is to achieve its plans.

Participative leaders generally have an open-door policy for learners, staff, and parents. They do not serve on all committees in the school, but will have a representative on all committees, and because of the respect that exists, committees will still solicit the leaders' opinion. These schools are generally very positive because everyone is working on the same page. The staff believes that they are doing a good job of educating the children, and they feel comfortable enough to enrol their own children in the school. With this type of leadership the staff has first hand knowledge of what is happening in the school because they help develop policies and procedures. Most importantly, the participative leadership style has a positive effect on the learners in the school. Generally learners' discipline problems are fewer because they respect an administration that seems concerned about them. The positive atmosphere motivates the learners to perform to the best of their ability, which eliminates much of the negative behaviour. Learners will be encouraged to participate in clubs, organizations and in the overall school functions.

School leaders are now playing important roles as change agents in educational leadership reform from the traditional autocratic leadership style to the more democratic participative style, and school change can be made possible only when it begins with the principal and the school's leadership team (Flanary, 2009; Leech & Fulton, 2008). School leaders are also said to be important figureheads who have the power to either encourage or discourage collaborative decision-making processes. Bogler (2011) mentions that teacher job satisfaction is affected by both the principal's leadership styles and decision-making strategies. It is important that all stakeholders in education are involved in what is happening at schools, so that they feel that they own the school and are part of it. When there is a sense of ownership everyone works to make sure that what they have set up for the school is achieved, as they have been part of the decision making process. If changes at school are to be introduced, it is important that parents are informed and give their ideas on how they feel about the change, instead of imposing the change on parents which they might not accept. By involving all the stakeholders in decision making their hearts are won over as they are part of the discussions and will support the implementation of the decisions taken.

### **Restoring the Dignity of the Teaching Profession**

Nikodemus (2013) argues that the prefix "Re" means "taking back something to its original state". Examples are words such as: reclaim, restore, repent, recycle, rearrange, rehabilitate, regain, refocus, refund, renew and rejuvenate.

In our Namibian context, especially from the perspective of teacher education, when we say we want to "reclaim" and "restore" the dignity of the teaching profession, we are in essence acknowledging that our teaching profession is not at the level that it used to be, or supposed to be, and thus warrants the need to restore or take it back to its original state or status.

Currently, the quality, commitment and dedication of the teaching profession need to be restored. In the past, teachers could be recognized from their good conducts, professionalism and excellent leadership behaviour. Therefore, apart from teachers being role models and knowing their subject matter very well, they also have a stake in leadership through participative leadership approach. It is well-known that teachers are policy implementers, and as such can contribute a lot towards school and educational leadership when afforded opportunities to participate in decision making and contribute towards change. It is only logical that change that does not take on board the input from teachers is less likely to be effectively implemented given the role teachers play in this regard. As professionals, the status of teachers can also be enhanced when they play an active role in leadership, and participative leadership approach promotes this. Finally, it is important to consider that the Teaching Profession is the Mother of All Professions. All other professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, accountants, government ministers, state presidents and pharmacists were taught by a teacher in one way or another. Hence when the dignity of the teaching profession is restored, the benefits would be enjoyed beyond just the teaching profession.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory that is informing change management is the theories of organizational change. The theory of Teleological tradition model this model has a common name as planned change. According to Carnall (1995) states that the process for change is rational and linear, but individual managers are much more instrumental to the process. The change process is characterized with many aspects. According to Carnall (1995) Key aspects of the change process include planning, assessment, incentives and rewards, stakeholders' analysis and engagement, leadership, scanning, strategy, restructuring and reengineering. The leader is the focus; this is a human model with the change agent at the Centre. Another theory that informs the notion of participative approach in managing change is that of path-goal theory by Robert House. The path-goal theory simply articulates the relationship between superior and subordinates within an organization and

how the former's leadership style can motivate the latter in the performance of their functions. One central tenet of the theory is that leaders' behaviour is considered acceptable and satisfying to the subordinates to the degree to which such behaviour is either an immediate source of satisfaction or is instrumental to future worker satisfaction (House & Mitchell as cited in House, 1996). Essentially the path-goal theory is about how leaders can choose a leadership style most suitable to the situation and goals of the organization at hand. Such leadership behaviour are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented behaviour. Within the framework of democratic change and people's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the participative leadership behaviour is most suitable to this study.

