

The Mentoring Process as Antecedent of the Leadership Process: Incidents of School Improvement

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Abstract

Mentoring and coaching has been seen as a critical element in the success of any organisation. In the schooling system there is still a perception of leadership focus regarding the role of the school principal in facilitating change management. The paper argues from the premise that school principal has an influential role to play in his/her interactions with the teaching staff. The present study of principals' influence in schools' renewal and reorganisation to perform better in their respective academic duties was conducted among nine high schools in the Free State Province. From these nine high schools, six of them have had a new principal in the past two years. A total of 167 teaching staff was selected to participate. The sample size was 167 teaching staff and the response rate was 128 (76.6%). In order to obtain a holistic view of the overall leadership style present in the school system, a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used. As the methodological paradigm applied in this research is a survey method with the questionnaire constructed in the Likert-type approach, ranging from 1 to 5, the study may be classified as quantitative research. Permission to conduct the study was requested and granted by the district management. Data analysis and interpretation were done using the interactive model of quantitative data analysis, which first involved sorting or sifting through the data and sequences. Data were analysed by descriptive statistics, such as percentages, frequency to assess the teachers' views regarding the mentoring programme provided by their respective principals, as well as its existence. The study reveals that the principals are central to the success of a mentoring programme, as well as their leadership capability. One item that can improve the relationship between principal role and mentoring, as in the case of the current study, is when the task is related to a specific, work related task. The study argues that to a large degree the experience of the mentee has a limited influence on the mentoring process. Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that the teacher has a positive role to play in the mentoring process and ultimately, has a bearing on the results of the mentoring. It can be concluded that motivation does influence interest in participating in mentoring.

Keywords: Mentoring, Principal, Perception, Change, Influence.

1. Introduction

In recent discussions of mentoring, the quality of the mentoring relationship has emerged as either keeping the traditional focus or changing to a relational one (Srivastava & Thakur 2013). Mentoring entails the all-round growth and development of the mentee within his/her personal and professional growth. While mentoring is regarded as another element that enhances institutional growth, this process cannot happen in the absence of effective leadership. Quality leadership is essential to the impartial improvement of workers' retention rates and the turnover reduction of working staff. The current study advocates the instrumental role that leadership can play in developing the organisational human capital skills. This process can take place only if effective mentoring is implemented. It is also important to recognise the influence that leadership has on reducing staff burnout and high absenteeism among workers by ensuring adequate staffing levels and allocating appropriate workloads and support to workers. Quality leadership should focus on, among other things, enhanced leadership skills, high confidence, a broadened perspective, and higher communication skills, (Kincaid & Knop, 1992). However, structuring such qualities is challenging as leaders are expected to be realistic, practical and enhance growth by providing new knowledge to the employees and the organisation. Furthermore, leaders should be able to face the reality that workers come into an organisation with diverse skills. Holmes et al. (2003) and Hackman and Johnson (2000) define leadership as a consistent communicative performance which, by influencing others, facilitates acceptable outcomes for the organisation and maintains harmony within the team or community of practice.

Previous researchers have regarded leadership as performance oriented and mentoring as more development oriented (Burke, McKenna, & McKeen, 1991). In the current study, mentoring is at centre stage with regard to its influence on the development of human capital growth. Although little has been done on mentoring, the current study

recommends institutionalising mentoring in the schooling system.

2. Theoretical Rationale

Relating to the study of Bass (2004), leadership has been associated with commitment, job satisfaction and performance. Similarly, mentoring is associated with higher subordinate commitment, career satisfaction, career mobility, salary, and performance (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1998). Thus, transformational leaders may be viewed as career mentors since they have the ability to advance the workers' careers. Transformational leaders, via individualised consideration, may be more capable of delivering the coaching characterised in mentoring literature. In this case, organisational leaders are often in an excellent position to provide valuable mentorship to their followers as they have first-hand knowledge of their followers' needs (Allen, Eby & Lentz, 2006).

