



# Using the Theory of Learning Organisations to Understand the Role of Principals in School Health Promotion: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

The role of principals is increasingly recognised as important in school health promotion. There is a significant body of literature regarding school health promotion and its benefits for learners and the school community, but little is known about the role of principals. Using Senge's theory of learning organisations as a framework, this study qualitatively sought to understand the roles of principals in promoting healthy school environments. The study used a combination of semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups to gather data from six school management team members; seven teachers; and three school governing body members from a high school in Fezile Dabi District of the Free State. Individual interview data was obtained and focus group discussions were conducted to confirm the findings. The data gathered was analysed using a combination of inductive classification and theory analysis. The study's main findings demonstrate that principals should (i) provide leadership in health promotion activities within their schools and in collaborations and partnerships with the external community and (ii) have personal mastery, vision, knowledge and thinking skills to be able to play their role effectively. Furthermore, it was found that all five principles of the theory of learning organisation can be used to understand the role of principals in school health promotion. Based on these findings it is recommended that a learning culture be created in schools. The findings of this research suggest implications regarding both the practice of providing leadership in school health promotion and practices in the preparation of principals and teachers for the task of School Health Promotion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Principals are mandated to play a role in school health promotion. For instance, the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship clearly outlines the general roles and responsibilities of school principals which is about the creation of a safe and secure school environment.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, school principals have a responsibility to ensure that the school, human and other resources are organised and managed in a way that would provide a safe, effective and invigorating environment.<sup>2</sup> Although the implementation of the Integrated School Health Promotion (ISHP) is the prerogative of the school-based support team, all activities must be conducted under the supervision of the school principal.<sup>3</sup> Thus, principals according to the ISHP are assigned the responsibility

<sup>1</sup> Department of Basic Education, *South African Standards for Principalship* (Pretoria: Government Gazette, 2016), <https://static.pmg.org.za/140807sastandardforprincipalship.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Basic Education, *South African Standards for Principalship*.

<sup>3</sup> South African Government, *Integrated School Health Policy* (Pretoria: South African Departments of Health and Basic Education, 2012).

of providing guidance on the performance of tasks and mobilising the community to ensure that all components of the integrated school health package are provided. To that end, the two policies mentioned here place school principals in South Africa at the forefront regarding school health promotion.

This research underscores the importance of school leadership in creating a conducive learning environment that enhances academic performance. The researchers recognise that the act of leadership is not static and that it responds to various learning environments. In that regard, Senge's theory of learning organisations is used as a sense-making tool. A learning organisation is one that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself to meet its strategic objectives.<sup>4</sup> The aim is to present a theoretical perspective that improves the understanding of the role of school management in school health promotion. Literature advocating the practice of the learning organisation concept in school management has begun to accumulate. However, empirical studies on how the principles of learning organisations can be linked to the roles of principals in school health promotion to better understand them are relatively limited.

This study intends to answer the following question: How can the role of principals in school health promotion be understood through the lens of learning organisations? The objective of this research is to analyze the role of school managers in school health promotion in the light of learning organisations in a public high school in the Free State province of South Africa. Although there are differences in how learning organisations are defined, there is agreement among researchers that organisations will be better off if they become places where learning is fundamental. A common belief is that people and organisations should develop flexibility, adaptability and learning ability to deal with problem situations and changing environments.

This paper is organised as follows: following the introduction, a literature review with theoretical and empirical studies that focus on leadership roles in school health promotion and a theoretical framework are presented. The third part introduces the background information on research and methodology. After analysis and findings of the study, the authors provide discussions and implications. Finally, this paper concludes with key points, recommendations, future research directions and limitations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

School health promotion is about reform, innovation, and change. According to Hoberg, as gatekeepers, principals must accept and support school reforms in their leadership roles.<sup>5</sup> DuFour and Marzano emphasise the necessity for school reform to solve school challenges that schools are faced with.<sup>6</sup> School reform occurs by “developing a results-oriented process and plan committed to building the collective capacity of staff to fulfil the purpose and priorities of their school.”<sup>7</sup> Morrison, Brown Thompson, and Glazier add that “school reform further helps the organisation to form a workable future and the capability to shape the environment and move towards a productive future for the organisation.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, it is about making structural changes that are meant to improve the quality of education. It is believed in this research that structural changes rarely predict outcomes, but they are essential for initiatives to take root and develop. For such initiatives to be effective, principals need to assume the role of being change agents.

Bush views school leadership as “administrators in charge of the daily operations and activities of a school, from instructional leadership, transformational leadership to managerial operation.”<sup>9</sup> School leadership “involves a process of influence” which is exerted intentionally by one person, or many people, over others to structure the activities and relationships in the school.<sup>10</sup> The term intentional is significant, as “school leadership is based on specific goals or outcomes to which the process of influence is expected to lead.”<sup>11</sup> Eyal and Roth indicate that “principals can exert idealised influence by acting according to the school's values and

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<sup>4</sup> David AL Coldwell and Andrea Fried, “Learning Organizations without Borders? A Cross-Cultural Study of University HR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Salience of Senge's Five Disciplines in Effective Work Outcomes,” *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 12, no. 1 (April 15, 2012): 101–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595811413107>.

