

**The design and implementation of educational policy, as reflected in
the decision-making process: case studies from Greece**

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Introduction

Taking into consideration that a) education is a social service that makes a substantial contribution to the social and economic development of a country and b) its management affects the implementation of the school curriculum, the efforts of human resources, the uses of material resources, and the development of efficiency criteria and control systems for the successful performance of educational organizations, the continuous improvement of educational management must be considered a top priority for any country. It is therefore, very important to recognize the importance of educational management and to emphasize the need to view the educational administration system from a new perspective.

Close analyses of management in schools lead to the conclusion that the process of management is divided into specific tasks which commonly face educational managers. The manager in education has to deal with a number of issues and determine how they are to be managed since this is how educational institutions are organised. The key tasks of educational management tend to follow the functions of management theory (planning, directing, controlling, organising and co-ordinating) and are also interdependent in a variety of ways. Eraut (1988), Paisey (1981) and Bell

(1988) identified necessary skills or tasks which embrace the major areas of education. Among others, human knowledge tasks are very important for decision making and play a vital role in a manager's life. They affect the school structure, the development of staff, and policy making in general. Knowledge of people is generally recognised to be of vital importance.

Harry (1994) addresses management in a wider context by focusing on the process of 'decision making'. In his view, attention should be given to managerial decision making and to how the organisation will use available information in making efficient decisions, resulting in higher productivity. In this context, successful management is the clarification of goals and the implementation of solutions. Special emphasis is given to information channels and communications in an attempt to make decision making more effective.

The design of a strategy that maintains stability in the operations of educational institutions and adapts the education system to challenges in a controlled manner would include workforce participation as an essential element, since the latter facilitates creativity and positive communications, leads to better and higher quality decisions and therefore produces more effective performance (Connolly & James, 2006; Deetz & Brown, 2004; Knight et.al., 1999; Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Miller & Lee, 2001; Osbourne, 2000; Tourish & Hargie, 2004). The need for increased participation in the decisions of the workplace, as well as for the increased representation of different parties, is very important for the successful functioning and survival of an education system. Ideally, the reaching of a decision in a large system such as the educational one involves not only one person but requires the participation of diverse groups (from the upper to middle managerial level) as well as the gathering, analyzing and interpreting of relevant information (Minner & Lee, 2001; Deetz & Brown, 2004).

Although greater involvement in the decision making of different committees can increase costs, a number of studies favour decisions derived by "working together" over hierarchical alternatives as working together results in more effective decisions (Deetz & Brown, 2004; McLagan & Nel, 1995; Lawer, 1999). Moreover, diversity in perspectives is also essential since it enhances creativity and leads to better and faster decisions. Considering that education is a "citizen's right", guided to a great extent by non-profit motives and concerned with the well-being of the community, greater public representation creates decisional quality. Since problems

tend to move from lower to higher levels of complexity, authorities in education are forced to adopt 'effective measures' such as productive participation in decisions in order to operate in as efficient a manner as possible. The more complex the problem, the more necessary it becomes to arrive at an effective organisational solution. Hence, new techniques of decision making are available to be used by systems in order to determine efficient policy and performance.

Certainly, a successful collaborative decision making process is not a simple and easy case (Connolly & James, 2006; Deetz & Brown, 2004). Among the factors that affect successful participatory decisions are the environment (political and social), the characteristics of the organization (size, structure, departmentalization)¹ and the characteristics of decision makers, since factors such as the ability, dedication and motivation of the decision makers contribute to a more productive consultation, more so "when it is done in a spirit of cooperation and dedication than when it serves as an occasion for politicking or bickering" (Miller & Lee, 2001, p. 164). Studies on organizational behavior and human resource management, which mostly deal with private organizations, have shown that the organization's commitment to its employees enhanced their dedication and motivation, improved their commitment and made them more responsible (Arthur, 1994; Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Eisenberg, Cotterrell & Marvel, 1987, Eisenberg, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Miller & Lee, 2001; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). Considering that managers in the private and public sectors generally face similar problems which require managerial action, the previously mentioned findings can be applied to education. Furthermore, Connolly & James (2006) suggest that collaborative working in the educational field requires the participation of every level within each organization. It demands flexibility, adaptability and fluency in communication among the participating groups. Characteristics like motivation, dedication and commitment are important attributes in education and educational decision making, in particular. Thus, many practitioners and academics in educational management are increasingly recognising the value of collaborative working in education policy, highlighting the fact that, in education, work "can never be only individual but must be organisational" (Connolly & James, 2006, p. 75).

