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Revisiting the Tension between Management and Leadership Practices in Ensuring Quality Teaching and Learning

Abstract

Leading and managing schools across the globe requires accountability for the utilisation of resources entrusted to schools for improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Little, however, is known about the school managers' effectiveness in accounting for the schools quality teaching and learning. This paper explored school managers' accountability in leading and managing schools for quality teaching and learning in South Africa. The research question posed is: How effective are school leaders and managers in addressing the tension between management and leadership practices in ensuring quality teaching and learning? Despite most school leaders and managers believing that they do their best to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools, available literatures on the same, contradict these perceptions. The study therefore concludes that, school leadership and management is not an effective accountability mechanism for ensuring quality teaching and learning in schools in South Africa and recommends a policy shift on school leadership from a control approach to an innovative and collaborative approach.

Keywords: leadership and management, accountability, contextual intelligence, teaching and learning, collaboration

Introduction

This paper is in essence a summative analysis and interpretation of existing literature on the leadership and management practices of ensuring quality teaching and learning in South African schools. Education plays a significant role in improving the socioeconomic conditions of individuals and communities and requires accountability to be of quality. Given that the youth make up the largest proportion of the population in the country, it is important to ensure that they are effectively developed to contribute to the existing pool of knowledge for the betterment of the society. Employment requires skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change. Attainment of this goal, according to Bejaković (2014), requires leaders and managers to ensure education and training is based on high-level skills, ability to work as a team, possession of problem-solving skills, information and communications technology (ICT), and communication and language skills. This combination of skills may be achieved if there is no tension between management and leadership practices in the world of work.

The South African government has allocated a considerable portion of the budget to the education sector to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Despite the public funding pumped into the education sector, the quality of

teaching and learning leaves much to be desired in Black schools. Informing the writing of the paper are four assumptions, viz. that (a) school leadership and management is important for ensuring quality teaching and learning in schools; (b) school leaders and managers have the skill to improve teaching and learning in schools; (c) school leaders are responsible for ensuring school staff members are supported to provide quality teaching and learning; and, d) that teaching and learning should be supported through resources. Informing these assumptions is the notion that school leadership and management should foster teaching and learning and increase organisational effectiveness. The paper has included both a review of literature on leadership and management, accountability, and, an analysis of existing school leadership/management practices.

Leadership and management

This conceptual qualitative paper highlights the importance of accountability in ensuring quality teaching and learning in schools. Principals placed in charge of social organisations, occupy a unique position which requires skills to ensure quality teaching and learning is achieved. The position they occupy demands the combined role of both leadership and management for the performance of the two functions in all contexts. The two roles which represent two sides of the same coin, puts different demands of accountability on school principals working in a given school context for the achievement of outcomes. Simply stated, principalship is an important function of leadership and management, though Bush and Glover (2014), state that management and leadership differ, particularly with reference to the school principal's role, and that the practice of both creates tensions and dilemmas.

Principalship is complex and places demands for management and leadership on the principal from a multiplicity of sources. Firstly, the demands put on the school principal are a mix of leadership and management demands, evidenced by current policies on standards for principals in developed and developing countries (DfE, 2015; DBE, 2016). Secondly, various stakeholders expect one principal to serve various constituencies ranging from the education department, the school governing bodies, teachers and learners, and the broader community. Lastly, the organisational environment in which principals operate is dynamic and complex and places a special demand requiring principals to have contextual intelligence. As managers, principals are expected to manage resources, data and processes; to consider policies, take decisions, act upon them and account for both the decisions and subsequent actions. Furthermore, they have to be innovative and take their organisations forward from one improvement level to the next, in response to contextual demands (Bush & Glover, 2014). These different expectations create tensions, leaving the principal trapped between both sides.

Quality teaching and learning

Quality teaching and learning is a pursuit of innovations in an education system. It is a systematic way of encouraging, monitoring, and evaluating all the innovations so that positive results, negative consequences and costs are measured, documented and reciprocated where necessary. Accordingly, innovations that may yield success in ensuring quality teaching and learning require training and professional

development for teachers, modification of roles and responsibilities of head teachers to include support supervision of their peers, engaging key school stakeholders in performance review meetings, signing customised performance agreement with teachers and head teachers, mobilising teachers to work as a group in setting and marking exams (Serdyukov, 2017). For the above to be attained, the school principals need to have strong technical capacity to do work and to diagnose problems affecting teaching and learning as far as the interventions are concerned. Principals need to identify the behaviour, and social relationships, policy and legal issues that are of concern, and come up with appropriate intervention strategies to address them.

