

## Exploring Effective Communication in District Education Offices in South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** Managers at district education offices in South Africa should be able to apply a variety of communication skills effectively in a range of management contexts for these district offices to be successful. This paper reports on a theoretical investigation into effective communication strategies and dimensions, as well as an empirical study of the perceptions of managers and staff at an educational district office regarding the effectiveness of the communication channels and strategies, as well as of the barriers to effective communication. The findings suggest that district managers may need training specifically with regard to the role and importance of communication and that the dissemination of proper feedback should be a consistent practice. While professional communication depends on both task and interpersonal orientation for its success, it is recommended that the latter should receive the greater emphasis in a people-oriented and pedagogical institution such as an education district office.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a paucity of studies that assess the influence of communication in facilitating educational change (Siu 2008; Steyn and Van Niekerk 2012). This is of special importance in the execution of complex policy directives, such as has been the case in South Africa since 1994 when apartheid was dismantled. While much has been written about the task, skills and competencies of education managers in general in South Africa and elsewhere, not much has been forthcoming about the special communication strategies and dimensions that specifically South African education district managers are expected to command in order for their education districts to function effectively. Since the advent of democratic rule in South Africa in 1994, education district offices have increasingly been performing a range of new responsibilities that complicated their functioning. One such task is effective communication.

### Objectives

In view of the above exposition the purpose of the study is to understand the nature of effective communication in district education offices in South Africa. More specifically, the objectives are, (a) to determine the kind of training education district officials may need with regard to the role and importance of communication, (b) to establish to what degree consistent communication is regarded as standard practice in the district offices, (c) to establish whether communication in this district office was operationalised in such a way that every employee was involved in all the activities pertaining to the process of communication. The idea with this paper is to present evidence to establish the validity of these objectives in the education district. Two sets of evidence are presented. Firstly, a framework in which the effective professional communication by district managers in terms of the complexity theory, as well as the strategies and dimensions of communication is conceptually and theoretically argued, and secondly, a discussion of the results of a qualita-

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tive, empirical investigation based on the theoretical framework.

### METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the strength of evidence explored about the perceptions of managers and staff members on communication in their district. A case study format was adopted to capture the key features of staff members and their managers' perceptions of effective communication, at a specific district office of education in South Africa. The works of Leonard et al. (2004) as well as Steyn and Van Niekerk (2012) provided the theoretical guideposts for establishing what is critical with regard to the special communication skills that education district managers are expected to command in order for their education districts to function effectively. The conceptual narratives of Feigenbaum (1996) and the constructivist communication categories offered by Knoblauch (2013) helped the researchers understand the integrated nature of communication skills, while, among others, the critical-interpretive work on leadership-communication training by Johnson and Redmond (1998) and the complexity theory as interpreted by Chin and Qin (2014) provided us with the conceptual tools for interpreting the results of the empirical data.

Finally, explorative hermeneutic phenomenology facilitated the development of the conceptual-theoretical framework that undergirded the empirical investigation. The argumentation was commenced with a condensed exploration of the philosophical genealogy of the notion of communication, which was followed with a discussion on management versus staff communication in relation to dialogue and dialogic space. Finally, an attempt was made to explore communication strategies and skills heuristically against the theoretical backdrop of the Complexity Theory. As will emerge in our discussion of the terms, we constructed meanings that are relevant in the context of the project.

### Conceptual-theoretical Framework

#### *Effective Communication and the Pivotal Importance of Dialogue*

Communication, just as dialogue, has a rich and polyvalent resonance within Western and