According to the relevant literature (Adair, 1985; Dubrin, 1998; Hoy & Miskel, 1996), the stages of a decision making process are the following: The clarification of objectives, the specification of the problem, the development of

alternatives, the identification of the best possible solution, the implementation of the solution and the assessment of the implemented program. This process establishes the basis for an organizational response to events in the external environment and may enhance the effectiveness of the education system. A number of studies (Miller & Lee, 2001; Mintzberg, 1994; Noda & Bower, 1996) have emphasized the importance of decision making elements such as collaboration, initiatives, etc. in the organizational performance outcomes. However, a key question concerns whether there is any way of ensuring a capable educational administration in order to effectively implement the decisions taken. In the case of the central educational administration, it may take measures to ensure effective implementation since the decisions alone cannot guarantee a successful performance of the system.

There is a huge difference between conception and execution, with different strategies having different implementation requirements (Eardly, Lewis & Powell, 1996; Galbraith & Kazanjian, 1986; Lee & Miller, 1999; Porter, 1996; Rogers, Miller & Judge, 1999). Among the elements of effective implementation are collaborative management, stability among the administrators (so that they may offer continuous organizational support), the cooperation and commitment of the individuals, and the channels of communication. All the above are key elements for implementing strategic decisions that influence future outcomes.

In large organisations, the concept of ‘planning’ is generally considered to refer to strategic planning. Decision making is the formulation of choices among the alternative methods of action under three conditions: certainty, risk and uncertainty (Hodgetts & Kuratko, 1991). “Planning as programming” (Rogers, Miller & Judge, 1999, p. 568) enables organisations to foresee with objectivity, or satisfactorily explain, changes or uncertainties that the future may bring and hence to focus on long-term results. Policy² making is applied in different social spheres, including education, and takes different forms (e.g. those found in ministerial statements or other papers). Jeremy Bray (1970)³, for instance, suggests that one level or stage of decision making is to follow a pattern of policy and reappraisal and determine long-term goals in order to implement an action programme for the achievement of these goals.

The Background and Aims of the Study

In Greece, education helps the pupils (Greek Parliament, 1985) to:

- broaden and adjust the relationship between their creativity and the programmes, situations and phenomena they are studying;
- build up the mechanisms which contribute to the assimilation of knowledge, develop physically, improve their physical and mental well-being, and develop their motor skills;
- grasp fundamental concepts and gradually acquire the ability to proceed from an understanding of the evidence presented to the senses, to the field of abstract thought;
- become familiar with moral, religious, national, humanitarian and other values and introduce them into a system of values;
- cultivate aesthetic judgement so that they can appreciate works of art and express themselves in their own way through artistic creations.

According to the 1975 Constitution (Article 16) amended in 1986, education in Greece is under the supreme supervision of the State (Ministry of Education) and is provided at the State's expense. The authority for educational policy clearly establishes the interdependence of the central and local areas, although the central government's role as a senior partner is intended to secure the cooperation of local authorities. The Ministry of Education follows up the implementation of the laws and can intervene if necessary to adapt them to regional variations in practice. It also delegates responsibility for their implementation to its regional authorities, irrespective of their degree of autonomy.

According to Laws 309/1976 (Greek Parliament, 1976), 2026/1992 (Greek Parliament, 1992), and 2817/2000 (Greek Parliament, 2000), the duties of the Ministry of Education are not limited to the promotion of the education of the people of Greece and to the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose, thereby ensuring the implementation of national education policy, but they continuously expand to administrative activities to the point that the Ministry absorbs even those duties that belong to the regional educational units. In this sense, despite decentralisation measures implemented in recent years, the central administration of the Ministry of Education remains the main centre for decision making (Andreou, 2000; Gerou, 1996; Saitis & Eliophotou-Menon, 2004; Saitis, 1995, 1997, 2005b;

