

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP FORMATION AND ITS APPLICATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERACTION AND BALANCE THEORIES

P. A. Olofu

Department of Educational Management,
University of Abuja, Abuja

N. O. Kanu

Department of Educational Administration and Planning,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

K. M. Ugochigborogu

Department of Educational Administration and Planning,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Abstract

Managing the day to day affairs of education is usually a cumbersome process; as often times some school administrators have slim or thin knowledge of the dynamics of group formation. Hence, the extent to which educational administrators administer the system more efficiently and effectively lies greatly on their knowledge and application of the dynamics of group formation. The thrust of this paper therefore critically examined interaction and balance theories of group formation with more emphasis on the borrowables or implications of the theories to educational administrators. The knowledge of interaction and balance theories of group formation would help school administrators to ensure a clearly and distinctive definition and delineation of the responsibilities of employees in the system. It would also help them to maintain and sustain a healthy work environment which promotes positive interactions and sentiments among staff members; thereby promoting effective and efficient realization of the system's predetermined aims and objectives.

Key Words: Group Formation, Interaction Theory and Educational Administration

Introduction

Group formation is the process in which a number of individuals with common purpose come together interacting with each other with respect to: common motives and goals, an accepted division of labor, established status relationships, accepted norms and values with reference to matters relevant to the group as well as development of accepted sanctions-praise and punishment (Muzafer and Sherif, 2010). Forsyth (2010) in his opinion submits that when a group is formed, its component varies greatly, including verbal or non-verbal communication, social loafing, networking, forming bonds, etc. Groups that are usually formed vary in sizes, functions, purpose and life span. In a group, there is the tendency for interdependence or objective similarity. The process of group formation takes time as well as skills and a successful and sustainable group is hard to form. As such, every formal work environment; the school system inclusive encompasses of a group of people with different needs and interests who have come together to work towards realizing educational goals.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

P. A. Olofu, Department of Educational Management, University of Abuja, Abuja
E-mail: paulagbade@gmail.com

Therefore, the need for school administrators to understand the way and manner in which groups are usually formed and the principles as well as the values which they are predicated on is very necessary; as this can help administrators shape interventions that would promote or enable a team to become high performing (Platow, Grace and Smithson, 2011). Thus, the central focus of this work is not to merely x-ray interaction and balance theories of group formation but more emphasis is laid on the implications and application of the theories to the school system and other work environment.

Several scholars over the years have come up with different school of thoughts with a view to explicitly explaining the dynamics of group formation. Thus, this work principally examined two theories of group formation such as-Homan's interaction theory and balance theory

Homan's Interaction Theory

As the name implies, Homan's interaction theory was postulated by George Homans in 1951. Homan's theory explains the basic rationale underlying group formation. It is built or based on three fundamental elements such as: activities, interaction and sentiments. In fact, the three basic elements are directly related to each other.

The first element (activities) refers to the assigned tasks to which group members are to carry out. According to the theorist, the more activities people share, the more will their interactions be and the stronger will be their shared activities and sentiments. And the more sentiments persons have for one another, the more will be their shared activities and interactions. According to Pragya (2010), members of a group or organization do share activities and interact with one another not just because of physical proximity but also to accomplish the predetermined aims and objectives the group.

Interaction which the second element takes place when any person's activity is influenced by the activity of another person. Thus, interaction is brought about when individuals in a group try to carry out their activities or assigned responsibilities. The way and manner in which group members interact determines and influences the performance of their assigned tasks. When members see themselves as pursuing a common goal, they are very much likely to align themselves and work as a team; thereby promoting the principle of unity of purpose. The process of healthy or positive interaction among group members is often moderated and regulated by clear and distinctive definition and delineation of the roles and tasks of each member. Failure to do this is tantamount to having confliction of responsibilities among members; as a member may encroach into another member's role knowingly or unknowingly (Pragya, 2010).

Sentiment which is the last element refers to the feelings or attitudes of a person towards others. That is, group members' likes or dislikes, approval or disapproval for each other. When members of a group (the school system) is characterized by likes for each other in the process of their interaction, the tendency for healthy and harmonious relationship very like; thereby culminating in organization/group effectiveness and efficiency. On the other hand, when the interaction of group members is depicted by dislikes or disapproval for other, the reverse of the above would be the case. Hence, the most important element is interaction. This is because it is through it that group members develop common sentiments for one another. Interaction further helps in

attaining goals as well as helps to solve group problems, facilitate co-ordination, reduce tension and achieve a balance (Pragya, 2010).

