TEACHER TEAMS: PROMOTING TEACHER INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Employee involvement efforts in schools have increasingly encouraged teacher involvement in planning and governance procedures. Most involvement efforts could be described as suggestion involvement or individual job enhancement approaches (e.g. career ladders, differentiated teacher roles). However, these approaches seem to result in only limited involvement and leadership by teachers due to existing organizational control mechanisms an d professional norms in schools. Correspondingly, leadership is being reconceptualized more broadly to emphasize shared influence by many employees across the organization, with teachers as a group (versus individual teachers) exercising greater organizational leadership and having more impact on school effectiveness and other outcomes. The implications of these two complementary developments suggest that the formation of teacher teams (and corresponding sub-schools) holds more promise for substantive teacher involvement and teacher leadership in secondary schools than other currently-emphasized efforts.

Over the past decade, many school systems have increasingly promoted teacher involvement in school planning and governance procedures. Some of the first documentation of site-based decision making described initiatives beginning during the early 1980's reform movement (Malen & Ogawa, 1988). These efforts have developed and evolved in spite of a great deal of conceptual and operational ambiguity about employee involvement.

Correspondingly, traditional conceptualizations of leadership are changing--in both public and private sector organizations. Increasingly, leadership is described as shared power and influence across organizational roles and hierarchies rather than primarily focusing on the traits or behaviors of individuals in positions of formal authority.

These two complementary developments, employee involvement efforts and leadership reconceptualization, have strong implications for redesigning educators' work and for restructuring schools to improve teacher involvement and leadership in secondary schools. This paper will discuss: a) different approaches to employee involvement and their viability in school contexts; b) changing leadership conceptualizations; and c) implications of these two developments for educator work design and school restructuring to promote greater teacher involvement and leadership in secondary schools.

A Typology of Employee Involvement Approaches

The concept and practice of employee involvement in education has fallen under several different labels, including site-based management, site-based decision-making, participative decision-making, and others. Regardless of the terminology used, the idea of employee involvement has become increasingly popular in spite of the continued ambiguity and variability in the concept and its practice.

However, a recent article on employee involvement approaches (Mohrman & Lawler, 1992) may help conceptually and operationally clarify the range of employee involvement approaches in schools. The article describes three basic types of employee involvement in organizations. These types are referred to as suggestion involvement, job involvement (including individual job enhancement and work group enhancement), and high involvement.

Suggestion involvement approaches create opportunities for employees to offer advice about organizational problems or make suggestions for organizational improvement. Suggestion involvement may also provide opportunities for employees to acquire greater information about the organization, gain knowledge of problem-solving or decision making processes, and share in certain organizational rewards. However, suggestion involvement does not make significant changes in the organizational control structures for most decision issues, and often only a small percentage of employees are included in suggestion involvement or employees are included on a very limited basis.

Suggestion involvement approaches may be the most typical type of teacher involvement in school decision making because this approach is easiest to implement within the parameters of the traditional structure of public schools (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Often representative teachers serve on various school or district advisory councils or committees. Also, teachers typically may be included in decisions which focus on curricular or instructional issues rather than budgetary or personnel issues (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Ultimately, however, decision authority rests within the traditional administrative or district and state governance hierarchy.

Job involvement is the second type of employee involvement approach described. Job involvement approaches focus on ways to design work to enhance employee motivation and performance. There are two subcategories of work design efforts, depending on the unit of involvement--individual job enhancement or work group enhancement. In the case of individual job enhancement, often an established model for job enrichment is followed (see Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Specifically, jobs are designed to increase:

a) skill variety (need for many different skills to accomplish tasks);

b) task identity (completion of a whole task or piece of work);

c) task significance (degree to which a job affects others or their work in the organization);

d) autonomy (freedom, independence, discretion in scheduling or carrying out work assignments); and

e) feedback (information on performance from the job itself).

Some schools have implemented at least a limited job involvement approach by enriching some individual teacher jobs (Murphy & Hart, 1986) with additional leadership,

coordination, or supervision responsibilities (e.g. lead teachers, master teachers, or other career ladder or differentiated staffing positions). However, often teachers are reluctant to seek differentiated staffing roles or career ladder positions that require leadership or supervisory responsibilities because they don't want to "raise themselves above the others" in the school (Troen & Boles, 1993). This norm of egalitarianism has undermined the effectiveness of individual job enhancement efforts in schools by inhibiting individual teachers from assuming roles with greater decision involvement, leadership, or organizational influence. Similarly, some individual teacher reward systems such as merit pay systems have met with resistance, in part because teachers perceive that these reward approaches encourage competition rather than the more highly valued professional norm of cooperation. Thus, the professional norms and culture of schools have limited the effectiveness of many individual job enhancement approaches to teacher involvement in schools.

