

MANAGING INEFFECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOLS AT LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

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Abstract

This study reports the findings of the masters studies on management styles that are adopted in effective secondary schools and examined how the effect of participative management styles could positively change the status of ineffective secondary schools. Two hundred educators and five school principals were sampled for the study. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data for the study. The respondents argued that their school principals adopted democratic, transformational, situational, and behavioural styles of management. They further believed that the adoption of participative management styles would positively change the status of ineffective secondary schools. They argued that by adopting democratic, transformational, situational and behavioural styles of management will encourage educators to: i) develop effective teaching and learning in their classrooms as they will be highly motivated; ii) adopt participative teaching methods that encourage learners to take part in classroom activities with confidence; and, iii) adopt team teaching which contributes to better performance in the classroom.

Keywords: School management, effective schools, ineffective schools, leadership styles and participative management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trends in the South African schooling system show that some secondary schools in South Africa can be regarded as ineffective and/or dysfunctional because they are failing in their roles as centres for teaching and learning. This status needs to be changed for learners to receive sound education that they could use as productive citizens of the country. The study endeavours to investigate how the effect of a participative management styles could positively change the status of ineffective schools.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Lejweleputswa district, in the Free State province has 64 secondary schools that offer Grade 12. Statistics released by the director of Lejweleputswa education district indicate that some secondary schools in the region are constantly producing poor results for Grade 12. For instance, analysis of 2006 Grade 12 results shows that 14 secondary schools fall under the extremely high risk schools category, whilst 4 secondary schools fall under the high risk schools category.

Furthermore, statistics reveal that, of the 18 secondary schools that are constantly producing poor results, 16 of them had pass rates of below 50%. This performance implies that an effective culture of teaching and learning does not exist in some secondary schools, and that, furthermore, educators in these schools may have poor classroom management skills. Mahloko (2010) defines classroom management as that aspect of the teaching role that focuses on creating an environment and establishing conditions that facilitate learner success in achieving both academic and social goals. The researchers think that schools that strive to improve on learner performance are perceived to be helpful towards creating an environment that allows effective teaching and learning. Secondary schools whose performance is poor are considered dysfunctional and ineffective. This implies that an intervention management strategy that will address this state of affairs needs to be identified and adopted.

It is also important to note that the performance of these schools is contrary to the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) which promotes a culture of respect for teaching and learning in educational institutions. Furthermore, the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998) indicates that the principal has to ensure that education of the learners is promoted in a proper manner and in accordance with approved policies. The principal is responsible for the professional management of a public school and has to provide professional leadership of the school. The Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998) also states that the deputy principal assists the principal in managing the school and promoting the education of learners in a proper manner. The Act also suggests that the principal and the deputy principal should practice pro-active leadership. This leadership requires that the principal and the deputy principal should be accountable. Loock (2003) argues that “successful schools are not only collaborative internally, but they have the confidence, capacity, and political wisdom to reach out, constantly forming new alliances”. It is further claimed that principals should create a supportive and trusting climate. This implies that principals should adopt and implement participative management styles to enhance the effectiveness of their management practices. The study envisages that the adoption participative management styles may positively change the status of ineffective secondary schools. Loock (2003) points out that there is a relationship between leadership and school effectiveness.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Participative management styles are democratic, transformational, situational, and behavioural styles of management (Hellriegel, Jackson and Slocum 2005). Therefore, leadership in organizations should encourage their subordinates to participate in the decision making process. In an educational setting, participation in decision-making serves as one of the variables that could stimulate school effectiveness.