<sup>5</sup> Hoberg Kai, “Experiential Learning for Humanitarian Logistics,” in *Humanitarian Logistics in Asia-Pacific: Challenges, Opportunities and Perspectives* (Vienna: Haupt Publisher, 2012), 61–68.

<sup>6</sup> Richard DuFour and Robert J Marzano, *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement* (Solution Tree Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Scott A Morrison, Corliss Brown Thompson, and Jocelyn Glazier, “Culturally Responsive Teacher Education: Do We Practice What We Preach?,” *Teachers and Teaching* 28, no. 1 (2022): 26–50.

<sup>8</sup> Morrison, Brown Thompson, and Glazier, “Culturally Responsive Teacher Education: Do We Practice What We Preach?”

<sup>9</sup> Tony Bush, “School Leadership and Management in England: The Paradox of Simultaneous Centralisation and Decentralisation,” *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership* 1, no. 1 (July 15, 2016): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.30828/real/2016.1.1>.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Yukl et al., “An Improved Measure of Ethical Leadership,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 38–48.

<sup>11</sup> Yukl et al., “An Improved Measure of Ethical Leadership.”

serving as models to be emulated.”<sup>12</sup> Mahlangu assert that “leadership is about providing direction, assuring alignment, building a commitment in teachers, and facing adaptive challenges.”<sup>13</sup> All these definitions indicate that school leaders must have a vision, bring transformation and be innovative to attain positive outcomes at school.

A leadership role is one where a leader is responsible for managing a situation, a team, or an entire organisation ethically and effectively. According to Rigby, “it is critical that school principals skilfully manage their roles as school leaders in order to establish role competence.”<sup>14</sup> Handford and Leithwood define competence as both “functional and mutual”. This definition indicates that competence is more than managing school resources properly; “it also entails problem-solving, maintaining the school vision, and modelling professional behaviour.”<sup>15</sup> The school vision must be shared. The principals play a leading role in developing a shared vision.”<sup>16</sup> Celik et al. define a shared vision as “a clear mental view and often a goal that a person wants to achieve which is important for bringing people together and fostering a commitment to a shared future.”<sup>17</sup> Bockelmann believes that a “shared vision seeks to establish consistency in all affected areas, such as the curriculum and teaching, professional development, communication with stakeholders, resourcing, and learner agency.”<sup>18</sup>

The same can be said about consistency in the promotion of healthy physical environments. Research conducted by McIsaac et al. found that schools that were motivated by vision and school health promotion support, showed enhanced health promotion functioning.<sup>19</sup> Scholars suggest developing a vision for a change of a situation<sup>20</sup> and a sense of the desired future workings and outcomes of an organisation.<sup>21</sup>

Based on the development of a vision for change, the principal becomes a change agent. Change agents are the “individuals who transform organisations through special approaches, attending to internal processes and culture, and examining different change options.”<sup>22</sup> Principals as change agents must understand how a shared vision is developed and implemented. Their interaction and communication with stakeholders will provide regular feedback about project goals and logic, and leaders and stakeholders “establish a shared language and shared imagination of the future.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, stakeholders are empowered to effect and own the change project rather than sign on to it. Engaging stakeholders in a shared vision is important, and this process can be started anytime in the life of a change project.

In addition, principals as leaders are responsible for building and sustaining high motivation to successfully change and coordinate processes and activities and encouraging them to sustain new practices and activities.<sup>24</sup> Khan and Law believe that “Developmental principals promote teachers’ intrinsic motivation to act

<sup>12</sup> Ori Eyal and Guy Roth, “Principals’ Leadership and Teachers’ Motivation,” *Journal of Educational Administration* 49, no. 3 (May 10, 2011): 256–75, <https://doi.org/10.1108/0957823111129055>.

<sup>13</sup> Vimbi P. Mahlangu, “The Effects of Toxic Leadership on Teaching and Learning in South African Township Schools\*,” *Journal of Social Sciences* 38, no. 3 (March 9, 2014): 313–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2014.11893261>.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica G. Rigby, “Principals’ Sensemaking and Enactment of Teacher Evaluation,” *Journal of Educational Administration* 53, no. 3 (May 5, 2015): 374–92, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-04-2014-0051>.

<sup>15</sup> Victoria Handford and Kenneth Leithwood, “Why Teachers Trust School Leaders,” *Journal of Educational Administration* 51, no. 2 (March 15, 2013): 194–212, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311304706>.

<sup>16</sup> Thandi Ngcobo and Leon Paul Tikly, “Key Dimensions of Effective Leadership for Change: A Focus on Township and Rural Schools in South Africa,” *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 38, no. 2 (2010): 202–28.

<sup>17</sup> Adnan Celik, Turgut Emre Akyazi, and Tahir Akgemci, “The Relationship between Shared Vision and Organizational Climate in Learning Organizations: A Study in the Banking Sector,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (March 9, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v6-i2/2024>.

<sup>18</sup> Tiffany L Bockelmann, “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership on Classroom Teachers’ Instruction,” *The Interactive Journal of Global Leadership and Learning* 1, no. 3 (June 29, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.55354/2692-3394.1021>.

