

OVERCOMING THE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE EXPERIENCED IN A PRIVATE
SCHOOL, THAT AROSE DUE TO A NEED TO REVERSE A
DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I INTRODUCTION.....	3
Research Problem.....	3
Background Information.....	4
Research Questions.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Significance.....	6
Chapter	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Understanding the Culture of the School Community.....	7
Process of Change.....	9
Resistance of Change.....	11
Chapter	
III. METHODOLOGY.....	13
Problem.....	13
Setting.....	15
Subjects.....	16

Data Collection..... 16

Data Analysis..... 16

Chapter

IV. FINDINGS..... 19

Chapter

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 20

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research 20

Recommendations..... 20

REFERENCES..... 22

Chapter I

Introduction

Change is not something that many people accept willingly. The manner in which change is presented will often determine the level of acceptance by the stakeholders. When change is instituted as a result of a leveling off of student enrollment, how does one facilitate acceptance of the change needed to reverse this trend to all the stakeholders? We are going to examine the recent changes made in a non-public school, the reasons for the change, and the reluctance of some to adapt to those changes. As the current faculty had been hired under the previous administration with the expectations of involvement and accountability being minimal, some of the stakeholders resisted the acceptance of the visions and goals of the larger stakeholder team. The challenge was to change the school culture, sustain that change and allow all the stakeholders to embrace that change.

Research Problem

In the non-public school sector of education, the viability and sustainability of the school are dependent upon enrollment, as the school finances are primarily tuition driven. An enrollment trend that is flat or decreasing is a cause for concern. After the causes of these trends are examined, a plan for change needs to be implemented. Overcoming resistance to planned change is essential to the sustainability of the school. Our research problem is to examine and overcome the resistance to change experienced in a private school, which arose due to a need to reverse a decline in enrollment over a period of years.

Background Information

As the population changes on Long Island, maintaining or increasing enrollment becomes problematic. A 32,000 person drop in the population of school age children is expected between the years 2010 and 2015 (Hughes, 2010). Lack of an increase in enrollment at School A has forced the pastor, who is the parish chief executive officer (CEO), to remove several members of the administrative team and replace them with a new team including the principal and two assistant principals.

To combat the major hurdle of stagnant enrollment, with some years showing a decrease, the first step of the new team was to evaluate the changes necessary. A plan was outlined and presented to the pastor including changes as minor as adding three minutes to each period to major physical updates within the campus facilities.

There was a sense of urgency upon arrival of the new team. A priority was to examine the school culture to determine what internal steps could be taken to avoid the continuing student enrollment recruitment and retention issue. All but one of the new members of the administrative team had been a member of the school community for several years prior to the change and therefore was quite familiar with the present culture and the changes necessary.

Research Questions

The following research questions have guided the analysis of School A:

- 1.) How does understanding the culture of a school community help one to analyze changes necessary?
- 2.) How can better understanding the process of change guide planned change?

3.) How can the resistance to change be overcome?

Definition of Terms

Academic Programs: A program's mission, purpose or collective expression of what is important for students to learn (Tommbbs and Tierney, 1993).

Achievement Goals: An expected outcome of success through data-driven collaboration, plus ongoing assessment in a school system which results in effective innovations and strategies. (Schmoker, 2001).

Administration: School A considers the administrative team to consist of the principal, three assistant principals and six department chairpersons

Culture: Schein defines culture as a set of values, beliefs, assumptions, principals, myths, legends, and norms that define how one makes decisions. Schein believes that culture defines how people think (Schein, 1992).

Non-public School: Any non profit elementary or secondary school in the State of N.Y., other than a public school (NY Consolidated Law Service, 2002).

Private School: A school as defined that is owned or operated by a private person, firm, association, organization, or corporation rather than a public agency (California Department of Education, www.cde.ca.gov, 2010).

Stakeholder: "The term 'stakeholder' is intended to act as an umbrella for an increasingly diverse and extensive array of concepts whose basis and focus is thickening relationships between states and their populations in various ways that seek to go beyond the relationship of formal political citizenship (Popkewitz, p.123, 2009)."

