The Changing Context for the Educational Administrator in Tanzania

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Introduction

The fact that the working context of the school administrator is changing fast and the work of heading schools and other educational institutions is more challenging today than at any other time cannot be disputed. In many respects, education has become the rallying point for political legitimacy, and it holds out the hope of economic development and social cohesion. Most times, people's expectations of what education can accomplish in society are greater than what could ever be realistically achieved by it. For example, education can prepare people for the world of work, but it cannot create jobs; education can socialise people for peaceful co-existence but it cannot prevent war; education can teach people about the need for a stable family life, but it cannot prevent divorce. In other words, as educational administrators and stakeholders, we need to be constantly mindful of education's limitations and of what it can and cannot do, as education is often heralded as the universal panacea for all social ills and shortcomings.

In this presentation I seek to elaborate on what the changing context may mean for heads of schools or other education institutions in Tanzania, and the basic challenges they are likely to face, as well as putting forward propositions for possible ways out.

Educational administrators' roles

The most visible roles that an educational administrator is likely to play include personnel administration, instructional programme administration, and support functions administration.

Personnel administration
Personnel administration for the school head includes not only the central and sensitive role of recruiting and retaining academic teaching staff and but also that of managing the important and indispensable non-teaching staff. Here the head needs to be proactive in recruiting and staffing his/her school with the prerequisite number and type of academic staff. I am sure you are more familiar than I am with this particular nightmare, especially when it comes to getting the right kind of teachers in sufficient numbers for each combination of subjects taught in our schools. Recruiting staff is one thing, keeping them interested and committed to the task at hand is another. You cannot recruit and just let go, but you need to revise ways of not only keeping the staff

at your school but also being actively and positively involved in the central task of teaching and engaging in other educational processes.

Non-teaching staff may not be the central personnel for the core business of the school, but they are an integral part of the functioning of the school and absolutely essential for the maintenance of a peaceful and conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. Arguably, most of the strife and unrest occurring in schools are basically a result of personnel in this category failing to undertake their responsibilities as required, or neglecting to carry out their tasks for whatever reasons, justifiable or otherwise.

Instructional programmes administration.
Instructional programme administration is the central and core function of an educational administrator at whatever level. This function involves curriculum delivery, time-tabling, preparing for examinations and ensuring that teaching and learning is taking place in one's school. This undertaking is the cause of great unpopularity among many a head of school. Why? The various approaches used to ensure that the core functions of the school are undertaken by faculty may require intrusion into the sanctity of the teacher's workplace—the classroom. The moment the teacher in question feels that his/her sanctity has been violated is inevitably the point at which the school head loses popularity with that particular teacher. Nevertheless, in order for the head to be on top of things on how the school programme is being implemented, drastic acts such as walking and sitting in a teacher's class is unavoidable. A word of caution though, the head should avoid overdoing this.

Support services administration
Support services administration is another aspect of educational administration that takes up the time of an educational administrator. This function is not only important but absolutely necessary for the school to properly function. Such services cover finance, catering, procurement, storage, and the maintenance of vehicles, and school buildings and grounds. As we said in regard to non-teaching personnel, this is a potential minefield because it is area where many problems are likely to arise. Thus, this area needs to be accorded adequate administrative time and effort to ensure everything is running smoothly and efficiently, thereby nipping any problem in the bud.

These three functions taken together are the most critical, visible and formal responsibilities, which may probably appear in the terms, scope and job description in the school head's letter of appointment. However, there are many more roles and responsibilities that a school head will have to shoulder in addition to these. In the following sections we shall look at this complex administrative issue and the demands

in terms of time and effort that it places on the school head before examining some of the possible remedies.

Increasing work complexity

In today's context, the administration of schools is clearly not what it used to be in the past. The school administrator is increasingly caught up with the demands that go beyond the mere position of managing a given school efficiently and effectively. There are many more responsibilities that come with the designation of the head of school: school financial officer; the chief fund-raising officer; the head of information and communications technology; the chief documentation and education resources officer; the chief procurement officer; and the community and public liaison officer. These additional responsibilities have the capacity to engage the heads of school in terms of both time and effort at the expense of their effective execution of the core responsibilities listed above, for which they were appointed in the first place.