As globalisation continues to challenge the appropriateness of current organisational strategies, processes and structures, organisations are required to constantly grapple with the costs and benefits associated with change. The kinds of changes implemented could be minor, major or transformative. Minor change is characterised by a slight modification of the individual employee's mental attitudes and behaviours, without a shift in perception. This type of change is said to address surface-level issues and avoids threats to deep seated beliefs. Transformative change, however, is characterised by a fundamental shift in the meanings that employees attach to the organisation and its environment (Buckley & Perkins, 1984). Despite the nature of organisational change, however, it is generally confronted with resistance, uncertainty and fear. As a result, many organisational change initiatives fail, in spite of the effort and money that are invested in trying to render them successful.

Motivation to mentor is an important variable in mentoring literature as personal motives and goals of the mentor have a direct influence not only on the extent of the mentoring provided and thereby its outcomes, but also the type of mentoring that it provided; for example, career-related mentoring or psycho-social mentoring. Personal motives for mentoring relate to the provision of mentoring functions. Motives which are goal-directed forces within the individual (Srivastava & Thakur, 2013) and therefore serve as a mentor to others, can be viewed as one form of goal-directed behaviour.

While it can be argued that behaviour is goal-directed, is to say that it is motivated by a cognitive representation of some outcome. People realise that patterns of behaviour are likely to produce certain outcomes. This approach to human behaviour has been referred to as the functional approach which recognises that the same behaviour of staff can be experienced differently by different leaders (Srivastava & Thakur, 2013).

It is for this purpose that scholars have studied the job performance of the protégé or the mentor either through performance rating of the superior, or in the role performance of the mentor/protégé (Srivastava & Thakur, 2013). The impact of mentoring on the overall performance at work of the protégé has not been studied. Researchers have lamented, that the relationship between mentoring and individual performance is therefore still a puzzle to be resolved. The imperative to examine the impact of mentoring on performance arises due to the fact that there have been changes in the mentoring concept in the last 5-10 years. According to the relational perspectives, mentoring refers to the mutually interdependent, empathic, and empowering processes that create personal growth, development, and enrichment for mentors and protégés. Thus, with regard to the relational perspective mentoring is defined as a developmental relationship that involves mutual growth, learning, and development in the personal, professional, and career domains (Srivastava & Thakur, 2013).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

The present study of principals' influence in school renewal and reorganisation, to perform better in their respective academic duties, was conducted among nine high schools in the Free State province. From these nine high schools, six of them have had a change of principal within the past two years. A total of 167 teaching staff was selected to participate, and it should be noted that some of the reasons for the movement of principals from one school to another was based on the fact that these high schools were not performing above the provincial benchmark. Teaching staff were selected to participate in this study because teaching is a core duty in this enterprise. More importantly, the study intended to assess the influence brought by the new principal regarding organisational renewal. The participants were selected conveniently; however, the sample was chosen in such a way that more participants came from schools that were not performing above the provincial benchmark. Of the nine high schools, 95 percent of them performed above 80% in the 2013

academic year. The data were obtained from the schools and all the teaching staff were encouraged to complete the questionnaire. The sample size was 167 teaching staff and the response rate was 128 (76.2%). This response rate is regarded as good, and may be attributed to the fact that administrative clerks administered the questionnaires during schools hours.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

Identifying similar phrases, relationships between themes, distinct differences between target blocks, and common self-administered questionnaires containing structured items, were applied. Items in the questionnaire focused on the leadership styles and the role of leaders in the schools in assisting and supporting teaching staff. In addition, a question was asked on how the principal manages the school. Closed questions helped in eliciting specific information, while open-ended questions enabled the respondents to express their views freely and without restriction. In order to obtain a holistic view of the overall leadership style present in the school system, a MLQ was used (McLaggan, Bezuidenhout & Botha, 2013). From the MLQ, the researcher decided to use 12 items for the current study, and these were adapted from the original scale designed by Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993). As the methodological paradigm applied in this research is a survey method, with the questionnaire constructed in the Likert-type approach ranging from one to five, the study may be classified as quantitative research.

3.3 Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was requested and granted by the district management. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires with the assistance of the schools' administrative clerks, and the research support group collected the completed questionnaires. Throughout the study, every effort was made to maintain high ethical standards. Anonymity and confidentiality were protected at all times, with a thorough explanation in the form of a covering letter, provided to all participants, detailing the purpose of the study. Data analysis and interpretation were done using the interactive model of quantitative data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), which involved first sorting or sifting through the data and sequences.