Participation will further serve as a framework within which all decisions at school level are made (Van der Westhuizen 2007). Wayne (2008) indicates that shared decision-making is the best known model of management in most organisations. Shared decision-making has four rules:

- First, the quality rule (quality requirement): this rule uses a unilateral approach: (a) if the quality requirement is low, the matter appears to be uninteresting to subordinates; or (b) if the quality requirement is low and the decisions become important, the matter will then become important to the subordinates and will be accepted;
- Second, the leader information rule (leader information): this rule discourages unilateral decisions, in such cases in which the quality of decision seems to be important and one does not possess sufficient information and expertise in solving the problem alone;
- Third, the trust rule (goal congruence): this rule strives to make a unilateral decision when the quality of the decision is important and one appears to have a lack of in subordinates to decide the attainment of organisational goals. As a result, lack of control over the decision may endanger quality;
- Fourth, the unstructured problem rule (problem structure): this rule involves knowledgeable subordinates to gather relevant information when the quality of the decision appears to be interesting and important. The unstructured problem will also lead to lack of information.

Nieman and Bennett (2006) argue that school principals will need to take a strong stance in the decision-making process, as this action will influence the short or long-term success of the organisation. Nieman and Bennett (2006) further state that decision-making is the process of making a choice between different alternatives in order to choose the most effective and appropriate change in order to solve the problem. Hence educators will be involved in drafting a school curriculum, in which they will identify the content that must be taught. Participation in taking decisions indicates the promotion of team-building among all educators involved in the decision-making process, which is a democratic management style.

A democratic leadership style (Hellriegel, Jackson and Slocum 2005) is considered to be based on effective participation in which people are invited to make decisions, to build commitment among team members and to generate new ideas. Democratic leadership seldom gives negative feedback and it rewards adequate performance (Loock 2003). Schools that encourage the use of a democratic leadership style which does not give negative feedback are examples to neighbouring schools in that they have a continuous record of a high pass rate ranging from 80% to 100%.

School management teams (SMTs) could also adopt transformational leadership style.

Christison and Murray (2009) explain transformational leadership as having the ability to transform individuals within the organisation to produce results that are beyond their expectation. It is the responsibility of leaders to transform their co-workers within the work environment if they want to achieve success, and this will contribute towards productive leadership and the management of schools as effective organisations.

According to Fandt, Goodman and Lewis (2004) transformational leadership is the leaders' ability to have an influence on subordinates to accomplish more than was originally bargained for. Leaders should demonstrate that their actions of leadership can have an influence on their co-workers. Situational leadership style is also critical in the management of an organisation.

Situational style of leadership is an approach that examines whether there is any interaction between the leadership behaviour and the situation, as well as the subordinates' readiness (Fandt, Goodman and Lewis 2004). Good leadership behaviour will always influence a strong relation between the leaders and their co-workers in pursuit of a high and productive work performance. A leadership behaviour that is capable of instilling a good morale will improve effective co-operation that seems to be lacking in most secondary schools. Hellriegel, Jackson and Slocum (2007) maintain that a situational leadership style is an approach that is used to compare the levels of readiness that subordinates will demonstrate in order to perform the task that is entrusted to them. Cunningham and Cordeiro (2009) reveal that this leadership seems to be influenced by maturity, as well as development of the work group amongst individual subordinates, as it varies from subordinates to subordinates. This implies that the behaviour of the leader could promote or prevent teamwork in an organisation.

The behavioural theory of leadership as focusing on two leader behaviours, namely those that emphasise the task accomplishment and those that show concern for the employee (Dumler and Skinner 2008). The most important role of leaders within the organisation is to ensure that the organisation is productive, where employees do the work they are assigned to do. Furthermore, leaders should establish good relationships with their co-workers. The leader behaviour practised by school managers will determine their responsibility in ensuring schools' effectiveness. Bhagat, Kashlak and Phatak (2009) emphasise that behavioural leadership focuses on behaviour that makes leaders effective regarding two clusters of leadership behaviours. One cluster of leadership behaviour, known as consideration, reflects people-orientated behaviours such as showing trust, respect and concern for others' wellbeing. The second cluster, known as initiation of structure, focuses on behaviours that define and structure work roles.

