

## TEACHERS' COMMITMENT AS A PRECONDITION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

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In the context of implementation of new reforms and strategies in the education system researchers agree that students will achieve the best and most effective outcome when teachers work together, learn together, and suggest improvements and changes to ensure constant advancements in teaching. Teams have a central role in planning, coordinating and implementing innovative study methods suited to student requirements, and in turning schools into learning organizations. Organizational theories suggest that teams are essential for developing more productive organizations.

**Keywords:** *advancements in teaching, learn together, organizational commitment, empowerment, satisfaction, power and control relationships, authority, accountability.*

### ANGAJAMENTUL PROFESORILOR – PRECONDIȚIE A PROGRESERILOR STUDENȚILOR

În contextul implementării noilor reforme și strategii în sistemul de învățământ cercetătorii consideră că elevii vor realiza cel mai bun și cel mai eficient rezultat atunci când profesorii vor lucra împreună, vor învăța împreună, și sugerează îmbunătățiri și modificări pentru a asigura progrese constante în procesul de predare. Echipele au un rol central în planificarea, coordonarea și punerea în aplicare a metodelor de învățământ inovatoare, adaptate la cerințele studenților, și în transformarea școlilor în organizații de învățare. Teoriile organizaționale sugerează că echipele sunt esențiale pentru dezvoltarea mai productivă a organizațiilor.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *progrese în predare, învățarea împreună, angajament organizațional, abilitare, satisfacție, relații de putere și de control, autoritate, responsabilitate.*

### Introduction

When the education system is implementing new reforms and strategies with the aim of improving school effectiveness in general, and transforming teaching into a profession in particular, researchers agree that students will achieve the best and most effective outcome when teachers work together, learn together, and suggest improvements and changes to ensure constant advancements in teaching (Cole, 1993) [9].

Teams have a central role in planning, coordinating and implementing innovative study methods suited to student requirements, and in turning schools into learning organizations. Organizational theories suggest that teams are essential for developing more productive organizations (Senge, 1990) [27].

In accordance with the model and definitions detailed above, organizational commitment clearly has important implications for both the employee and the organization. Therefore, organizations which wish to keep and nurture their employees through organizational commitment must also examine the type of commitment they are instilling in their workers, due to the implications of the size of the commitment on organizational products (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993) [19].

Employees with high effective commitment – as opposed to employees with a high business or normative commitment (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 1995) – should be in high demand by the organizations [10]. The importance of effective commitment lies, as already mentioned, in its causing the employee to be emotionally involved in the organization and significantly identifies him with it. The employee who is effectively committed to the organization does not frequently leave, or absent himself from, his place of work, and demonstrates both low levels of pressure and good performance. He regularly helps his friends in the organization, as well as the organization itself, in achieving their goals.

### Empowerment

The teacher's sense of commitment is influenced by his feeling of identification and personal belonging to the organization, as well as his commitment to it, but is affected to a great extent by the way he views his status as a teacher.

In other words, it would seem a teacher's functioning is affected not only by his commitment to the organization and profession, but also by his sense of empowerment as a teacher. Teacher empowerment is defined as "the process in which the teacher develops ability to take responsibility and initiative for his professional growth and problem solving" (Short, Greer & Melvin, 1994) [28].

Conger and Kanungo (1988) [11] discuss organizational approaches and define empowerment as “a process in which the organization members’ sense of self-efficacy is increased, by identifying the conditions which encourage a sense of helplessness, and removing them with formal and informal methods.” They note three reasons why various managerial approaches discuss empowerment:

- Empowerment is considered a primary component in achieving managerial and organizational effectively (McClelland, 1975 [18]; Bennis & Nanus, 1985 [7]).
- Analysis of the power and control relationships within organizations demonstrates that the total creative and effective power in an organization grows as a result of managers sharing their power with subordinates (Kanter, 1979) [17].
- Experience with team development in organizations demonstrates that empowerment techniques play an important role in staff development and conservation (Nielsen, 1986) [23].

