

Conditions which favour participative management at secondary schools in South Africa: Observations of school principals in the Uthungulu district of KwaZulu-Natal province

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ABSTRACT : *The aim of this paper is to explore the observations of school principals on conditions which favour participative management at secondary schools in South Africa. The objectives of this paper were to find out conditions which make participative management appropriate in secondary school, and determine the management development needs of school principals. Apart from a literature review, the article reports on a study in which empirical investigation based on quantitative research paradigm was used to collect data from school principals in the Uthungulu district. Questionnaires were used to facilitate the process of data collection. The findings indicated that there is shortage of participative management practices, and that there is a need for vigorous and ongoing management development programmes for school managers.*

Key words: *management styles, management development, school management team, staff participation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Management is regarded as a process that is used to accomplish organisational goals, through the use of people and other resources (Robbins & Coulter, 2013). Both authors are of the view that there are various management styles that principals, deputy principals and heads of departments choose from, for instance, the directive management style, democratic or participative management style and laissez-faire management style. When principals, deputy principals and heads of departments carry out their functions of planning, organising, staffing, leading, and controlling, the onus is on them as school management teams (SMTs) to optimally involve other staff members in the decision-making process. This might be possible if the SMT adopts a management style, such as participative management which could assist them to align and integrate staff efforts and interests with the goals of the school. The failure to embark on participative management initiatives in schools could lead to poor staff morale, job satisfaction and performance. This view is confirmed by Boyarkova (2012) as he argues that the stability of a team depends primarily on such factors as employees' involvement and gratification, as well as friendly communication between colleagues. Being part of a team is an art that every person in any organisation should learn. The onus is on the school management teams to commit themselves on initiatives directed towards staff participation in decision-making.

The political culture of South Africa prior to 1994 had an adverse effect on the management of secondary schools structurally and operationally. For instance, the directive style was applied in the spheres of decision-making, policy-making, curriculum, instructional content and school management. This top-down approach had demerits for staff involvement in decision-making processes of various secondary schools in the country. The Bill of Rights embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act (Act 108 of 1996) introduced a participatory management style which required state institutions such as schools to be managed in consideration of democratic principles (South Africa, 1996a). The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluative analysis of participative management practices at secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

II. CONCEPTUALISING PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Robbins, Judge, Odendaal & Roodt (2013:540) define participative management as a process in which subordinates share a significant degree of decision-making power with their immediate superiors. Elliot (1994) concurs with Robbins, *et al.*, (2013:540) when he regards participative management as an initiative undertaken

by the school manager to involve employees, where appropriate, in the decision making. What is transferred by the school manager to the employees tends to be authority, responsibility and accountability. Participative management need not be perceived as an instrument for abdication of authority by the school managers, since they remain accountable for the achievement of the set goals in the school. In the light of this statement, Elliot (1994:2) postulates that participative management does not mean that school principals turn over control of the organisation to the employees, or that employees have a veto over school principals' actions, or that an authoritarian management style is never used. Situations and goals have a bearing on which management style to use.

Cho & Kim (2014:36) cite Lowin (1968), who defines participative management as a mode of organisational operation in which decisions pertaining to activities are arrived at by the very persons who are to execute those decisions. Cho & Kim (2014:36) cite Wagner & Gooding (1987), who define participative management as an organisational process by which employees join hierarchical structures. Cho & Kim (2014:36) conclude by defining participative management as an opportunity afforded to employees to take part in decision-making processes, which leads to improvement in performance, personal growth, and intrinsic motivation. This view demonstrates that staff participation in decision making could have positive effects for the organisation and employees so long as the process has been well executed. For the purpose of achieving the objectives of this study, participative management is defined as a shared management process initiated and championed by the school management team to involve all staff members in decision-making processes on matters that are affecting their professional and operational practice in the school.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

- Under what conditions is participative management style appropriate at secondary schools?

