

Human Resource Development for Office-based Educators

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ABSTRACT The objectives of the study are to provide a perspective of the underlying imperatives of human resource development; to explore the substantial indicators of an implementable Human Resource Development (HRD) plan for office-based educators and to determine the roles that individuals and groups play in formulating Individual and Group Development Plans. The study is qualitative in nature and semi-structured interviews were conducted with one section of office-based educators, namely Deputy Chief Education Specialists (DCES) in three education districts in the Free State province of South Africa. The key findings were that these office-based educators have the desire to play a significant role in their job performance and that they need empowerment, resources and leadership to guide them in their daily duties. The evidence of the narrative incidents with office-based educators suggest that the development of an integrated HRD plan will provide a useful research tool for those wishing to study the design and use of HRD plans in the future, as it provides a holistic overview to be taken in the process and makes the development of an integrated plan a feasible task. HRD requires a new way of thinking and interacting amongst district sections, and should be regarded as a step forward to improved development of office-based educators. This improved development will subsequently have a positive influence of service delivery to school-based educators with the aim of improved learner performance in the schools.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Strategic Framework of the Department of Public Service and Administration (2015) in South Africa, the prominence of Human Resource Development (HRD) and the significance of HRD initiatives have been and are still relatively low. Numerous education supervisors do not appear to take their HRD tasks seriously, and in many instances senior managers are seemingly not supporting HRD initiatives. Although an increased sense by all concerned that HRD is a key factor linked to organizational performance, this factor is not always revealed in practice. This paper is an exploration of human resource development needs of office-based educators in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education (hereafter called: the Department) has taken a decision to include performance management in the Workplans of office-based educators (Department of Basic Education 2015). This may then lead to development strategies for such educators.

It was during the attendance of meetings, workshops, assessment sessions, and also dur-

ing formal and informal discussions with colleagues that one of the researchers realized that education supervisors of sections and their down-line subordinates need support with regard to the design of Human Resource Development (HRD) programs. According to Awolusi et al. (2015), an organization's strategic human resource development planning must be done within a context where the mission is established, and the strategic and operational plans are developed. This planning process entails the development of operational plans for human resources that are consistent with the overall strategic plan of the organization (Chatterjee 2009). Human resource development planning is critical as it removes indecision, and can serve as the basis for the organization's operational planning (Prashanthi 2013).

Office-based educators are educational managers based at district offices of the Department. They are not teaching in classrooms, but assist classroom educators and school principals with aspects such as curriculum implementation, subject advising and school management and governance. The need for HRD programs for office-based educators is, amongst other reasons, essential in the technological era that we live and work in, as all staff members must keep abreast of advances and changes in their respective fields of work (Haldar 2009). HRD programs need to be updated to keep track with advances and changes in the workplace, and such programs

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within the Department, are not excluded. Innovation, commitment and professional growth among office-based educators need to be developed, and this responsibility rests on the shoulders of section supervisors within the Department.

Human Resource Development (HRD)

The role of educational managers (office-based educators) is crucial in influencing the organizational culture and in determining the success of HRD (Boninelli and Meyer 2004). When studying the concept of HRD, one realizes that there are many historical definitions depending on the views of organizations at that particular time, and also on current or future organizational strategies that organizations wish to implement. It is important to note that the view of HRD is not static, but rather ever-changing to suite the overall organizational strategic business, knowledge explosion and performance outputs (Kraak et al. 2013).

For Burma (2014), the main focus of HRD is learning with its main aim being to attain the objectives of both the organization and the individual. In this regard development takes place over time with the emphasis on learning, development and training opportunities to improve individual, team and organizational performance.

The Need for Human Resource Development

The development of human resources in the organization is important in order to meet evolving socio-economic needs (Garavan et al. 2015). The purpose of HRD could be seen from the perspective of activities or functions in human resource management which are mainly individual development, organizational development, career development and performance improvement, which can be described as interrelated functions within HRD (Chatterjee 2009). The purposes of HRD are said to be changing and evolving in accordance with organizational strategies and goals in order to meet the socio-economic needs.

