The School Spirit
Transforming the ‘Organization’ into an ‘Organism’

EDUVATION TAMAM
Progress Report and Ideal Scenario

3-19-2016
Abstract
This report provides a thorough reflection on EDUVATION TAMAM work since the beginning of the Scholastic Year 2014-2015. It demonstrates the TAMAM journey that guided the EDUVATION TAMAM team members mainly throughout the ‘Needs Identification’ and ‘Ideal Scenario’ pit stops.

In particular, the report presents the Findings that resulted from the Focus Groups conducted in June 2015 on the topic of ‘Communication and the School Spirit’ and describes the Data Processing, Analysis and Discussion that led the EDUVATION TAMAM to construct three Strategic Objectives. These objectives will constitute the pillars of an Improvement Plan that is believed to enhance the ‘School Spirit’ as they target the three main components of the School Spirit: Energy, Synergy and Enlightenment; the objectives are:

- Enhancing EDUVATION Family members’ commitment towards the School’s Mission & Vision in order to become contributors/promoters/ambassadors of the ‘School Spirit’.
- Empowering the Officers at EDUVATION School Network in order to become contributor and promoters of the School Spirit.
- Optimizing the Time Allocation Strategies in order to promote teachers and staff members' physical, social and mental well-being.
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Introduction and Project Overview
EDUVATION School Network has always perceived “School Spirit” as a vital element of their unique institutional identity and ethos. Hence, EDUVATION TAMAM envisioned, in 2009, developing points of reference that enable observing scientifically the development of the ‘school spirit’; EDUVATION TAMAM’s study consisted then of an action research that aims at investigating the perceptions of teachers and staff towards EDUVATION School Network values, culture and norms; hence developing benchmarks that help monitoring our school spirit.

The instrument that was used to collect data was a questionnaire made up of 36 closed items equally distributed among three domains (values, culture and norms) in addition to three open-ended questions. The data analysis of this quantitative study was completed in 2012-2013; the results allowed EDUVATION TAMAM to formulate five hypotheses that constitute the roadmap for enhancing our school spirit; nevertheless, the team believed that these hypotheses require validation through a qualitative study. (The five hypotheses are available in the Appendix A) The scholastic year 2013-2014 was accordingly consecrated for developing the EDUVATION TAMAM comprehensive report and elaborating a preliminary roadmap for carrying on with the project.

The Executive Board agreed on a new structure for EDUVATION TAMAM team in the beginning of the scholastic year 2014-2015. In fact, the Executive Board assigned an ‘EDUVATION TAMAM Lead Team’ and asked its members to form a ‘Support Team’ comprising a group of EDUVATION teachers and staff members. The ‘lead team’ embarked then on ‘search mission’ for enthusiastic and committed teachers and staff members. As a result, six teachers and staff members from different Academic, Educational and Administrative Departments joined EDUVATION TAMAM ‘Support Team’. The subsequent challenge was building ‘spirit’ among EDUVATION TAMAM teams and most importantly initiate team members to TAMAM as a Schoolwide Improvement Approach as well as TAMAM Pillars and Action Research Journey.

TAMAM Project Steering Team along EDUVATION TAMAM teams have always perceived TAMAM as a learning experience in which the individual acquires the competencies of a professional action researcher as he/she participates in the action research cycle and continuously engages with different stakeholders (School Administration, Colleagues, Teammates, etc.) in challenging conversations and debates that build understanding of the reality and expose opportunities for school wide improvement initiatives. Hence, in January
2015, EDUVATION TAMAM Lead and Support Teams sincerely engaged in the initial step of the TAMAM School Improvement Journey that is ‘Needs Identification’.

Building on EDUVATION TAMAM’s previous work, the EDUVATION TAMAM Teams proceeded with studying the five hypotheses (available in Appendix A) in an attempt to set a preliminary roadmap for the teamwork. As recommended by the previous team and agreed upon by the current team, the hypotheses require validation through a qualitative study before attempting to build and implement an improvement plan. EDUVATION TAMAM members agreed that these hypotheses picture the school statuses on the different Academic, Educational and Administrative levels; yet, targeting all hypotheses concurrently in a qualitative study is unmanageable.

‘Needs Identification’ arise from the sensed challenges; hence, EDUVATION TAMAM members engaged themselves in an informal focus group in an attempt to identify and prioritize the ‘challenges’ and improvement needs. The team members additionally attended few sessions conducted by the Schools’ Principals and Directors in February 2015 that were consecrated for detecting new EDUVATION members’ understanding of the School Spirit, Life, Policies and Procedures. The team accordingly decided to narrow the scope of the project and embark with studying the fifth hypothesis:

“Eduvation School Network staff highlighted the need to empower and build the capacity of staff, which is suspected to influence their attitude towards various school practices... Participants expressed their interest in empowering teachers to participate in the decision making process for the best benefit of learners. The same need was expressed in the form of enhancing communication and attitude towards innovation.”