Participative leader behaviour according to the path-goal theory requires leaders to consult stakeholders and their subordinates in decision making and this approach is instrumental in coordinating and aligning the organizational and individual's goals since participation encourages the sharing of values and increases commitment to goals decided upon (House, 1996). House maintains that the participative leader behaviour increases the autonomy and ability of individuals in carrying their work, leading to greater effort and performance. As the path-goal theory postulates, participative leadership approach suits change management because it encourages all stakeholders to partake in decision making which in turn strengthens their commitment to new goals initiated by the change process. Few things are important in change management than ensuring that all people instrumental to the successful implementation of change are fully committed to it, and as such, democratic participatory leadership approach reigns supreme over other approaches.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research was located within the interpretive, qualitative paradigm. The interpretive was selected to enable to gain new insights and knowledge about the phenomenon of participative management, its roles, and possibly to discover effects of the theory. Through the use of interpretive paradigm there was an opportunity to capture the understanding of individual participants on their current school leadership and application of leadership among school principals, in accordance with views of Merriam (2009) when she says: "The overall purpose of interpretive qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making and, describe how people interpret that experience."

### **Sample**

The research sample included two principals, two heads of departments, three teachers, five learners and two school board members from each school. Two inspectors of education from the regional management within the Khomas Region were also selected. Respondents who regarded as relevant to the study were purposively selected to provide the kind of information needed for this research.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

### **Interviews**

The purpose of research interviews is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and /or motivations of individuals on specific matters. Qualitative methods such as interviews are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomenon than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods such as questionnaires. Interviews are, therefore, most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants. They are appropriate for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group

environment (Gill, 2008). Semi-structured interview was used to obtain data and I had a list of key themes, issues, and questions to be covered.

### **Findings And Discussions**

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define analysis as the process a researcher uses to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. Data analysis is the process of reducing large amounts of collected data to make sense of them. Patton (1987) cited in Kaliwuch indicates that three things occur during analysis: data are organised, data are reduced through summarisation and categorisation, and patterns and themes in the data are identified and linked. The findings from respondents are presented below.

Apart from the members of management teams, the majority of teachers from the two schools believed that autocratic domination still prevailed in the way in which managers make decisions. Further evidence of autocratic leadership of certain management activities were taken only by management members. Some teachers claimed that “sometimes there were decisions being made without involving teachers and sometimes it will be autocratic” whereby the manager will just decide that one has to do something, and “if you don’t do it, come and see me in my office”. Management members stressed that sometimes one has to be autocratic although being democratic is most important, but autocratic style “sometimes have to apply especially in decision making” and there should be a “limit of participation”.

In a similar vein, a certain teacher revealed that at their school the major challenge is only one man’s decision not for everyone, part of the staff are excluded and there is nothing like democratic participation. Another teacher echoed that authoritarian leadership still exists or partly exists at the school. The participants felt that those were some of the problems that were causing them not to participate in school management and decision making at school. One can detect that teachers did not share responsibilities with management at one school; even the HOD did not play his role as a second in command. Since every managerial responsibility was with the principal, the teachers were given only extra-mural activities. This shows evidence of directive leadership that may be helpful to coordinate work and clarify policies (House, 1996). However for managing change, it is the participative approach that “helps ensure that unanticipated problems that arise during the work can be tackled directly and immediately by those affected by the problem” (Durham et al as cited in Somech, 2005:781) and that exactly is what one can expect to happen when managing change.