Education for All (2013) indicates that educators are prime candidates for targeted development. Although training may not be the answer to ineffective performance, a sound group or individual development program may be what is exactly needed to alleviate the problems. Employees' skills must be updated through devel-

opment so that technological advances are successfully integrated into the education department programs. Technology is part of the organization and equally, new technological advances could provide useful skills in performance, but it will unavoidably require funding and employee development before it can be used. It is abundantly clear then, that skills technology is a major financial, operational and organizational component of any strategy.

Most office-based educators are motivated by achievement and need to face new challenges in their workplace. According to Kgati (2007), people need time and assistance to grow and as such organizations, such as the Department, should assist office-based educators identify goals for improvement towards personal growth. Educator development can provide activities that result in both organizational effectiveness and personal growth. In this regard Swarts (2006) mentions that the desire of educators to be involved in their own development encourages them to discuss current research on educational issues and to offer and receive ideas related to immediate problems.

Statement of the Problem

The key problem observed by the researchers is that the employee evaluation system used by the Department for office-based educators, the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS), does not offer a prescribed personal or group development plan. As stated in the original document of the PDMS Task Team (2003), the needs and problem identification is left to the jobholder and supervisor to fathom their own learning and development. Office-based educators therefore, do not have a guiding HRD plan that can be used by all sections across the education districts, and whose purpose would mainly be to empower office-based educators with the necessary knowledge, skills and training to perform better. In addressing the problem and in an attempt to assess the importance of an integrated HRD plan for the Department, the following research questions underpin this paper:

- What are the aims of HRD with regard the development of office-based educators?
- What roles do respective office-based educators play in identifying and formulating Individual and Group Development Plans?

- How can the leadership role of Deputy Chief Education Specialists promote a good working culture amongst office-based educators?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was employed in order to understand the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. In-depth qualitative interviews involve face-to-face encounters with participants and are intended to elicit their views and opinions (Maree 2012). Semi-structured interviews fit this paper as responses could be probed for further information (Leedy and Ormrod 2010). This enabled the researchers to gather data that reflect richness and complexity of behaviours occurring in the natural office setting of the participants.

Permission was obtained from the Department, the employer of office-based educators, to conduct the research. All participants were informed that their anonymity would be secured. All interviews were conducted in English. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2010), validity depends on the amount and type of evidence there is to support the interpretations researchers wish to make concerning data they have collected. In this study, the researchers interviewed participants until a saturation point was reached. To increase validity in this study, the researcher made use of measures such as guarding against personal biases and prejudices, and ethical considerations (consent was provided by participants and confidentiality ensured). McMillan (2012) opines that reliability is the extent to which participants' scores are free from error, that is, reliability is the consistency of information provided. A pilot test was done to ensure interview questions are relevant and will generate valid data.

Population and Sample

The population includes office-based educators (Deputy Chief Education Specialists (DCES)) from three education districts of the Free State Province, South Africa. The three districts are Lejweleputswa, Motheo and Fezile Dabi.

Non-probability purposive sampling is used. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to capture rich and topic-specific data from partic-

ipants who are knowledgeable about the problem of the study. The participants included one DCES in the General Education and Training Band (GET), one DCES in the Inclusive Education section, three DCESs in the School Management Development and Governance (SMDG) section, one DCES in the Adult Education and Training (AET) section, one DCES in the Examination and Assessment section. The total sample therefore includes seven DCESs from sections in the three education districts respectively. Therefore, the total sample of the study consists of 21 (7x3) office-based educators across the selected sections in the three education districts. The general ranking of office-based educators is from lowest, the Senior Education Specialists (SES) who reports to the Deputy Chief Education Specialists (DCES), who in turn report to the Chief Education Specialists (CES). DCESs were selected as they link to both subordinates and supervisors.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of selecting qualitative data, enunciating the qualitative importance attributed to such data and noting possible similarities and differences between and among such units of data (Chenail 2013). According to Katz (2015), in interviews the researcher needs to code answers and generate information regarding the frequency and nature of various codes according to patterns in the responses provided. For this study thematic analysis was used as it provides the opportunity to code and categorise data into themes (Yin 2011). Such themes are then reported on as was done in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are discussed according to the following themes:

HRD Aims (Related to the Development of Office-based Educators)

Most participants acknowledged the importance of HRD aims for office-based educators in their endeavour to promote personal development and job performance. Some participants however opted for a more direct approach of injection of resources by the Department so that

aims of HRD for office-based educators become a reality.