<sup>19</sup> Jessie-Lee McIsaac et al., “Applying Theoretical Components to the Implementation of Health-Promoting Schools,” *Health Education Journal* 74, no. 2 (2015): 131–43.

<sup>20</sup> Rebecca E Michel, Sonya Lorelle, and Katherine M Atkins, “LEAD with Data: A Model for School Counselors in Training,” *Professional School Counseling* 21, no. 1b (2017): 2156759X18773276; Jeroen Stouten, Denise M. Rousseau, and David De Cremer, “Successful Organizational Change: Integrating the Management Practice and Scholarly Literatures,” *Academy of Management Annals* 12, no. 2 (June 2018): 752–88, <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0095>.

<sup>21</sup> D. Keith Gurley et al., “Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals: An Exploration of Key Organizational Statements and Daily Practice in Schools,” *Journal of Educational Change* 16, no. 2 (May 26, 2015): 217–42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-014-9229-x>.

<sup>22</sup> Fred C Lunenburg, “Managing Change: The Role of the Change Agent,” *International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration* 13, no. 1 (2010): 1–6.

<sup>23</sup> Adrianna Kezar, “Higher Education Change and Social Networks: A Review of Research,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 85, no. 1 (January 31, 2014): 91–125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2014.11777320>.

<sup>24</sup> Siphokazi Kwatubana, Velaphi Aaron Nhlapo, and Nomsa Motetee, “The Role of Principals in School Health Promotion in South Africa: A Qualitative Study,” *Health Education* 122, no. 3 (March 22, 2022): 304–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-08-2020-0078>.

beyond their job description by elevating their self-esteem and self-value.”<sup>25</sup> According to Eyal and Roth “motivation can be about providing intellectual stimulation by soliciting creative thinking, challenging teachers and stimulating them to question, reframe problems and approach old situations in innovative ways.”<sup>26</sup> Motivation is all about how engaged employees feel in the cycle to the organisation’s goals and how empowered they feel.<sup>27</sup> Teachers are motivated when they are given individualised consideration by attending to their individual needs and differences and helping them to work towards higher levels of potential.<sup>28</sup> Principals need to provide support, especially to teachers leading health committees, as open and honest communication is the foundation of a successful team.<sup>27</sup> This is true because it helps to build the interpersonal skills necessary for effective support and teamwork. Cosner et.al., posit that “sharing ideas, points of view, information and expertise helps to keep everyone informed and, in the loop,”<sup>29</sup> Varrati and Smith also assert that “teachers view principals as key figures for support and guidance.”<sup>30</sup> Principals could also take an active role in “improving their support systems through mentoring programmes.”<sup>31</sup> The provision of support can be associated with caring leadership. Caring lies at the heart of the effective enhancement of healthy school environments and good school leadership. This is evidenced by health policies, wherein “principals are indirectly obliged to act ethically and morally.”<sup>32</sup>

Another role of school leaders is to strengthen relationships between internal and external stakeholders and solidify commitment to work together.<sup>33</sup> According to Barlow et.al., “it is the school manager’s responsibility to initiate and give guidance on actions to warrant the participation of the school community in school health programmes.”<sup>34</sup> Collaboration and school health promotion relate because they are both internationally recognised and connect health and education in a planned, “integrated and holistic way and has the potential to support improvements in both health and education.”<sup>35</sup> Collaboration and societal relationship are defined as that which “comes into being when individuals bind themselves together for the purpose of fulfilling a special need or to realise a shared or a communal interest.”<sup>36</sup> The recognition of a need for collaboration with school communities provides a foundation for the investigation of skills and qualities that school leaders need to acquire to steer their teams. School leaders who are role-competent engage in formal and informal school observations and are knowledgeable about the activities occurring around the school.<sup>37</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was used in this study. In qualitative research, participants are allowed to describe their lived experiences of a phenomenon. In this study, in the focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews, participants aired their views on their understanding of the role of principals in school health promotion. Qualitative research is suitable for developing deep issues of making voices heard.<sup>38</sup> This study used a single case study as a strategy of inquiry. This study aligns itself with Stakes’ approach which is underpinned by a strong motivation for discovering meaning and understanding experiences in context.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of using a case study was to get as much as possible in-depth details about the role of principals in promoting healthy environments.

<sup>25</sup> Mohammad Ayub Khan and Laurie Smith Law, “An Integrative Approach to Curriculum Development in Higher Education in the USA: A Theoretical Framework,” *International Education Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 66–76.

<sup>26</sup> Eyal and Roth, “Principals’ Leadership and Teachers’ Motivation.”

<sup>27</sup> Shelby Cosner et al., “Cultivating Exemplary School Leadership Preparation at a Research Intensive University,” *Journal of Research on Leadership Education* 10, no. 1 (2015): 11–38.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Heystek and René Terhoven, “Motivation as Critical Factor for Teacher Development in Contextually Challenging Underperforming Schools in South Africa,” *Professional Development in Education* 41, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 624–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.940628>.

<sup>29</sup> Cosner et al., “Cultivating Exemplary School Leadership Preparation at a Research Intensive University.”

<sup>30</sup> Anita Varrati et al., “Principals as Mentors in Teacher Education: How Preservice Teachers’ Voices Informed Practice,” *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.58809/YAOJ5026>.