Significance

This study helps to understand the importance of assessing a school's culture in creating successful planned school change. In addition, understanding the process whereby change is implemented and accepted helps to overcome the resistance to that change. By applying the research to School A, it is hoped that a plan for positive school change will be met with better acceptance.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Understanding the Culture of a School Community

Schein defines culture as a set of values, beliefs, assumptions, principals, myths, legends and norms that define how one makes decisions. Schein believes that culture defines how people think (Schein, 1992). Culture is an important part of any institution. When change is introduced to a system, the “Death and Mourning” stage takes place for the former rituals and ceremonies that used to exist (Smith, 1992). If the mourning stage for these former rituals is underestimated and not taken seriously, resentment towards those who introduced the change might occur (class notes, Fasano, 2009).

Schein points out that in order to more effectively implement change one needs to understand the culture of an organization. The culture of an organization can be understood in terms of artifacts, assumptions and beliefs that are observed in the organization (Schein, 2009). The martrix below helps to clarify what artifacts, assumptions and beliefs are.

Artifacts: Visible organizational structures and processes that enable us to better understand organizational culture.	Blackboard, Trophies, Bells, Bulletin Boards, Interactive White Boards, Lockers, Locks, Alarms, Gates etc.
Basic Assumptions: Cultural themes that an organization shares on such a basic level that they drop out of awareness.	Students can learn. Students will steal things if not watched. Teachers are lazy. Standardized exams are ineffective.
Values & Beliefs: Unconscious, taken for granted, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings visible in organizational structures and processes.	If we work together we will accomplish more things than if we work alone. Students can tell if you really care about them.

Figure 1. A matrix of definitions and general examples that reflect organizational theory based upon Edgar Schein (2009).

According to Carlson, understanding culture is essential to creating change in any institution (class notes, Fasano, 2009). Culture is closely related to emotions and when change affects a culture, emotional reactions should be expected (Schein, 1992). When one tries to make changes in a community without first understanding the culture, the stakeholders involved tend not to subscribe to the change being instilled, and the change therefore is never truly accepted into the community (class notes, Fasano, 2009).

Change can proceed from the top down or the bottom up. Successfully introducing change to an organization occurs two ways. First, members of the former organization are discarded and replaced with new members who will believe in the change being introduced. Secondly, change occurs by preserving the original members of the organization and changing their beliefs to meet the recommended change (class notes, Dunlop, 2010).

The final stage of change is often acceptance. The level of acceptance to a particular change is closely related to the culture of the organization. If members of an organization do not subscribe to the change being introduced, the change will not be successful (class notes, Fasano, 2009).

Process of Change

Understanding the culture of a school is the formative knowledge that one needs in order to approach planned change in an effective manner. It is the culture of a school that influences all individually guided education. School culture can essentially be categorized into one of three types: technical, illusory or constructivist (Popkewitz, Tabachnick and Wehlage, 1980). One must know where one is in order to know where one is going. Likewise, planned change is a two step process. The first step is to discover which culture the school operates. The next step is to determine the process whereby the culture can be raised to the constructivist culture.

"The Popkewitz Model"

Authors: Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage

Critical Incident	Significance	Culture	Criteria
Incident observed in the school environment	What does this mean to the observer?	Type of Culture: Technical, Illusory, Constructivist	Things needed to work on to become constructivist

Figure 2. A matrix of definitions and general examples that reflect organizational theory based upon Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1980).

This is not an easy process. In order to understand the school culture, three questions must be answered: what does it mean to know; what does it mean to work; and what is the nature of authority (Popkewitz, et al., 1980). This path of discovery requires that many and varied

incidents in the school be analyzed for their significance to the school community. It is through this process that one can discover the true nature of the school culture.

In School A we will see that an illusory school culture existed and the planned changed was to create a more constructivist culture. This can be seen in incidents related to the academic program, the extracurricular program, scheduling, facilities and communication.