We add an additional ethical-moral reason for the organizational empowerment process, being a directed process with the goal of developing and enabling the organization’s members to realize their individual potential and growth, by conferring power. When the principal shares his power with his subordinates, he offers them new and varied experiences within a system that has positions with flexible and developing limits. Being given power by the principal allows the delegated person to discover his wide range of strengths, which he can develop and amass. The power discovered by the subordinate is personal, and once he has uncovered it, the principal or organization cannot limit it or take it back. During the learning and practice, the subordinate acquires thinking abilities, critical thinking and judgment, and develops realistic self-esteem. The process allows realization of individual qualities, a sense of belonging and ownership, and faith in self-efficacy and self-control.

Another consequence of empowerment is the change in the subordinate’s attitude toward authority. Their attitude towards authoritative figures is frequently based on the basic beliefs and needs of dependency and conservation. Since the authoritative figure “has authority”, the subordinates trust in the figure and allow it to “arrange their lives” (Miller, 1991) [20]. Whether this “arrangement” with the authoritative figure allows the subordinates to achieve their needs, or not, such a relationship harms their ability to be, do, be concerned for themselves and be capable. The change in the perspective of self-efficacy resulting from accepting authority and experiencing the use of power and authority leads to a change in this basic belief regarding authority. The relationship with the authoritative figure in the organization becomes less dependent, more rational and more critical.

The empowerment process is organizational and does not focus solely on the subordinates. As the subordinates change their attitude towards authority, the process can also change their understanding of authority, and, therefore, in the way principals use their power: the change is from using power due to “having authority” to using power due to “being authority” (Fromm, 1976) [13].

*Having authority* is based on power, and serves the principal so as to utilize the person on which it is used. This is an irrational and obstructive perspective of authority, and can be seen in its most extreme form in the relationship between a master and his slave. The master wishes to make the greatest possible use of the slave, and the more he gains from him, the more satisfied he is. When the master uses his authority to exploit someone, the distance between him and his slave grows over time. However, *being authority* is a rational understanding of authority based on efficacy, and helps the person who was relied upon to grow. We can see an expression of such a perspective in the ideal relationship between a teacher and student. The teacher and student have shared interests: the more the student studies, the more he resembles the teacher, leading to the gap between them gradually closing.

*During the empowerment process, the principals, who must struggle with a greater variety of meanings of their authority, experience greater psychological growth, and can change their attitude towards the authority they possess. As a result, empowering subordinates and principals contributes to an increase in organizational strength and a change in its essence. The power of the organization is no longer limited to the strength of those with formal positions of authority, since a larger part of the varied potential strength of all its members is expressed. The individual empowerment given to the teacher by the principal is not enough – there is a need for the teacher’s feeling of self-efficacy together with its empowerment, reinforcement and intensification.*

#### **A sense of efficacy and the link with student achievements**

Many studies have proved the link between teachers’ sense of efficacy, their teaching, and the individual differences in their effectiveness (Armor et al., 1976 [2]; Allinder, 1994 [3]).

Within the task, we can divide the studies into the following categories (Raudenbush et al., 1992 [24]; Jablonski, 1995 [15]): the link with student achievements; dealing with students with difficulties as against good students; the material which the teacher is expected to teach; teaching methods and particularly cooperative teaching and the ability to use computers in teaching; willingness to adopt innovative methods; class size, and the influence of intervention programs and professional learning.

The initial studies during the latter half of the 1970s were primarily interested in examining the link between efficacy and student achievements. Berman & McLaughlin (1977) discovered that teachers' sense of efficacy is connected with an improvement in student performance: the greater the sense of self-efficacy, the better the students' scholastic achievements [8].

Armor et al. (1976) [2] evaluated the efficiency of a Los Angeles curriculum for learning to read and reported that the greater the teacher's sense of efficacy, the higher the reading scores for his students. Ashton & Webb (1983) [4] found a clear link between the teacher's sense of efficacy and the students' achievements in mathematics and language. They discovered that teachers with a great sense of efficacy set high academic standards, exuded confidence, created a climate of acceptance, paid attention to students' special needs, and demonstrated clearer academic direction. Anderson, Green & Loewen (1988) examined the connection between the feelings of efficacy of teachers and students, thinking skills and student achievements of Canadian teachers in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, with 584 students completing questionnaires at the beginning of the school year. Their findings demonstrate that teachers' sense of self-efficacy at the beginning of the year particularly affect student achievements in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade [5].