Writing on Homans interaction theory, Buchanan and Andrzej (2010), posit that Homans developed the idea of an external and internal system. The external system according to Buchanan and Andrzej refers to three basic elements: activities, interactions and sentiments. The external system describes formal organization. From workers' perspective, there are certain givens of their jobs, which meet the expectations of their managers. These are requirements that demand individuals to perform certain activities have certain interactions with others and have certain sentiments toward their work. Each of these three elements reinforces each other. The more activities employees share, the more frequent will be their interactions and the stronger will be their shared activities and sentiments (how much the other persons are liked or disliked). The greater the numbers of interactions between persons, the more will be their shared activities and the stronger their sentiments towards each other. The stronger the sentiments people have for one another, the greater will be the number of their shared activities and interactions. Persons in a group interact with one another, not just because of spatial or geographical proximity (called propinquity) but also to accomplish goals such as cooperation and problem-solving.

The internal system is regarded as a definitive theory of informal groups within the organization. It relates not to the formal groups of the external system but is applied only to informal groups. The internal system also has great influence on the external system; as it defined group members' activities, interactions and sentiments emerging from the physical/technological/social environment. He termed them emergent activities, emergent interactions *and* emergent sentiments which in his view collectively making up the internal system (Buchanan and Andrzej, 2010). Thus, the internal and external systems are interrelated. A change in one will apparently lead to a change in the other. This is in essence a dialectical relationship. Homans's systems are essentially useful sociological guides to how groups relate to the dynamics of the workplace and how individual interactions form into group relationships. They are a useful aid to anyone, not just managers, seeking to understand how informal groups emerge, and how they can be built into formal groups given the context of the workplace concerned.

Application and Implications to Educational Administration

Interaction theory is predicated or built on three fundamental elements such as: activities, interaction and sentiments. The implications of the above fundamental elements (activities, interaction and sentiment) to work setting and educational administrators are very gamine. In fact, each of the elements has its unique applications and implications.

Activities refer to the assigned tasks to which group members are to carry out. What application can be derived from this? Activities as an element imply that in every work setting, there are organizational activities which are usually split into tasks and assigned to staff. Thus, an educational administrator must ensure that responsibilities to be carried out by each staff are clearly articulated and distinctively assigned to member staff. This is to avoid negligence of duty; as everybody's business/task is nobody's business/task. It also helps to reduce if not remove role clash; as often times some over-zealous staff may over step their bounds by doing other people's work. When every worker in an organization has clear information and understanding as to who is to do what, responsibility and accountability (answerability) would be highly promoted

and sustained. Also, an administrator has to be very assertive in assigning responsibilities to staff. That is, assertive of what he/she expects his staff to do and on the other hand, assertive of what his/her subordinates expect of him/her too.

More importantly, in assigning teachers/staff with responsibilities, managers/administrators must as a matter of necessity ensure that the ability and capability of members are indeed put into cognizance. That is, administrators should have a pre-idea as to who can do what and how? Doing otherwise is tantamount to assigning responsibilities to mediocre, promoting inefficiency and organizational ineffectiveness. This is further important because being guided by the personality of your staff as an educational administrator while assigning responsibilities would determine the expectations or outcome of the job performance.

The second element which is interaction also has its implications to work setting and educational administrators. Interaction is brought about when individuals in a group try to carry out their activities or assigned responsibilities. First, it shows that no member/worker can entirely work in isolation in the process of carrying out his/her assigned activities or responsibilities in an organization. Workers need to seek for other colleagues' knowledge and experience in areas of challenge in order to solve the problem. Interaction therefore, is an integrating force or element that promotes unity, collectivism, team work, brain storming and sharing of ideas in an organization.

Therefore, administrators should ensure that work environment is healthy enough to promote positive interaction among staff in their organizations. One of such ways is to encourage team work, hold regular meetings and interaction sessions when need be etc. However, there should be certain rules and regulations that should be put in place to regulate the level of interaction among members. For instance, no phone calls should be made on official hours; workers should not leave their duty post to other places to gist with friends during official hours etc. Though, the regulation of workers' interaction level by managers should be done with wisdom, flexibility and relativity; thereby not affecting the performance of staff's responsibilities and organization effectiveness and efficiency.

Sentiment refers to the feelings, attitudes, behaviors and disposition of group members towards each other such as group members' likes or dislikes, approval or disapproval for each other.

By implication, the extent to which members in an organization carry out their responsibilities and more importantly interact with one another depends to a very great extent on the kind of sentiment being shared among themselves. When group members express more of negative sentiment (dislikes or disapproval) towards each other, the performance of their activities and interaction level would be negatively influenced; thereby affecting organizational level of effectiveness. On the other hand, when group members express more of positive sentiment (likes or approval) towards each other, the performance of their activities and interaction level would be positively influenced; thereby promoting organizational effectiveness.

Thus, it is the responsibility of every school administrator/manager to ensure that the organizational culture in existence is such that promotes peaceful and harmonious relationship among workers in his team/organization. This is because a happy workforce is a committed workforce. When there seems to be discord/ dislikes among workers, administrators should understand that such is inevitable and would occur but the timely and sagacious handling of the conflict matters. Hence, conflict

resolution strategies should also be put in place to raptly take care of such issue when it occurs.