<sup>31</sup> Varrati et al., “Principals as Mentors in Teacher Education: How Preservice Teachers’ Voices Informed Practice.”

<sup>32</sup> Siphokazi Kwatubana, “Caring Principal Leadership for the Support of Teachers Leading Committees for Promotion of Healthy School Environments,” *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2018): 1–13.

<sup>33</sup> Samantha M. Paredes Scribner et al., “‘Successful’ Principals: A Contested Notion for Superintendents and Principals,” *Journal of School Leadership* 21, no. 3 (May 1, 2011): 390–421, <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461102100304>.

<sup>34</sup> Jane Barlow et al., “Individual and Group-based Parenting Programmes for the Treatment of Physical Child Abuse and Neglect,” *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>35</sup> P C Van der Westhuizen and P J Mentz, *An Ontological Perspective on the School as an Organisation* (na, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Handford and Leithwood, “Why Teachers Trust School Leaders.”

<sup>37</sup> Martin Terre Blanche et al., *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences* (Juta and Company Ltd, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> A S De Vos et al., *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions* (Van Schaik Publishers, 2011), <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=M5GEnQAACAAJ>.

<sup>39</sup> Robert E Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis* (Guilford press, 2013).

A purposive sampling method was used. The selection criteria was based on high enrolment, which is 1,000 learners in a school. The assumption is that schools with high enrolment would have low academic performance because of challenges in running the school and struggles to sustain or focus on the promotion of healthy physical environments. The selection of participants was informed by the organisational development theory which emphasises the inclusion of representatives from different stakeholder groups. The participants were selected from three groups made of school management team members (n=6), teachers (n=7) and school governing body members (n=3). A total of sixteen (16) participants from a high school in Fezile Dabi district of the Free State participated in this research. Although each group might have different perspectives about the role of the principal, the sample is geographically homogeneous in that it was drawn from the same school. The aim was to discuss their perceptions in depth without focusing on variations.

Multiple sources were used to collect data to get an understanding of the topic under investigation. The data was collected using a combination of focus group discussions and individual interviews to enhance data richness. As the combination of individual interviews and focus groups was for confirmation, the data obtained by one of the methods was anticipated to corroborate those acquired with the other.

The researchers first obtained individual interview data and then carried out focus group discussions to confirm the findings as suggested by Plack, and concerning the relative weight of each data set, both had equal value.<sup>40</sup> A semi-structured interview guide was developed for use with both focus groups and individual interviews. There were three groups and these were school governing body members (n=3); teachers (n=7) and school management team members (n=6). All interviews were tape-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim.

Although during the data analysis phase, the researchers were tempted to use the different principles of the theory of learning organisations, they did not always work. The researchers then decided to make use of inductive analysis as a key strategy. Data was analysed using a combination of an inductive classification and the theory of learning organisation framework analysis. Ethics approval was obtained from the university and hospital ethics review boards.

## RESULTS /FINDINGS

In the results section below, school management team members are denoted SMT and teachers T and school governing body members as SGB. The three themes that derived from the data were leadership in school health promotion; leadership in collaborations and partnerships; and managerial role.

### Leadership in School Health Promotion

The first theme on leadership in SHP entails three roles. The first is about the establishment of functional structures that focus on SHP. The second pertains to inspiring and motivating teams to work towards a shared vision, and the third is about being supportive.

Participants indicated the following:

*It is the role of the principal to establish functional structures that help to promote a healthy school. This would ensure effectiveness in the implementation of initiatives (SMT 2). The principal and teachers who are members of health teams should be passionate about their own health and the health of others. Leaders should be committed to the task of executing SHP (T6).*

Engaging staff who are as committed and passionate about students' health and wellness as them, was a critical facilitator of the school health team's success in this study. This means that principals should believe in the establishment of a functional structure with efficient management and control. It is, therefore, important that principals are aware of the expertise and interests of their staff members so that they do not establish committees that are doomed to fail. Additionally, it is necessary to have an existing cooperation structure and to be able to count on coordination within the team. A committee involves teachers and teacher leaders to collectively promote healthy school physical environments. Committees create opportunities for teamwork and team learning where teachers learn from each other and work collaboratively towards a common goal. Team learning implies the continual enhancement of collective capacities and the improvement of team effectiveness.<sup>41</sup> In teams, there is a team leader who must give guidance and direction on how strategies have to be implemented. In this research, the participants regard the principal as a team leader. In innovations such as

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret M Plack, "The Development of Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills, and a Professional Identity within a Community of Practice," *Journal of Physical Therapy Education* 20, no. 1 (2006): 37–46.

