



# Functionality and Deployment of Structures to Effect Balanced School Leadership: Narratives of School Principals

Thokolosi John Tshabalala<sup>1</sup>  & Loyiso Jita<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education Management Policy and Comparative Education, University of the Free State, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Curriculum Studies and Higher Education, University of the Free State, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

This study set out to map the changing dynamics of school leadership in South Africa and the enormous challenges that go with it. The article explored the democratisation of schools since the advent of democracy in 1994 and how school principals are handling the devolution of powers as accounting officers. It further mapped out a few key themes on the structures available in schools meant to affect the changed policy framework in South African school leadership. Furthermore, it argued that different expectations are piled on school leadership and that the new policy framework has largely transformed the school principal's work. Scholars warn that there is an unanticipated and largely unacknowledged consequence of this. It is so complex that it may have contradictory effects that impede rather than assist school improvement in South Africa. The study followed a qualitative approach, with a case study design, where the narratives of four purposively selected principals from two provinces of the Republic of South Africa, the Free State, and Gauteng, were compiled. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis over three months. The findings from the four case studies reflect a reigning confusion in schools regarding the deployment of structures. Furthermore, the findings showed a degree of misalignment of structures and their functionality. The study recommended reviewing the policy and the realignment of structures, focusing on their functions and demarcation of roles. This study draws the attention of education stakeholders to the importance of support and capacity building for school principals. The findings and recommendations of this study will impact scholarship in various ways that will in turn benefit school leadership across the globe.

## Correspondence

Thokolosi John Tshabalala  
Email: [TshabalalaTJ@ufs.ac.za](mailto:TshabalalaTJ@ufs.ac.za)

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## INTRODUCTION

Mestry asserts that the work of school principals is often riddled with new demands and challenges. He goes further to highlight that apart from the usual administrative and managerial roles such as procurement, discipline, conflict resolution, and interaction with parents and the communities, the principals still must accentuate their instructional leadership duties.<sup>1</sup> This is further emphasised by Cushman who suggests that administrators from widely different settings face role reconciliation where strong leadership and participatory decision-making appear juxtaposed in forming the backbone of change.<sup>2</sup> Scholars across the globe agree on the

<sup>1</sup> Raj Mestry, "Principals' Perspectives and Experiences of Their Instructional Leadership Functions to Enhance Learner Achievement in Public Schools," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 69 (2017): 257–80.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Cushman, "The Essential School Principal: A Changing Role in a Changing School," *Horace* 9, no. 1 (1992): 1–8.

critical nature of Instructional leadership as a valuable tool in establishing and sustaining an effective learning and teaching environment.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Jita asserts that school principals as Instructional leaders stretch themselves beyond the normal call of duty, where they dedicate their time and focus on developing knowledge and implementing the curriculum, which includes instruction and assessment.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the hierarchical nature of the South African schooling system, the Department of Basic Education has sought to give a mandate to schools to establish and constitute structures whose primary goal is to provide support to Instructional Leadership while also enabling schools to function and ensure the achievement of educational objectives and goals. The formation of structures in schools derives from the decision of the Education Department to turn all schools into self-managing schools by devolving certain powers, roles, and responsibilities. This paper argues that structures in schools and their functionality are more inclined to foster and entrench democracy and strengthen school leadership. However, despite these structures' presence in schools, principals seem confused about their roles and functionality. The paper seeks to investigate how principals deploy structures in their schools to attain a balance in their multi-pronged roles as managers and leaders of instruction.

The study is guided by the main research question: How effective are the existing school structures? The following three questions, therefore, anchor the study:

- What are the existing structures to support and promote curriculum delivery in schools?
- How do principals make use of these structures?
- How can the functionality of these structures be improved?

The researchers explore concepts such as leadership, management, principalship, and decentralisation to draw relevance to the topic. This is followed by an outline of the research methodology and the theoretical framework employed. The narratives of the participants will be outlined and discussed under the set-out themes. The study concludes with the findings, which are meant to contribute to scholarship globally.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Leadership

Christie posits that leadership may be understood as a relationship of influence directed towards goals or outcomes, whether formal or informal.<sup>5</sup> She further emphasises that although leadership is often framed in terms of individual qualities, it may more usefully be framed in terms of the social relationships of power, where some can influence others. Christie's suggestion goes on that leadership is characterised by influence and consent rather than coercion, and having said that, if viewed as an exercise of power, it necessarily entails ethical considerations.<sup>6</sup> In a school context, where leadership aims to achieve goals, it is often associated with vision, values, and goals. Various scholars have alluded to the fact that school leadership should not be viewed as the preserve of any position or individual but can come from and be built throughout the entire school. According to Newman and Wehlage, leadership can originate at the centre rather than at the top.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, Spillane and Diamond assert that leadership can also be distributed to people and functions.<sup>8</sup>