Collaborative Leadership

By way of suggesting some ways out of this dilemma that some leaders in educational institutions find themselves in, we would like to examine some alternative ways by which heads may be relieved of the pressure of their busy schedules so that they can carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

To start with, we wish to argue that more collaboration in the running of the school would allow the head to delegate some of the responsibilities to subordinates, instead of trying to accomplish everything her/himself. In fact, collaboration is the term employed to express partnership, co-operation, agreement and consent and working in combination to accomplish institutional objectives. The concept is bound up with the notions of consultation, involvement and participation, shared goals and shared vision, openness, trust and democratic ideals.

In the school environment, Cardno (1990) makes a distinction between internal and external collaboration. Internal collaborative partnership is built between the head and his/her staff as a result of the values and structures fostered and facilitated by astute and active heads who promote staff participation in planning, problem-solving and decision-making. External collaborative partnership, on the other hand, can be fostered between the school, the system and the community through consultation with and involvement of those outside the school who can and wish to contribute.

Literature on organisational development points to the centrality of collaborative processes in a developing school. Cardno (1990:2) notes: "Development, review,

responsiveness, growth and improvement are based on concerted and collegial commitment; the mutual determination of all participants in the schooling endeavour to improve the organisation and contribute collectively to its effectiveness". Furthermore, collaborative practices find their way into the fabric of school life as a result of the commitment of key professionals in an educational institution. These undertake the development of other leaders at all levels and ensure that staff, students, the board and the system are alerted to the concept of collaboration in a viable framework for each school. In particular, the head of school should be prepared to manage collaboration once it has been prioritised as an integral part of the school's management, is in existence and recognised as one which holds potential for instructional and institutional improvement.

It may need to be stated here that no matter how differently or at what pace the processes of collaboration are introduced, they should be seen as the means for achieving educational ends and not as ends in themselves. Features of collaborative management that contribute to professionalism and collegial commitment to institutional goals include the following characteristics and attributes:

- Sound leadership and direction;
- Staff being knowledgeable on all aspects of the school;
- Teamwork being evident at all levels;
- Roles and responsibilities being clearly spelt out;
- Evidence of participation—e.g. channels of communication;
- Problem-solving related to school development;
- High profile given to teachers' and leaders' professional development;
- Systems for managing internal and external collaboration

A conceptual framework for collaborative management has to be drawn up by the leadership team in the school, based on the pragmatic acceptance of what will work in the school given the realities of the situation, the resources at the school's disposal and the priorities of the institution.

Shared decision-making

Closely related to the notion of collaborative management is the concept of shared decision-making (SDM), which has been billed as one of the major educational management reforms in recent years (Liontos 1994). As the process of making educational decisions in collaborative manner, SDM involves fundamental changes in the way schools are managed, as well as alterations that could be made in the roles and relationships of everyone in the school community.

Some of the basic beliefs and values underpinning SDM include the following:

- Those closest to the children should be the ones making decisions regarding the children's education;
- Teachers, parents and school staff should have more say in the policies and programmes affecting their schools and children;
- Those responsible for carrying out decisions should have a voice in determining those decisions;
- Change is most likely to be effective and lasting when those who implement it feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.

Liontos (1993) suggests that SDM has the potential to improve the quality of decisions; increase a decision's acceptance and implementation; strengthen staff morale, commitment and teamwork; build trust; help staff and administrators acquire new skills; and increase effectiveness. Indeed, when more people are involved in the decision-making process more alternatives are likely to be generated and this can result in more innovative approaches to problem-solving.

One of challenges of SDM is that it calls upon teachers and administrators to do what they have traditionally not been required to do and to contend with the frustrations that accompany the resulting slower decision-making process. In the SDM environment, teachers who normally work in isolation from other adults, "in the egg-crate organisation of schools" (Weiss, et al 1992), have to engage with other adults to negotiate and resolve their differences, and to come to decisions concerning the issues that have traditionally fallen outside the scope of their duties. Needless to say, increased demand on the teachers' time may pose the biggest barrier to implementing and maintaining SDM.

With these challenges in mind, it is imperative for us to state that SDM does not in any way seek to replace the role of the head of school as the decision-maker on all issues. Instead, as Bauer (1992) contends, the head of school becomes a member of a team of decision-makers and would likely make decisions on his/her own on matters outside the scope of SDM groups or committees. Stine (1993) describes the head's role in the SDM context as that of an organiser, adviser and consensus builder, who takes advantage of the group's thinking. Heads of school who utilise SDM can then be seen as internal consultants who provide staff with current research information and advice. Heads of school would hav a facilitative role, such as finding the space and time for staff to meet, helping groups work effectively together and minimising distractions and obstacles facing SDM participants. By promoting a non-competitive, trusting climate, creating opportunities for staff to express their ideas and views, and putting priority on

professional development, heads of school would be helping a school to be ready for SDM.