"I think the aims are broad, they begin with what the Department aims to get out of the system using office-based educators as a vehicle to attain its goals." (Probing) Can you expand further on this? "Well, it is about organizational effectiveness by thorough planning and in the process, develop office-based educators so that good results are achieved in schools. We need to be relevant in this changing technological world, so we need proper skills and training."

"It is what the Department wants to achieve through us. The department must provide us with resources like equipment and inject more money in schools so that school-based educators do not struggle. We are dedicated workers ready all the time to work for extended hours. There is only one goal for us all, and that is improved learner results".

The aims of HRD is linked to the task of people management and leadership, which is the responsibility of supervisors who need to play a strategic role in terms of planning, allocating, supporting and creating a conducive environment for effective job performance. This is in line with the Strategic Plan (2011-2014) of the Department of Basic Education to provide human resource development for office-based staff (Department of Basic Education 2011).

Performance Management System (PMDS) as a Tool for HRD

Most participants said that the PMDS is a good appraisal tool that should not be abandoned. Despite its shortcomings in terms of appraisal mistakes, the office-based educators highlighted the need to improve on the management of PMDS especially when implementing the monitoring rating. One of these participants commented that what should be most emphasized in PMDS is the continuous feedback between the supervisor and subordinate. It enhances good working relationships, trust and promotes respect.

A small number of participants regarded the PMDS as a tool to 'trace' their work or punish them. They complained about the nasty experiences they had with appeal cases and interventions they had to seek from superiors for unfair treatment. However others did appreciate the

difficult tasks that their supervisors encounter in trying to attain departmental objectives. The overall PMDS was embraced as a working tool that must continue to maximize performance and further develop office-based educators. The majority of office-based educators have acknowledged the availability of the PMDS document which they say if used correctly, can yield positive results for human resource development across sections in district offices.

"The PMDS is an excellent appraisal instrument. It must be continued because it guides our work, our job descriptions, and our needs, and it teaches us respect and obedience".

"I think it is only used to catch us out. Some supervisors just want to punish us."

According to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), the aim of PMDS is to assist managers and jobholders to manage and develop performance. The key elements of PMDS, that is setting goals, selecting competencies, learning goals and formal reviews of performance, are all fundamental aspects of managing performance. Effective performance management requires constant and ongoing, evidence-based review and feedback on performance throughout the year. This being stated, some of the issues brought forward by participants, such as the identification of developmental needs, how training and development will be offered to various office-based sections, and how monitoring and evaluation will be conducted across all sections, echo that not all the key elements of PMDS as stated, are carried out successfully. Two-way feedback is regarded as assisting both supervisor and subordinate in addressing areas of concern and is an area that also needs attention.

Resource Provision to Perform Activities

The participants stated that resources are provided according to the needs of operations to be performed and as per the availability of the operational budget. Computer hardware, office stationery, as well as materials for conducting workshops are some of the resources provided for in order to assist with work performance.

"We budget every year for the workshop materials to be used but at times all the needs are not catered for. Training materials as well as laptops assist us a great deal in making our job easier."

“We should network and collaborate with the use of training equipment and other resources. It is impracticable at times to avail every need if office-based educators cannot work as teams.”

The data highlighted the resource need in order to effectively perform all activities associated to the job. These office-based educators need to plan and provide well-organized workshops to educators at schools. Without the necessary resources such workshops will not reach their intended aims. Ample provision for such resources and the proper spending of funds allocated in the Operational budget of the Department are key drivers for successful training and development. The Annual Performance Plan (2013/2014) of the DBE (2013) confirms the importance of providing opportunities for teacher development programs in targeted priority areas with teachers, in response to the need to improve the professionalism, teaching skills and subject knowledge of teachers throughout their careers.