### Management

According to Buchanan and Huczynski, management differs from leadership, in that, it is an organisational concept that relates to structures and processes by which organisations can achieve their goals and central purposes.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that management can arguably be tied to formal positions other than to persons. Many educational leadership and management scholars allude to the fact that good governance is

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<sup>3</sup> Aaron Mkanga Manaseh, "Instructional Leadership: The Role Of Heads Of Schools In Managing The Instructional Programme," *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management* 4, no. 1 (January 15, 2016): 30–47, <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2016.1691>.

<sup>4</sup> Loyiso C Jita, "Instructional Leadership for the Improvement of Science and Mathematics in South Africa," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 9 (2010): 851–54.

<sup>5</sup> Pam Christie, "Landscapes of Leadership in South African Schools: Mapping the Changes," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 38, no. 6 (November 1, 2010): 694–711, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143210379062>.

<sup>6</sup> Christie, "Landscapes of Leadership in South African Schools: Mapping the Changes."

<sup>7</sup> Fred M. Newmann and Gary G. Wehlage, *Successful School Restructuring: A Report to the Public and Educators* (Madison: Centre on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> James P. Spillane and John B. Diamond, *Distributed Leadership in Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> David A. Buchanan and Andrzej Huczynski, *Organizational Behavior*, 3rd ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1997).

essential for schools' proper function and effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Anuna et al. posit that effective management involves a principal's ability to obtain the necessary resources and support to create a school climate and culture where teachers and students work toward school goals.<sup>11</sup>

### Principal-ship

According to Christie, school headship or principal-ship is an organisational concept that designates a structural position that carries with it responsibilities and accountabilities. She further points out that while leadership is expressed through influence, the power of principal-ship may legitimately extend beyond consent and influence on compulsion.<sup>12</sup> The ideal school principal should possess the requisite competencies necessary to instigate action and develop skills that can enable school development processes.<sup>13</sup>

Individuals occupying structural positions in organisations are bound by the goals and primary tasks of those organisations, and their successes and failures are judged based on these goals. School principals are regarded as the accounting officers who account for the operations and outcomes of the organisation. They are expected to be knowledgeable and caring while at the same time being able to perform.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, they carry a massive responsibility, which does not seem to improve in the foreseeable future. In fact, things are gradually moving from bad to worse with every rising sun. The most important thing for school development is that the principal can collaborate to improve quality through joint programmes prepared by various other institutions and individuals.<sup>15</sup>

### Decentralisation

Reforms in education, particularly schools, started a long time ago, as early as the 1980s. The focus of this study is the decentralisation of authority and powers to schools so that they become autonomous over various operations within the institutions, which is done to improve the levels of performance in schools.<sup>16</sup> Principals have been given decision-making responsibility and accountability. Schools have become increasingly responsible for curricular and instructional decisions and managing financial and material resources and personnel. These reforms are adopted on the premise that schools are more knowledgeable about their own needs and the most effective ways to allocate resources and design the curriculum so that they can better meet the needs of their learners. The devolution of these powers is done by believing that schools can execute them and are better placed to identify their critical needs.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Sense-Making Theory was found to be the most appropriate lens through which this study on functionality and deployment of structures to effect balanced school leadership can be discussed. According to Namvar et al., Sense-Making as a theory has changed and evolved.<sup>17</sup> This has been shown by various scholars such as Russel et al., who initially defined it as "the process of searching for a representation and encoding data in that representation to answer task-specific questions."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Weick et al. maintain that sense-making is "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalise what people are doing."<sup>19</sup> From the above views, it cannot be said for certain that there is only one definition of sense-making. Namvar et al.'s

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<sup>10</sup> Brahm Fleisch and Pam Christie, "Structural Change, Leadership and School Effectiveness/Improvement: Perspectives from South Africa," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 25, no. 1 (March 2004): 95–112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630042000178509>.

<sup>11</sup> Chigozie Anuna Magnus et al., "Principals' leadership Needs For Effective Management Of Secondary Schools In Rivers State, Nigeria," *European Journal of Education Studies*, 2019, 312–25.