<sup>41</sup> Peter M Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Broadway Business, 2006).

school health promotion, the principal and teachers become change agents. A change agent is anyone who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate and coordinate the change effort.<sup>42</sup>

Participants mentioned inspirational leadership as an important factor for health and wellness committees to thrive and for schools to benefit from such initiatives. Principals were considered inspiring if they were actively involved in the activities and had clarity of the goals of health promotion initiatives and projected a shared vision and ownership for achieving the goals. Participants indicated the following:

*Strong leaders inspire others to rally around what must be done. Teachers get motivated and strive to do their best if the principal clearly articulates personal vision and values (T2). The ability to persuade and motivate teachers so the vision becomes shared is important (SMT1). Having the courage to tackle issues relating to their committees depends on the interactions between them and principals (SMT5).*

The results indicate that school health promotion cannot be the sole responsibility of the principal. Its effectiveness depends on how inspired and motivated the whole school is to work towards shared goals. Such insights reveal that there is an inevitable shift away from leadership as a position to leadership as an interaction. Inspiring others involves effective communication which can instil confidence to succeed. By inspiring and motivating teachers to take responsibility for health promotion, the principal is also delegating leadership. Harris maintains that principals need to relinquish power and authority. In that way, there is collaborative ownership of the health programmes and their implementation.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, principals need to build a high degree of reciprocal trust to successfully motivate teachers who lead committees to be strong leaders. In this case, there is available evidence that highlights the potential of distributed leadership to make a difference in organisational change and improvement; the same can be expected in school health promotion.

The understanding of the participants was that principals were in a position that enabled them to be interpreters of policies. They influence the way policy is interpreted and translated into action. The committee members depend on the principals' understanding of the contents of the policy.

*Each committee must have a policy and a year plan that is implemented (SMT4); school-based policies are developed from national policies. The principals have to lead in the development of policies. This activity calls for knowledge and understanding of policies. The principal works closely with the school-based support team and the environment committee to promote the importance of school health promotion (SMT5).*

The results highlight the responsibility of principals in translating the policy text into actions in schools. This means that principals must possess knowledge and understanding to be able to provide theoretical insights about the policies for committees to make informed decisions when implementing policies.

The supportive role entails supporting the committees, teachers and initiatives that are meant to promote a healthy environment. The principal must support, encourage and recognise committee members' efforts and cooperation. Participants indicated the following:

*The principal has to appreciate whatever good gesture made by teachers to motivate and encourage them to do more, recognise the teachers' efforts and their cooperation in activities (SMT3); support them to perform to their potential (T4); support teachers' ideas for them to trust him more (SMT6).*

The results speak to the nurturing of structures for school health promotion. In supporting committees and individual teachers that are part of them, the principal is also championing the vision of a healthy school environment. Literature indicates that a leader must stay close to the team when cascading the vision as they are responsible for assessing the impact of the cascading process. Support from the principal encourages members and makes them work harder to meet the required standards in school health promotion. Provision of support may be associated with caring leadership, as teachers are not left to struggle on their own but are supported by the principal. This research also highlighted an important element of support – that of interaction. That would mean that for principals to support teachers in their endeavours, they have to communicate with them to understand their support needs. The last role is about being a transformational leader:

*It starts with me, I have to be a leader who focuses on change (SMT1). A good leader transforms the school, and teachers and learners will follow suit, be exemplary, and guide us (SMT6). We look up to the principal if s/he is not passionate about what needs to be done, teachers regard that as not important*

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<sup>42</sup> Lunenburg, "Managing Change: The Role of the Change Agent."

<sup>43</sup> Alma Harris, "Distributed Leadership: Implications for the Role of the Principal," *Journal of Management Development* 31, no. 1 (December 30, 2011): 7–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211190961>.

*and health promotion will not be effective (T3). A good communicator, problem solver and role model in order to transform the school into a healthy one (SGB2).*

The results indicate that transformation comes from a focus on change processes, being a role model, being passionate and being a good communicator. A principal who applies transformational leadership may provide an opportunity for their staff to achieve more and grow the school to a new level.<sup>44</sup> A school principal must model the behaviour that they want to see in others. A role model is an individual who displays certain behaviours or has achieved a certain level of success that other people look up to and wish to imitate.<sup>45</sup> These are leaders who concentrate all their efforts on developing their personal and professional skills and capabilities<sup>43</sup>.

### **Leadership in Collaborations and Partnerships**

The second finding is that the principal should provide leadership in collaborations and partnerships. This is a whole-school approach that involves members of the school community. It was revealed that:

*Collaborations are important for health promotion to reinforce the efforts of health promotion in schools. The principal should strengthen collaborations with the community and build sustainable relationships(T1).*

Several studies support the importance of principal leadership in collaborations for health promotion. This finding is confirmed by Kwatubana et al., who reported that grant support to forge strong partnerships between home and school is an important facet of effective health promotion.<sup>46</sup> It is important to build partnerships with community members, especially in schools in disadvantaged communities where resources are scarce. A study by McIsaac et al. showed that although school characteristics – like staff allocation, physical location and resources – are important, these barriers can be mitigated by building organisational capacity and establishing a supportive school community culture.<sup>47</sup> The leadership actions of principals must always be considered in relation to their social context.<sup>48</sup> A strong leadership in collaborations with the community is good for capacity building:

*Involving community members is important as teachers can learn and gain an understanding of health promotion (SMT4). People who are knowledgeable about health issues and how to deal with them are in communities (T5). Teachers can learn from health advocates in communities (SGB3).*