IV. MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

School management team members such as principals, deputy principals and heads of departments face a challenge of managing schools through participatory ways in a manner that could augur very well for a democratic nation. The current management styles of school management team members might not augur very well for a democratic nation since the country is in the transitional period from apartheid system. Participative management increasingly gained momentum in the management of public institutions, such as schools after the 1994 democratic elections held in South Africa. The democratic values enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (South Africa 1996a) seemed to be critical in the management of schools, since they created the basis for staff participation in decision making. Chapter Ten of the constitution further endorses that public administration must be managed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the constitution when it makes the following provision:

People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making (South Africa, 1996a).

In spite of the democratic ideals of the constitution of South Africa, the process of fast tracking participative management in secondary schools remains a far-fetched dream in the post-apartheid era.

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) (South Africa 1996b) also makes provision for the participative management style. The need for staff participation at school level is reflected in the partnership principle set out in the preamble of the Schools Act:

Whereas the achievement of democracy in South Africa has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation; and whereas this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State; and whereas it is necessary to set

uniform standards for the education of learners at schools and the organisation, governance and funding of schools throughout the Republic of South Africa, (South Africa, 1996b:1).

Thus the existence of the legislative frameworks such as the constitution of South Africa and the South African Schools Act paved the way for the study of this magnitude to determine the compliance of school management team members to the various pieces of legislation endorsed by the democratic nation.

Creating an environment for staff members to participate in decision making might be the way of life for any democratic nation or institution. The prevailing management philosophy for certain school management team members in South Africa could be a contextual factor for unleashing participatory practices. Thus Kinicki & Fugate (2012) point out that if participative management is poorly executed, experience shows us that productivity or work performance could fail. All functional schools strive for enhanced levels of performance on the part of its employees. Thus this study endeavoured to change the management philosophy of school management team members so that workplace environments allow for staff participation in decision making.

Participative management advocates for a flatter organisational structure in the workplace. The inflexible organisational structures of secondary schools in South Africa might not allow for staff participation in decision making. In the light of this view, March (2012) asserts that people attend to decisions not only because they have an interest at stake, but because they are expected to or obliged to. In other words, they act according to rules. This view demonstrates that roles and duties are, therefore, behaviourally important to staff participation or involvement in the school.

Arriving at a decision through a consensus is a cornerstone of participative management. The consensus seeking approach seemed to be a daunting task for some school management team members in South Africa. Thus the study established the prevalence of the consensus seeking approach at various secondary schools in South Africa.

Consideration of what management style is necessary in each situation is critical in the management of secondary schools. The school management teams in South Africa seemed to have a challenge of utilising appropriate management styles which could yield positive results. School management team members might not adopt a particular style in all situations without pausing to examine when it is appropriate and when it is not. It should be borne in mind that participative management is one of the contingency management approaches. This paper sought to investigate the importance of understanding different situations by school management team members, so that an effective management style could be utilised.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative research methods in order to fulfil the objectives of the study and to answer research questions. The researcher considered the issues of validity and reliability of research data in the choice of research methodologies.

The researcher chose the quantitative methodology, taking into account the purpose of conducting the study, the questions being investigated and the available resources. This view was confirmed by Creswell (2003), as he asserts that a quantitative approach is one in which the researcher primarily uses post positivist claims for developing knowledge, (that is cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypothesis and questions, use of measurements and observation, and the test of theories), employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data.

Population and sampling

During the period of investigation there were two hundred and fifty (250) public secondary schools in South Africa which formed the target population. Public secondary schools in South Africa were randomly selected to constitute the target population of this study. The study focused on five education circuits, namely Nkandla, Richards Bay, Umhlathuze, Umlalazi and Umthongweni. The researcher randomly chose secondary schools from each education circuit. The principals of the randomly selected secondary schools in the South Africa formed the sample of this study. Deputy principals never formed the target population because their management duties tended to be similar in nature and context with those ones of principals. The researcher

chose three circuits, namely Richards Bay, Umhlathuze and Umlalazi because South Africa is large, and comprises schools in urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

The quantitative research method was favoured for its simplicity, unbiased nature, and its closeness to fulfilling the major assumption of probability, namely that each element in the population stood an equal chance of being selected (Kumar, 2010). The researcher considered the issue of validity and reliability of data when choosing participants of the study. Two hundred (200) principals of randomly selected secondary schools in the three above-mentioned circuits were requested to complete questionnaires.