African philosophical traditions, from Plato's Socratic dialogues to Martin Buber's 'life of dialogue' and Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, to Paulo Freire's understanding of dialogical education as a practice of freedom and Moacir Gadotti's inclusion of conflict as part of the dialectic of dialogue (Rule 2004); from Rhoda Howard's (1992) *African Communitarianism* to Mphahlele (1974) and Bengu's (1976) *African Image of Communication* and Mbigi and Maree's (1995) *Ubuntuist Communication Strategies*. Authentic, continuous language-based communication is decisively important for social interaction, particularly in an organization such as a school or school district office, and for this reason it is imperative to note that the English verb stem *communicate* not only derives from the Latin word *communis*, which means to *make common* and thus to *impart*, to *share*, to *pass along* and to *transmit*. It also derives from the Latin words *communicare* and *communicatio*, meaning to *associate with* and *announcement* or *dialogue* (Du Toit and Potgieter 2008). The researchers regard the notion of *dialogue* in this respect to be of central significance. The essentially dialogic character of effective communication is shared by the semantic values of 'account', 'ratio', 'reason', 'argument', 'discourse', 'saying' and 'word'. The Greek compound word *dialogos* means 'conversation' or 'discourse'. The term therefore signifies a particular kind of communicative speech act that happens between two or more people, and is associated with the pursuit of knowledge, reason, argument or discourse. It also has a connotation of *difference*: the two or more who partake in communicative dialogue are separate and distinct as individual beings, as speakers and as thinkers, but the conversation brings them together and fashions a unity of process through their joint engagement (Rule 2004).

Dialogue is, furthermore, an unfolding process, a search or quest for knowledge and understanding usually through the medium of spoken language, but not excluding written and visual codes, involving partners who are committed to this quest. Thus, dialogue assumes relationship and is impossible without it (Du Preez 2008). This is one of the differences between dialogue, on the one hand, and monologue and diatribe, on the other (Rule 2004).

From the above, the etymology of the term *communication* suggests that the managers and

their designated staff members within, for example, a district education office context are always in a specific dialogical relationship and, therefore, dialogically connected to one another – ‘communication’ is thus effected. This explains why district managers may view themselves as ‘leaders of leaders’ because of the various indirect forms of power that are bestowed upon them in ‘polyphonic settings’ (Moos 2009). These forms are intended to influence the ways in which, for example, managers at education district offices and their designated staff members perceive, interpret, understand and act. The actions themselves, however, become less important in this era. The values and norms behind them seem to be more important from a departmental point of view because indirect forms of power attempt to influence the values and norms (Moos 2009).

Leonard et al. (2004) describe communication therefore as a series of processes in which two or more humans interact through the exchange of meanings in terms of a common system of symbols that – in some way or another – address or, at least, refer to, these values and norms. Fullan (2013) regards communication as a series of processes that also involves the context as well as the content of the messages that are sent and received. The research of Rule (2004) and Du Preez (2008) furthermore demonstrates that communication can create dialogical space for a wide variety of inherently value-laden and norm-based communication forms, including, for example, polite disagreement, heated exchanges as well as serious testing of assumptions, opinions and ideas.

### *Communication Strategies and Skills*

The work of Akpınar (2009) suggest three generic categories of effective communication skills: firstly, technical communication skills, which include methods, processes, techniques and procedures related to effective teaching and learning. This category refers to skills associated with instructional leadership, communication of high expectations, clear academic goals and an effective system for monitoring learner progress. The effective instructional leader possesses listening skills that enable him/her to pay attention and to reflect on feedback.

Secondly, skills that involve the ability to work with others: the ability to create an atmo-

sphere conducive to democratic participation by learners, educators and the community (Akpınar 2009), the ability to empower people, which means to provide people with the authority, information and motivation to make decisions in the best interests of the education district (Johnson and Redmond 1998), fairness and transparency when appraising educators and learners as part of their development, and the ability to reflect on the achievement of the education district’s goals to assess its level of accomplishment. Thirdly, conceptual skills, which include the skill to identify and analyse problems and to implement effective decisions, skills that assist the education district in achieving its goals and engage stakeholders in democratic decision-making, and create an empowering atmosphere (Akpınar 2009).

In the context of an education district office, the manager may characteristically want to communicate with his or her co-workers on the basis of task orientation, a well-defined value system as well as commitment. This form of communication is commonly understood as professional office communication. Managers typically communicate with their co-workers to influence the latter’s behaviour. They may often claim that they communicate for the purpose of eliciting the best from their co-workers. In participative communication, ordinary staff members are involved in decision making. In directive communication, however, the manager usually makes most of the decisions, with little or no consultation with staff members: they communicate plans, organise tasks, lead and control.