Saiti, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Samatas, 1995; Tzani & Pamouktsoglou, 1998). There is a growing need for the delegation of power to the lower levels of management in a system burdened with such bureaucracy that the majority of decisions require the Minister's signature. Even though this centralized method of operation may ensure uniformity in the administration of the school system, since each executive receives orders from his/her director, the lack of attention paid to informal networks and open communications is the main reason why Greek public organisations are neither flexible nor fluid (Macrydimitris, 1999; Poulis, 2001; Saitis, 1997, 2005b; Saiti, 2000; Saiti, 2003b; Tzani & Pamouktsoglou, 1998; Zavlanos, 1982). This points to the need for a reorganisation of Greek public services. The concentration of power in central administration stifles flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances and often leads to strong bureaucratic behaviour. Moreover, 'the enormous number of legislative frameworks in education has subsequently led to unclear and contradictory reforms that in turn need new, clear and interpretive regulative actions' (Andreou, 2000, p. 222).

The purpose of this paper is, through case studies, to investigate the decision making process in the Greek education system, as an indicator of the design and implementation of educational policy. Specifically, we attempt to examine the degree to which the final decision of the Minister of Education is a product of collaboration, consultation and interaction of different parties within the administrative hierarchy of the Ministry of Education.

Greek Central Educational Administration: The Ministry of Education

Educational policy affects the lives of most citizens to a considerable extent. The main function of a system of government is to maintain the standard and quality of life of its citizens through its own resources, and to maintain an awareness of the need to develop the skills and talents of young people to the maximum. This is widely accepted throughout society (Kourtis, 1977; Saitis, 2005a, 2005b; Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005). Indeed, educational provision has come to be seen as the most significant factor in national economic survival.

In Greece, the responsibility for national education policy lies with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for promoting the education of the people of Greece and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose. It is also expected to secure the effective implementation of

policy, having the direction of national education policy under its control (Saiti, 2003a, p.34).

As previously noted, the State's functions of supervision and control are exercised through the Ministry of Education. This is the highest administrative unit of education in Greece and is under the jurisdiction of the government. Therefore, the Ministry of Education formulates educational policies according to the direction of the political party in power. It transforms these policies into laws and submits them to Parliament for debate, after which (with occasional amendments) they are approved. The Ministry is then responsible for their implementation and facilitates action through decrees, directives and circulars addressed to the regional and local authorities, to the entities of public law or to the civil entities that it supervises (Saiti, 2000, 2003b).

Moreover, regulations passed under the appropriate sections of the Constitution prescribe policy in precise detail on matters such as school sessions, school attendance, curricula, the establishment of schools, the appointment of teachers, pupil issues, financial arrangements and expenditures, and school operations. The Ministry is also responsible for the drawing up and management of the two annual education budgets (current and capital) apart from the budgets allocated to the prefectures. Since all activities or processes imply some expenditure, it is inevitable that the Ministry of Education should exercise control over the majority of operations and particularly over the most important ones (Saiti, 2003a).

The present structure of the Ministry of Education is based on certain Divisions or Sections, each of which deals with a clearly defined block of work. However, close contacts are maintained between the divisions on all matters of common concern and this principle is followed throughout the central administration of the Ministry of Education. The following divisions exist in the structure of the Ministry:

Personnel Division. This is concerned with the development and application of policies governing manpower planning; recruitment, selection, placement and termination of staff; career development; terms of employment; working conditions and employee services; formal and informal communications and consultations at all levels.

Administrative Division. This deals with the establishment and organisation of the schools in primary and secondary education. It is also concerned with the creation of

new appointments for the school staff and the development and application of governing policies.

Economic Division. This has certain responsibilities concerning financial provision, education expenditures, school budgets and, generally speaking, all economic aspects of primary education.

Division of Equipment. This has the duty to secure the provision of equipment to primary and secondary education, to identify the needs of each school individually and to ensure that equipment is available in sufficient quantity for all pupils who are able to attend school.

Division of Educational Service. This facilitates a great deal of educational initiatives on matters such as teaching methods, approval of courses, work on curricula and the training of school staff.

The responsibility for the functions performed by the Ministry of Education falls upon the Minister of Education, who is usually of Cabinet rank. He or she is appointed by the President of the Republic upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister and is therefore responsible to Parliament, to government and to public opinion for the decisions of the civil service within the Ministry. The two deputy ministers and the Secretary-General are political appointments and are the Minister's chief assistants. These persons make up the political leadership of the Ministry of Education.