In order for real change to occur in School A, it must be sustainable. Sustainable change has learning at its core. There are seven main principals of sustainable leadership: depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conservation (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). These seven principals are not chronological and would be best to be worked on simultaneously. Two areas of apparent concern for School A surround depth and length. In order for the changes that the new administration intends for the school to take hold, the change must have a deep investment in quality learning. This learning is not just learning for standardized testing, but learning in order to come to know and understand the meaning in the material. In addition, these changes need to be embraced on their own merit, because they are good for the school. They cannot simply be embraced due to the charisma of the leader. There needs to be long term change that is structured in such a manner that it outlasts individuals and becomes part of the school culture (Hargreaves and Fink).

The process of change is not always a straight path. Obstacles will be encountered. Setbacks will befall it. Perhaps School A could learn a lesson from the experiences of change in a school system in Patterson, N.J. The process of change instituted there caused many to go through a stage of death and mourning. The change in ritual and ceremony caused much anxiety and fear to arise among the stakeholders (Smith, 1993). In the process of change, the feelings of the stakeholders must be considered for it to be effective and lasting.

Resistance to Change

Sustainable leadership is needed for deep-rooted change to occur. To achieve this type of change, teachers must be seen as a resource. Veteran teachers have seen many administrative changes during their career. Their wisdom is often overlooked or dismissed. This creates a resistance to change within a school. Abrahamson describes the *Repetitive Change Syndrome*. Change that incorporates downsizing and restructuring often leads to a loss of successful traditions. It wears down teachers and creates resistance (Hargreaves, 2006). Instead, teachers should be viewed as a renewable resource. While younger teachers can bring enthusiasm and energy, it must be combined with the valuable experiences of veteran teachers.

Sustainable leadership respects the past and builds upon its successes. Senior members of a school are nostalgic and resistant to change. But, they are also a source of wisdom that should be tapped. As leaders begin to implement change within a building, they must value what has worked and redefine what has not. Eric Abrahamson describes two views of change. *Creative Destruction* occurs when leaders obliterate the past leading to increased negativity. On the other hand, *Creative Recombination* reuses the successes of the past. Staff members are valued and sustainable change can occur (Hargreaves, 2006).

Many implementing change, several types of *organization forgetting* occur which have a negative impact on a school. First, dissipation occurs when a school acquires new knowledge but it does not stick. For new knowledge to stick, it must be connected to prior knowledge. Secondly, degradation occurs when high turnover results in a loss of well established knowledge. The third type is organized abandonment where practices that do not produce results are eliminated. When these practices are identified, they need to be stopped. Then, effective

activities must be continued and started. Lastly, poor practices and bad habits must be purged (Hargreaves, 2006).

Chapter III

Methodology

Problem

The financial sustainability of a private school is primarily driven by enrollment and tuition. A flattening and eventual decrease in enrollment in School A was a cause of great concern for the pastor, who functions as the chief executive officer. Examination of School A had revealed a series of issues which have created a culture that is not conducive to attracting new students. These issues surrounded the facility, the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and faculty performance. The new administration has embarked upon a series of planned changes which were initially met with resistance. After causes of these trends are examined, a plan for change needs to be implemented. Overcoming resistance to planned change is essential to the sustainability of the school. Our research problem is to examine and overcome the resistance to change experienced in a private school, which arose due to a need to reverse a decline in enrollment over a period of years.

Several problems were observed. The first problem included the academic program and achievement goals. Although the school is a college preparatory high school, the current climate did not allow students to achieve their personal best academically. Although the students were mandated to meet the requirements to receive a New York State Regents Diploma, neither the incentive nor the drive was evident to push them towards the Advanced Regents Diploma. The courses offered did not have a comprehensive curriculum, preventing acceptable achievement on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

Scheduling within the school allowed for far too many study halls which were unstructured and meaningless.

Another problem was the ineffectiveness of the extracurricular activities program. The current program did not allow sufficient time for students to participate in clubs or activities. In addition, the clubs were not challenging or age appropriate. Over the years this program was truncated to the extent that it was barely existent. Clubs and activities were offered for fifteen minutes in the morning before classes started, preventing most students from attending as they were mostly bussed from surrounding school districts.

The lack of accountability and ownership on the parts of both the faculty and student body was evident in the halls and in the classrooms. The physical plant was deteriorating due to neglect by the facilities manager for a period of many years. As a result, the overall cleanliness was poor. The classrooms were undecorated and evidence of the students' work was absent throughout the halls and classrooms.