### *Complexity Theory and the Typology of Managerial Communication*

Because of space constraints, we will refer only briefly to the Complexity Theory as base theory. It is a theory of change, evolution and adaptation, often used in the interests of survival, and often through a combination of cooperation and competition (MacGill 2011). It evolved from René Thom’s Catastrophe Theory in the 1970’s and the Chaos Theory of the 1980’s (Mason 2008). It breaks with straightforward cause-and-effect models, linear predictability, and a reductionist, atomistic, analytically-fragmented approach to understanding phenomena, replacing them with organic, non-linear and holistic approaches, in which *relations* within

interconnected networks are the order of the day. Using key terms like *emergence* and *self-organisation*, it seeks to understand how order and stability arise from the interactions of many components according to a few simple rules (Cohen et al. 2007). When an organization or firm shares the properties of other complex adaptive systems (CAS) they are more likely to adapt to their environment and, thus, survive. In a CAS, the system and the agents co-evolve; the system lightly constrains agent behaviour, but the agents modify the system by their interaction with it (Snowden and Boone 2007). CAS approaches to strategy seek to understand the nature of system constraints and agent interaction.

In a CAS, a typology of managerial communication generally describes four quadrants: (a) the task top-down approach, (b) the personal bottom-up approach, (c) the personal top-down approach, and (d) the task bottom-up approach, as originally informed by leadership theory (Siu 2008). The typology is defined in this case study to capture the key features of staff members and their managers' perceptions of effective communication at a district office of education. Specifically, the task top-down approach is characterized as a communication strategy in which the managers set goals and clear guidelines for their staff members and give clear instructions about the tasks that they are required to perform. The task bottom-up approach is defined as the communication strategy in which staff members proactively initiate education-related reform projects and suggest areas for improvement. Here, the managers usually avoid setting clear instructions and guidelines to implement the education-related reform programs.

The personal bottom-up and personal top-down communication strategies are interpersonally oriented. These communication strategies emphasize maintaining interpersonal relationships and attempting to foster a spirit of collegiality among staff members in the execution of their duties Fullan (2013). In the personal top-down communication strategy, managers usually make most of the decisions and their decision-making usually also involve only fairly limited consultations with staff members. One reason may be that managers usually tend to function as managers of the status quo. Another reason may be the fact that there usually is a general resistance to change, with the result that staff members in education district offices often seek

to retain a certain kind of organizational structure to which they are used (Siu 2008).

In order to find out how the theory outlined above would work out in practice an empirical investigation was launched in one of the District Offices that are so characteristic of the education system of South Africa. Our choice fell on the Bojanala District Office in the North-West Province because of its proximity to the university where the investigation was conducted.

## **Empirical Research**

### ***Research Design***

Qualitative research portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and in a continuous state of flux and the qualitative research process involves the production of knowledge and not its discovery (Gummesson 2003; Creswell 2013). Consequently, a case study design was used for exploring and understanding qualitatively and interpretively (against the backdrop of communication strategies and skills and the complexity theory) the perceptions of managers and staff about ways to ensure effective communication strategies in the Bojanala Education District Office in the North-West Province in South Africa.

### ***Aim***

The aim of the project was to empirically explore and understand how managers and staff viewed effective communication in the Bojanala District Office.

### ***Sampling***

Creswell (2012) stated that "the research term used for qualitative sampling is *purposeful sampling*. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon". Purposeful sampling thus means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make the holders of the data needed for the study. Purposeful sampling were used in this study. Three managers and three specialist staff members were selected as participants. They represent different divisions and were interviewed to explore and come to an in-depth understanding of their perceptions about effective

tive communication in the Bojanala District Office:

### **Data Generation**

Gummesson (2003) prefers the term “data generation” to “data collection” or “data gathering” procedures. The argument goes that data in social settings are not objects that are ready for some kind of “collection” or “gathering” procedure. Instead, data are essentially “generated” during qualitative research, meaning that they are the creation of the researcher in interaction with participants during interviews. Three data generating procedures were employed, namely *participant observation*, *interviewing* and *written document analysis*.

*The participant observation* had taken place at the District Office of Education referred to above. For this purpose, an observation schedule, based on the results of the review of the body of scholarship, was used. The researcher observed the way in which communication was being implemented among the employees. In order to maximise the effectiveness of the observation, field notes were made.

*Six individual, semi-structured interviews* were used and the interview schedules for both the managers and staff members consisted of five items each, which were based on the nature and functioning of communication, the importance of communication in educational organisations, channels for communication and strategies for communication.