The above leadership of the Ministry of Education is assisted in its work by six general directors, each of whom is concerned with certain aspects of the Ministry's work. In the existing organisational structure, it is observed that each General Division of the Ministry includes a number of sub-divisions; each sub-division is divided up into departments, each of which deals with a clearly defined block of work and is under the charge of the Head of Division. There are also 'independent' departments and offices such as those for libraries and historical records which perform duties that concern, in one way or another, all the other sectors of the Ministry of Education. At present, the administrative hierarchy of the Ministry of Education consists of six levels. In practical terms, this means that a document needs at least five to six signatures before its final 'production'.

With Law 2817/2000 (Greek Parliament, 2000), regional educational authorities of primary (and secondary) education were established. Thus, an extra

educational level in the administrative hierarchy was added. At present, the structure of the school administrative system consists of four levels:

National Level: The Ministry of Education. This level is responsible for the design of educational policy and the effectiveness of the educational system.

Regional Level: The Regional Educational Authorities (REAs). This level was established in order to help directly or indirectly the Ministry of Education to accomplish its mission. It is the formal channel of communication between the central and prefecture authorities.

Prefectural Level: The Prefectural Educational Authorities (PEAs). This level covers all the offices and directorates of primary and secondary education, which contribute either directly or indirectly to the execution of the regional administration, depending on the balance of the administrative power.

School Level. In this lower hierarchical level, the school principals and deputy heads are mainly responsible for the smooth functioning of the school and the coordination of school life, as well as for the observance of laws, circulars and official orders. They are also responsible for the implementation of the Teachers' Council resolutions.

Decision Making in the Greek Education System

The Greek education system follows the hierarchical model and, with strong state control, decision making flows in a top-down direction. It seems that the decision making in the Greek education system is an individual, rather than collective, action and is based on a "personal" perception of the situation (Gerou, 1996; Papadimitropoulos, 2003; Poulis, 2001; Saitis, 2005b; Tzani & Pamouktsoglou, 1998).

The decision making process in the Greek education system has been characterized by: a) political concern - an element that requires rapidity of implementation and an adjustment to the current political conditions, and b) technological awareness, an element that requires analysis, scanning and an understanding of the main problems. The upper level of educational administration must consider the above characteristics in order to assess the different threats and opportunities, and to secure the optimum effective performance of the system with minimum costs. In this context, central educational administration finds itself embodied within the "self-generated" limits of any decision on educational matters. It

appears that central educational administration affects the determination and implementation of educational policy at two levels:

First Level. This level refers to the analysis and scanning of all available data, the processing of the information and the final submission of proposals (via the Minister of Education) for approval by the Greek parliament.

Second Level. The central educational administration has an input but at this stage there is an increased degree of autonomy regarding the implementation of the legislation. The autonomy of central educational administration is based upon the opportunity to exercise regulative authority. The main aim of such an opportunity is to effectively implement the laws and to adjust them according to current circumstances.

With regard to the first two levels of education (primary and secondary), the duties of the central administration are the design of the educational legislation, the assessment and monitoring of the prefectural authorities and school units, and the financial support of the educational activities. The work of central services includes a number of activities which, either directly or indirectly, affect the function of the school units. The basic administrative units that have the responsibility for the subjects offered in primary and secondary education are the relevant Directorates. The hierarchical structure of these Directorates is as follows: Minister, Deputy Minister, General Secretary, Special Secretary, Head of a Directorate, and Head of a Department. Thus, the hierarchical structure not only reflects political and managerial considerations, but also points to the reason why, whenever the Minister of Education changes, there are also changes among the political administrators (Andreou & Papaconstantinou, 1994; Kazamias & Kassotakis, 1995; Macrydimitris, 1999; Saitis, 2005b). The short life of political administrators has created over-flexible education policy making and an excessive number of Education Acts and Laws. The excessive number of laws creates an enormous burden of work for the officials, and prevents the State from implementing efficient education planning.

Case Studies

The case studies which follow are designed to show, based mainly on the current legislative reforms, whether the current decision making process in the Greek education system contributes to an improved provision of education.