<sup>12</sup> Christie, "Landscapes of Leadership in South African Schools: Mapping the Changes."

<sup>13</sup> Yoyok Cahyono et al., "Do Servant Leadership Influence Market Performance? Evidence from Indonesian Pharmacy Industries," *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy* 11, no. 9 (2020): 439–51.

<sup>14</sup> Ismet S. Isik and Sebahattin Ziyamak, "Review and Analysis of the Role of the Principal in Shaping a School Culture," *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences* 4, no. 5 (2018): 556–59.

<sup>15</sup> F. N. Mahmudah et al., "The Importance of Partnership Management to Improve School-to-Work Transition Readiness among Vocational High School Graduates," *The Education and Science Journal* 24, no. 5 (May 14, 2022): 64–89, <https://doi.org/10.17853/1994-5639-2022-5-64-89>.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Carnoy, "Globalization and Educational Reform," in *Globalization and Education: Integration and Contestation across Cultures* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 43–61.

<sup>17</sup> Morteza Namvar et al., "Simplifying Sensemaking: Concept, Process, Strengths, Shortcomings, and Ways Forward for Information Systems in Contemporary Business Environments," *Australasian Journal of Information Systems* 22 (January 22, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v22i0.1654>.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel M. Russell et al., "The Cost Structure of Sensemaking," in *Proceedings of the INTERACT'93 and CHI'93 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 1993), 269–76.

<sup>19</sup> Karl E Weick, Kathleen M Sutcliffe, and David Obstfeld, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking," *Organization Science* 16, no. 4 (2005): 409–21.

definition is more appropriate in this context. The scholars posit that sense-making is "a process of clarifying and removing ambiguity and uncertainty by searching for and organising similarities and differences from data sources through which goal-directed interpretations for decision-making are established."<sup>20</sup> South African scholars need to make sense of the available structures within their schools and how they assist school principals in their daunting tasks of ensuring learning and teaching occur.

## METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed the qualitative research approach, which, according to Minichiello and Kottler, enabled the researchers to focus on contexts and situations without expecting to find objective and universal explanations for why school principals engage in certain behaviours and practices.<sup>21</sup> A qualitative approach was also helpful in seeking insights and explanations on how principals made sense of policies, legislative frameworks, structures, and resources at their disposal to lead, manage, and achieve a balance in their work. A multiple case study was used as the qualitative research design because it allowed the researchers to indulge in each participant's space where four full consecutive days were spent. This was followed by sporadic afternoons, weekends, and school holiday visits, spent with the participants over three months. According to Freeman, a case study can take the form of a programme, event, or activity.<sup>22</sup> During this period, the researchers observed and engaged with principals about their work and shadowed them as they went about their daily duties and responsibilities. Using empirical data collected through interviews, they examined the narratives of the four case studies, which provided rich data which resulted in the central theme which, when critically analysed, yielded sub-themes as follows.

### Main Theme: Structures

#### Sub-Themes:

- School Governing Body (SGB)
- School Management Team (SMT)
- Representative Council for Learners (RCL)
- School-Based Support Team (SBST)
- School Assessment Team (SAT)
- School Committees (SC)

The researchers examined these six structures linked to school leadership and management in the South African schooling system. They drew on the narratives of the chosen participants from different schools. They also drew on the literature on the devolution of powers to enable schools to self-manage by giving credence to the importance of structures within schools. These themes are discussed in subsequent sections.

## STRUCTURES THAT ENABLE THE WORK OF PRINCIPALS

### School Governing Body (SGB)

The South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996) outlines each school as a juristic entity and mandates all SGBs to govern their schools.<sup>23</sup> The Act sets out all procedures and processes for establishing SGBs, and its membership consists of democratically elected parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, and learners (at secondary schools). Therefore, the School Governing Body (SGB) is a statutory body elected democratically by relevant stakeholders at each school.

The responsibilities associated with the SGB are strictly governance and supporting the principal. Section 16 of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) explains the position of a school governing body as follows:

*Subject to this Act, the governance of every public school is vested in its governing body, and it may perform only such functions and obligations and exercise only such rights as prescribed by the Act. The SGB stands in a position of trust towards the school, and subject to this Act and any other applicable provincial law, the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Namvar et al., Simplifying sensemaking: Concept, process, strengths, shortcomings, and ways forward for information systems in contemporary business environments

<sup>21</sup> Victor, Minichiello and Jeffrey A. Kottler, "An Overview of the Qualitative Journey," in *Qualitative Journeys: Student and Mentor Experiences with Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 11–31.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Freeman, "The Case for Teachers' Classroom English Proficiency," *RELC Journal* 48, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217691073>.