Attaining the above, requires principals to find resources (time and money) to allow teachers to take up the vital work of professional knowledge production. They have to support through their work to build up a staff of like-minded teachers, and also develop strong out of school friendships with them. The work of leading/managing relies heavily on trust and reciprocity. The principals however are often caught in a double bind where systemic emphasis is placed on individual performance of schools and the individual leadership of the principal, rather than collective performance or collective leadership (Mulford et al., 2008). Supporting continuous professional development of teachers is a very important quality improvement intervention initiative to be prioritised by the school principals and all government structures, with sufficient budget allocation. Every changing school environment should be scanned using a framework and appropriate strategies to respond and account to identified learning challenges in the schools so that they can be understood and dealt with (Henard & Roseveare, 2012).

Accountability theory

The study uses an accountability theory advanced by Philip E. Tetlock (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999) which holds that no social system can function sustainably without an accountability check on its members. Trust and internalisation of norms alone are not sufficient for institutions to function effectively. First, the fact that the principal has a legislative authority to ensure quality teaching and learning, the influence of leadership and management cannot be wished away. The state provides the school with resources and has a legitimate expectation for accountability for managing these resources (DeCenzo, Robbins & Verhulst, 2016). Similarly, the school community expect effective leadership from principals, who have to rely on leadership theories for guidance in meeting the community's expectations. The choice of the accountability theory is based on the knowledge that school leadership and management is an accountability function (Hislop, 2017) and that, accountability as an organisational function, defines peoples' way of reasoning, and shapes their behaviours and actions; and sets performance standards that define rewards and penalties in organisations. Accordingly, Tetlock's (1999) accountability framework is used to guide people in decision making, and the framework entails:

Accountability as a universal feature of decision environments, a distinct attribute of discernment that reminds leaders to act in accordance with the existing norms of a society; provides a rationale for people to behave in conformity or contrary to the existing norms; and, it is an indispensable condition for the

attainment of quality teaching and learning in schools. It connects decision makers to their society and results in accountability in performance of tasks.

People seeking approval for both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Principals' support for staff will be shown by their automatic response to situations, for example, by becoming happy, angry or even frowning. Extrinsic motives, on the other hand, may be revealed by the ability of the individual to seek approval from the leader they consider more powerful than them in terms of control of resources.

People's motives to attain quality teaching and learning will influence their interaction with others. People who are motivated may seek social approvals, minimise the cost of relationship; maximise benefits in a relationship; they may need affiliation; and hold certain internalised principles and convictions.

People always link their motives to coping strategies. It is up to the principal to always choose strategies that are feasible or have potential to enhance teaching and learning or damage the school's reputation. Prevailing circumstances can increase or decrease motives. For example, the contextual situation may result in the staff choosing to be cooperative, confrontational, duplicitous, candid, rigid, opportunistic, principled, decisive, oscillating or chronic complainers. Thus, in their attempts to balance leadership and management demands, the school principal faces tension, and the possible way of reducing such tension requires contextual intelligence to ensure quality teaching and learning is accounted for in the school.

Contextual intelligence

According to Kutz (2015), contextual intelligence is the ability to 'recognise and diagnose the plethora of contextual factors' in a given situation and adjust one's behaviour to influence that situation. Contextual intelligent principals can understand the limits of their knowledge and to adapt that knowledge to an environment different from human capital, information processing demands, and are effective (Khanna, Jones & Boivie, 2014). Such principals understand how schools can gain and sustain competitive advantage, as well as make well-reasoned strategic decisions. A contextually intelligent principal encourages people to see the brighter side of the future and creates a sense of urgency for everyone to shift from the present situation to the new one. Staff members are encouraged to take risks and are defended in the best interest of student learning and achievement (moral purpose). In other words, the promotion of a collective pursuit of a shared moral purpose, reduces the tension between management and leadership demands by focusing on what matters for both. The high management and leadership expectations that require contextual management and leadership skills, are lacking, and cause frustrations when principal are required to be accountable for quality teaching and learning (Marishane & Mampane, 2018). The absence of contextual intelligence makes the role expectations cause tension in the leadership course of pursuing a common goal of student learning and achievement. The school principal and the school are in a co-existential relationship with their context or situation. For a school principal to succeed in their core business, they need to gain knowledge of the context, and, its dynamics.