Case Study 1: The Organization and Functioning of the Full-Day Primary School

According to the legislation reform of 1997, a full-day primary school is a new type of school that functions all day (until 4 p.m.) and provides pupils with extra curricular knowledge (Greek Parliament, 1997). It is known in the Greek educational context as the “Oloimero Scholio”. Article 4 of Law 2525/1997 (Greek Parliament, 1997) states that “the purpose of the full-day primary school is the implementation of the school curriculum, the optional study of the following day’s lessons, the involvement in extra curricular activity, and finally the optional implementation of special programs for students with difficulties in learning”. Moreover, according to a ministerial decision published after the report of the Pedagogical Institute, all primary schools that satisfy the conditions of proper functionality (a result of the cooperation of teachers’ councils, parents associations, etc.) can be defined as full-day primary schools and can apply the school curriculum.

The full-day school was chosen since it is a new type of school that is intended to take into account most contemporary educational and social needs. The teaching staff of these types of schools must adapt themselves to subjects that are not in their field and hence the training of the teaching staff becomes a necessity. The interpretation of the legislative framework raises questions such as:

1. What is the main procedure that the central educational administration followed in order to introduce the framework for the organizing and functioning of full-day primary schools?
2. Who was the main decision maker in relation to the organization and the functioning of the full-day primary school?
3. According to which procedure did the central educational administration define and implement the action program for the functioning of this particular type of school?

With regard to Question 1 (the procedure followed by central educational administration), the decision of the central educational administration is expected to be a product of communication and collaboration of different collective social bodies such as parents, educators, etc. In this particular case, however, the procedure that the upper level of management (Ministry of Education) has followed in order to determine the policy for this educational matter is unknown. The fact that the relevant law determines the functioning of the full-day primary school is not sufficient to justify the decision taken. In fact, it has been suggested that there is no scientific basis for this decision. For instance, it has been pointed out that there is no scientific

evidence in the form of published material indicating that this reform is effective (Michopoulos 2002; Papadimitropoulos, 2003; Polychronopoulos, 1999; Poulis, 2001; Saitis, 2005b; Saiti, 2003b). Moreover, in the introductory report of Law 2525/1997 (Greek Parliament, 1997), there is no indication that the decision regarding the operation of the full-day primary school is the result of collaboration between different groups and hence there is no indication of a participatory decision. This decision making process, according to which many educational matters are settled, is characteristic of a traditional hierarchical administration where the important decisions are made at the upper level of the hierarchical pyramid. However, this model of the decision making process not only creates obstacles in the communication system with the lower levels of managerial structure but also decreases effectiveness and decisional quality (Deetz & Brown, 2004). If both the design and the implementation of an educational change are being made without the participation of all (both directly and indirectly) interested parties, then the decision is not likely to be effective. All the above indicate that the policy regarding the functioning and the organization of a full day primary school has been determined without “a collaborative constitutive view of communication that offers great potential for transformative practices” (Deetz & Brown, 2004, p.173).

With regard to Question 2 (the main decision maker), Article 4 of Law 2525/1997 (Greek Parliament, 1997) gives the opportunity to the political and managerial authorities of the Ministry of Education to define in detail the legislative framework of the functioning of full-day primary schools. In this context, the implementation of educational laws and reforms depends to a great extent on the individuals that hold the seats of power in the Ministry of Education. Considering that a) in a centralized system all the important decisions for educational matters are made by the central administration and b) the allocation of duties among the managerial executives of the Ministry of Education is subject to constraints, it appears that the political authorities do not engage themselves only with the design of the regulative actions but also become involved in the implementation of educational policy.

It is known that the appropriate legislative authority determines regulative actions. In the case of the full-day primary school, the decision was reached without any proposal from the Pedagogical Institute (Kotsis, 2000, p. 332), even though the idea behind this decision was to improve the quality of the organization and the functioning of a school unit. Specifically, the ministerial decision 884/3-9-1998 (the

one according to which the full-day primary schools were established) was published without any introductory report from the Pedagogical Institute. This introductory report eventually came out in November 2002, stating that a new ministerial decision 121153/13-11-2002 was being introduced. Thus, between September 1998 and November 2002, the full-day primary schools were functioning without the school curriculum being determined by the Pedagogical Institute and each school unit, in agreement with the ministerial decision 884/3-9-1998, had been making its own program according to their own capacities. This indicates that the main decision maker was either the relevant employee from the Ministry of Education, who made the decision on the basis of his/her knowledge and experience, or the political executive, who assumed responsibility for the implementation of educational policy. Hence, in the particular case of the full-day primary schools, the main decision makers were the education service managers of the Ministry of Education.