Individual Sectional Plans for Developing an Integrated Human Resource Development Plan

Most participants felt that the available sectional operational plans are relevant documents to guide the development of integrated HRD plans. In this respect working teams can be brought together to identify common ground for co-operation that include objectives, needs identification, time-frames, reporting schedules, feed-back and continuous development. Group or sectional plans can only be used to identify those striking areas of practice that can be useful to the common HRD plan. The participants felt that a variety of documents should be used that include the PMDS documents, operational plans, policies and Acts relevant to educator development. The majority of the perceptions of office-based educators were that integrated HRD aims at ensuring that there is collaboration amongst teams across the various sections. Office-based educators must receive continuous training on personal developmental skills and job performance aspects. The emphasis is on personal development which, when achieved, will consequently promote service delivery in schools.

“Sectional plans are very distinct in terms of goals and objectives, but they are useful tools

in guiding the effective performance of office-based educators. The manner of operation should be one and the overall goals should be identical despite the job descriptions. Therefore common work working plan need not be a problem.”

“Plans are used to guide operations. In this respect the manner of functioning should include all elements of job performance that is, reporting, communication, feedback and evaluation.”

It can be established that the roles of office-based educators in the formulation of individual or group development plans is of great importance in that they cannot be separated from the formulation of their own development. The formulation of development plans is positively associated with positive office-based educators' job outcomes. As a person who manages the operational plans almost on a daily basis, one of the researchers has discovered that there are linkages between job performance and job satisfaction, commitment to the job, and feedback between supervisor and subordinate is increased. This positive result is due to the operational plan which is well-planned, with clearly stated goals and objectives, performance measures that are clearly stated, performance activities and time-frames that are stated. What is of essence is the responsibility attached to each office-based educator in the performance of tasks to be achieved. When office-based educators do not meet the targets or perform as expected, there is a need that together with the direct supervisor, a development plan be designed to serve as guidance for future development.

Influence of Leadership on Performance and Development

Most participants mentioned leadership style and good management as contributing to an effective working culture, which also contribute to a positive working environment. A good manager can also be a good leader due to initiative and positive changes that he/she implements in the section and amongst the staff. The leader must have certain behavioral characteristics that differentiate him/her from the daily managerial activities. The participants echoed the indispensable leadership role that supervisors must play so that all sectional goals and objectives are achieved.

“The leader must have influence so as to direct the activities of the section in a right track. We need change in the way things are run in our sections and if our supervisor does not venture into some new things, then we are as stagnant as water”

“We need quality leadership that can encourage, motivate, influence, maintain good relationships, appeal to followers to be committed and create an environment conducive to job performance. We need trained leaders who can be above unpredictable situations at all times”

An aspect of developing employees is providing continuous learning and development opportunities. Without development, people may be reluctant to take on new duties or responsibilities because they do not always know how to perform critical tasks. The approach used to develop others is subject to their capability and confidence levels. The leader is the key to the skill development of subordinates (Cebula et al. 2012). The close interrelationship between the characteristics of leadership and of management implies that DCEs should be good administrators, be knowledgeable, display quality skills and implement principles that promote personal and professional behavior. The DCEs should be able to create an environment conducive for followers to improve their performance and consequently to the quality of education within the Department.

Formulation of an Integrated HRD Plan

The responses from the participants differed considerably. The participants mentioned that the pressure to support schools and produce good academic results is hampering co-operation among sections. However, the idea of an integrated HRD plan is an essential tool for effective performance amongst office-based educators.

Some participants felt that the steps to follow depend largely on the direction of the supervisors and the co-operation of colleagues from other sections. Despite the different operational plans, quality HRD planning is essential for office-based educators to perform to their maximum. In this respect bringing all sections together, identifying needs, analyzing needs and developing a training program is important. Co-operation among sections is essential for a sustainable integrated HRD plan.

Some participants were not sure whether the plan would take into consideration their plight and frustrations. They need a plan that would alleviate their work pressure and ensure that they manage sections as they are supposed to.

“A group of office-based educators from all or identified sections should meet to plan for the HRD program. The steps to follow will be simple - to plan, to develop, to assess and to reinforce for performance. Reinforcement will surely include motivation by means of monetary bonuses and other incentives”.

