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## Professional Development Programmes: Learning Platforms for the Advancement of Departmental Heads and Schools as Organisations

### Abstract

For organisations to thrive, their employees need to be trained and developed. The training must be specific and targeted to the benefit of both the individual employee and the organisation they serve. The training and development can be for the development of the individual which will directly benefit the organisation. In reverse, whole organisations can be targeted for development which in turn also benefits the individual employee. Schools are no exemption. During the implementation of training and development, the individual teachers gain through enhanced and accelerated career advancement, their leadership skills and knowledge will be boosted, and they will also develop supervisory skills to mentor those serving under them. It is incumbent upon organisations like schools to invest heavily in the development and upskilling of their teachers to benefit from organisational growth and advancement based on such an exercise. The implementation of training and development programmes is not an easy task, but one that requires careful planning and management. Departmental heads will gain immensely if such programmes are implemented in their schools.

Keywords: professional development, organisational development, career advancement, leadership, supervision, departmental head

### Introduction

Developing professionally using professional development (PD) platforms is vital for the improvement of results of schools as formal organisations. It is a fundamental task of management and leadership which rest mainly with the school principal. It is very important that school principals and their management teams (SMT) invest over a prolonged time huge amounts of resources and much-needed energy in the development of the capacity of others like departmental heads (DHs). Departmental heads are those teachers who are either formally promoted or occupying informal positions but are critical to the school leadership hierarchy (Tapala, 2019). They are called differently in different countries around the world. What is of a common definition for them is that they are the information peddlers between the highest office in the school and the teachers in the classrooms, leading from the middle, hence the middle management (De Nobile, 2018).

Basset (2012, p. 17), adverting to puts it wisely that “leadership development is specialised form of professional development through which leaders of all levels may develop competencies and capabilities to perform leadership functions effectively”.

Implementing leadership development for individuals like DH develops their ability to be effective and current skills wise as leaders. It cannot be argued anymore that being trained for management in the classroom alone be used as a stepping stone for assuming leadership roles such as that of a DH and being expected to learn on the job. Principals by virtue of being school leaders must have succession plans for middle managers like DHs through identification and development of future leaders (Mense et al., 2018) at all the school's leadership levels (Basset, 2012, p. 17). Programmes that produce the intended outcomes of progression from classroom management to leadership for the entire school are an obligation for education systems worldwide.

The target of PD programmes is to equip employees with work related skills. Organisations such as schools choose who, when, how, what, and why to train, depending on the requirements of the establishment and the employees' priorities and needs. For this paper, the following four most relevant PD programmes are deliberated on:

- (a) Organisational development;
- (b) Career development;
- (c) Leadership development; and
- (d) Supervisory development (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014).

These PD programmes are preferred for their relevance both to this paper and to the work of DHs who are required to have an understanding of their organisations. For DHs to grasp the ideals and vision of their schools, they should be well trained and developed. The DH, like all employees, needs career advancement at some point. As teachers, they must be competent to be promoted to higher leadership levels or to be the next cohort of leaders in schools (Mense et al., 2018). DHs manage cohorts of teachers in their departments during their incumbency as leadership. They, therefore, require training in managerial roles and be prepared to deal with all the barriers of being an overseer, irrespective of this as an individual or as a team player (Mense et al., 2018). Leading is not an isolated skill. Leaders are trained for the appropriate milieu of the organisation such as a school, which is why the development of numerous approaches and styles in leadership for the new incumbents is imperative and needs to be afforded.

In summary, DHs should be afforded PD slots for up-skilling and receive the latest and current knowledge while the entire school benefits too. A discussion about the selected training programmes and their value ensues below.

### **Programmes for the development of organisations**

Gagnon and Collinson (2014) state that the development of organisations is grounded on behavioural disciplines where skills and knowledge of the staff are utilised to appraise structures of the organisations, subsequently, deviations are made to improve the effectiveness of all organisations. As schools as organisations are appraised for academic output and progress, similar mediations and targets are utilised for their efficiency are also used for the advancement of teachers and support staff, and teams within the school (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Schools as organisations invest lots of capital in training and developing teachers to preserve and advance performance (Sung & Choi, 2014). During the drawing and designing PDs, schools and other organisations mix the current with new material in the quest for modernisation and future survival (Sung & Choi, 2014). Organisational inventions and expansion take place through the participation of employees and teams who drive the modernisation of

such organisations. Schools and DHs are not spared from development. When schools perform self-evaluation, they not only concentrate on specific areas for efficient operation, but also on the progress and performance of key staff such as DHs occupying strategic positions which oversee the implementation of the curriculum. In the South African context, Whole School Evaluation (WSE) is the process used to evaluate schools (RSA, 2001). As a requirement, schools must annually self-evaluate using the nine areas for evaluation (RSA, 2001). Sampled schools may be evaluated externally by a quality assurance unit from the Provincial Department of Education (PDE). One of the nine areas is the evaluation of school staff at different levels of their careers, a key area for the organisational functioning of the school. The DH in a school requires training for the entire school to develop.