Precisely, EDUVATION TAMAM asserted the need to build a comprehensive understanding of our current ‘communication system’ and thus attempt to improve it, as we believed that communication consists one tool for enhancing our School Spirit. EDUVATION TAMAM discussed this matter with the Executive Board who approved the initiative and gave directions for the teamwork.
Focus Groups on ‘Communication and School Spirit’
EDUVATION TAMAM believed that studying qualitatively our ‘Communication System’ and its implications on the School Spirit could be best done through focus groups with both the Teachers and Academic and Educational Officers; the administrative staff members were exempted at this stage. Nonetheless, conceiving the Focus Groups was a challenging mission for EDUVATION TAMAM team as few members had previously experienced this data collection tool. Consequently, EDUVATION TAMAM team gathered in a retreat that aimed at comprehending the topic of ‘Communication and School Spirit’, exploring and acquiring the basic skills of a focus group facilitator and accordingly deciding on the focus groups’ target audiences and questions. The team agreed on conducting two focus groups with representative samples of teachers and Academic and Educational Officers; hence, the team decided on the sampling criteria and developed a draft of the focus group questions.

Developing the focus group questions required many conversations among EDUVATION TAMAM members as well as discussions in the Executive Board. In fact, the Executive Board expressed the concern that communication serves many purposes such as Exchanging ideas, Informing a message, Convincing, Expressing ourselves, Reaching a common understanding, Changing the attitude of the listener, Call for action, Raising awareness and call for a commitment; yet, what is truly needed is exploring how communication can serve the purpose of building spirit. Accordingly, EDUVATION TAMAM modified the set of questions and conducted the first Focus Group with EDUVATION Teachers; the focus group gathered teachers from the different schools, different divisions and subject matters, and taking into consideration the teachers’ contract type and years of experience.

Major learning on ‘Focus Group’ resulted following the encounter with EDUVATION teacher; indeed, EDUVATION TAMAM believed that the focus group questions need to be stated clearly and further elaborated. A drawback for the first focus group –conducted with teachers- was the fact that the questions evolved essentially around challenges and practice problems and hence, did not trigger the participants to present the different instances in a positive manner nor advance solutions for the described challenges. Thus, a third version of the questions was developed and employed during the focus group with EDUVATION Academic and Educational Officers. (The three versions of the Focus Group Questions are available in the Appendix B)
The process of developing and conducting a focus group was truly a learning experience as EDUVATION TAMAM members constantly reflected on the mistakes and arising challenges. Team members have built consequently convictions about the role of the focus group facilitator, facilitation techniques as well as principles for the focus group questions, size and setting, participants, etc. Besides, more reflection occurred when analyzing the teachers and Officers’ answers. A working paper that highlights the major learnings on ‘Focus Groups’ will be later developed.

Focus Groups’ Data Processing

The Data Analysis process of the Focus Group Findings consisted a milestone in our EDUVATION TAMAM journey as team members enacted as researchers while attempting to make meaning of the findings. The Data Analysis process seemed to be an extended process that requires the physical and emotional commitment of the team members\(^1\); indeed, the process turned out to be very challenging due to the great amount of extracted data and the absence of a clear and scientific framework for qualitative data analysis. Hence, the analysis was initiated started in June 2015 and completed over the following three phases:

- **Phase 1: June – July 2015**

To begin with, EDUVATION TAMAM checked thoroughly Teachers and Officers’ answers to the focus group questions and accordingly agreed a on a preliminary process for the qualitative data analysis, which can be summarized by the following:

a- Reading Teachers and Officers’ focus group answers

b- Brainstorming to extract subthemes that describe the findings

c- Conceptualizing the Subthemes (and checking their connection with the School Spirit and Communication)

d- Elaborating narrative texts that summarize the gathered data under each subtheme

e- Comparing and Contrasting Teachers and Officers’ findings

Accordingly, the ‘raw’ data was grouped under seven themes that the team thought they cover all findings; these themes were:

- Working Climate
- Clarity in Delivering messages/ communicating the rationale behind decisions

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\(^1\) EDUVATION TAMAM Team note: The Data Analysis could have been easily completed if the Focus Group Design was done in a better manner.
- **Role of the reference/officer**
- **Communication channels**
- **Obstacle of time and workload**
- **Participation of Teachers in the Decision Making Process**
- **Reaction to issues/Attitudes when communicating decisions**

- **Phase 2: September – November 2015**

At the beginning of the scholastic year 2015-2016, EDUVATION TAMAM team revisited the Focus Group findings and proceeded with phrasing teachers and Officers’ answers in descriptive narrations. These narrations has put the data in structured frameworks that can reflect the pre-set subthemes. Simple ‘cause and effect’ relations were established when gathering the data into comprehensive paragraphs; yet, this exercise did not help in detecting the real challenges in our ‘communication system’ that are hindering our School Spirit. Indeed, EDUVATION TAMAM members realized that both phases (1 & 2) were simply ‘data organization’ activities that aimed at making the large amount of answers easily readable.

- **Phase 3: December 2015 - January 2016**

As the team believed that the pre-set subthemes cannot help in the data processing, the team engaged in a third data analysis phase that aims essentially at linking the data in order to understand it in a holistic manner; consequently, the following activities were agreed upon:

1- Reading the Data under each subtheme and extracting titles that are more expressive of the data content and self-explanatory. Although this activity consisted an additional layer of ‘Data Organization’, the team believed that it is pre-requisite for engaging in the Data Analysis and moving to the following step.