Work group enhancement differs from individual job enhancement in that it creates work groups or teams and treats the work group as the unit of employee involvement, rather than the individual. Work groups are designed to increase members' responsibility for the group's performance and to create opportunities for self-management. Work group members must develop interpersonal and group decision-making skills, and often have greater control over a broader range of work issues including staffing decisions, performance assessment, reward structures, and a host of decisions affecting the way the work is done and coordinated. Team approaches are more complicated to introduce and maintain in most organizations, "but may be necessary if the work is such that no one individual can do a whole part of it and get feedback about it" (Mohrman & Lawler, 1992).

Developing work groups or teacher teams as an employee involvement approach is perhaps less common in schools than other involvement approaches described above. The clearest example of this method may be found in some middle schools in which teachers are organized into teams that have decision-making responsibilities for the educational program of a particular sub-school or grade level of students in the school[1].

Team decisions may include work issues such as curricular emphasis and coordination, teaching or classroom management methods, student placement and grouping, curricular and co-curricular scheduling, student assessment, coordinated parent communication, staffing arrangements, or budgetary allocations. These and other school-within-school arrangements may begin to capture some of the elements of the work group approach to teacher involvement. (In this regard the work groups display elements of high involvement organizations described below because the work is organized around student-based units rather than around discipline-based departments.)

These strategies may be most beneficial at the secondary level where it may be argued that teachers do not have as much control over the whole task of educating students (task identity) or have as much opportunity to get comprehensive feedback about the student and his/her educational outcomes as do elementary teachers. That is, in secondary schools, it could be argued that the work of teachers, as analyzed by the job

characteristics definitions above, does not have strong task identity or feedback because teachers do not have comprehensive information or influence over students' complete educational experience or outcomes. Rather, secondary teachers deal with students' education in a fractionalized manner, influencing and having knowledge of student learning in only one class or content area; whereas in elementary schools teachers spend the better part of each day with the same group of 20-30 students and teach most, if not all, of the major academic content areas.

Also, in spite of the fact that teachers' work is often described as highly autonomous (e.g. Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975), this description may more aptly apply to work in elementary schools than secondary schools. For example, rigid secondary school schedules of 50-minute class periods decrease teachers' degree of control and discretion in scheduling and planning class instruction time to suit learners' needs (e.g. more time-consuming "hands-on" activities or demonstrations) or to reinforce important skills that cut across multiple content areas. Thus, in secondary schools, a work group or teacher team emphasis may enrich teachers' work design and enhance their involvement by increasing the task identity, feedback, and autonomy dimensions of the work.

The final employee involvement approach is termed high involvement and builds upon elements of the previous approaches. High involvement approaches structure the organization so that employees across all organizational levels have a sense of influence over the total organization rather than only over their jobs or their work groups. Organizational power, information, knowledge, and rewards are distributed across organizational hierarchies and work units. Often, organizations are designed around "consumer-based" (or student-based) units rather than around "functional" (or content area) units. Employees must acquire not only the decision-making skills and knowledge listed above in the other involvement approaches, but also must understand the entire work process and management fundamentals such as financial, legal, political, or social concerns. To achieve a high involvement approach, virtually every aspect of the organization and its control mechanisms must be redesigned.

It is difficult to think of examples of high involvement approaches in public schools today. Further, because the decision-making control and influence over many public school issues rest outside the local school or district organization--that is, at the state or even federal level--it is much less likely that a high involvement approach could be reasonably implemented in public schools. However, as mentioned above, some schools have implemented an important feature of high involvement plans with the organization of work into student-based units rather than into discipline based departments.

Given the array of employee involvement approaches described above, work group enhancement may have the greatest potential for meaningful, yet achievable, change in teachers' involvement in school decision-making. Current suggestion involvement approaches, though fairly easy to implement, do not make significant change in teachers' decision involvement, influence, or work. The success of individual job enhancement approaches (e.g. career ladders, differentiated teacher roles) has been inhibited by the strong professional norms of egalitarianism and cooperation in education. And, high

involvement approaches may be too difficult to implement in public schools due to the constraints of state control and federal influence. However, redesigning teachers' work with emphasis on the work group (teacher team) as the decision-making unit may hold promise for more substantive and meaningful teacher involvement.