### **Programmes for career advancement**

Development for career advancement creates prospects for employees to assess and strategize their future, advance their professions and improve their knowledge and skills base (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Teachers as staff members in organisations such as schools need growth opportunities for career improvement. When formal training opportunities for leadership development present themselves, teachers should be allowed to participate to prepare them for future incumbency. Individual training should be an extensive strategy to benefit both the organisation and staff members (Sung & Choi, 2014). When giving opportunities to employees like teachers and DHs for articulating their future wishes, organisations address what is of concern and the well-being of such employees. Here, teachers who aspire to become members of the SMT can be used as examples. The teachers need to be given a chance for development to ascend to higher levels of leadership without setbacks when such opportunities are available. Gaps for career advancements must be determined by watching the staff attrition rate due to occurrences of resignations, staff retirement, or death cases. Seamless transition can be established when replacing an outgoing employee by providing training on time. This can be achieved by looking into the future and establishing who will retire, or who may be looking at resigning before their retirement age. Otherwise, death cases cannot be predicted, but readiness is a necessity as career advancement can be used to plague such unforeseen occurrences. Future DHs need to be trained when a new cohort of curriculum leaders is needed.

### **Programmes for leadership development**

The talents and abilities of new leaders need to be developed by experienced ones. Principals of schools need to guard jealously the future prosperity and survival of their schools (Satiani et al., 2014). Those identified to nurture future leaders need to have an eye to recognise such talent from the aspirant crop of teachers at their disposal. The experience and matching competency of the identified personnel is very key to leadership development (Hor et al., 2010). As Hor et al. (2010, p. 529) argue further, “leadership development programmes include both experiences and leadership competencies which project what the organisations needs are”. In essence, the developing of the organisation encompasses the development of personnel to aspire for the envisaged vision of an organisation such as a school. The leadership development programme aims at staff members aspiring to or occupying higher positions while

looking at growing the leader's capability to be effective in leadership roles and processes.

The leadership development programme is appropriate for teachers like DHs who are part of the hierarchy in the school leadership. The programme aims at equipping incumbent or potential leaders with the required abilities to carry out their work with ease (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). The development of leaders targets leadership and management of personnel relating to the organisation's plans and ideals (Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017; Ogina, 2017). During leadership training, setting goals, taking decisions, communication strategies, the allocating and management of resources, working in teams, drawing and management of budgets, the management and monitoring of people are some of the skills transferred to the prospects (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Prospective or incumbent DHs require training and development in all areas of departmental or whole school leadership and management. It is not something to doubt that when the incumbents are well trained, they will also provide good leadership training for the next cohort of school leaders. Closely interrelated to the programme for the development of leaders is one for the development of supervisors.

### **Programmes for the development of supervisors**

According to Bernard and Goodyear (2009, p. 7), supervision is when a senior person intervenes over a junior person who is in the same profession as themselves. Here, the relationship is evaluative, occurs over a set period and where the junior can benefit professionally. The programme for developing supervisors aims at the personnel who form links between the higher leadership (principals and deputies) and lower ranked employees in e.g., teachers. DHs are the perfect example for such employees, hence the importance for them to be trained as supervisors.

As supervisors, DHs are expected to have relevant capabilities relevant to supervise others (Meyer, 2015). These skills include among others the ability to demonstrate high level skills in managing teaching and learning and the implementation of the curriculum in their departments. To supervise is a great distinctive opportunity, one which should be cherished but also carried out with due diligence (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Meyer, 2015). Supervision demands from the incumbent learning to implement skills attained from other roles qualitatively divergent from the present, e.g., a new DH having to supervise teachers in a department with little or no training but having learned related skills from a different orientation such as a leading of a committee in a local church. Personnel occupying the in-between positions in organisations like DHs are called middle managers or leaders. Some of the supervisory skills for the development of DHs are interpersonal, understanding leadership and management processes, and understanding productivity and quality improvement skills (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014; Satiani et al., 2014). Supervisors are geared toward productivity and for the DHs, their production and quality improvement points to the performance of learners and teachers, and the excellence of their results, which points to quality.

DHs supervise curriculum implementation in their departments and by default in the school. For every training that happens for the DH, supervision skills must be provided as they are in contact with teams of people which they need to have full control over and be able to advise. It is therefore worth noting that it is imperative to provide supervisory skills to DHs through continuous training and development, to

equip them with the know-how of supervising teachers in their departments. The following section is on knowledge management and teachers' professional development, based on two models by Zhao (2010) on the school knowledge management framework and strategies: the new perspective on teacher professional development, and Chen and Chang (2006) whole teacher approach to early childhood professional development.

## Conclusion

DHs are some of the most neglected sectors in the education system when it comes to the provisioning of training and them knowing what is expected from them. It is important to note that while there is much training offered for principals and deputies of schools, the DH is a forgotten legion. Training programmes like the ones discussed in this paper can assist to put this to rest. When well developed and presented with a particular aim, they can go a long way in plugging what a vacuum for training for school-based DHs.

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