A mentoring program was not in place for the newer teachers, many of whom lacked professionalism on many levels. The same complacent attitude was noted by the student body. Supervisory responsibilities in the classrooms and hallways during the change of classes were performed only when assigned. There was no initiative to take a leadership role with regards to student accountability. Volunteerism was nonexistence. Socially, there was a division among the faculty due to a level of immaturity of several of them. This had led to a lack of camaraderie.

The Guidance Department did not function properly as they did not give the students the help that they needed socially or academically. There weren't any programs or orientation for the freshmen to assist in the adjustment process. Supervision of students was lacking after

school and in the early morning hours. Additionally, hallways and bathrooms were unmonitored all day which became problematic with cell phones and other types of technology.

Communication between administration and faculty, including department chairpersons, was minimal. Occasional department chair meetings were held for 15-20 minutes before school, once every other month. Faculty meetings were on the calendar three times for the year. There was no other forum for dialogue between faculty and administration.

Setting

A private religious secondary school, serving grades nine through twelve, which we have called School A, on the north shore of Nassau County with 415 students, is the setting of our study. The student population is mostly white and the enrollment is declining. The administration of the school consists of a principal, three assistant principals and a director of guidance. The school is governed by the local parish and the pastor serves as the employer and chief executive officer. The principal serves as the chief educational officer and day to day supervisor of the other administrators, faculty and staff. In September 2007 the enrollment was 450. In September 2010 the enrollment had decreased to 415. On Long Island the expected population is projected to be constant over the next five years. In addition, there is expected to be a 6% decrease in the student age population. Over the next five years, the Hispanic population is expected to rise 13%. Clearly, there will be a decline in white students, which is the current student ethnicity. While the student population decreases, the 65+ population will increase 12%. With a large increase in the retirement age, there will be concern over income available for school funding (Hughes, 2010).

Subjects

The subjects of our study include: the director of guidance, the faculty and the support staff.

Data Collection

The data for our study were collected through three main avenues:

- 1) Enrollment, guidance, extra-curricular activities and scheduling data were collected from the files at School A.
- 2) The condition of the facilities and the artifacts in the hallways were noted through the process of walk through observations.
- 3) The attitudes of the subjects were discovered through a process of qualitative discussion, observation and interviews.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the model created by Popkewitz, Tabachnick and Wehlage to analyze the school culture, we reviewed particular incidents reported by stakeholders. We were then able to ask the stakeholders the significance of each incident in relation to the current culture. Reviewing this as a baseline, we developed criteria for developing a constructivist school culture. The matrix below was created by asking key school stakeholders what incidents they have witnessed as significant in defining school culture and what significance they saw in each incident.

Incidents	Significance	Culture	Criteria
Building deteriorations due to neglect in maintenance	Ineffective facilities manager; poor administrative priorities	Technical	Address immediate concerns; Create maintenance plan
Ineffective staff	Low student achievement; low staff professionalism; staff resistance to criticism	Illusory	Initiate mentoring program; create professional development plan; revise teacher evaluation process; encourage peer observations
Hallway disturbances	Staff focused only on own classrooms	Illusory	Require staff to supervise halls; keep doors open
Lack of staff turnout at non-mandated student events	Poor teacher volunteerism; students unsupported by teachers	Illusory	Staff/Student Dinner; Student/Faculty Basketball game; School Spirit Friday
Undecorated classrooms and hallways	Students unmotivated; little connection to school	Technical	Display student work and achievements resulting in motivation and school pride
Low student participation in extra-curricular activities	Students uninvolved in school life; feelings of disconnect	Technical	Change meeting times from mornings to afternoons to increase participation
Limited availability of Guidance Counselors; low application rate to colleges	Little student support from the Guidance Department	Technical	Increase support services; increase senior college application rate; increase counselor availability
No 9 th grade orientation	No new student support	Technical	Initiate new student orientation
Rules in faculty handbook ignored	Poor communication between faculty and administration; administration unhappy with teacher performance	Illusory	Conduct monthly department meetings to increase communication; utilize faculty meetings to address issues and offer professional development

Figure 3. A matrix of incidents observed in School A, the significance reported by school personnel and the school culture it reflects based upon Popkewitz, Tabachnick and Wehlage

Utilizing the model of Schein to examine artifacts, assumptions and beliefs we examined examples in School A in order to better understand the school culture. The artifacts facilitated the process of understanding assumptions in the school culture. Examination of both of these areas enabled us to understand the beliefs in a school culture.