Instrumentation

For quantitative research method, the questionnaire was used as research instrument. This quantitative methodology was chosen in the light of the objectives of the study, the kind of information that was required and on the basis of the available resources. Kumar (2010) maintains that questionnaires permit anonymity, preclude possible interviewer biases and permit a respondent sufficient time to consider answers before actually answering. Data provided by questionnaires could be more easily analysed and interpreted than the data obtained from verbal responses and lastly, questionnaires could elicit information that could not be obtained in other methods. The researcher believed that this kind of survey would lead to some truths about participative management at secondary schools in South Africa, and it would provide information on whether certain generalisations presented in the literature were also true for this population.

Administration of research instrument

The researcher piloted research instrument, namely the questionnaire five (5) secondary schools in South Africa. Such secondary schools were then excluded in the study. The aim of the pilot study was to establish whether there was a need to make necessary adjustments such as the lay out, possible spelling mistakes, questions format and an average time taken by both research instruments. The general purpose of the administration of research instruments was to elicit information on the part of the respondents.

Three education circuits, namely Richards Bay, Umhlathuze and Umlalazi were used by the researcher. These education circuits also comprised of schools in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. Two hundred (200) questionnaires were distributed to all randomly selected principals in the three chosen education circuits.

Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

The respondents' responses in quantitative research data were coded and frequency distributions generated by the researcher in order to establish choices and current practices of participative management at secondary schools. Elaboration, interpretation and checking of data with people who knew a lot about the topic, as well as those who did not was ensured. The aim was to obtain people who considered things from a fresh perspective and to check reliability and validity of data provided by respondents. Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2012) regard reliability as the degree to which the results are repeatable, and validity as the degree to which the research conclusions are sound. The latter view was greatly considered in this study. The researcher made generalisations from the data to broader populations and settings applicable to the field of educational management in South Africa.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results emanating from the study.

[General and Biographical Profile of the Respondents]

Table 1: Highest educational qualification

This table provided the researcher with knowledge of the respondents' qualifications. According to the table, there were no respondents who had matric as their highest qualification. Fourteen % of the respondents had BA degrees, and 39% percent had B. Ed. degrees. A significant number of respondents (28%) had BEd. (Honours). Twelve % of the respondents had BA (Honours) degrees, 5% had Master of Arts degrees, and 2% Master of Education degrees. Specialisation in management at postgraduate level appeared to be a challenge for most respondents. According to the staff writer for Adcorpon 2 October 2014, the small number of individuals with professional management qualifications was a great concern for South Africa. The shortage of school principals

with knowledge of management might have an adverse effect on management styles currently used at secondary schools in South Africa.

[Conditions which favour participative management at secondary schools]

Table 2: Conditions which favour participative management at secondary schools

- *There is a need for creating a school policy which allows for staff participation in decision making.*

Table 2 revealed that the overwhelming majority (100%) of the respondents agreed that there was a need to create a school policy which allows for staff participation in making decisions. Mosoge & van der Westhuizen (1998:73) point out that recent reform policy in education rests on the implementation of school-based management which has a direct impact on the devolution of authority, management styles, decentralisation of school functions and teacher participation. This means that school policies and legislation need to reflect the participatory practices of school management. However, the information on the questionnaire did not elicit responses from the respondents on the basis of how many secondary schools have created such policies for staff participation in decision-making.

- *There is a need for principals to fasttrack the process of participative management in schools.*

Table 2 showed that the overwhelming number of 100% of the respondents endorsed the need for principals to fasttrack the process of participative management in schools. Pateman (1970), in Doughty (2014: 87), emphasises the need to optimise and accelerate participative management in the pursuit of organisational goals. Thus organisations such as secondary schools have not been left untouched by such a need.