It is on the basis of these clusters of leader behaviour that leaders are faced with the subjective task of developing their co-workers, so that they work towards the achievements of the organisation, which are influenced by personal goals of the employees. This implies that educators should follow identified paths that will enable them to achieve the set goals of their schools.

The path-goal theory of leadership is considered to be based on the expectancy theory of motivation whereby the leader's role is two-fold (Dumler and Skinner 2008). The two-fold role of the leader is to explain to the employee the path by which an individual employee can realise personal goals (in the form of salary increases and promotion) and organisational outcomes can be improved; and to expand the rewards that are valued by the employee as a follower (Dumler and Skinner 2008). This will be the role of the leader who acts as a facilitator engaging the organisation in the learning process. This will also be a way to demonstrate leadership behaviour by assisting the employees as followers to understand better how their actions link and correlate to organisational rewards. Dumler and Skinner (2008) point out that an effective leader will be able to motivate the employee as a follower regarding outcomes that are valued by individual members of the community, learners' parents and staff members within the organisation. The adoption of these participative management styles could improve performance in ineffective secondary schools.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which participative management styles may positively change the status of ineffective secondary schools.

5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Statistics show that some secondary schools in Lejweleputswa district are not performing as they should and that this could be attributed to the way in which they are managed. Hence, it is the school principals' responsibility to influence their educators toward the achievement of good Grade 12 results. Therefore, the management styles that are implemented in ineffective secondary schools are contributing to poor performance in these schools. This problem gives rise to the following research questions:

- What styles of management exist in effective secondary schools?
- In what way can the adoption of participative management styles change the status of ineffective secondary schools?

6. RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that the adoption of participative management styles is likely to improve educators' performance and learner academic achievement.

It is also assumed that ineffective secondary schools will set high performance standards for themselves and will have faith in their capability to meet these standards.

7. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A mixed method study was used. It is an explanatory design in which the quantitative phase came first and the qualitative phase came later. The quantitative approach was used to determine the management styles practiced in effective schools while the qualitative approach was used to establish the extent to which participative management styles could change the status of ineffective schools. The qualitative approach was used to establish how the implementation of participative management styles could change the status of ineffective schools. A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The questionnaire comprising a four-point Likert scale, namely, strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree was used. The questionnaire was administered to 200 educators and five school principals were interviewed.

Simple random sample was used to select the respondents. The researchers used SPSS to analyse data. Frequency statistics were computed to analyse questionnaire data and these data were scheduled in tabular form. Interview data was analysed by first coding, categorising and then interpreting to provide insight.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following paragraphs present questionnaire and interview data.

8.1 Questionnaire data

Two hundred educators from effective secondary schools completed the questionnaires. The sample consisted of 92 male educators and 108 female educators. The respondents were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements that measured the adoption of the various participative management styles at their schools. Items 1, 2 and 3 of the questionnaire measured the adoption of democratic management style, items 4 and 5 measured the adoption of transformational leadership style, items 6, 7 and 8 measured the adoption of situational leadership style, whilst items 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 measured the adoption of behavioural leadership style. The participative management styles of effective schools are as follows:

Table 1 Management Styles at Effective Schools**N=200**

Questionnaire Item		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
1	The school principal invites educators to participate in decision making process.	7	3.5	182	91.0	7	3.5	4	2.0
2	The school principal builds commitment among educators.	12	6.0	185	92.5	2	1.0	1	0.5
3	The school principal affords opportunities to educators to generate new ideas.	38	19.0	150	75.0	9	4.5	3	1.5
4	The school principal has the ability to transform educators to produce results that are beyond their expectations.	16	8.0	176	88.0	8	4.0	0	0
5	The school principal has the ability to influence educators to accomplish more than what was originally bargained for.	20	10.0	176	88.0	3	1.5	1	0.5
6	In our school there is a strong relationship between the leader and educators in pursuit of a high and productive work performance	18	9.0	173	86.5	8	4.0	1	0.5