2- Attempting to link the titles in schemas that might highlight ‘cause and effect’ relations among them.

EDUVATION TAMAM team completed the first activity; the following titles were identified for each subtheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity in Delivering Messages</strong></td>
<td>- Role of HOD/HAD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that the organization of Teachers and Officers’ answers in our TAMAM focus groups adopted a ‘Template Analysis’\(^2\) approach. Teachers and Officers’ verbal answers were transcribed by EDUVATION TAMAM Team and processed through three different phases (as described above).

**Focus Group Findings**

The Data Processing have led EDUVATION TAMAM team to spot major challenging areas affecting our ‘communication system’ and thus, implicitly hindering the enhancement of our School Spirit. These areas will be described below

1. **Communication and Decision Making Process at EDUVATION School Network**

   a. The Officers’ Perspective:

   ‘Communication’ and ‘Decision Making’ are inter-related concepts. In fact, on one hand, the Officers affirmed that ‘communication’ precedes the ‘Decision Making’ and helps building a comprehensive understanding of the resulting decisions; on the other hand, the Officers admitted the ‘decision making approach’ directly influences the way decisions are communicated to their team members.

\(^2\) Template analysis is the process of organizing and analyzing textual data according to themes.
The Officers mentioned two factors affecting both ‘communication’ and ‘decision making’:

- The role of the Officers (Academic, Educational and Administrative Officers):

The Officers mentioned many conducts such as coming unprepared to the Academic/Faculty Board Meetings, and not participating effectively in the voting process. For instance, the following was stated:

“Going unprepared to Faculty / Academic Board meetings in addition to the lack of time for thorough discussion of topics / proposals leave things unclear and do not help in communicating ideas properly to all members”.

- The context in which ‘communication’ and ‘decision making’ occur:

The Officers have compared between the Academic Board and Faculty Board meetings and claimed that the Academic Board meetings are more effective in terms of communication and decision-making. Besides, another claim by the Officers regarding the context ‘Decision Making’ process at the schools is the following:

“The decision-making at the school level does not occur in a ‘bottom-up’ manner. This fact affects the effectiveness of the decision-making as the input of the concerned persons is not always enabled; hence, discouragement often results among these persons”.

b. The Teachers’ Perspective:

The teachers have also recognized the interrelation between ‘communication’ and ‘decision-making’. Nonetheless, they mostly reflected on their participation in the School’s Decision Making Process. In fact, the teachers affirmed their participation in the ‘Academic Decision Making Process’; their participation is facilitated by their Head of Division and Head of Academic Department. In contrast, they claimed being incapable of influencing the schools’ Administrative Decision Making. They have additionally claimed that the Teachers Committee does not participate in the decision-making at the school level.

Teachers’ statements has again put upfront the context in which the decision-making occurs; the following statements are self-explanatory:

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3 The Academic Board gathers the Directors and Heads of Academic Departments.
4 The Faculty Board gathers the Principals, Directors and Heads of Academic, Educational and Administrative officers, i.e. all schools’ officers.
“The number of participants in the decision making process within a department/division meeting as a critical factor affecting the effectiveness of the communication channel.”

“Taking decisions is easier on the level of department but harder at the division level due to the big number of teachers.”

“Division meetings are one channel for communicating and discussing learners’ academic and behavioral performances; but, this channel rarely enables teachers to discuss their various concerns.”

2. Communication and Officers/Teachers’ Attitudes

‘Communication’ at EDUVATION School Network seems to be greatly influenced by the Officers and Teachers’ attitudes. These attitudes reflect the schools’ climate and hence, affects the school spirit.

a. The Officers’ Perspective:

The Officers recognized their role in motivating their teachers/team members as they become sometimes resistant to ideas or change and lack the initiative of ‘taking the extra mile’; this resistance is accompanied by demotivation and a ‘negative attitude’ regardless of how the ideas/change/suggestions are constructive. In addition to that, the Officers mentioned the below factors influencing their department/division spirit:

- The stress that the Officer undergoes which is sometimes transferred implicitly to team members
- The conflict of visions between departments/divisions and the perceived absence of a ‘common language’.

b. The Teachers’ Perspective:

The teachers join the Officers’ claims regarding the Attitudes of Teachers and Climate of their Department/Division. They mentioned the absence of a ‘common language’ that could be sensed by looking at the different rumors and interpretations of an original message.

Moreover, the teachers admitted that negativity, mistrust and lack of enthusiasm can be detected among teachers and staff members; these are caused by the sensed incapability of causing change. These feelings are accentuated by the continuous complaining attitudes in the ‘teachers’ lounge’. Few teachers have stopped frequenting the places in which they will have to endure other teachers’ complaints.
In addition to that, it was stated that some teachers are losing the sense of responsibility, sharing and belonging; this fact has been demonstrated through delivering messages to learners without any feeling of ownership.