3.4 Data analyses

After the return of all the questionnaires, it was important that the mass of data collected should then be reduced to a format suitable for analysis. The respondents' responses were then coded according to the emerging themes using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0 for Microsoft Windows. Data were analysed by descriptive statistics, such as percentages and frequency, to test among other things, the reliability of describing the impact and the leadership style in these schools.

4. Results and Discussion

The study comprised 167 respondents of which a response rate of 128 was received. The results obtained from the empirical study will now be discussed according to the emerging themes from the variables stated in the literature. The results below were analysed from the Multifactor leadership questionnaires. The reporting in this paper will focus only on five items in the questionnaire that relate, in particular, to the principal's influence on the management and leadership in the school.

Table 1: Teaching and Coaching

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
not at all	16	9.6	12.5	12.5
once in a while	7	4.2	5.5	18.0
sometimes	21	12.6	16.4	34.4
fairly often	39	23.4	30.5	64.8
frequently if not always	45	26.9	35.2	100.0
Total	128	76.6	100.0	
Missing				
System	39	23.4		
Total	167	100.0		

The results presented in Table 1 show the dominance of teachers that are satisfied with the mentoring provided by their principals. It should be noted that 35.2% respondents said that the principal frequently mentors and coaches them in their teaching activities. On the other hand, 30.5% of the respondents commented that the principal fairly often mentors and coaches them. Still on the positive side, 16.4% of the respondents were of the view that sometimes the principal assists with the mentoring and coaching process. The remaining respondents (12.5 & 5.5%) felt that within the South African schooling system the schools still need transformation with regard to leadership and the manner in which the mentoring and coaching is performed by their respective principals. They felt that the principal was not doing anything at all or that mentoring occurred infrequently.

It appears that some of the principals have not been trained as mentors and coaches, but by virtue of their position, as well the level of experience, they are expected to deliver those tasks. The problem of a principal not having intensive training in mentoring and coaching can be a challenge that results in the other respondents lacking confidence in the skills displayed by their respective principals in their particular responsibilities.

Table 2: Articulation of Mentoring and Coaching: a compelling vision of the future

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	once in a while	8	4.8	6.3	6.3
	sometimes	19	11.4	15.1	21.4
	fairly often	38	22.8	30.2	51.6
	frequently if not always	61	36.5	48.4	100.0
	Total	126	75.4	100.0	
Missing	System	41	24.6		
Total		167	100.0		

One should note that the results are different from the previous section as the teachers who did not see any value in the interventions provided by their principals in mentoring and coaching are increasing. It is important also to note that majority of the respondents were quite satisfied with the role and responsibilities rendered by their principal. More than 48.4% of the respondents see the importance of the compelling vision as stated by their principals through offering the mentoring process. Significantly, more than 30.2% were fairly satisfied with the compelling vision provided by the principal. The respondents suggested that their school's organisational culture was developing an active school; that mentoring gave some hope that building a new culture in schooling would emerge as a more supportive role and that inclusive leadership was highly encouraged.

It is for this purpose that majority (30.2% & 48.4%) of the respondents were quite happy with the leadership afforded to them by their principals in developing both personal and professional growth. Although 15.1% of the respondents indicated that at times the principal integrates mentoring with the vision of the school, while 6.3% of the respondents agreed that once in a while the principal attempted to integrate the two strategic elements. It was pleasing to note that, none of the respondents indicated that the principal did not try at all to integrate the school's vision with mentoring. From this item it can be concluded that leadership is essential in giving direction to the potential growth of the school, while, at the same time, undertaking mentoring that is aligned with the school vision.

Table 3: Treats me as an individual rather than as just a member of a group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not at all	16	9.6	12.5	12.5
	once in a while	12	7.2	9.4	21.9
	sometimes	23	13.8	18.0	39.8
	fairly often	30	18.0	23.4	63.3
	frequently if not always	47	28.1	36.7	100.0
	Total	128	76.6	100.0	
Missing	System	39	23.4		
Total		167	100.0		

Individualisation is an important strategy in trying to recognise and treat staff members by using their unique identity as a starting point so as to pave the way for their growth using each one's unique character. Flowing from Table 3, it is interesting to report that 36.7% of the respondents agreed that the principal frequently, if not always, treats educators

equally, taking cognisance of each one's unique character. 23.8% of the respondents indicated that their principal was really applying the principle of individuality in ensuring that cohesive leadership is provided to the educators. On the same note, 18% of the respondents were of the belief that 'yes' the principal was indeed treating them as individuals in matters affecting their work performance. The remaining 12.5% and 9.4% were of the view that the principle of individuality is not being practised by their respective principals in their respective schools. Overall, the study confirms that the highest numbers of the respondents were supportive with regard to the leadership principals were giving in recognising individualistic principles.