*A document analysis* of the following documents of the Bojanala District Office of Education, the North-West Department of Education, as well as pertinent national documents was also carried out:

*Strategic Planning Documents*– the strategic planning document of Bojanala Education District Office indicates the overview by the district executive manager. These documents also included the vision and mission of the office, situational analysis, challenges, measurable objectives and the operational plan.

*A Collection of Relevant Government Gazettes*–policies on matters of service delivery and manuals that outline procedures for procurement matters.

*Budget Matters* – information on budget and allocation of funding to different sections.

*Staff Development Programmes* – annually compiled programmes that address the needs of the employees, as well as documentation pertaining to the nature and scope of skills and programmes offered to employees.

*Job Descriptions*– copies of job descriptions that indicate the duties that each employee has to perform according to his or her appointment, as well as reporting procedures on how employees should report to their managers monthly.

*Reports* – monthly, quarterly and annual reports that were written by different sections to report on their performance, challenges and achievements.

*Circulars and Memos*– documentation containing instructions or requests for information from different sections, including relevant responses.

*Invitations to Meetings*– copies of invitations for staff members to attend sectional and district meetings.

*Minutes of Meetings*– copies of a wide variety of meetings (especially as regards the nature and scope of decisions that were taken, actions that had to be taken, as well as the people who were responsible for these actions).

### **Data Analysis**

The following four data analysis procedures were used: developing conceptual labels, developing categories, developing patterns, as well as theorising.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2012) defines validity in qualitative research as trustworthiness and added that in qualitative research “validating findings means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies such as member checking or triangulation.” In order to enhance validity, this researcher used participant observation, interviews and document analysis. The managers and staff members were all asked the same questions about the role of communication in their work environment, strategies of communication and what they perceived to be barriers to communication. This afforded us the opportunity to explore and understand how the managers and the staff members responded to their own situation. Below are the results that were obtained from the interviews,

observations and document analyses are offered in an integrated manner.

The researchers regard this research to be substantively generalizable to the extent that independent researchers may find much the same in comparable research settings. A description of the conceptual and theoretical framework was also provided. The fact that three data generation methods were used kept possible research bias to the minimum.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permission to approach the respondents in the sample was received from the District Executive Manager of the Bojanala District in the North-West Department of Education. The participants were also informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The study was also ethically cleared by the university under whose auspices it was done.

## **FINDINGS**

### **What is the Primary Role of Communication in a District Office?**

On the one hand, the three managers responded as follows: Mr A mentioned that communication should aim to build a satisfactory working relationship. Mr B indicated that:

*“Maintaining a two-way channel of dialogue which will encourage feedback, informing one another, sharing, motivating, guiding, deciding, resolving issues, planning, etc.”*

Ms C indicated that without communication, nothing can be done in work related matters and one's personal life. She emphasised the paramount importance of teamwork.

On the other hand, the three staff members responded as follows: Ms X regards the role of communication as a way *“...to deliver instructions [and] ...to give information in order to do their job (sic)”*.

Mr Y emphasised the central place and role of relationships in communication:

*“I believe the primary purpose of communication in any situation is to develop relationships. Without maintained relationships which result in trust and respect, any information is useless.”*

Ms Z pointed out that a shared spirit of camaraderie was, in her opinion, vitally important for team-building and the maintenance of good communication between managers and staff members.

An investigation of the job descriptions of fourteen staff members revealed that the roles and responsibilities of employees were succinctly and satisfactorily communicated and that these related well to the Staff Development Programme as well as the Skills Development Programme which in turn, endeavoured specifically to address the needs of the Bojanala Education District Office. A study of this district's planning documents for the past four years showed that the majority of employees were repeatedly invited to strategic planning sessions – all of which ran for three working days.

From the responses of the interviewees, the documentation that was examined and from our observations, it was clear that communication in this district office was operationalised in such a way that all officials were involved in the activities pertaining to the process of communication.

### **How Much Information is passed from Manager to Staff Members?**

The responses revealed that the three managers believed that people should be given a sufficient amount of information (with well-structured explanations) and time in order to feel included in the team and allow the team to function well:

Ms C mentioned the caveat that: *“generally overloading people with information is counter-productive to getting the work done”*.