3. Communication and Tasks/Time Distribution

A third assertion pertains to the Time allocations and Tasks Distribution. Officers and Teachers agree that the prevailing workload leaves minimal time for effective follow-up and communication. For instance, the teachers claimed that besides their tasks (which include classroom preparations, departmental work, follow-up on learners’ grades and assessment of CCCs) their overloaded schedules leaves minimal time for collaboration amongst them to discuss learners’ issues. The following statements by teachers support this assertion:

“During a parents’ meeting, the teachers said contradictory statements due to the fact that there was short notice about the meeting and no time to discuss the learner’s case ahead of time.”

“The SED teachers could not find the right time to discuss the subject matter or test material with the concerned teacher; thus, they are meeting during recess time/teacher’s free period/in-between classes.”

4. Communication Means

The Officers and Teachers have mentioned the overreliance of e-mails; e-mails were described as technical and mechanistic tools for communication. This fact has negative repercussions:

- According to the Officers, this indirect mode of communication hinders the clarity of the delivered message; thus, in order to maintain the importance and weight of a message, it should be directly communicated to the concerned person.
- According to Teachers, this mode of communication weakens the family spirit; besides, since people do not always read emails, different interpretations and rumors arise.

Discussion

In a challenge to carry on the Data Analysis, EDUVATION TAMAM team attempted to apply a ‘Root-Cause Analysis’ through linking the generic titles described above in schemas that might highlight cause and effect’ relations and eventually lead to explore the ‘mystery’ of the School Spirit. The identified schemas are visualized as following:
This exercise highlighted the interconnectedness between all data, and most importantly enabled the team to realize that the challenges hindering our ‘Communication System’ (and implicitly our School Spirit) do not reside in one practice nor manifested into specific actions but rather cascaded throughout the processes.

This analysis have launched debates among EDUVATION TAMAM team members; indeed, at certain stages, the team members lost ‘hope’ in detecting the real faults/challenges hindering our School Spirit and accordingly, building a ‘remediating’ improvement plan.

In parallel, our Schools’ Rector along with the Executive Board have continuously reminded the team of adopting a ‘Holistic Approach’ rather than a mechanistic one when looking at the data and attempting to explore the ‘mystery’ of the School Spirit through assessing the interconnectedness of the gathered data to the School Spirit components, which are:

- Energy, which transforms the organization into a living body.
- Synergy, which governs our interactions with oneself, one another and with God.
- Light, which goes beyond our daily practices and triggers within our souls, higher levels of existence.
EDUVATION TAMAM team engaged accordingly in additional reflections and have come to comprehend that the School Spirit refers to individuals having differentiated talents, personality traits, backgrounds (Energy) continuously interacting with each other (Synergy), in order to make ‘meaning’ of their practices (Light/Enlightenment). The three components of the School Spirit are constantly interacting with each other.

Hence, inspired by this ‘philosophical’ perspective of the School Spirit, and through referring to the Literature in the field of Educational Leadership, the team was able to draw the following conclusions:

1. **The Energy Component:**

The ‘Energy’ element of the School Spirit is essentially linked to the individuals who are engaged physically, mentally and emotionally in the School Life. Nonetheless, this element seems to be hindered by many factors:

   a. **Tasks and Time Distribution:**

   The Focus Group Data suggests that the Tasks Distribution and Time Allocation at EDUVATION School Network are negatively affecting the individuals. Both Teachers and Officers find themselves overwhelmed with overloaded schedules that do not only leave minimal time for effective communication but also influences individuals’ social, physical and mental health. This reality might be additionally affecting teachers and Officers’ Job Satisfaction. According to Locke (1976), Job Satisfaction is the enjoyable emotional situation that comprises features relating to the Job itself (As cited in Yadav & Rangnekar, 2014); it refers also to the employee’s personal well-being and the overall health of the organization (Weiss, 2002 as cited in Yadav & Rangnekar, 2014).

   b. **Employees’ Attitudes:**

   Although our gathered Data highlight few negative attitudes exerted by the Officers which are influencing the departments/divisions’ Spirit, there are abundant evidence that describe Teachers’ Negative Attitudes within our Schools. Besides, a remarkable statement by the Participant Teachers (in our Focus Group) suggests that ‘negative attitudes’ result from a weak ‘sense of responsibility, sharing and belonging’.

Indeed, we can strongly argue that some teachers demonstrate, as described in our Focus Groups, a negative attitude, such as:
- Resistance to ideas and change regardless of how the idea/change/suggestions are constructive
- Lack of initiative and ‘taking the extra mile’
- Mistrust and Lack of enthusiasm
- Complaints attitudes in the ‘teachers’ lounge’
- Delivering messages to learners without any feeling of ownership

2. The ‘Synergy’ Component

In simple words, the ‘Synergy’ element refers to the interactions among individuals within the organization. Our focus data suggest that our ‘Synergy’ is influenced by two factors:

- A mechanical factor that describes the tools facilitating the Synergy. In that context, the findings put forward the fact that we over rely on e-mails that consist technical and mechanistic means of communication that lessen human interaction.
- A qualitative factor that describes the encounters that put the individuals together. In that context, the Schools’ Decision-Making process which consists an opportunity for ‘synergy’ does not seem to be always serving the purpose of enhancing the School Spirit.

In fact, while the decision-making process is ‘participative’ at the level of Officers in the schools’ Academic and Faculty Boards, it seems to be less ‘participative’ at the level of Teachers especially in their respective divisions.