- *There is a need for principals to analyse the readiness of staff members before introducing participative management initiatives.*

In Table 2, hundred % of the respondents felt that they should concede to the need for principals to analyse the readiness levels of staff members before introducing participative management initiatives. Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson (2009) argue that school principals and other school management team members turn responsibility for key behaviour over to employees because they are ready to perform the identified task. This means that school principals need to analyse the readiness of staff members before introducing participative management initiatives, so that employees are not thrown into the deep end.

- *There is a need for principals to allow staff members to participate in decision making.*

Table 2 revealed that 100% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a need for principals to allow staff members to participate in decision making. Riggs, Bethel, Atwater, Smith, & Harvey (2012:566) argue that today's employees want to share in the management of the organisation they work for. Thus it has become imperative for principals in secondary schools to allow staff members to participate in decision making.

- *There is a need for schools to have a model for staff participation in decision making.*

Table 2 showed that 98% of the respondents agreed that there is a need for schools to have a model for staff participation. Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum (2003:518) have argued in Victor Vroom and Phillip Yetton's leader participation model (1973) that the model provides a set of rules to determine the amount and form of participative decision making that should be encouraged in different situations. This means that a model for staff participation in decision making assists in terms of mapping out the route about why participative management exists in secondary schools.

- *There is a need for principals to match individual goals with organisation goals in the pursuit of participative management.*

Table 2 revealed that 98% of the respondents affirmed that there was a need for principals to match individual goals with organisational goals in the pursuit of participative management. J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba (1957), in van der Westhuizen (2014:101) have demonstrated in the social system theory the need to merge individual needs with organisational needs in the pursuit of participative management.

Through merging individual needs with organisational needs employees tend to feel valued at the workplace. The employees' levels of productivity and job satisfaction could be enhanced.

- *There is a need for principals to involve staff members in matters pertaining to professional practice.*

Table 2 showed that 99% of the respondents agreed on a need for principals to involve staff members in matters pertaining to professional practice. Joyce, Calhoun & Hopkins (2012:137) argues that there is a need for school principals to involve staff members on issues pertaining to their professional practice. Staff involvement is essential to create the sense of ownership for decisions taken collectively about professional matters.

- *There is a need for principals to encourage staff participation in extra-curricular activities.*

Table 2 showed that 100% of the respondents conceded that there is a need for principals to encourage staff participation in extra-curricular activities. Caldwell & Spinks (2012:75) indicates that staff participation in extra-curricular activities is an important area in terms of school success. This means that staff participation in extra-curricular activities might have an educational value for learners' personal development.

- *There is a need for principals to initiate participative management in order to minimise organisational conflicts.*

Table 2 reflected that 100% of the respondents agreed that there is a need for principals to initiate participative management in order to minimise organisational conflicts. In Table 2 there was a need for principals to initiate participative management in order to minimise organisational conflicts. However, Robbins (2011:157) warns that too much reliance on participative management might stimulate conflict. This might be true since participative management tends to lead to promotion of differences amongst staff members. On the other hand, this view seems contrary to Lichtenstein's (2008:31), who states that underlying participative management is the belief that through staff participation, organisations might mitigate instances of conflict. This means that Lichtenstein observations participative management as a vehicle which can bring about peace, stability and productivity at the workplace.

- *There is a need for principals to regard participative management as a critical aspect of power sharing in various decision-making processes.*

Table 2 showed that 95% of the respondents affirmed that there is a need for principals to regard participative management as a critical aspect of power sharing in various decision-making processes. Power sharing is a critical component of participative management. Indeed, John Dewey (1916), in Pausch (2013:87), argues that exclusion from participation was a form of suppression that should not be accepted in a social relationship. Principals may need to share power with staff members as a mode of implementing participative management in schools. In Table 2, five % of respondents were undecided about this matter.