“What is the use of a plan that will further load us with work? We are stuck with the new Annual National Assessment (ANA) we now work even on week-ends and we need guidance on how to alleviate the pressure.”

“An integrated HRD plan is a good idea despite the different operational plan in the district. It will give us a common purpose and determine a common yardstick for us. Its first step should be inclusive of all the ideas in terms of needs, then addressing of developmental gaps, how and when to report about our performance. What is more important is communication between the supervisor and us so that we are constantly assured of our performance”.

The development of an integrated HRD plan would initiate close co-operation amongst office-based educators who have experience and expertise. This experience and expertise across sections should be tapped into to contribute to produce the required HRD plan for all sections. To be effective and functional the introduction of an integrated plan has to undergo phases of intersectional meetings to be discussed and inputs be made that would in the process develop a synergy of developmental needs and a common approach to operational matters. What is of paramount importance is the use of the plan to be of benefit to all office-based educators.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions that follow are made as per the themes discussed. HRD aims relate to the empowerment of the individual, the important role of the organisation (Department) and the standards set for individual office-based educators (for their specific positions). Each component works in a triangular shape that supplements each other. The role of HRD is therefore that of linking the three elements in a co-ordi-

nated, coherent and cohesive way in order to achieve the overall goals for the organisation.

PMDS is generally viewed as a good appraisal tool but only if implemented with honesty and avoidance of assessment rating errors. Two-way feed-back is regarded as assisting both supervisor and subordinate in addressing areas in need of attention. PMDS is not regarded only as a tool to assist office-based educators, but has consequential effects to school-based educators in the sense that the development of office-based educators impact positively on school-based educators and curriculum developments.

The provision of resources is relevant to the effective development of office-based educators through in-house workshops. The work performance of office-based educators can be enhanced through collaboration, support and encouragement of each other in order to maintain high performance standards. In addition, policies and programmes of the Department influence the provision of resources as influenced by the Skills Development Act and the National Skills Development Strategy. Although funds are available, training sessions are not followed per planned schedules and as a result cause congestion of such training sessions at the end of the annual cycle.

The roles of office-based educators in the formulation of individual or group development plans are of great importance, as the formulation of development plans is positively associated with office-based educators' job outcomes. This positive result is due to the operational plan which is well-planned, with clearly stated goals and objectives, performance measures that are clearly stated, performance activities and timeframes that are stated. If then executed as planned, much benefit can be derived from such a plan.

The leadership style, communication, organisational goals, leadership characteristics, readiness for change play an important role in the job performance of subordinates. The leader sets the sectional goals by planning and assigning tasks to reach these goals. Planning is complemented by open communication channels amongst staff members. Motivation, loyalty, trust, influence and team performance are key to organisational success. Goals are more likely to be reached when leaders motivate their teams.

The leadership contribution of DCEs depends on the lead-

ership style in terms of tasks to be performed and the favourable conditions available to practice leadership. This influence is what is put forward by the contingency theorists. The emphasis is on improved results and improved working relationships.

A HRD plan that has been drafted by all parties concerned are most likely be accepted and supported by such parties. Office-based educators are educated and have undergone various spheres of training and possess certain skills that can be used to draft a 'fit for purpose' HRD plan. As to which areas of focus their expertise are to be utilized, should be the responsibility of the supervisor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department should draft an HRD policy for office-based educators to be implemented in the respective education districts so that it becomes easier for districts to implement HRD plans that suit specific contexts. The developmental needs of office-based educators should first be identified through consultations and thereafter, the planning sessions with selected office-based educators should follow which will result in the development of an integrated HRD plan. In this instance the strategic goals of the Department, various sectional strategic plans and objectives, operational plans and achievable targets can be highlighted. Selected office-based educators with expertise from various district sections must be involved in the identification and prioritization of developmental needs and in the planning sessions as required.

The HRD plan implemented should be reviewed on a periodic basis (per semester), which would then be followed by an annual appraisal system. This will ensure improved performance feedback, heightened performance of the staff, efficient district management and organized Departmental outcomes.

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