In a study published by Muijs (2009) [21], he wished to reinforce the findings regarding the link between the teacher's feeling of self-efficacy and his students' scholastic achievements. The study was conducted in Belgium among elementary school students, with control preserved for variables such as the teacher's gender, commitment to the school, parental socioeconomic status, and teaching experience. The results showed that the teacher's feeling of self-efficacy in the scholastic field and academic achievements are good mutual predictors, but self-esteem is not a strong predictor of achievements. Researchers (Ashton & Webb, 1983 [4]; Moore, 1992 [22]; Ross, 1995 [25]) found a link between a general sense of efficacy for teaching and student achievements in mathematics, and between a sense of self-efficacy and a general sense of efficacy.

Ross (1995) [25] notes in this context that a sense of self-efficacy is connected with student language achievement, such as reading, humanities, and social sciences, while a general sense of efficacy is connected with mathematics. Ross explains that teachers believe mathematical ability is an inborn talent, while they see language as a learned ability. Therefore, they believe the teacher has individual ability to teach the student for languages, while they feel that they have less influence in mathematics. Ross claims that the fact that the researchers did not distinguish between a general and individual sense of efficacy in their studies, led to contradictory findings in this field.

One of the interesting issues examined in the field of the task is how teachers grapple with children who have difficulties in their studies, and how this struggle affects their efficacy level. Gibson & Dembo (1984) discovered that teachers with a low sense of efficacy quickly despair when their students do not reach the required standards, and criticize them for their failure [12]. Allinder (1995) [3], who examined 19 special education teachers, found that teachers with a high sense of efficacy (personal and general) set higher level targets for their students. He also discovered that teachers with a high sense of efficacy set more challenging goals for both themselves and their students, take responsibility for their students' achievements, and persist when they encounter difficulties.

Ross (1995) [25], who analyzed 88 studies examining the teachers themselves as learning teacher efficacy, notes that teachers with a high sense of efficacy take more responsibility for their students' successes and failures, and teachers' sense of efficacy increases when they work with students who are obedient and have good study capabilities. Teachers who believe that student learning can be affected by effective teaching, and who have confidence in their own teaching ability, will persevere longer in their attempts to achieve better scholastic results in class, and demonstrate different forms of feedback, to teachers with low expectations of their own ability to affect their students' learning.

Miller (1991) [20] claimed that teachers who are effective for students with difficulties will be effective for all the other students. Soodak and Podell (1993) presented the case of a student with learning and/or behavioral problems to 192 teachers in regular and special education [29]. The teachers were asked to give their

opinion of where to put him: in a regular or special education setting? It became clear that educators in both regular and special education with a high individual and general sense of efficacy tended to place the child in a regular class. Teachers with a high sense of efficacy pay more attention to their students' needs and bring about a change in how the students perceive their study capabilities (Doda, 1983 [4]) – the students begin to believe in their ability to progress, they have a stronger desire to connect with their teacher, and all this directly affects their scholastic achievements (Soodak et al., [29]; Ashton et al. [4]).

Another important topic is the **connection between the sense of efficacy and the teacher's willingness to adopt innovations and changes in his work.**

Imants & Tillema (1995) [16] found that teachers with a high sense of efficacy are open to experiments, innovations and formal opportunities, and will also persevere longer when trying out new teaching methods and tools for solving classroom problems. However, those with a low sense of efficacy will avoid new ideas, outlooks and teaching methods which they studied formally or informally.

Other researchers (Raudenbush, Rowen & Cheong, 1992) claimed that the sense of professional efficacy can create "an integrative ability" which encourages teachers to create new teaching strategies, and increases their willingness to grapple with difficult teaching situations [24].

In a study examining science teachers, Schriver (1993) found that professional knowledge for developing an appropriate curriculum is the best predictor for teachers' sense of efficacy in both junior high and high schools [26]. Ross (1995) emphasized the importance of class management skills as significant for a sense of efficacy [25].

### **Teacher satisfaction**

There are many definitions of teacher job satisfaction. One is a teacher's positive feeling towards his work. The result is that teachers wish to remain in their profession, and are pleased with both their workplace and position (Bar-Haim, 1988 [6]).