Several important guidelines have been put forward to facilitate the successful implementation of SDM, which we may have to adopt, depending on our respective school's situation and priorities:

Starting small and growing slowly
It is suggested that SDM would work most successfully if it is carried out in small steps rather than introducing wholesale changes which are foreign to the school and the participants. Thus, the head needs to analyse the school's needs and then adapt the selected processes in tune with the local situation—with the possibility of making additions as and when the staff are ready.

Setting out specifics at the beginning
It is proposed here that there is not a single "right" way to enforce SDM. Some schools use a standing decision-making team or council while others use several committees or groups. The choice of who may be on the committee may depend on the issues at hand and the circumstances within which the decision is being made. The inclusion of students, teachers, and community members or even outside consultants may depend on the need for representativeness, or the kind of expertise required for making the decision. The determination of how the decision will be made –consensus, majority vote, etc—may have to be confirmed beforehand.

Defining roles, procedures and expectations
Participants need to be aware of the procedures and steps to be followed in the decision-making process, as lack of clarity would simply lead to lack of progress in SDM. While clear processes empower participants, unclear processes create confusion and fragment people's actions. It is also important for the participants to know beforehand whether they are a decision-making body or merely an advisory one. It could be demoralising for groups to think that they are making decisions only to realise later that their decisions are being vetoed or ignored. If possible, all the SDM procedures and processes need to be spelt out in writing.

Giving everybody a chance to be involved
When decisions are made by administrative appointees as opposed to the elected or volunteer representatives, they would in most cases be viewed as top-down decisions imposed on the lower levels, and therefore susceptible to opposition or rejection. Being on a task force or any other position provides volunteers with an opportunity to participate as much or as little as they want in the decision-making process. The more

accessible the process is perceived to be by all the teachers, the more positive they would feel about it.

Building trust and support
When mistrust and apprehension exist between administrators and teachers, SDM is not easily accepted. Indeed, decisions should not be pushed on to the group and neither should the decisions delegated to the SDM teams be overridden. There should also be hierarchical support for the whole SDM process. If the culture outside the school does not change, those inside the school will find it difficult to take charge of the decision-making process.

These guidelines mean that a head of school intent on using SDM or any other form of collaborative decision-making will inevitably shoulder the responsibility for ensuring that the process is in place and functions as it should.

Leadership beyond management and administration
The process of involving other members of your institution and the community in decision making denotes that you are not only administering and managing the school, but that you are also striving to lead it. As a matter of fact, leadership in education today must have the wisdom, vision, and knowledge needed in order to achieve development and growth. This means building consensus, cultivating the culture of industriousness, encouraging commitment and ensuring the participation of all stakeholders including the masses in their own development and growth. This means a "leadership" (not just administration or management) that has the wisdom, patience and courage to lead people not only to the leaders want them to go, but also where they need and ought to be even if, at present, they think they do not necessarily want to go there.

Going beyond the mere administration and management of schools and other educational institutions, school heads may wish to acquaint themselves with some of the qualities and features that have been associated with great leadership (see Box 1).

Box 1: Features of Great Leadership

(i)   Morals of Leadership: "True leadership must be for the benefit of followers, not enrichment of the leaders".

(ii)   Integrity of Leadership: "To be a great leader, you must deliver more than you promise and not promise more than you deliver".

(iii)   Arithmetic of Leadership: "A leader who develops people adds, a leader who develops leaders multiplies" (John Maxwell).

(iv)   The secret of mass and grassroots participation: "People support what they create and become dependable when they participate in achieving their own development and growth with or without outside partnership or superior intervention"

(v)   Culture of truth in leadership and Society: Truth is a challenge that is crucial to co-operation, commitment, peace, harmony and tranquillity in any community or country. The Challenge of truth is that it is not always the same as the 'correct answer'. However, transparency, integrity and hearing both sides of a story together approximate the "correct answer" to the "truth" and only then can good governance be achieved and justice be done and be seen to have been done. Truth is therefore a very basic requirement of both good governance and justice in society, starting from family to nations and across human institutions and corporate bodies.

Adopted from Ole Kambainei (2007)

At this juncture, it might be instructive for us to revisit a few attributes and quotable quotes on leadership which the school head may find useful in reflecting on his/her role and responsibilities as a leader over and beyond the call of duty as a manager or school administrator:

LEADERSHIP AND HUMILITY: To be a good leader one must be humble and a good follower. One may not cheat and disrespect those above him/her and expect trust and respect from those below. Humility coming not out of hypocrisy, opportunism or fear is a priceless gift.