It is important to note that strengthening collaborations between schools and communities may provide much-needed support in terms of knowledge and understanding of health promotion in a school. A study by McIsaac et al. revealed that sustaining the positive effects of a health-promoting school would require continuous engagement and collaboration with multiple stakeholders to embed health promotion in school community norms.<sup>49</sup>

### **Managerial Role**

The third finding involves the principal's managerial role. The managerial role was indicated as including planning, guiding and monitoring. In relation to planning participants revealed the following:

*Plans are developed at the beginning of each year. Each activity has a due date and a responsible teacher. Plans included what to do, when and why (T4). Planning is one of the implementation phases of school health initiatives. In the absence of planning, implementation can be haphazard and uncoordinated, which can result in ineffectiveness in the application (SMT2).*

Plans and the goals on which they are based give purpose and direction to the school and staff members. It becomes particularly important in school health promotion as the kinds of tasks the school community will be performing throughout the year will be outlined. The implementers will be clear on how the activities are

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Rhodes and Mark Brundrett, "Leadership Development and School Improvement," *Educational Review* 61, no. 4 (November 2009): 361–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910903403949>.

<sup>45</sup> Tony Bush, "Conceptions of the Leadership and Management of Schools As," *The SAGE Handbook of School Organization*, 2018, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Kwatubana, Nhlapo, and Moteetee, "The Role of Principals in School Health Promotion in South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

<sup>47</sup> McIsaac et al., "Applying Theoretical Components to the Implementation of Health-Promoting Schools."

<sup>48</sup> Kim Fong Poon-McBrayer, "School Leaders' Dilemmas and Measures to Instigate Changes for Inclusive Education in Hong Kong," *Journal of Educational Change* 18 (2017): 295–309.

<sup>49</sup> McIsaac et al., "Applying Theoretical Components to the Implementation of Health-Promoting Schools."

related to the overall goals of the school. Planning is important for the principal as a prerequisite to other leadership functions as it becomes the basis for monitoring and evaluating actual performance.<sup>50</sup>

The principal should also provide resources that are necessary to meet the target goal. Activities become successful if all the resources are available, as objectives can be met.

*Resources are important for the success of health promotion activities (SGB1). Lack of resources has a negative impact on the effectiveness of initiatives. The provision of resources is a managerial role. Resource provision includes making decisions on hiring people to help with certain tasks (T5); physical and financial resources like equipment have to be provided (SGB2).*

School principals need to attend to the provision of resources as it has an impact on the sustainability of health programmes. A study conducted by Estrada et al. showed that a lack of resources impedes the implementation of school health programmes and activities.<sup>51</sup> In guiding, participants mentioned encouragement of reflective practices in empowering teachers.

*Reflecting on activities of the year or a semester can empower teachers, enabling us to think about the successes and failures of our actions (T3). We could just focus on one or two specific issues at a time and analyse these based on our experiences (T6). Empowerment through reflective practices can sharpen teachers' skills, and improve and develop confidence in teachers (SMT3).*

Reflective practices seem to be an important tool in empowering teachers. It can provide an opportunity to generate knowledge which will affirm good practice. Committees may be able to take corrective action based on the newly gained insight which may lead to increased excellence in health promotion practice. The approach may also lead to the necessary unlearning of previous beliefs and the changing of negative attitudes and mental models. Reflective processes according to Fullan, are linked to constant learning that allows the attitudes, values and beliefs of an institution to change.<sup>52</sup>

Principals must focus on the empowerment of teachers through professional development. Professional development refers to the workshops that were provided by the Department of Education and the sharing of information. Empowerment through professional development is at the individual and organisational levels.

*Teachers should attend workshops to gain knowledge and understanding of SHP (SGB1). The principal must support the attendance of workshops and teachers who attend (SMT4). As teachers who attend workshops give feedback to the rest of the staff members, information is shared (T1). Sessions for information sharing are facilitated at the school level. The feedback sessions are important, this is where we learn about new developments (T2).*

Empowerment of teachers is part of a plan to see their vision turn into reality. Good managers know how to develop and empower subordinates. A study by Young et al. indicated that the level and quality of the preparation of teachers to implement health promotion policies were central to school health promotion.<sup>53</sup> Concerning monitoring, it is the principal's role to monitor the implementation of all activities.

*The principal should monitor and evaluate if activities are done according to the policy and plan of action (SGB1). The principal monitors the execution of tasks and committees' schedules (SMT2); a monitoring system has to be developed to make it easy for the principal to monitor the implementation of decisions (T5).*

Monitoring is associated with reflective processes as the principal would continuously reflect on the plans, policies and decisions taken by the school. Monitoring programmes strengthen reflective practice and enable the principal to remove themselves from the proximity of being directly involved in the decision or action and to put their actions into a context that provides a fuller appreciation of all the circumstances that led to that decision or action.<sup>54</sup> Thus, principals should develop monitoring processes, strategies and structures that allow

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<sup>50</sup> Rachael McDonnell, *Essentials of Program Planning and Evaluation* (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Alejandro Estrada, Paul A. Garber, and Abhishek Chaudhary, "Current and Future Trends in Socio-Economic, Demographic and Governance Factors Affecting Global Primate Conservation," *PeerJ* 8 (August 21, 2020): e9816, <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.9816>.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Ian Young, Lawry St Leger, and Goof Buijs, "School Health Promotion: Evidence for Effective Action," *Background Paper SHE Factsheet 2* (2013): 1–23.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth A. McDaniel and Holly DiBella-McCarthy, "Reflective Leaders Become Causal Agents of Change," *Journal of Management Development* 31, no. 7 (July 13, 2012): 663–71, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211243863>.



school improvement processes. Without monitoring and reflection on decision-making and implementation, strong and effective schools cannot be realised.