Table 4: The importance of having a collective sense of mission

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not at all	7	4.2	5.5	5.5
	once in a while	9	5.4	7.0	12.5
	Sometimes	12	7.2	9.4	21.9
	fairly often	45	26.9	35.2	57.0
	frequently if not always	55	32.9	43.0	100.0
	Total	128	76.6	100.0	
Missing	System	39	23.4		
	Total	167	100.0		

As can be seen from Table 4, school principals, in most cases, use the mission statement of the school to give direction to their respective institutions. Generally, it is clear that 43% of the respondents stated that the principal frequently guides them with regard to the school's mission, by using a transformational leadership style to ensure that the school's goals are achieved by being aligned with the mission statement. In perusing the responses, Table 4 reveals that 35.2% of the respondents indicated that fairly often the principal aligns all the plans and their work with the school mission statement to emphasise the importance of a collective effort in the school. 5.5% and 7% of the respondents were in disagreement with the statement, indicating that the principal did not attempt at all to build a collective mission statement towards a cohesive effort. The respondents indicated that they did not have a collective mission statement in their schools and that no direction existed towards achieving a mission statement. Furthermore, they indicated that as educators, they were not being sensitised to the expected output emanating from a clear mission statement which should be coordinated and filtered down by the principal.

Table 5: Expresses confidence that goals will be achieved

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not at all	6	3.6	4.7	4.7
	once in a while	5	3.0	3.9	8.6
	sometimes	16	9.6	12.5	21.1
	fairly often	47	28.1	36.7	57.8
	frequently if not always	54	32.3	42.2	100.0
	Total	128	76.6	100.0	
Missing	System	39	23.4		
	Total	167	100.0		

Table 5 reveals that principals are satisfied and show signs of confidence when tasks are achieved. The respondents agreed that when a principal delegated certain tasks to individual teachers, it is also important to recognise their contribution. The majority of the respondents agreed that their principals did show appreciation when the mentored task was completed successfully. It can thus be said that this majority included 42.2% of the respondents who confirmed that their principals frequently, if not always showed appreciation, while 36.7% of the respondents confirmed that fairly often their principals acknowledged their progress when mentoring them. Although, the majority were in agreement, there was small (12.5%) group of respondents that felt that their principals sometimes do indeed recognise them. The remaining 3.9% and 4.7% of the respondents felt that their principals do not really recognise their progress at all. If their progress is being taken into consideration, some feel that it is only once in a while that appreciation is shown for a particular task.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that there should be mutual understanding regarding the manner and the approach on how mentoring should be integrated into the schooling system. The principal is central to the success of the mentoring programme, as well as his/her leadership capabilities. Although the above-mentioned results suggest that there is a need for mentoring in our school system in order to accelerate the skills transfer, the respondents were generally satisfied with the leadership that is capacitating them to improve on the functionality of their role. It is therefore imperative that leadership, particularly by the principal, should guide and improve a teacher's performance by means of guiding and peer mentoring the teaching staff. While mentoring can be regarded as a difficult task, it is crucial that the mentor must, at all stages, take cognisance of the progress made by the mentee. In ensuring that success in mentoring is achieved, the relationship between the two parties is very important. This study reveals that the supervisory mentoring relationship hinges on a positive relationship based on the teacher's work-based performance. One item that could improve the relationship, as in the case of the current study, is when the task is related to a specific work-related task. This said, the study could argue that, to a large degree, the experience of the mentee has a limited influence on the mentoring process.

Motivating teachers has a positive effect on the mentoring process and ultimately has a bearing on the results of the mentoring. The study reveals that motivation strongly influences the interest to participate in a mentoring programme, together with the important influence of the mentor on the mentee.

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