LEADERSHIP AND MATURITY: "You must always be able to look at a mirror and recognise yourself". Leadership and maturity means succeeding in serving families and society, surviving through it all and remaining you. Though positively upholding truthfulness, strong opinions, honesty, principles, professionalism, commitment to society and the public interest may at times be unpopular and painful, this is the way that leaders become mature, especially they display humility and are sensitive to the feelings of others. Please don't be fooled into believing that timidity and fear are humility and respect.

LEADERSHIP TOLERANCE: If the leadership is intolerant, impatient and destructively critical when errors and mistakes are made by subordinates, it kills initiative and innovativeness. Leaders should positively and encouragingly correct the mistakes made by those trying to genuinely innovate or initiate action to advance society. Each of us has some strength and some weaknesses….we are neither perfectly good nor entirely bad.

LEADERSHIP and PEOPLE: People will respect truly humble leaders, BUT will despise those who behave like demigods and think they are a law unto themselves.

LEADERSHIP and ABILITY: The higher up you are as a leader, the more likely it is that you are there because of your judgment and ability to inspire others than for your specific expertise alone. Therefore, use your experts, especially local ones expertly, as an expert is someone who knows something you don't know. What is rarer than our ability is the ability to recognize ability in others.

ARISTOTLE: "He who has not learnt to obey cannot command".

ANATOLE FRANCE: "People who have no weaknesses are terrible".

MWALIMU NYERERE: "This country … has three greatest assets, its people, land and leadership"

BILL CLINTON: "I ask you……. to be interested not just in getting but in giving, not just in placing blame but in assuming responsibility, not just in looking out for yourself but in looking out for others".

These quotes and attributes on and about leadership are included here to allow for the practice of reflection that school heads need to develop in order to keep in arrive at wise decisions in the course of their never-ending busy schedules. Self-reflection has been billed to aid administrators in adopting best practices and improving their decision-making ability. Thus, it is assumed that school leaders may also feel the urge to reflect on their practices as being equally beneficial to their own situations.

School leadership and new technologies

As we come to the end of this presentation, it would be a serious omission if we did not look at the changing environment in terms of information and communications technology and the implications such changes have for the school leadership. Therefore, it needs to be pointed out that we have now software packages out there that are designed to handle most administrative chores and allow the school leader to make decisions in minutes on issues that would normally require days for one to get the appropriate data, decipher it and make sense of it before making informed decisions. It is my plea to the teachers to find ways by which they could take advantage of the Education Management Information system (EMIS) installed at the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. In addition to taking advantage of this officially approved EMIS, the individual school head should also make an effort to get support for devices such as modems and other innovations now available at reasonable prices to

provide universal access to the internet and other web-based services that would help with the administration of schools and enhance the teaching and learning environment.

ICT may not only be enable the heads of school to get facilitative support for decision-making in their day-to-day activities, but it could also enhance their role as instructional leaders as well as that seeing to the professional development of their staff. Through the internet and other associated services, members of the academic and non-academic staff and even members of the community may improve their standing in their field of expertise, by enrolling for and completing online studies through open and distance learning institutions within the country and beyond. There is also a mine of knowledge that is available through the Net that could be put to good use, and in that way schools would become not only learning centres but also centres that learn.

Way Forward

In recognition of the changing context of the school administrator in Tanzania today, we have -sought to outline some remedies that may enable the school head not only to lead the school more collaboratively, but also to share the school's vision as well as have a shared decision-making process with members of staff and even students and members of the community. The implication is that the school head should delegate some of the more mundane and routine activities to other levels of leadership so that he/she could get more involved in research and consultative activities to support decision-making and also professional development at his/her school. We have also argued that the school head need to be proactive as regards learning, particularly in the acquisition of ICT facilities for his/her school not only to facilitate the decision-making process but also to support his/her efforts and those of the members of staff in their professional development.

In this regard, it may well be imperative for school owners, particularly of public schools, to ensure that all heads of school acquire at least one networked computer they can use for administrative purposes for information processing, storage and retrieval, as well as for accessing important information through the internet. Internet access would enable school leaders to be abreast of developments in their specialties in addition to getting state-of-the-art information on administrative matters. Generally, heads of schools should have working knowledge of some basic management packages that they can use for student and personnel records, examinations and other data generated in their schools. It is a truism that as the head of school learns, so does the whole school and its attendant community.

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