LEADING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN EDUCATION

MANAGEMENTUL PROCESULUI DE SCHIMBARE ÎN DOMENIUL EDUCAȚIEI

Dalia HALFON-HEN,
PhD student,
Tiraspol State University, Chisinau

Rezumat: Articolul dat abordează conceptul de schimbare din perspectivă educațională și relevă acele dimensiuni ale sale, care asigură funcționalitatea managerială și didactică. Se stipulează că resursele umane constituie factorul de bază în procesul de realizare a schimbării, de aceea este necesară valorificarea lor, prin diverse activități formative.

Cuvinte-cheie: educație, manager școlar, management, schimbare, proiect, seminare metodice.

The pluralistic and changing society we live in requires lots of changes in the educational system, so that it could provide individuals capable to adjust themselves to the society needs. A traditional school that concentrates in knowledge delivery will not be able to do that, if it has no culture of research, continuous and constant learning involving both teachers and pupils. Thus, a modern school requires changes, a renewed definition of roles and authorities of each of the partners in shaping the educational policy. In this context, school must pay attention to and deal with changes [14], or it will be perceived as irrelevant to its clients' lives.

The concepts of change, initiative and project are the axis upon which the educational activity in a process of change is based. A change requires renunciation, it disturbs an existing meaning at a time of exposure, and application of new goals and processes. The change itself creates an environment of uncertainty and some discomfort. Every change requires taking "risks", in the meanwhile acquiring new knowledge [11]. Sara-

son defines change as replacing permanent behaviour patterns by unfamiliar and new behaviour patterns. In the modern age, change is conceived as a normative process, steady and integral in the system, growth and development being possible only through it rather than laying in abeyance. Educational systems seeking to supply a response to the social demands and adjust themselves to the spirit of times, face the need to change concepts, structures and teaching methods [23]. From reviewing the professional literature dealing with the process of introducing changes into educational systems, there were pointed out two central factors that occlude accepting the desired changes and achieving behaviour changes amongst individuals involved in the renewal: those that relate to individuals manning the system and to organizational limitations of the system.

Every process of change involves objective characteristics, imprinted in the process of change itself, rather than in the character of change, in the field or in the subject, in change agents and its leaders or in the population partici-

pating in it. In order to deal with these difficulties, it is necessary to be aware of the characteristics of change and its implications on partners. Changes are dynamic, with a mechanism of regularity and cyclicality. They move in circles, starting with enthusiasm, energetic activity and creativity. Sometimes a change might halt to offer the opportunity to become aware of the phenomenon. Then it is important to use appropriate techniques in due course. A change takes place at three levels: conscious, emotional and behavioural. The conscious level relates to the learner's personal experience leading to intellectual change; the emotional level leads to a change of values and viewpoints and the behavioural level improves teaching and social skills [21]. Change is a long-term process, with no shortcuts, affecting three dimensions simultaneously: professional, personal and physical. The professional dimension includes knowledge, beliefs, skills, learning and teaching behaviours and organizational willingness to flexibility. The personal dimension relates to the human capital: principal, teachers, pupils, establishment and parents. The physical dimension includes buildings and resources available to the organization.

Many studies point at the princepal as the leader of change processes, the key component of change success [2], [12], [15], [18], [24]. The principal has a decisive position in shaping the school culture and organizational policy, including everything connected with management and control of school atmosphere [8]. A successful education institution, managing to implement, refine, improve and develop changes, is usually lead by a principal with clear pedagogical leadership and educational visions, characterized by commitment to institution goals and values, with personal involvement in the processes of change and with high performance staff. Such a principal acts in cooperation with teachers, promoting their development, and involves parents and the community as partners of the educational process. Opposed to it, difficulties arise in organizations where the principals are reserved or not personally and actively involved in the process of leading the change. Therefore, leadership style of a principal and the level of his involvement in the process are key factors in the success of an institution functioning [12], [13]. Lortie indicates that principals wishing to successfully lead change processes, are required to have very high behaviour and management skills. He identifies several characteristics specific of such principals:

- A person with vision, reach and diverse experience in education;
- A person able to build a good communication system with teachers and the community;
- A person able to deal with resistance to the change [21].