Leadership Reconceptualized

In addition to increased emphasis on employee involvement in organizations, traditional leadership conceptualizations are also changing. Educational leadership most typically has been framed with the individual as the unit of emphasis or focus. Further, leadership by those in a position of formal authority (e.g. the principal) has probably received proportionately more attention than informal leadership by others in the school setting. Thus, school leadership has largely been conceptualized as the traits, behaviors, or management styles of individual administrators (with and without consideration of situational context).

However, corresponding to reform trends which emphasize employee involvement, a different view of leadership has emerged--a perspective with a broader conceptualization of leadership as well as a broader unit of focus. For instance, some scholars have applied the concept of social influence to their definitions and study of leadership (Cartwright, 1959; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Turner's (1991) definition of social influence--the process through which people directly or in directly influence the thoughts, feelings, an d actions of others--suggests that leadership may be a form of social influence. Leadership as social influence is evidenced when individuals utilize their personal attributes, their control over valuable resources, or their political prowess (Yukl, 1989) to modify the responses and actions of others (March, 1955; Simon, 1957).

Thus, these and other scholars (Tannenbaum & Cooke, 1979) argue that leadership exists at various organizational levels and can be exerted by any organizational member, regardless of formal position authority. Further, Tannenbaum offers evidence that the degree to which leadership is shared across organizational hierarchies can be an important determinate of the effectiveness with which organizations operate.

A recent study (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995) conducted in a large urban school district documented the presence of organizational leadership, or leadership distributed across organizational roles and hierarchies in the school. Specifically, the study examined the influence exercised by various individuals or groups in the school setting--the principal, the school secretary, faculty/staff members acting as a group, a faculty/staff member acting alone, and patrons in the community. The study also assessed the relationship between the influence of these individuals or groups and school effectiveness outcomes--including student achievement, student attendance, turnover rates of certificated staff, and perceptions of effectiveness.

Findings of the study indicated that most of these individuals or groups exercised "some influence" to "quite a lot of influence"(p.571). Specifically, principals were thought to exercise the most influence, followed in descending order of influence by faculty/staff

members acting as a group, patrons in the community, school secretaries, and faculty/staff members acting alone. It is important to note that teachers acting as a group exercised a high degree of influence (second only to that of the principal) whereas a teacher acting alone exercised the least amount of influence in the school. Similarly, the influence of teacher groups had indirect relationships to school faculty/staff turnover and to perceptions of effectiveness whereas teachers acting alone showed no direct or indirect relationship to school-level outcomes or perceptions of effectiveness.

These study results reinforce the conceptualization of leadership as a type of influence that may (or perhaps should) be shared across both the organization and organizational roles. Further, the focus of teacher leadership or influence might best be shifted from the individual teacher to the group or teacher team. This shift of focus from individual teacher leadership to team or work group leadership also may effectively address the obstacles to the institutionalization of many struggling teacher leadership efforts--the egalitarianism and cooperation norms of educators discussed above (Troen & Boles, 1993).

This broader conceptualization of leadership would suggest that not only should the work of teachers and other educators be structured to increase opportunities for influence in school planning decisions, but also that this influence may be more effective if exercised by a work group or teacher team. Teacher teams may be particularly effective in exercising instructional leadership, assessing the instructional needs of students, implementing and coordinating instructional programs or methods, and analyzing and evaluating the effects of instructional approaches or strategies.

This new leadership conceptualization would also suggest that the work of designated leaders such as principals may need to be revised accordingly. Perhaps, the new role of managers is to teach employees to lead and manage themselves (Manz & Sims, 1989), effectively developing the influence capabilities of the work-unit and increasing its information, knowledge, skills, and the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards it receives for excellent performance (Lawler & Mohrman, 1989). As emphasized by Troen and Boles (1993,p.29), "[Principals] need to provide teachers with both the reason and the opportunity, including time, to lead."

Implications for Educator Work Design and School Restructuring

Employee involvement and broader conceptualizations of leadership have numerous implications for educators' work and school organizations today. In particular, these tandem developments point to the merit of teacher teams as the focal unit in employee involvement and leadership initiatives, with schools-within-schools as the complementary structural adaptation in schools. The following discussion will address the development of teacher teams and schools-within-schools at the secondary level.