7	The school principal is capable of instilling good morale among educators.	28	14.0	167	83.5	4	2.0	1	1.5
8	Our school develops team-building among staff.	1	0.5	199	99.5	0	0	0	0
9	The school principal shows concern for educators' well-being	1	0.5	196	98.0	3	1.5	0	0
10	Educators work together as co-workers to improve on their teaching practices.	14	7.0	182	91.0	3	1.5	1	0.5
11	The behavior of the school principal promotes teamwork in our school.	36	18.0	160	80.0	3	1.5	1	0.5
12	The school principal shows concern for the educators.	10	5.0	184	92.0	3	1.5	3	1.5
13	The school principal assists the educators to understand how their actions link to school rewards.	0	0	200	100	0	0	0	0

The Table indicates that the majority (94,5%) of respondents agree that the school principal invites educators to participate in decision making process, 98,5% of the respondents agree that the school principal builds commitment among educators and 94% of the respondents agree that their school principals afford them with opportunities to generate new ideas. These results imply that school principals in effective secondary schools adopt democratic management styles as educators take part in various management activities.

The Table also reveals that 96% of the respondents agree that their school principals have the ability to transform educators to produce results that are beyond their expectations. The majority of the respondents (98%) also agree that their principals have the ability to influence educators to accomplish more than they bargained for.

Table 1 further indicates that 95, 5% of the respondents agree that there is a strong relationship between the leader and educators in pursuit of a high and productive work performance. 97, 5% of the respondents agree that their school principals are capable of instilling good morale among educators while all respondents agree that their schools develop team-building among staff. The results suggest that in effective secondary schools there is situational style of leadership.

Finally, the results in Table 1 indicate that 98, 5% of the respondents agree that their school principal show concern for educators' well-being. The majority of the respondents (98%) agree that educators work together as co-workers to improve on their teaching practices whilst 98% of the respondents agree that the behaviors of their school principals promote teamwork in their schools. Ninety eight percent of the respondents agree that the school principal show concern for their educators. All respondents agree that their school principals assist educators to understand how their actions link to school rewards. The results mean that principals in effective school adopt behavioural leadership style. These results imply that school principals in ineffective should also adopt participative management styles in order to improve teaching and learning performance in their schools. Interviews were conducted to investigate the way in which participative management styles could change the status of ineffective schools.

8.2 Interview data

In response to the question in what way can participative management styles change the status of ineffective secondary schools? Participants indicated that the use of participative management styles would encourage educators to adopt democratic classroom management styles. Democratic teachers use participative teaching methods which are learner-centred (Vakalisa 2011). All principals indicated that educators would use teaching methods such as discussion, role-playing and project methods that develop cooperative learning. Participative teaching methods increase learner involvement in the lesson and they also promote self-discovery of knowledge by the learners (Vakalisa 2011). Two principals indicated that participative teaching developed effective teaching and learning in the classrooms as educators and learners would be highly motivated. Three principals indicated that the use of participative teaching methods encouraged learners to take part in classroom activities with confidence and this might contribute to better performance in the classroom.

The responses above infer that participative management styles could lead to productive classroom atmosphere as learners are involved in the teaching learning activities. This is likely to encourage initiative and creativity in the classrooms. Creativity in the classroom happens if learners have critical thinking abilities that should be developed by their educators. The researchers contend that learners who think critically tend to perform well academically, hence Grade 12 results will improve at ineffective secondary schools.

9. CONCLUSION

School management teams in effective schools adopt various leadership styles such as transformational leadership, democratic leadership, situational leadership, and behavioural leadership. Schools that implement these leadership styles achieve their objectives, positively change their status from ineffectiveness and build cooperation among educators. These leadership styles promote partnership among school community members. These styles help learners to understand the contents of the subjects taught with ease. Participative management styles contribute towards empowering educators to work as a team. This stimulates a desire in educators to teach effectively in order to improve learner performance. Educators are able to adjust their teaching practices and strategies to develop all learners to their fullest potential.

10. REFERENCES

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