Changes can be successful when being carried out by a professional community, learning the process of change, performing it during studying, cultivating an educational project at a community level, and encouraging collaborative team learning. A learning community alongside with learning skills, invites experiencing in the adjustment of teaching-learning-evaluation at a system level. Thus, the emphasis should be placed upon the development of the human resource as the leader of change [16], [26]. This can be done by achieving community projects involving organizing professional learning communities,

training apprenticeship, direct encounter between teams etc.

What is a community project? A project is a one-time task of a collection of actions that have defined start and ending. The actions must be carried out in an order that has been planned in advance, according to technological and logistical considerations. There are five stages in a project: initiating and starting stage, planning stage, execution stage, inspectional stage and finishing stage. The success of a project in a business field is determined by its functioning, the extent to which the project supplies a good answer to the reason it has been created for. On the other hand, an educational project sets the central goal we wish to achieve, with endless and developing actions and tasks, expressed in the lifestyle of school culture. Studies conducted in educational systems around the world, on the subject of regional, community or national projects, indicate a series of advantages. Projects reinforce the status of single schools, due to their belonging to a group of colleagues, togetherness giving safety to respond to policy and programs, to demand answers from policy makers to the needs arising in the field. They enable mutual thinking with colleagues on educational issues between theory and practice in application in school, encouraging systematic brainstorming, during discussions and interactions between groups, that produce a holistic educational product, thus creating higher obligation to application [3], [7], [20]. In the last decade, different projects have been in operation, their purpose being to generate improvement of all aspects of education.

Professional learning communities are groups of people that share apprehension, a complex of problems or passion for a certain subject, deepens knowledge and expertise to share ideas, to set standards, to build tools and to develop relations with colleagues [9], [25]. The central indexes characterizing the efficiency of an educational organization, that has a learning professional community characterized by a continuous learning, are: mutual vision, values, goals, collaborative work culture searching for challenges and planning new learning opportunities, focusing on reflective practice, experimentation, knowledge systems and acceptance of decisions based on data. Growth of leadership and its cultivation requires: commitment, obligations, research, principles and agreed standards through a collective learning and formulation of meaning. The basic principles of such a community are: building a steady learning framework for a theoretical learning and application at the same time, creating a common language at all levels, accepting educated decisions based on field data, building a mutual vision and more [1], [10].

Training apprenticeship is an essential coefficient to process renewal and change amongst teachers. The purpose of training apprenticeships is to provide knowledge of new skills and approaches, while introducing the apprenticing person with a need to accept change in skills and behaviour. It is important that the training apprenticeship could respond to the needs of teaching employees, could work diligently on absorption of innovations in the dynamic environment and could be positioned

organizationally and normatively to support them. The quality components of a training apprenticeship success are to view the apprenticing people as partners, to create relevance, and to clarify the goal. Practice and actual experience must be included alongside with a theoretical study, enabling the apprenticing person to test his work and to find problems and professional needs in order to be able to ask for a suitable response. A learning whose purpose is understanding, must be mainly a learning on experience basis Lately, a trend has arisen for replacing the use of the words "course" or "training apprenticeship", with the term "learning experience", its use expressing what is really happening during studying [4], [27]. Those actions are adequate for an adult learner, capable of directing himself towards learning, to apply what is relevant for him and produce outputs, pleasure and motivation upon experiencing a success to learn and experience at the same time, and even reach deeper understanding with the activity.

A regional training apprenticeship constitutes a group pressure. According to the "theory of field", in order to understand an individual's behaviour his surrounding forces must be considered. The behaviour of an individual in certain situation is dependent upon factors operating in his environment and relationships. A group is meaningful to an individual in several aspects: feeling of belonging, enhancement of sense of security, identifying with the group. The group is the means for achievement of a goal, accepting a public obligation and creating "group pressure" upon participants in the group activity [6], [17].

A direct encounter between teams. The uniqueness of a regional community seminar, unlike a school seminar, consists in a direct encounter between people from different "fields". This kind of an encounter enriches the experience, cultivates thinking and the practices that support the development of teachers [5], [19], [20].

Finally, it should be underlined that community projects have declared indexes of success. They enhance the visibility of change leading in schools, upgrade lessons and promote learning achievements, they emphasize the importance of professional communities' development, educational leadership, development of innovative pedagogy and up-to-date study program, combination of practice and theory integrating I.T., learning environments, and strategies meant to promote advanced pupils.

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