Our focus group data suggest that teachers’ participation in the Decision-Making process is enabled at the level of Academic affairs; their participation is facilitated by their Head of Division and Head of Academic Department. Nonetheless, their participation is rarely enabled on the level of Administrative Affairs. A further investigation conducted with the Principals and Heads of Divisions on the context and role of ‘Division Meetings’ sustain that these meetings consist ‘floors for teachers to speak up’ and raise their concerns; they are not encounters for discussing the ‘Academic Affairs’ only but also rules and regulations, division calendar, follow-up on Educational issues, discipline protocol, etc. Hence, although teachers’ participation in the decision-making is guaranteed by the meetings’ governing policies and agenda, teachers do not seem to participate effectively and influence the outcomes of such meetings. This leads us to assess critically how efficiently strategies of ‘Participation in the Decision Making’ are executed; but first detect the philosophical approach of our schools when
it comes to Participative Decision Making (PDM). The following questions mentioned by Yadav & Rangnekar (2014) clarify our statement; “does PDM mean collective decision making or democratic decision making? Is it a process in which individuals contribute to group decisions made by others, or is it merely rhetoric?”

Furthermore, scholars define Participation in the Decision Making as the level of authority granted to the different stakeholders within a decision-making process. Those who are in position to influence the outcomes of the process are more likely to find themselves receptive to the outcomes. These claims explain some teachers’ resistant attitudes to change/new suggestions as well as their lack of taking initiatives. Yadav & Rangnekar (2014) assert that “Participation in the Decision Making leads to improved access to information, increases the power of ownership, the quality of decision making and their relative outcomes, thereby, diminishing negative behavior.

Most importantly, listing ‘Participative Decision Making’ under the ‘Synergy’ component asserts that this process results from the interaction among/between different parties, i.e. Officers and teachers. This assertion puts upfront, once again, the ‘Energy’ component of the School Spirit as it refers to the individual factor. Hence, the challenges/problems described in our Schools’ Decision Making Process indicate that the concerned stakeholders are not fulfilling their role effectively. On one hand, we have extensively described teachers’ weak citizenship attitudes especially those reflecting a sense of mistrust and lack of enthusiasm; on the other hand, the Officers, who are the governors of the Decision Making process, do not seem to manage and contribute effectively to this process. Indeed, the Officers, enacting as participants in the decision-making at the level of the Faculty Board, have sometimes demonstrated similar weak citizenship behaviors such as coming unprepared to the meetings or abstaining from participating in the debates, etc. Besides, within the context of department or division meetings, some Officers do not trigger teachers’ participation and hence, they are partially hold accountable for a diminished teacher involvement in the decision-making process.

3. **The ‘Light/Enlightenment’ Component:**

The ‘Light/Enlightenment’ element results from the interaction of both ‘Energy’ and ‘Synergy’; it contributes to the School Spirit as it gives meaning for our existence. As mentioned in our EDUVATION TAMAM report in November 2013, the ‘Enlightenment’ is
reflected through the School Praxis that is the ‘ambiance’ prevailing within the School; the report states:

“The School’s Praxis is the space where everybody feels accepted and appreciated, it connects several processes into a meaningful harmony, relying on norms and values that are shared by school members and which influence their functioning at school.”

In that perspective, any hindrance in the ‘Light/Enlightenment’ component seems to be consequence of the interaction of both the ‘Energy’ and ‘Synergy’ rather than a ‘root cause’ for a ‘weakened’ School Spirit.

**Ideal Scenario**
Enhancing the School Spirit has always been a school-wide concern at EDUVATION School Network. This concern gained importance as our Schools grew in size and expertise. In fact, our schools have developed throughout the years a large and complex structure that hosts numerous teachers and staff members who are permanently growing personally and professionally. Although growth is regarded as a positive indicator, it does not actually imply having a healthy School Climate and thus a constructive School Spirit. This ‘nuance’ has always been pinpointed by EDUVATION Leadership through affirming the vital need to turn the schools from the state of an ‘Organization’ characterized by its structured and mechanistic activities towards the ‘Organism’ state that regards the schools as a living body in which the School Spirit is the fundamental element of its existence and catalyst of its operations.

Inspired by this conviction, EDUVATION TAMAM engaged in extended reflections to identify an ideal scenario that is coherent with the ‘Organism’ that we aspire to. The following paragraphs will draw the conclusions that the team has attained regarding our ‘School Spirit’, hence, picture the different facets of our ‘Ideal Scenario’. These conclusions will additionally state the ‘Strategic / Long Term’ Objectives that EDUVATION TAMAM ‘Improvement Plan’ will aim at achieving and will provide a glimpse of the ‘Operational’ and ‘Tactical’ objectives that will be developed at a later stage into a fully-fledged Action Plan.