The responses from the staff members showed that Ms X was of the opinion that her manager sometimes forgot to communicate vital information to her and that:

*“...he seems to think that keeping us in the dark and not consulting us gives him the edge and keeps us off balance.”* Mr Y indicated that his manager tended to provide him with too much information and Ms Z averred that superfluous information impacted negatively on the way in which staff members were supposed to execute the duties assigned to them.

There is a subtle relationship between providing too much information, contextualising issues and expecting staff members or manag-

ers to find things out for themselves. All three of the managers who were interviewed were of the opinion that providing their staff members with the so-called “bigger picture” and contextualising their assigned duty-load within the role of the division in which they worked actually helped them to perform their duties better.

The caveat mentioned by one of the managers, Ms C, seems to be important in this regard: the possibility of information overload may lead to task-overload and over-expectation. Field-notes made during our observations revealed that although all managers attempted to maintain a responsible, neat and tidy administrative system, not everyone necessarily succeeded in accomplishing just that. Relevant documentation such as government gazettes and other policy documents were properly indexed, well maintained and easily accessible. Newly issued information was also duplicated and the copies were issued to staff members on a regular basis.

From the responses of the interviewees, the documentation that was examined and from our observations, it was clear that managers needed to review the amount of information that they disseminated to their designated staff members.

### **How Do Managers and Staff Members Communicate?**

The managers’ responses showed that regular team meetings, tea-time and other more informal kind of communiqués, as well as a well-communicated open door policy represented their preferred channels of communication.

Responses from the staff members showed that while there were sufficient opportunities for one-on-one communication, as well as for group meetings and emergency meetings, bulk e-mail messages and informal verbal update-sessions were also regularly used by their managers to communicate with them.

Both managers and staff members emphasised the importance of face-to-face communication, as well as the vital role that formal and informal meetings (opportunities for socialising) play:

*“We talk over tea and ... my door is always open for any staff member”* (Mr A)

*“There is one-on-one communication between my manager and myself all the time”* (Ms X)

*“Communication in our section is usually face-to-face...”* (Ms Z)

The researchers’ observations also revealed at least two instances of emergency group meetings, as well as frequent examples of, for example, tea-time impromptu communiqués. Our study of relevant documentation furthermore showed that all staff members regularly received formal invitation letters to join particular group meetings. Detailed e-mail messages were also used on a regular basis to communicate matters of urgent interest to all staff members.

From the responses of the interviewees, the documentation that was examined and from our observations, it was clear that communication between manager and staff members were meant to promote healthy relationships and interactions. Regular staff meetings and other forms of communicative interaction served to instil among all staff members a feeling of acceptance and belonging. It was, however, also clear that there was a constant challenge of uncoordinated activities.

### **What Kind of Feedback do Managers Give to Their Staff?**

From the responses offered by the three managers who were interviewed, it was clear that feedback was mainly seen as a communicative device for the purpose of recognising and or renouncing the conduct and professional performance of staff members:

*“Disciplinary encounters when necessary (sic) but I try to be constructive”* (Mr A)

*“For achievements photographs are taken and given to communication section (sic)”* (Mr B)

*“Sometimes something more subtle – a kind of constant affirming – showing personal interest in others’ (sic) work”* (Mr C)

The responses received from the staff members were slightly different. They spoke openly about what they perceived to be “blanket allegations”, the highlighting of errors and a general lack of positive feedback:

*“There are allegations that staff members are not performing but without specifics of who and when”* (Ms X)

*“...positive feedback is very seldom used or given”* (Ms Y)

*“Errors are often highlighted and used as a measuring stick (sic)”* (Ms Z)

Copies of minutes of all formal meetings were made readily available to all staff members. The

same applied to written notices of events such as wellness day rallies, closing dates for applications for employment, etc. Reports from senior management regarding infrastructure, human resource management, professional and auxiliary services, legal matters, labour issues, etc. were also regularly made available to all members of staff – either in their original form, or in condensed format in newsletters, etc.

From the responses of the interviewees, the documentation that was examined and from our observations, it would seem that, at least in some instances, the perceptions of staff members about the feedback that they received differed markedly from the perceptions of the managers about the feedback that they offered to their staff. These included feedback that contained factual errors, the lack of positive feedback, as well as some managers' inclination for making blanket allegations. Generally, though, it would seem that the place and role of feedback was satisfactorily understood in this particular education district office.