- *There is a need for principals and staff to make decisions by consensus.*

Table 2 revealed that a significant number (92%) of respondents agreed that there is a need for principals and staff to make decisions by consensus. Achieving organisational goals by consensus is the key aspect of participative management. Bush (2011:72) associates participative management with collegiality when decisions are made through a process of discussion leading to consensus. This process requires staff members to have a common understanding about the aims of the institution. Eight % of the respondents disagreed on the need for principals and staff to reach decisions by consensus.

- *There is a need for principals to value regular staff meetings in order to share information.*

Table 2 reflected overwhelming support for regular staff meetings. Ninety five % of respondents agreed that there is a need for principals to value regular staff meetings in order to share information. It is probable that most respondents regard staff meetings as a method of sharing ideas. Trewatha & Newport (2012:437) contend that through the implementation of participative management methods such as staff meetings, employees are given the opportunity to play an active role in making decisions that affect them.

However, 5% of the respondents were undecided on the matter. It is possible that the school climate does not allow such respondents to value regular staff meetings in order to share information.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study provided empirical investigation into participative management practices at secondary schools in the Uthungulu district. The research tool used in this investigation was the questionnaire. The researcher designed the questionnaires to assess principals' perceptions of participative management. The methodical procedures adopted in acquiring the data on the research problem were discussed, after which the data were presented, interpreted and analysed.

Once the statistical data had been presented, interpreted and analysed, the researcher brought in supplementary information from the literature study, as well as from his own experience of participative management practices in the Uthungulu district. Where statistics revealed a tendency in one direction or another, the searching question, "Why is it like that?" was posed. The approach of probing empirical data permeates this investigation, for it is only by identifying participative management practices at secondary schools in the Uthungulu district that school management challenges can be exposed and addressed by education authorities.

The researcher also provided the summary and findings of the study. An endeavour was made to collect responses to individual items in order to arrive at specific conclusions. After discussing conclusions, the researcher made a set of recommendations for participative management practices at secondary schools in the Uthungulu district.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study the following recommendations are made:

- The organisational cultures for schools must be developed and strengthened so that they can cater for participative management.
- The SMTs, together with staff members, must ensure that there is a school policy which provides for staff participation in decision making.
- There is a need for setting the parameters for staff delegation at various management levels.
- School organograms should allow for vertical and horizontal aspects of management practice, since participative management is permissible in flatter organisational structures.

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Table 1.Highesteducational qualification

Qualification	No. of respondents	Percentage
Matric	0	0
BA	26	14
B. Ed.	70	39
B. Ed. (Hons)	50	28
BA Hons	21	12
MA	9	5
M Ed.	4	2
PhD	0	0
Other	0	0
Total	180	100

Table 2: Conditions which favour participative management at secondary schools

ITEMS		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
a)There is a need for creating a school policy which allows for staff participation.	N	105	75	0		0	180
	%	58	42	0		0	100
b)There is a need for principals to fastrack the process of participative management in schools.	N	125	55				180
	%	69	31				100
c)There is a need for principals to analyse the readiness of staff members before introducing participative	N	70	110				180

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management initiatives.	%	39	61				100
d)There is a need for principals to allow staff members to participate in decision making.	N	170	10				180
	%	94	6				100
e)There is a need for schools to have a model for staff participation in decision making.	N	60	117	2	1		180
	%	33	65	1	1		100
f)There is a need for principals to match individual needs with organisational goals in the pursuit of participative management.	N	90	87	2	1		180
	%	50	48	1	1		100
g)There is a need for principals to involve staff members on matters pertaining to professional practice.	N	135	44	1			180
	%	75	24	1			100
h)There is a need for principals to encourage staff participation in extra-curricular activities.	N	135	45				180
	%	75	25				100
i)There is a need for principals to initiate participative management style in order to minimiseorganisational conflicts.	N	105	75				180
	%	58	42				100
j)There is a need for principals to regard participative management as a critical aspect of power sharing in various decision-making processes.	N	95	75		10		180
	%	53	42		5		100
k)There is a need for principals and staff to reach decisionsby consensus.	N	90	75			15	180
	%	50	42			8	100
l) There is a need for principals to value regular staff meetings in order to share information.	N	120	50		10		180
	%	67	28		5		100