1) Teachers and Staff members’ Commitment towards Mission/Vision of the Organization

EDUVATION TAMAM Team believes that the ‘School Spirit’ that contributes to building the desired ‘Organism’ demands individuals who are well aware of the Mission, Vision, Educational Philosophy and Values and most importantly, are ready to commit willingly –
physically and emotionally— to promoting them (i.e. Mission, Vision, Educational Philosophy and Values) throughout their lives within the schools. In other words, we believe that the sense of ‘Commitment’ that the individual develops towards the mission/vision of the organization will nurture the ‘Energy’ component of the ‘School Spirit’ and will eventually result in ‘Acts’ that might go beyond the daily job expectations and thus promote a healthy ‘Synergy’. Manifestations of the School Spirit among EDUVATION family members could be:

- Altruism: developing empathy towards others, engage in cooperative and selfless helping behaviors;
- Courtesy: respecting the roles and responsibilities/duties of colleagues, making constructive statements about their work group and the organization;
- Civic Virtue: participating and being concerned about the School life through regarding the school as public sphere and public concern;
- Conscientiousness or ‘Role Modeling’: internalizing the values, rules, and regulations of the schools and demonstrating commitment to the School Mission, Vision and Educational Philosophy, volunteering for extra-job activities;
- Sportsmanship: tolerating gracefully the occasional work-related impositions and nuisances adopting a positive attitude, avoiding unnecessary conflicts, giving alternative solutions to occurring problems and most importantly taking initiatives.

Consequently, one Strategic objective of our TAMAM improvement plan would be:

- Promoting the commitment of EDUVATION Family members towards the School Mission and Philosophy in order to become contributors/promoters/ambassadors of the ‘School Spirit’.

2) Scheduling and Time Distribution

The ‘Energy’ of EDUVATION Family members is greatly influenced by the quality and quantity of missions and tasks that they exert within (and outside) their daily attendance at the Schools. EDUVATION TAMAM believes that the tasks required from teachers as part of their job duties, although they are numerous, cannot be omitted nor reduced as they are fundaments of the teaching position. Yet, we believe that a better time planning of school events and activities as well as a creative allocation of instructional sessions and complementary ‘tasks’ can be achieved and hence, contribute to EDUVATION Family members’ social, physical and
mental health. In addition to that, it can instill within teachers’ daily attendance at the Schools’ premises opportunities to meet colleagues, cooperate and coordinate effectively concerning teaching-learning matters.

Planning strategies influences greatly the work environment; hence, it affects directly the individuals’ well-being and indirectly their Job Satisfaction. Job Satisfaction has been regarded as the strongest variable that has influence on employees’ Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Organ & Konovsky, 1989 as cited in Yadav & Rangnekar, 2014).

Therefore, the second Strategic Objective of our TAMAM improvement plan is:

- Optimizing the Planning Strategies in order to promote teachers and staff members' physical, social and mental well-being.

3) Role of the Officers

A critical factor that has been highlighted in our Focus Groups’ findings and data analysis is the ‘Role of the Officer’ at EDUVATION. Indeed, EDUVATION TAMAM believes that the Officers’ convictions, beliefs and leadership styles can contribute explicitly to motivate support teachers and staff members in their journey towards become professionals and implicitly enhance our ‘School Spirit’. Indeed, the leadership and attitudes of the Officers and concerns for his/her team members’ well-being at different levels engage both the Officers and team members in close social non-materialistic exchange relationships that are believed to promote trust and credibility.

Besides, the Officers, as described and guaranteed in the EDUVATION schools’ policies, the Officers play the most vital role within the School Life as they ensure that their divisions/departments operate according to the Mission, Vision and Objectives in a holistic manner. They are responsible of spreading and nurturing the School’s Spirit among the small community they are in charge of.

In that perspective, the Officers contribute essentially to the ‘Synergy’ of the School Spirit through their daily interactions among each other and with their team members. Accordingly, our third Strategic Objective of our EDUVATION TAMAM improvement plan would be:

- Empowering the Officers at EDUVATION School Network in order to become contributors and promoters of the School Spirit.
As mentioned briefly above, the leadership of the Officers influences greatly teachers’ commitment and involvement in School Life. This implies that EDUVATION TAMAM Strategic Improvement Objectives relevant to the teachers and staff members on one side and Officers on the other side are actually interconnected as they engage permanently in an ‘osmosis’ relation. Interestingly, the Improvement Objective relevant to the Scheduling and Time Allocation—which will be described later- contributes to this osmosis through instilling a working environment that promotes the individual’s well-being.

On one hand, EDUVATION TAMAM team is fully aware that its contribution to enhancing the Time Allocation strategies -highlighted in this ideal scenario- might be limited as this correlates directly with High-Level Budget Decisions. On the other, the team advocates, within the framework of this ideal scenario, for an improved role of Officers; actually, for an empowerment of EDUVATION Officers to regain their Status as defined in our Educational Philosophy and Schools’ policies. Such empowerment will hold the Officers accountable for promoting the School Spirit and attaining a specific ‘Role Identity’ that is demonstrated through certain behaviors/attitudes/convictions/leadership styles such as:

- **Supervisory Support:**

Studies explain that employees are involved in at least two social relationships at work: one with his/her immediate supervisor and one with his/her organization (Masterson et al., 2000 as cited in Yadav & Rangnekar, 2014). Indeed, at our Schools, the Officers are the ones who have the most direct and frequent contact with teachers and staff members; hence, their relationship provides the foundation of trust within the organization. They are additionally responsible for the implementation of the schools’ mission objectives through planning and monitoring the division/department’s daily operations and affecting the working environment through creating harmonious teams and constantly motivating team members.