Schools have always played an important role in every community, and if the community is to remain the foundation of our ability to adapt, schools must rise to the challenge of change, said one principal. One of the parents interviewed described that the community has more awareness of the benefits of education. She remembers when many parents shared responsibility amongst themselves during the meetings and during the event parents came together to prepare food and do other duties for the school bazaar in order to raise money for the school and that many parents were willing to volunteer themselves. Decision-making throughout the organization is enhanced by the involvement of the community. “Consultation, involvement, and group decision-making are generally superior to individual decision making.” (Keith & Girling, 1991:135).

### **CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHEN USING PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH AS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS**

Change always results in resistance and conflict. This is in line with Ferting (as cited in Prew, 2004:4) when he says “schools and teachers are notoriously resistant to change in the entire world and usually for a reason, particularly as the intent behind change and the actual impact are often variance”. This situation could be avoided if principals, who are primarily responsible for the implementation of change, recognize the factors that cause resistance to change, and how to manage it at their level of authority.

Unwillingness to Accept Responsibilities

One of the challenges of participative management as identified by the participants is the unwillingness of some staff members to accept responsibility and fear of failure. Participants revealed that management always tries to invite them to participate in decision-making but teachers were not willing to participate. Some participants believed that the reason why managers sometimes take solitary decisions is because teachers do not want to participate in decision making. One teacher argued that the main reason is that some teachers do not want responsibilities, they are afraid of responsibilities and at the same time, they are afraid of heavy workloads. This was stressed by the HOD that when teachers hesitate, that is when the management will come in and try to decide on their behalf.

### **Involving others in Decision-making**

Some principals feel that if they involve their staff in decision making, then they will be seen as weak leaders and that they cannot make decisions on their own. Principals should be made to understand that for the school to be a success, every stakeholder should be considered and made to contribute towards running of the school.

### **Staff Members Lack Confidence and/ or Expect Leaders to Make Decisions**

Some staff members feel that they cannot be involved in decision making because they are not managers and do not have the experience. This lack of confidence has also been seen as one of the reasons why some staff members are not willing to be part of decision making and consequently the participative approach does not work.

### **Time Consuming Method**

Time consumption is believed to be a stumbling block since the method demands that everyone shares the same view and has a clear understanding of the situation before final decisions can be made. One HOD contended that the democratic principle is time consuming, because you have to involve all the stakeholders at all levels, you have to convince them to agree before decisions can be taken on anything.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs and leading to a 'vision' for the school. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain the commitment of staff and stakeholders to the ideal of a better future for the school, its learners and stakeholders (Bush, 2007). In the light of the findings of the study, it is pertinent to say that for better organizational results and benefits, it is appropriate to practise participative management style in schools as it shapes the future of coming generations as practised by the educational managers of other schools. For this there must be an effort to:

- Train the principals and administrators to encourage the participative management style in schools
- Ask policy makers to hold workshops and seminars for school principals on the importance of participative management
- Ensure community involvement in the school affairs through school management Councils
- Ask school principals to hold workshops in their schools on the benefits of participative management
- Monitor school principals to determine whether they practise participative management or not, and
- Ask the school principals to encourage participation of the employees in the school's affairs and let the employees play their role in decision making.
- Educate school leaders on the importance of using participative management approaches in managing change as a means of strengthening stakeholder commitment to such changes



It can be said that the participative approach is an ideal model on which to lead the stakeholders involved in an educational environment. Its benefits are widespread as it serves to effectively empower all individuals working within a particular organization, however, the operation of this leadership style places increased internal and environmental challenges on each administrative team wishing to implement it into each respective educational organization.

Education in Namibia is still in transition; we are still learning how to operate our education system well for an effective and efficient reform. From the findings, it can be seen that the principals have many roles to carry out at schools. The principals are the main facilitators of change. Principals in Namibia did not receive adequate leadership training which is making participative approach in change management implementation not an easy task.