Contextual intelligence, which has its roots in psychology and is based on Sternberg's *Triachic Theory of Human Intelligence*, which involves the ability to recognize and diagnose the plethora of contextual factors inherent in an event or

circumstance, that intentionally or intuitively adjust behaviour in order to exert influence in that context (Kutz, 2015, p. vi). It includes the ability to influence anyone, anywhere and anytime. Such intelligence is demonstrated in four significant ways, notably: a) recognising the shifting dimension of a situation; b) recognising individual differences in terms of creative, analytic and practical skills needed for success (goal setting and goal achievement) within a given context/situation; c) knowing, understanding and demonstrating the behaviours (hindsight, insight and foresight), that are considered important in a situation; and d) adjusting one's behaviour at the right time to exert the right amount of influence when the situation changes. The latter involves applying common sense/tacit knowledge to a situation. Tacit knowledge is defined as whatever needs to be known for one to work effectively in the environment without necessarily being taught or told what to do (Sternberg, 2003). It is about being *smart/streetwise* – to use an everyday expression.

Discussion

From literature reviewed, Mulford and colleagues (2008) found that the existing tension in leading and managing schools for the improvement of teaching and learning are manifested through four key dimensions, namely: control/change, care/responsibility ethics, major imperative, and major function dimensions. *Control-change* dimension involves the tension principals experience between externally imposed change and control of schools (through policies, standards, monitoring and evaluation systems). These emphasise stability on the one hand, and school autonomy marked by internally generated change, aligned with the needs and goals of the school, on the other hand. The *care/responsibility ethics* dimension involves the tension between participation and collaboration based on the ethics of responsibility (demanding accountability, efficiency and certainty) and participation and collaboration based on the ethics of care for the wellbeing of teachers and students (considering effectiveness, innovation and individual differences). *Major imperative dimension* involves the tension between personal time and professional task, leading to a situation where principals sacrifice their personal time to satisfy the demands of the job. *Major task dimension* represents the tension between management and instructional leadership, where management shifts principals' attention away from focusing on teachers, learners and instruction, to focusing on 'paperwork', procedures and systems, while the instructional leadership does the opposite (Mulford et al., 2008).

Conclusion

Both educational management and educational leadership focus on purpose, specifically, and school effectiveness and school improvement, respectively. These are articulated through student learning and achievement – complementary goals of quality teaching and learning. One of the core responsibilities of the school principal who has contextual intelligence is to acquire knowledge of, and create a collective sense of, a moral purpose. Resolving the tension between management and leadership, in line with the current change in focus from school management to school leadership, requires being responsive to the context of this shift, a suggestion

that the principal should transform from being caught up in the mixed context, to someone who is contextually intelligent in behaviour, practices and knowledge possessed. School principals find themselves in a situation where they face competing demands of their working environment by virtue of their profession and employment. The competing demands reinforce that human existence cannot be divorced from its world, because *being-in-the-world* is part of that existence. Principals cannot succeed in meeting contextual demands – however pressing – by working at the mercy of this context, they need to interact with their environment. They have the capacity to shape the environment and take control of the interactive relationship between their leadership and the environment, which consists of people, work, working conditions and related factors. According to Bray and Kehle (2011), for one to fit into the environment one should be able to shape and adapt to the current environment and select an environment better than the current one. Success in this regard depends on the principal's understanding and acknowledgement of the existence of multiple, and sometimes conflicting demands, from the internal and external school environment, and sharing that understanding with others. Equipped with this understanding, the principal can ensure that there is a collective ownership of what matters to move the school forward; what needs to be prioritised in terms of the school's cherished norms, beliefs, values, goals and vision – underscored by a sense of a widely shared moral purpose. It is against this background that the application of contextual intelligence is suggested as a strategy to reduce existing leadership tensions.

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