As discussed earlier, secondary school teachers may not feel a particularly strong sense of responsibility for the whole task of educating students (task identity); and work arrangements may provide relatively less opportunity for feedback and autonomy (than

for elementary teachers). Thus, secondary teachers' work may be more effectively enhanced by developing work teams rather than enhancing individual teacher jobs.

By establishing teams as the primary unit of influence in decision-making, teachers may enhance their breadth of knowledge and influence in student's total educational experience and outcomes as well as increase their level of control over how their work is done, including increased flexibility and control over time and other instructional resources and parameters. At the same time, this influence and power may be exercised in a context or structure that is congruent with the professional norms of egalitarianism and cooperation discussed above.

Further, the development of work teams may capitalize on the collective influence and knowledge of school personnel, while confronting the complexity of the educational process--that individual teachers and groups are interdependent in achieving the broad goals of educating students. If so, teachers would need to gain broad organizational information as well as to develop effective group problem-solving skills. Teachers would also need a reconfigured work day to allow time to acquire and utilize these skills and information for shared decision-making. Lastly, teacher teams would need to be kept to a reasonable size for efficient group interaction or communication, decision-making, and work coordination (perhaps four to six members per team).

To accommodate employee involvement approaches beyond that of simple suggestion involvement, organizational structure changes will probably need to occur concurrently with job design changes, especially when teacher work teams become the unit of focus in work redesign. If work teams are established to increase teachers' opportunity for task identity, feedback, and autonomy, then a team's span of control or influence must be increased accordingly. That is, teacher teams need to have the authority to influence students' educational experience across a wide range of content areas and developmental activities. At the same time, this span of influence must be limited to a manageable size for a relatively small teacher team (see above).

These considerations would suggest that sub-schools or schools-within-schools may be appropriate organizational structure changes to accompany teacher teams. A school-within-a-school would include a specific subset of students from the total school enrollment, and the corresponding teacher team would have more comprehensive influence and responsibility over these students' educational experience, including education across a broad range of individual and interdisciplinary content areas with coordinated home-school interaction, guidance or social services. Additionally, teacher teams may have influence over appropriate extra-curricular or co-curricular activities as well.

Schools-within-schools would mimic an important element of high employee involvement approaches by organizing work to be more student-centered than discipline-centered. These changes in the work and organizational structure may allow teachers greater flexibility to influence students' total educational experience, as well as the opportunity for greater knowledge of overall student outcomes. Because teachers may be

more involved in the decision making as well as the corresponding feedback loop, they would be better prepared to make appropriate and timely adjustments to students' instructional and developmental programs.[2]

The development of schools-within-schools would necessitate some horizontal coordination between teams or sub-schools as well as the typical vertical coordination between school levels (e.g. elementary, middle, high schools). The principal would likely become an important linking agent between and among the various sub-school teams, as well as providing information to help teacher teams develop organizational and self-management skills.

[Summary](#)

Employee involvement efforts in schools have increasingly encouraged employee involvement in planning and governance procedures. Most involvement efforts could be described as suggestion involvement or individual job enhancement approaches, although these currently emphasized approaches to teacher involvement have had limited impact due to the limitations of traditional school control mechanisms and the professional norms of schools. Correspondingly, leadership is being reconceptualized more broadly to emphasize shared influence by many employees across the organization, with work group influence rather than individual influence a more promising strategy for school effectiveness. Specifically, research suggests that teacher teams may be able to exercise greater influence and may have greater impact on school outcomes and effectiveness than leadership by individual teachers. The implications of these two developments suggest teachers' work may need to be redesigned to have a group or team emphasis. Correspondingly, secondary schools would require restructuring from a traditional discipline-based, departmentalized structural arrangement to a more student-centered school within-school structure. These work design and school restructuring changes hold promise for increasing teachers' involvement and leadership in secondary schools.

1. The formation of teacher teams in middle schools is but one component of the middle school movement which originated around the 1970s to restructure traditional junior high schools to better meet the developmental and educational needs of the early adolescent child.
2. An additional benefit of schools-within-schools' more wholistic approach to students' educational experience is the potential for students to become more integrated or connected to school. This may be especially important at the secondary school level where some students become disengaged or lost within today's large comprehensive schools. Further, parents may find schools to be more user-friendly because home-school communication can become more coordinated and less random. The school's approach to the child's development may more nearly resemble a parent's approach; that is, the whole child would become the focus rather than fractionalized attention to separate skills or curricular domains.

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