The winning of hearts and minds of the participants can be achieved through participative leadership especially when people are given a chance to share and give their inputs in decisions to be made.

In cases where parents were part of meetings of school activities, the parents were more willing to help. This shows that when parents are informed early of a certain change, they are more convinced and this makes things more easier for the school.

For participative change to take place, the right procedure should be followed in implementation. There are many challenges facing the change management in schools such as lack of training in people management, leadership and management skills, lack of volunteering from community members, ineffective school leaders, and lack of are not workshops and seminars.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **According to Fullan (1993:46)**

There are two basic reasons why educational reform is failing. One is that the problems are complex and intractable. Workable, powerful solutions are hard to conceive and even harder to put into practice. The other reason is that the strategies that are used do not focus on things that will really make a difference. They fail to address fundamental instructional reform and associated development of new collaborative cultures among educators.

It is even more difficult to manage organisations such as schools during times of change. Therefore this study would offer support for educational leaders and make the following recommendations:

- i. It is a matter of urgency that Education Directorates provide management learning programmes for principals and management members.
- ii. There is an urgent need for schools to be offered continuous professional development programmes such as people management workshops and training.
- iii. Staff surveys should be organised to prepare the staff members and to repair damage and mistrust.
- iv. The Ministry of Education and the various educational directorates should support the participative approach in the form of pedagogical and administrative support and supervision for change management, assistance in organizing training workshops and guidance on planning issues that affect the reform of the school.
- v. The school principal is the agent of change and should be able to motivate teachers, parents, community members, and learners.
- vi. Community members' participation in education is one of the goals of education. It seems appropriate to provide parents, community parents, and teachers with the opportunity to serve together on management committees.

- vii. Institutions of Higher Learning such as the University of Namibia should introduce courses in people management.
- viii. Schools should organise more awareness campaigns on participative approaches in education.
- ix. School board members should be trained on how to advise school management on extracurricular issues and how to make proper recommendations in the appointment of teachers.
- x. The Ministry of Education should put more emphasis on creating learning communities.
- xi. The parent organizations should play an important role in the life of the school, so they can have ownership of their school.
- xii. Schools should have community partners, for example, businesses and organizations that take an active interest in the life of the school to support them financially, their employees serving as mentors for learners and offer volunteering services to the school.
- xiii. The professionalism, dignity, quality, commitment and dedication of teachers in the Teaching Profession need to be restored.

In conclusion, an effective principal is a very useful tool agent of change and reform, and holds the potential for providing the quality education development to enable Namibia achieve its Vision 2030. The principal is a facilitator who communicates powerful motivation to teachers, learners and all stakeholders in order for them to do their best to bring about change. With a proper collaborative system by all stakeholders, communities of learning and ownership of schools of excellence could be created. This study concludes that if the current challenges experienced in our schools are addressed, schools would effectively carry out change management implementation that would win the hearts and minds of participants in education.

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**Rehabeam Katengela Auala** is a Professor of Educational Management and Administration in the Faculty of Education at the University of Namibia (UNAM). He was the Dean of the Faculty of Education for many years. Prof Auala has written books, chapters in books, conference proceedings and research articles in refereed journals. He continues to provide community services at local, regional and international levels

**Erkkie Haipinge** is a Lecturer in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Studies at the University of Namibia. He completed his post-graduate studies at the University of Oulu, Finland.

**Fredrika Babsy Uahengo** is a teacher by profession and became the first black female Rector of the Former Ongwediva College of Education. She is now Lecturer in Education at the University of Namibia (UNAM).

**Julia Chaka** is an Assistant Faculty Officer at the University of Namibia in the Faculty of Science. She is currently pursuing her Masters degree in Education at the University of Namibia.

**Jogbeth Kaita** is a student at the University of Namibia pursuing her Master of Education studies. She is working for the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture as a Senior Education Officer in Khomas Education Directorate. Jogbeth has a special interest in academic writing.