In Maslow’s Hierarchy the ‘Need for Belonging’ comes third. Inspired by Maslow’s theory that asserts that any need cannot be fulfilled without satisfying the pre-requisite needs, we can claim that Officers hold a great role in ensuring that the ‘Security Needs’ are fulfilled.
While the physiological needs such as salaries and work-related benefits are fulfilled by the School Administration, the ‘Security Needs’ can only be fulfilled through the commitment of the middle management Officers to teachers and staff members’ emotional and social well-being through instilling trust and support and maintaining deeper life experiences.

As we mention ‘needs’, we present the following statement by Yadav & Rangnekar (2014):

“As employees develop their careers, they climb the ladder in the hierarchy of needs, show more urgency and are more willing to become involved in work-related decisions. If management succeeds in catering to these needs, they will reap the benefit of more positive organizational outcomes.”

This statement leads us to the following ‘Role Identity’ demonstration.

- **Enable Teachers and staff members’ Participation in the Decision Making process:**

The Officers are the leaders of their respective departments/divisions; thus, they hold mostly the decision-making authority. Nonetheless, their encounters with their team members whether through one-to-one coordination or team meetings consist opportunities for enabling team members’ participation in the decision-making process whether in a formal one or an informal one. This participation generates many positive outcomes on the School Life; in fact, it can achieve the following results:

- Reducing role ambiguity and accordingly a reduction of stress
- Improving individuals’ self-efficacy and team efficacy
- Increasing organizational commitment
- Most importantly, expanding the loop of decision-making to include teachers and staff members increases their sense of ownership and reduces potential resistance to change. Job Satisfaction, which will be described in the next paragraph, is also one outcome of participative decision-making.

- **Contributing to Job Satisfaction:**

Job Satisfaction seems to be a result for Supervisory Support and Participative Decision Making. Nonetheless, Job Satisfaction comprises more features related to the ‘Job itself’ that can be channeled or influenced by the Officers such as:

- The Appraisal of the individual’s work
- Reward system, essentially a motivation system based on non-materialistic ‘intrinsic motivators’
- Individual’s emotional, physical and social well-being
- Department/division climate

Besides, the following strategies might consist tools for enabling Officers to achieve this ‘Role Identity’; these might consist the pillars of EDUVATION TAMAM Action Plan. At this stage, we will pinpoint them briefly:

- Develop Officers’ Self-Reflective Practices
- Adopt a Mentoring approach for Officers that aims at assisting the Officers to gain professional maturity. In this context, the ‘mentoring’ and ‘supportive’ role of the Principal/Director is valued rather than the evaluative one.
- Design a special ‘Induction Program’ for New Officers

**EDUVATION TAMAM Ideal Scenario and Schools’ Context**

Interestingly, the development of EDUVATION TAMAM’s Ideal Scenario comes with an increased school-wide awareness of the unique institutional identity defined by our ‘School Spirit’. Therefore, EDUVATION TAMAM can identify many school-wide initiatives that will, first, accentuate the fact that ‘enhancing the School Spirit’ is one common aim uniting EDUVATION Family members, and second, complement EDUVATION TAMAM efforts towards attaining the School Spirit that our Schools strive for. These existing initiatives are:
- Increasing the number of teachers and staff members serving on Schools’ Committees; hence, enabling some teachers and staff members to take part in school-wide projects. One obvious example is EDUVATION TAMAM team.
- Launching the internal Community Social Responsibility – CSR program – entitled ‘Bayneitna/بيناتنا’ which is school-wide exchange project that is believed to promote the School Spirit through instilling a culture of ‘Sharing and Caring’.
- Launching the Professional Learning Program (PLP) that “aims at nurturing, within EDUVATION School Network, a community of professional educators committed to both their personal and institutional growth, and thus, ensuring the achievement of the schools’ Mission. The PLP envisions promoting a culture of commitment and accountability to the educational profession through designing and allocating professional learning and capacity building activities, which adopt our schools’ Holistic Approach. Such activities are based on reliable needs’ assessment and respect the differentiation rule and the Network’s goals” (as cited in the Minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on January 18, 2016). Within the framework of the PLP, professional learning activities such as Mentoring program, Orientation Programs, Workshops and Trainings, Formative Performance Appraisal are supporting tools for enabling each member of EDUVATION (Teachers, Academic Departments’ Staff, Educational Departments’ Staff as well as the Academic and Educational Officers) to attain the Educators’ Profile.
- Developing the Management Levels/Officers’ Ranking Policy that is believed to trigger EDUVATION Officers’ personal and professional growth.
- Not to forget our Schools’ landmark that is the Resourcing Days that consist an opportunity for gathering all EDUVATION Family around themes related to Professionalizing Teaching; in addition to special and occasional gatherings on Teachers’ Day, Christmas celebration, etc.
Conclusion
This report has provided a thorough reflection on EDUVATION TAMAM work since the beginning of the Scholastic Year 2014-2015. It demonstrated the TAMAM journey that guided the team members mainly throughout the ‘Needs Identification’ and ‘Ideal Scenario’ pit stops. Indeed, although this journey was triggered by a sensed need to enhance the Communication System within our Schools, it has channeled EDUVATION TAMAM team members’ focus towards the vital and unique element differentiating our schools that is the ‘Spirit’.