Certain articles of the Education Acts were followed by the issue of interpretative circulars by the appropriate Ministry of Education service, as well as by consultations of the Legal Council of State concerning the way the particular terms of the law should be implemented. In addition, the implementation of most Education Acts is based on many authorisations by presidential decrees and ministerial decisions.

Given that the issue of presidential decrees and ministerial decisions is followed by interpretative circulars, and that there is no agency in the Ministry of Education for the codification of the education legislation, it is frequently difficult for personnel at the Ministry of Education to know whether a specific article of a law is in force at a given time or not.

From the above examples, it is clear that policy proposals for educational reform are made by small groups of educationalists, advisers, specialists or bureaucrats commissioned for the task by the Minister of Education and acting on behalf of central administration. The decision making process itself lacks adequate national consultation or responsiveness to the views of a wide stratum of the population which suggests that the process is more arbitrary than democratic (Gerou, 1996; Macrydimitris, 1999; Papadimitropoulos, 2003; Pyrgiotakis, 2001; Saitis, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Tzani & Pamouktsoglou, 1998). No pilot programmes are used for implementing an educational change, no consultants are used and no committees are formed to deal with the problems which arise during the process of implementation.

With regard to Question 3 (the particular procedure followed for the full-day schools), it seems that there was no action plan for the development of a data base for the continuous gathering of information from all levels of the educational administration regarding the functioning and the organising of the full-day primary schools. Hence, it seems that the different managerial levels did not take part in the organisational decisions concerned with the functioning of the full-day primary schools; nor was there any wide-spread participation of diverse groups such as parents associations or educators. Moreover, instead of publishing one regulative action based on the model of a collaborative decision making process, the central educational administration proceeded to publish more than 25 ministerial decisions - an action that complicated many matters regarding the functioning of the full-day primary schools (Pyrgiotakis, 2001; Pashalis & Tsiagis, 2001). Taking into consideration that reduced commitment and decreased diversity in the decision making process does not ensure effective implementation of decisions and that strategic plans require appropriate structures and processes to achieve good results (Lee & Miller, 1999, p. 585), it appears that decision making in Greek education does not substantially contribute to productive organisational performance.

Case Study 2: Evaluation of the Qualifications and the Selection Criteria of Educational Leaders

In Greece, as outlined in the relevant Presidential decree, the general selection process for educational leaders is based on the following criteria: a) the information contained in the personal files of educators, b) the appraisal reports of the candidates, and c) the recommendations of the Selection Committee. Again, in this case the question arises: On what basis did the central educational administration define the criteria and the qualifications, and have them placed in the presidential decree?

First, these actions are the result of committees that work under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and meet without the representation of other interested parties. For this particular regulative action, the Minister can determine the qualifications and the selection criteria of the educational leaders according to his/her judgment. The main decision maker on this matter is, of course, the Minister of Education. In practical terms, however, the final decision for the determination of the qualifications and the selection criteria of the educational leaders is made by the members of an appointed committee, members that have been appointed by the

Minister of Education and have as a mission to implement the relevant presidential decree. The Minister of Education usually holds the formal authority for the implementation of educational policy and administration.

In the Greek educational system, the central educational administration is a significant 'actor' to the extent that it affects and determines the decisions for education. For example, the introductory report of the Educational Act of 1985 to the Greek Parliament, was based on the 'collection' of views/proposals from various educational, scientific and social groups and on the development of their ideas and suggestions by a special committee of the Ministry of Education. This report however, does not mention anything about who the members of the 'appointed committee' were and how they were selected. The members of many committees appointed by the Minister of Education to participate in educational decision making were neither Ministry of Education officials nor staff experts from the area of management.

Research has shown that the most successful organizations are those who have committed and knowledgeable managers working together for a decision in an environment that spurs creativity and speedy implementation (Drucker, 1993; Whitney, 1994; Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1995). The interaction between the organization itself and the decision makers contributes to an effective performance - a dynamic relationship that appears to be lacking in the Greek decision making process.