### DISCUSSION

The results of our study suggest that communication between managers and their designated members of staff in an education district office offers the opportunity of constructing a possible dialogical space (Rule 2004) where managers and staff may be allowed the freedom to explore the potentially unifying power of honest conversation and differences of opinion. The acquisition and use of information for planning, organising and executing effective communication, the use of different modes of communication and the continuous, regular provision of sincere and honest feedback assumes the building and subsequent nourishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Du Toit and Potgieter 2008).

If the results of the perceptions of the managers and the staff members are considered jointly against the above-mentioned background, appealing issues arise. This might suggest that managers fail to understand that differential communication may sometimes be needed and subsequently based on the developmental level of the staff member or the task/duty in question (Moos 2009).

If participative communication is understood for purposes of this case study as a bottom-up

communication strategy in which staff members collaborate in and initiate education-related reform programs – in line with complexity theory – with the encouragement of their managers, then the data unfortunately does not support its possible existence in the Bojanala Education District Office. Similarly, the available data also does not seem to point to a task bottom-up approach in that office.

There does, however, seem to be some evidence in the data of the personal bottom-up and personal top-down communication strategies, which are interpersonally oriented and which emphasize maintaining interpersonal relationships and attempting to foster a spirit of collegiality among staff members in the execution of their duties. The same can be said of the personal top-down communication strategy in terms of which managers usually make most of the decisions and where their decision-making usually involves fairly limited consultations with staff members. In this regard, the data also suggest that some staff members may resist change and wish to retain a certain kind of organizational structure to which they are used (Siu 2008).

These discrepancies between how managers perceive their communicative behaviour and what their designated members of staff feel that they actually do are important. It could be argued that some of the managers do not “walk-the talk”; instead they seem to act differently from the way in which they explained that people should act in organizations.

Although some of the data seem to chime with the basic tenets of participative communication theory and the complexity theory, the empirical part of our study showed that most of the communication in an education district office still tends to be largely hierarchical and directive and mainly monological in nature, with only sporadic evidence of authentic dialogue. For a truly collaborative, participative and empowering office culture to exist, in which all staff members may communicate effectively in the interest of transformation, more focused effort is needed.

The execution of the management tasks of the manager should, therefore, form part and parcel of a person- and people-orientated approach. The application of effective communication skills can be observed in the accentuation of democratic participation, empowerment, developmental communication, reflective dialogue and fairness.



### CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the objectives of the study two sets of evidence were presented, namely a conceptual-theoretical framework that reflects the literature on communication in education and the results of an empirical investigation that revealed how participants perceived the effectiveness of communication in their district offices. The evidence support the idea that good communication is of vital importance for the effective functioning of district offices. District officials should therefore be empowered on a continuous basis to perform critical communication functions. Although district offices will always have to act as leaders in the educational system they must focus on people-oriented approaches.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the fact that communication is the primary method that the district office should be using to influence groups and individuals it is recommended that all district office officials be empowered with basic communication skills. In effect this means that they should be capacitated on a continuous basis by training exercises like written tasks, 'in-basket' activities, group problem solving and interviews. Although these skills are essential for effective communication, the emphasis should be on holistic development and the appropriate application of a variety of social and human skills. It is indeed so that district education officials should be brought to understand the application of a wide range of communication skills lie at the heart of their work.

A further recommendation is that district education offices should always be prepared to transform. This entails improving by re-organizing internal systems. During this process district officials should be connecting with each other and interacting with school stakeholders in such a way that the teaching and learning processes in schools are enhanced. Effective communication thus involves the development of a collaborative system of networks with designated schools, parents, communities, and professional organizations to improve the sustainability of the education district office.

While professional communication depends on both task and interpersonal orientation for its success, it is recommended that the latter

should receive the greater emphasis in a people-oriented and pedagogical institution such as an education district office. In the present education climate in districts managers need to understand that they are required to function progressively more as change agents who are prepared to take up the leadership in curriculum planning and instruction and become leaders in fostering participative consensus and collaborative problem solving.

It is further recommended that district offices should consistently, seek to avoid a predominantly top down, authoritarian approach in the execution of their functions. They should promote a collaborative working environment through, *inter alia*, interdisciplinary team meetings and other professional development activities and must engage all role players in school development.

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