Artifacts	Broken glass on stairway landings. Dirty bathrooms. Gum under desks. Disturbances in hallway. Empathetic faculty and staff. Absence of supervision of students. No freshman orientation. No faculty mentoring. Limited guidance sections.
Basic Assumptions	Teachers do not need to act as professionals. Students do not need to be held accountable. Building appearance does not affect student performance.
Values & Beliefs	Teaching is a job not a vocation. Students cannot be interested in learning. Students are not capable of being challenged. Students are responsible for their own success.

Figure 4. A matrix of artifacts, assumptions and beliefs observed in School A based upon Schein (2009)

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to examine the resistance to planned change experienced in a private school, which arose due to a need to reverse a decline in enrollment over a period of years. The current administration has only been in place for less than two years. Due to this limited timeline horizon, the findings should be taken as a preliminary reflection on the study. Our analysis confirms a number of directives from the Popkewitz, Tabachnick and Wehlage model.

The data collection procedures included an observation of various incidents within the school under the previous administration, with a subsequent determination of the significance of these incidents on the school culture. As a result of this process, it was determined that School A initially had both a technical and illusory school culture (Popkewitz, et al., 1980). After reviewing the planned changes initiated by the current administration, we found that these changes fit the criteria for moving toward a constructivist school culture.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

As a member of the administrative team for two years, the new principal was able to thoroughly understand the culture and the change needed to create a constructivist environment. Examining the incidents led to an overhaul of the building maintenance, display of student artwork throughout the buildings, presence of faculty throughout the halls, and an overall improved school community. It would be recommended that the next researchers who study School A look at the frequency and selection of electives and curriculum to determine if they are enhancing the academic program in School A. We would also recommend that the frequency of professional development be reviewed. Finally, we would recommend an analysis of the current amount of time allotted to grade level meetings and the corresponding effect on student performance.

Recommendations

- Mandate a 4th year of Science and Math for all students (thereby reducing number of study halls)
- Add three minutes to each period in order that provide more instructional time for the students
- Incorporate a freshmen study skills and PSAT/SAT skills class
- Appoint new department chairs to eliminate the sense of “business as usual”
- Assign Department chairs and conduct professional development in teacher supervision in order to allow chairs to observe new teachers both informally and formally three times during the school year

- Draft faculty contracts that include committees and clubs to be moderated and chaperoning duties, in addition to the specific classes that will be taught
- Create small committees to conduct new teacher mentoring meetings bimonthly
- Offer a two day freshmen orientation camp to familiarize them with faculty and classmates making the adjustment to high school easier
- Replace the full-time teaching responsibilities of a male and female dean with 3/5 teaching responsibility
- Revise of the faculty dress code to be more professional
- Assign one office staff member to be present from 7:30 A.M. to accommodate students arriving early
- Assign homeroom teachers the responsibility for collecting all paperwork which must be returned to the main office
- Assign Guidance department staff to administer midterm and final exams for all students who hold an IEP
- Revise and improve the proctoring procedures
- Schedule class meetings once a month during homeroom
- Increase official office hours from 7:30 A.M. – 3:30 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M
- Schedule faculty members to monitor the hallways as a scheduled duty period
- Change location of student lockers in order to keep more control in the hallways
- Distribute to all students a student planner which contains a calendar and rules
- Establish a strategic planning committee and invite professional in to train the committee in planning methodologies
- Establish, discuss and practice lockdown and fire drill procedures at least once during the school year
- Schedule more frequent and comprehensive chairperson's meetings
- Review and revise student dress code including input from faculty members and students alike
- Increase the selection of club activities to be held after school

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