Conclusions

In this study, an effort was made to examine the way in which decisions on educational matters are taken from the Greek central administration. This study argues that the precondition for effective educational management is a well-designed decision making process with increases diversity among the decision makers, and positive communication practices that lead to creativity and therefore to collaborative participation in the decision making process. The analysis of the two case studies points to certain conclusions, which are discussed below.

In Greece, The existing relations between political administrators and education service managers restrict the effectiveness of management in education, since there is no sign or indication of participatory decision making or of constitutive communication - two key characteristics that affect decisional quality and have a great impact on the effectiveness and productivity of education. The structure of the

Ministry of Education, through its centralised character, inhibits diversity in participatory decision making and certainly results in a lower degree of collaboration. This points to a weakness in the Greek education system in that “the lack of voice even with appropriate forums results from constrained decisional contexts, inadequate or distorted information, socialisation and colonization activities and the solicitation of consent where stakeholders choose to suppress their own needs and internal value conflicts” (Deetz & Brown, 2004, p. 173).

The decision for the implementation of a certain educational policy is the responsibility of the Minister of Education, while the proposals of the appointed committees concerned with the design of an educational reform can be characterised only as a consultation. This indicates that the final decision of the Minister of Education is not a product of collaboration, consultation and interaction of different parties within the administrative hierarchy of the Ministry of Education.

The Greek educational central administration remains the main centre for decision making. However, Ministers of Education are not usually in power long enough (Macrydimitris, 1999; Poulis, 2001; Saitis, 2005a, 2005b) to have full consultations with all the groups involved in the education system in order to decide changes that need to be made. Thus, the concept of a stronger decision making process through increased commitment and greater representation from different stakeholders certainly does not seem to be promoted in the Greek education policy.

Taking into consideration that education constitutes the central mechanism for the strengthening of an economy, the establishment of a productive and effective educational system should be the top priority of any country. If this is the case, then the Greek State must consider education as an important and productive national investment by emphasizing not only the quantitative but also the qualitative measures of the educational system. As a national investment of great importance, education needs the continuous commitment of central administration, meaning that educational reforms should be a product of creative decision options and the integration of different perspectives. The participation and the consultation among capable and dedicated decision makers will support an effective process and secure superior quality results (Miller & Lee, 2001).

This study has certain limitations, which point to the need for further investigation of other aspects of the educational decision making process. A deeper analysis and examination of the qualifications of the staff and the members of the

appointed committees should be the subject of further analysis. Analysis of additional data for different educational matters may be necessary for comparison. However, considering that:

- quality in educational decision making is not solely associated with one government or a ministry but is a product of those who work collaboratively with each other
- productive communication and collaboration focuses on the reaching of a common understanding and mutual commitment to a decision by focusing on the ends to be achieved rather than the preferred means of achievement or present positions (Deetz & Brown, 2004, p.186)
- collaborative leadership not only secures the experience of individual actors in education but also enhances the successful implementation of educational reforms

then the transition of the Greek educational decision making process from the traditional hierarchical model to the ‘age of making decisions together’ should occur quickly if the Greek education system desires to capitalise on all the benefits to be derived from greater stakeholder participation.

Notes

¹ Every large-scale enterprise (public or private) requires many people to keep it going. When many people work together, the best results are usually secured when there is departmentalising of work among them. More specifically, in every organisation, it must be decided how many sub-divisions or sections and management levels there should be and how many subordinates a superior should manage. Given that the levels of management are expensive and need to address problems of communication, planning and control, the structure of such an organisation must be carefully designed. There is no set of rules that prescribes the one best pattern of organisational structure. However, there are guides (e.g. in relation to the size of organisation) which help to select the most appropriate structure (Sisk & Williams, 1981).

² For more information about Jeremy Bray, see Fenwick & McBride (1981).

³ Educational policy is a polymorphous concept, an elusive one, which is not amenable to a precise and clear definition that is generally acceptable. Because of this, the term demands clarification. Some researchers in management science do not clearly distinguish the terms ‘policy making’ and ‘decision making’. Policy can be thought of as a guide for taking future actions, for recognising problems or matters of concern, and for making decisions directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired objectives.

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