This report has, hopefully, shed the light on the ‘mystery’ of the School Spirit through detecting its hindrances within our School Life and providing practical Strategic Improvement Objectives for enhancing it. Indeed, the ‘School Spirit is already there’; our EDUVATION TAMAM contribution along with all EDUVATION Family members would be developing in means that would guarantee that our growing ‘Organization’ attains the fully-fledge state of an ‘Organism’.
Appendix A: The Five Hypotheses that resulted from the Quantitative Study in 2012-2013

First Hypothesis
Eduvation School Network staff perceives themselves as a professional community of educators that share common Vision, Understandings, and Values related to their professional commitment and its underlying practices. In addition, the staff considers the strategies adopted at Eduvation School Network strongly reflect its mission and vision of education.

Second Hypothesis
Eduvation School Network staff strongly shares the school belief in Character Education as an integral entity of learner’s education, and expresses their commitment towards enhancing this facet of education within all practices. Although this hypothesis aligns with the first one, it is characterized by a practical aspect that staff commits themselves to in their daily practices.

Third Hypothesis
Eduvation School Network staff strongly respect individual differences among learners and staff and are committed towards modifying practices accordingly. This hypothesis has been demonstrated in the various practices the school staff and administrators display in daily practices.

Fourth Hypothesis
Eduvation School Network staff perceive that the school administration should put extra effort in reconsidering the management of staff time and load of work in order to optimize efficiency. At least 45% of Eduvation School Network staff believes that more effort should be done on developing timesaving procedures and arranging meetings that do not take more time than strictly necessary.

Fifth Hypothesis
Eduvation School Network staff highlighted the need to empower and build the capacity of staff, which is suspected to influence their attitude towards various school practices… Participants expressed their interest in empowering teachers to participate in the decision making process for the best benefit of learners. The same need was expressed in the form of enhancing communication and attitude towards innovation.
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions on ‘Communication and the School Spirit’

1. First Draft – developed on April 20, 2015

a. How would you define communication?
   i. This question will help building a common ground and understanding of ‘Communication’.

b. How do you perceive communication dynamics in our school?
   i. What are the means of communication? (formal, informal including gossip, and personalized)
   ii. What challenges the communication within your department / division?
   iii. Question for Officers only: How do you perceive the communication dynamics within the Faculty board?

c. How would you assess your engagement in your department/division’s decision-making process?
   i. How do you react if your opinion/suggestion was not taken into consideration?
   ii. If you ever have a problem, what do you do? Who would you refer to?

d. What does your school do to communicate decisions?
   i. How do decisions taken by other departments affect your work? Do you seek to know these decisions?
   ii. How are decisions explained to you?
   iii. How often do you discuss the decisions with your Officer / team members?
   iv. Question for Officers only: How do you handle a miscommunicated idea/decision? How would you communicate a decision that you are not convinced of?

e. What do you suggest to improve communication in our schools?
   i. What do you consider best practices in communication?
   ii. What takes you to become more involved in school life?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Probes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Define your understanding of effective communication.</td>
<td>This question will help building a common understanding of communication among focus group participants</td>
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| 2. In your opinion, and if we think of communication as a horizontal or vertical process, what aspects of communication can enhance the department work and climate? | (1) Focus not on communication for technical purposes but rather for educational purposes and sharing rationale behind actions. (enhancing team spirit)  
(2) How do decisions taken by other departments affect your work? Do you seek to know these decisions? |
| 3. From where you stand, what challenges that you face in your work, are attributed to communication? |                                                                                                   |
| 4. How does communication enhance your engagement in the school’s decision-making process? | (1) What does your school do to communicate decisions with you?  
(2) How are decisions explained to you?  
(3) How do you react if your opinion/ suggestion was not taken into consideration?  
(4) If you ever have a problem what do, you do? Who would you refer to? |
| 5. How can communication serve the purpose of building spirit?                 | (1) What do you consider best practices in communication?  
(2) What are the key pillars that lead to an effective communication process among individuals? |
3. Third Version – developed on June 4, 2015
   
a. Define your understanding of effective communication.

b. Communication is a horizontal process as well as a vertical one. How does communication happen at these different levels?

c. In your opinion, what challenges that you face in your work are attributed to communication? How do these challenges impact our school spirit?

d. How does communication enhance your engagement in the school’s decision-making process?
   
i. At the School Level:

   1. What does your school do to communicate decisions?

   2. How are decisions explained to you?

   3. How do you react if your opinion/suggestion was not taken into consideration?

   4. If you ever have a problem what do you do? Who do you refer to?

   ii. At the Department/Division Level:

   1. How do you take decisions within your department/division?

   2. How do you communicate decisions to your team members?

   e. How can communication serve the purpose of building spirit?

   i. Kindly provide real life examples.

   ii. What are the components of effective communication? What are the most effective communication means?