In sum, Interaction theory promotes division of labour (shared activities) and team work in an organization. The more there is shared activities, the more interaction among the workers is like to take place and the more sentiment (approval) is to be shared. When workers work very closely in terms of team work, they are more likely to interact often and better. And the often they interact, the more positive sentiment they are more likely to exhibit. This is because their understanding of group dynamics would go a long way promoting their integration and appreciation of individual difference. Administrators should as such promote team work.

Balance Theory

Balance theory was developed by Psychologist Fritz Heider in 1946, as first published in his article and later presented in his book in 1958 titled "The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations". Theodore Newcomb later contributed to the development of the theory in 1953. It states that persons are attracted to one another or group on the basis of similar attitudes towards commonly relevant objects and goals. Once a group/relationship is formed, it strives to maintain a symmetrical balance between the attraction and the common attitudes. If an imbalance occurs, attempts are made to restore the balance. And if the balance cannot be restored, the relationship dissolves. Pragma (2000) submits that there must be a balance in the relationship between the group members for the group to be formed and for its survival.

The theorist posits that sentiment or liking relationships are balanced if the affect-valence in a system multiplies out to a positive result. Heider also holds that people will attempt to maintain a psychological balance and form relationships that balance out their likes and dislikes. Balance theory holds that if people see a set of cognitive elements as being a system, then they will have a preference to maintain a balanced state among these elements. In other words, if people feel they are out of balance, then they would be motivated to restore a position of balance. The felt discomfort at imbalance will increase with the strength of the attitude and the overall interest in the matter.

The basic tenet of this theory according to Ashley (2017) is that groups are formed on the basis of attractions of people towards each other having similar attitudes and values. Thus, attraction and interaction by members of a group play significant role in ensuring that balance is always ensured. The persistence of imbalance interactions results in the discontinuity or dissolution the group or interaction. Pragma (2010) critique that balance theory of group formation fails to explain the full view of group formation; as mere similarity of attitudes and value do not necessarily lead to group formation. Further, there are other reasons for group formation besides similarity of attitudes.

Application and Implications to Educational Administration

The basic tenet of Balance Theory can be richly applied by educational administrators; thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness.

Since similar attitudes and values promote group formation, administrators should ensure that the principles of unity of purpose and subordination of individual interest are practiced and a healthy organizational culture that promotes good harmonious relationship among workers is in existence. Educational administrators at

all levels should understand that workers are human beings and tend to have values and would do everything humanly possible to protect and preserve them. Therefore, their different attitudes and values should be respected provided there do not inhibit the realization of organizational aims and objectives. Once there exist imbalance between the values of workers and that of the organization they are working, the growth and development of such organization is likely not to be guaranteed. Thus, a good administrator should strike a balance between workers' divergent attitudes and values with that of the values of the organization by incorporating workers' values into the organizational values. He is duty bound as a matter of obligation to ensure that as he works towards achieving the objectives of the organization, the values of his employees are also pursued zealously.

A good administrator/manager should see how the different attitudes and values of workers can be modified, aligned and subordinated through building organizational culture that would promote such atmosphere thereof. This can also be achieved through induction of workers. When workers are given adequate, functional and timely induction from inception, their attitudes, behaviors as well as values can be modified and aligned with that of the existing organizational culture. When this is effectively done, every worker would adjust and subordinate individual values and share the same values of the organization through unity of purpose.

Conclusion

Group formation is the process by which a number of individuals with common purpose come together interacting with each other with respect to: common motives and goals, an accepted division of labor, established status relationships, accepted norms and values with reference to matters relevant to the group as well as development of accepted sanctions-praise and punishment. The knowledge and ability of educational administrators to understand the dynamics of group formation especially from the perspective of interaction and balance theories as well apply borrowables thereof would go a long way enhancing efficient and effective administration of the day to day affairs of education.

Recommendations

The application of theoretical information and knowledge by administrators in the day to day management of educational affairs is very important. Thus, educational administrators at all levels should equip themselves by different theoretical school of thoughts; thereby applying all relevant knowledge gained from such process in effective administration of educational affairs.

References

- Ashley, C. (2017). *Exchange theory*. Retrieved from www.thoughtc.com, 20/1/2019.
- Buchanan, D.A. & Andzej, H. (2010). *Organizational behavior*. Harlow England: Financial Times Prentice Hall
- Forsyth, D. R. (2010). *Group dynamics*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley
- Muzafer, S. & Sherif, C.W. (2011). *An outline of social psychology*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Platow, M.J., Grace, D.M. & Smithson, M.J. (2011). Examining preconditions for psychological group membership: Perceived social interdependence as the outcome of self-categorization. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3 (1), pp. 100-115.
- Pragya, S. (2010). *Theories of group formation*. London: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.