## DISCUSSION

This research aimed to understand the role of principals in school health promotion using Senge's theory of learning organisation as a lens. This was investigated from the perspectives of school managers, teachers and parent components of the school governing body. The findings of this research revealed that all five principles of the theory of learning organisation such as personal mastery, systems thinking, shared vision, team learning, and mental models can be used to understand the role of principals in school health promotion. The leadership role of setting up functional structures that champion the cause for the implementation of school health promotion is associated with personal mastery. It can be argued that self-leadership can be regarded as one of the important roles that principals have to play in school health promotion. Personal attributes such as commitment and passion become imperative. The principal must assume the role of being an inspirational leader whose actions can be observed by those around them who can be motivated to emulate their behaviour.

It is believed that how leadership tasks are enacted may be the most important when it comes to influencing what teachers do. There is also a well-established consensus on the vital role of principals, both as active participants in making health promotion changes in schools and their role in ensuring its sustainability. Principals should be abreast with the implementation of programmes and health behaviour and attitude. These findings imply that for principals to play their role effectively they must first master themselves. Self-mastery and Self-leadership can be considered the same as they both require self-awareness, self-management and self-learning.<sup>55</sup> In addition, this study revealed that support, encouragement and recognition of committee members' efforts is important. Providing support and the ability to see what good others do may be related to caring leadership which is a core value in education. Values are fundamental in personal mastery. Leaders who practice personal mastery are guided by, and driven to act out of, a clear set of values. Caring is reciprocal, leaders who care will also be cared for and listened to. The authors agree with Kouzes and Posner who believe that leadership is, above all, a relationship that is values-based.<sup>56</sup> The implication is that mastery of leadership requires the mastery of skills central to developing and maintaining positive relationships with others.

The role of leadership involves a clearly articulated personal vision and a shared vision. Thus, it is about vision building and sharing. Leaders with personal mastery can model what they truly desire based on their vision for the school. People who have high personal mastery regard a vision as a calling, and behind their objectives is a sense of purpose.<sup>57</sup> A study by McIsaac et al. revealed that higher-level visioning and school-level leadership were critical in sustaining the adoption and implementation of school health promotion across schools and appeared to enable and integrate organisational processes – such as distributed leadership and collaborative school culture – to enhance school health promotion implementation at school level.<sup>58</sup> This role also pertains to delegated leadership as setting up teams and actively coordinating professionals and community members help in setting the ground for delegated leadership. Delegated leadership is one of the models that promote innovation.<sup>59</sup> With regards to schools in South Africa, Williams suggests that distributed leadership within schools can be actualized if the combined knowledge, expertise and experience of various role-players and stakeholders are harnessed collaboratively. In that case, the principal as a leader has to concentrate their efforts on developing the leadership capability and capacity of others, both in their school and in communities where the schools reside.<sup>60</sup>

Leadership role in school health promotion is associated with team learning and teamwork. In team learning, individual knowledge is important if it can be shared. Personal knowledge and skills such as problem-solving, and communication among others were considered as important as teams rely on them regarding policy interpretation and implementation. Teachers in this research were hoping to learn from the principal, this could mean that they expect them to be knowledgeable about policies and how to interpret them. For shifts in collective

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<sup>55</sup> Louis Langdon Warren, "Teacher Leadership Begins with Self-Leadership," *Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.tecs.20210601.11>.

<sup>56</sup> James M Kouzes and Barry Z Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (John Wiley & Sons, 2023).

<sup>57</sup> Hong T.M. Bui, Afam Ituma, and Elena Antonacopoulou, "Antecedents and Outcomes of Personal Mastery: Cross-Country Evidence in Higher Education," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24, no. 1 (January 2013): 167–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.669781>.

<sup>58</sup> McIsaac et al., "Applying Theoretical Components to the Implementation of Health-Promoting Schools."

<sup>59</sup> Maria Medina Dominguez, Antonio Medina Rivilla, and Conchita Medina, "Empathetic and Collaborative Climate in the Classroom," 2018, 70–93, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2960-6.ch005>.

<sup>60</sup> Clarence G Williams, "Distributed Leadership in South African Schools: Possibilities and Constraints," *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 2 (May 23, 2011): 190–200, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v31n2a421>.

knowledge to occur, team members must interact and integrate individually held information into the team's collective knowledge state.<sup>61</sup> Sharing of ideas is the cornerstone of team learning. However, team members must be willing to learn and share information. The team learning process occurs when teachers share ideas, learn together and work together to implement health programmes. The research also revealed that setting up structures in the form of health committees provides an opportunity for teamwork and team learning. For a team to learn knowledge transfer must occur, where individual learning is shared with other individuals and teams within the organisation.<sup>62</sup> Certain behaviours aid in the development of collective knowledge.