One of the ways of measuring teacher satisfaction level is examining their reactions to their working conditions. When each teacher reacts differently to his colleagues regarding his working conditions, meaning it depends on his subjective interpretation of the existing conditions and the objective differences which lead to a good relationship with the principal: the entire time content and time spent on activities and work in the school; accessibility to the place of work; physical conditions, equipment and achievements at work – these are factors which greatly influence teacher job satisfaction levels (Hovav, 2003 [14] and others).

Other researchers measure satisfaction through the level of emotional connection to the workplace. Meaning, the employee feels an emotional and personal bond to his place of work, including all his day-to-day challenges and experiences, and his opinion regarding the type of work within the institution, as well as his opinion regarding how the employee views the compensation he receives from the institution itself. We can note, that when both sides – the employee and the institution – positively value each other, it will probably benefit them both – the employee feels he belongs at his workplace, meaning his contribution, satisfaction level and accountability will increase, and the workplace will benefit from high quality output (Bar-Haim, 1988 [6]; Hovav, 2003 [14]).

Most of the studies of teacher job satisfaction indicated that satisfaction leads to positive and responsible behavior at work, such as: job productivity, taking responsibility, a lack of being late or absences etc. Conversely, a lack of job satisfaction affects intentions to leave, a tendency to lateness and absences, and a reduction in job motivation and accountability (Bar-Haim, 1988 [6]; Hovav, 2003 [14]).

### **Accountability: Expanding the concept of managerial accountability**

The principal has the *authority* to make decisions. This is the official and legitimate authority anchored in his position. Alongside this authority, comes the principal's formal *responsibility* to realize the organizational targets. We might think that the principal's authority overlaps with his responsibility, but there are several reasons why such overlap is unrealistic, both because the principal's authority is not broad enough, and also since he has great and ever-increasing responsibility:

Firstly, it is important to understand that a human organization functioning in a human environment, always operates at a certain level of uncertainty, which does not allow authority commensurate with the responsibility: we could perhaps define areas which are clearly the responsibility of one principal and others which are not within his jurisdiction, but the responsibility of a different principal. However, no organization can predict or plan every development in advance, and, therefore, there will always be "gray" areas

remaining between the two, the responsibility for which being unclear, and may be smaller or greater than the authority given for them (Adizes, 1991) [1].

Another reason for the gap between the authority given to the principal and the responsibility demanded of him, is the reduction in the "magic" which used to surround authoritative figures. Social resistance movements and information available through mass media have led to principals being regarded as more "human", with people seeing them as having negative traits such as being "egocentrics" or even "destructive" or "corrupt". Many subordinates are no longer willing to blindly obey authoritative figures, but see them as having specific specialist "earthly" authority, which is dependent on the principal's achievements and talents (Nielsen, 1986) [23]. The decline in authority attributed to principals directly leads to a decline in the principals' authority to realize their responsibility.

Similarly, while the effectiveness of the principals' authority is gradually being reduced, the expectations for principals' responsibility are becoming broader and broader: in addition to formal responsibility, within a modern organization the principal's commitment to the organization and its values continually increases, as does the need to be *accountable* for his actions and that of the organization. The ever-increasing use of the term *accountability* is intended to describe this broad responsibility. Within the organization itself, principals must meet more complex expectations of the subordinates regarding their workplace and nature of their work, and the expectations of the organization owners who can measure their performance more accurately. Outside the organization, the principals must take things into consideration and be capable of accounting for how his organization's activities conform to central social principles, norms and even laws such as laws concerning equal opportunities, health and hygiene, and ecology.

As a result, many principals find themselves today between the "rock" of ever-increasing accountability and the "hard place" of ever-shrinking formal authority.

Nielsen (1986) [23] examines two paths the principal can adopt so as to reduce this gap. One – to try and amass more and more power, expand his authority and sources of authority so as to increase his ability to control the complex environment in which he operates. The second way he can reduce the gap between authority and accountability is by sharing his authority with the employees under him: using a process in which the principal delegates some of his authority and power to his subordinates, he contributes to their sense of empowerment and self-efficacy, and they become more accountable. The subordinates willingly share the principal's areas of authority and transfer their joint power upwards, so as to help him realize his responsibility for the good of the entire organization. As a result, the principal's strength increases, and the organization as a whole has increased ability to realize all its aspects of responsibility.

Expanding the managerial responsibility and distribution of authority tangibly affects the school climate which the principal transfers and delegates to the teachers, and the teachers to the students, parents and the surrounding community.

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