In this research three behaviours were mentioned, the first included the involvement of community members who are already involved in health promotion in their communities. These members are expected to bring and share knowledge, skills and expertise to enable the team to increase performance. The second involves reflective practices that assist in gathering meaning from their experiences and using this knowledge as a guide for future actions. The third pertains to professional development including attendance of workshops to empower team members. Team learning behaviours encapsulate all the actions that aid in the development of collective knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

The managerial role can be linked to the principal as a team leader who must ensure that strategic planning is done, resources and guidance are provided, teachers are empowered, and monitoring is done. It seems that team leadership represents an important characteristic of effective team performance. The performance strategies used by team members are most likely to emerge from leader planning and coordination activities. This type of leadership can be referred to as functional. In functional leadership, a leader manages, by whatever means, to ensure that all functions critical to both task accomplishment and group maintenance are adequately taken care of.<sup>64</sup> Teachers look up to the principal for guidance and motivation. In addition, other ways, mentioned in this research, of influencing people include the appreciation of teachers' efforts and modelling the behaviour. It is therefore the team leader's role to raise the collective efficacy of the team. Cebeci and Çağanağa indicate that increasing motivation has positive effects on relationships between administrators and employees and this can lead to willingness to work and increased productivity.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, team effectiveness is grounded in members being motivated to work hard on behalf of the team. Motivation in this research derives partly from the establishment of a climate that compels hard work.

The role of leadership in school health promotion involves systems thinking leadership. This research revealed the importance of the inclusion of different stakeholders in school health promotion for the programme and teachers who are responsible for its implementation. Therefore, the role of a principal as a system thinking leader pertains to their capability to identify systems and be able to mobilise them to the benefit of health initiatives in their schools. Identification of systems involves systems analysis. Systems analysis is the process of learning an organisation to identify its objectives and create systems and procedures that would achieve them effectively.<sup>66</sup> Systems thinking also involves collaborative leadership as community members are leaders, in their own right, thus, the principal becomes the leader of leaders. School health promotion can be regarded as a systematic process that is essential for engaging the school community's support to improve the health of learners and the school community. This calls for a form of leadership that supports and nourishes meaningful collaborations. This research primarily depicts systems thinking as a local means for handling a specific critical field within the school which is school health promotion.

Various mental models were revealed in the responses of the participants. Understanding the mental models of principals and teachers is important as they influence how they enact their roles. For instance, a common sense of teamwork and openness to team learning can be used as a platform for "creating and maintaining a learning organisation."<sup>67</sup>

One of the mental models pertains to having structures that have the potential to optimise organisational efforts for the creation of a successful school-healthy environment. This way of thinking was linked to the principals' role of developing and capacitating teams and influencing them as team leaders.

<sup>61</sup> Dominguez, Rivilla, and Medina, "Empathetic and Collaborative Climate in the Classroom."

<sup>62</sup> Catarina Marques Santos and Ana Margarida Passos, "Team Mental Models, Relationship Conflict and Effectiveness over Time," *Team Performance Management* 19, no. 7/8 (October 14, 2013): 363–85, <https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-01-2013-0003>.

<sup>63</sup> Marques Santos and Margarida Passos, "Team Mental Models, Relationship Conflict and Effectiveness over Time."

<sup>64</sup> Stephen J Zaccaro, Andrea L Rittman, and Michelle A Marks, "Team Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (December 2001): 451–83, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00093-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00093-5).

<sup>65</sup> Oguzhan Cebeci and Cagda Kivanc Caganaga, "Effects of Motivation of School Administrators on Human Resources Management," *OALib* 06, no. 07 (2019): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1104808>.

<sup>66</sup> Lonnie D Bentley and Jeffrey L Whitten, *Systems Analysis and Design for the Global Enterprise*, vol. 417 (McGraw-Hill/Irwin New York, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer Feldman, "The Role of Professional Learning Communities to Support Teacher Development: A Social Practice Theory Perspective," *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020): 1–8.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of health promotion was grounded in the assumption that leadership resides within the person of the principal. Personal knowledge, skills and attributes were regarded as important in guiding and steering the health committee and the school community towards effective implementation of programmes. This mental model took an organisational orientation rather than a personal orientation of leadership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation is based on the belief in this study that the ability of a principal to learn is dependent on three factors. These factors are the school's organisational culture, leaders' personal mastery and in particular, the development of an internal culture of learning. This study highlighted the importance of team leadership by the principal in implementing and sustaining school health promotion activities. It becomes vital that a learning culture be created in schools for school health promotion to be effective. This means the principal's attitude towards learning has to be positive for them to become learning leaders. The recommendation is for embedded learning that does not depend solely on workshops provided by the Departments of Basic Education but also on continuous knowledge acquisition and skills development.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research suggest implications regarding both the practice of providing leadership in school health promotion and practices in the preparation of principals and teachers for the task of SHP. This research highlighted the important role that the principals play in facilitating ongoing activities within the school environment to develop the school's capacity to innovate and reform for effective SHP. The theory of learning organisations was instrumental in exposing salient factors that may enable principals to play the said roles including personal mastery, vision, knowledge and thinking skills. There is a need for these factors to be explored further.

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