<sup>23</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*.

They are responsible for, among other things, ensuring that the school's infrastructure is maintained, cleanliness, provision of resources, including the Teaching and Learning Support material (LTSM), and fundraising, to name a few. Section 20 of SASA outlines the roles and functions of the SGBs, which are mainly to promote the school's best interests and strive to ensure its development by providing quality education for all learners.<sup>25</sup> SASA provides powers to SGBs and includes additional powers to, among others, determine the school's admission policies and language policy, fees to be charged at schools; determine the choice of subject options and extra-curricular activities of the school and formulate the code of conduct for learners.

### **The School Management Team (SMT)**

The School Management Team (SMT) comprises the principal, two deputy principals, and several heads of departments (HoDs), depending on the size of the school. All these are promotional positions, where incumbents are appointed through the publication of an open vacancy list (Circular) and recommended based on their competencies. This structure is responsible for the overall management of the school. School principals effectively rely on the SMT to spread their wings across all facets and scope of work. HoDs are responsible for curriculum delivery in all subjects available at the school. They are experts in their fields and subjects. At the same time, the deputy principals must give account to the principal on the performance of the HODs relating favourably to Sammons et al.'s assertion that the task of instructional leadership implementation would best be placed in the capable hands of heads of departments at schools.<sup>26</sup> These studies emphasise that adequate opportunities must be created to promote and encourage collegial relations among teachers for curriculum improvement initiatives to succeed. The HoDs regularly interact with educators in their different departments on instructional leadership, assisting them with daily challenges and developing their capacity to deliver as expected.

### **Representative Council for Learners (RCL)**

The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 brought about numerous changes in the management of secondary schools. The right of learners to participate in and contribute to decision-making as stakeholders in their education brought about a new dimension in schools. Management, governance, and decision-making were decentralised to the school level instead of all decisions taken by provincial and national departments of education.<sup>27</sup> The new political dispensation allowed for the establishment and recognition of a structure called the Representative Council for Learners (RCL), mandated by the South African Schools Act, as amended.<sup>28</sup> The Act stipulates that all public schools in South Africa with learners from Grades 8 to 12 are mandated to establish RCLs, and these shall be the only recognised structures representing learners. The Act also makes provision for learners from this structure to represent learners in the School Governing Body (SGB).

### **School-based Support Team (SBST)**

The other structures the principals rely on are the School-based Support Team (SBST) and School Assessment Team (SAT). These statutory structures must be established in all schools to deal with support and assessment, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Membership of these teams includes SMT members and educators in post-level one who are elected to the structure in a formal staff meeting. The School-based Support Team (SBST) attends to all problems related to learners' learning and wellbeing. They receive learner information from the School Assessment Team (SAT) and other staff members about various challenges learners face. The SBST then must devise means to resolve those challenges and assist the learners.

Their scope of responsibility stretches across various problems encountered, including learners with special educational needs such as slow learners, child-headed families, poverty affecting learners, and abuse including substance abuse, truancy, and many others. This team relies heavily on the cooperation and support of all stakeholders within and outside the school. These stakeholders include the National Department of Health, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the South African Police Services (SAPS), South Africa's Formal Business Sector, and different Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The principal is a member of this team even though he does not occupy a leadership position within the team.

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<sup>25</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*.

<sup>26</sup> Pam Sammons, Sally Thomas, and Peter Mortimore, *Forging Links: Effective Schools and Effective Departments* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Department of Education (DoE), 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA). *The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*

<sup>29</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2015.

### **School Assessment Team (SAT)**

The School Assessment Team (SAT) is one primary structure in the school and is responsible for coordinating all assessment programmes in all subjects offered by the school. This team must ensure that they draw up an annual assessment plan, which should be followed by the whole school, including planning for examinations. They also analyse learner performance and report to all stakeholders. From the analysis of results, they identify learners who do not perform well and report them to the SBST for intervention. The annual assessment programme includes a selection of internal examiners, collating all question papers and ensuring that they are standardised and well-edited. The coordinator of this team is usually the deputy principal, who then reports to the school principal. The principal receives reports from these structures and intervenes wherever necessary. These reports enable the principal to plan and develop enrichment programmes for learners not doing well in different subjects. Mosiuwa shares this information with all stakeholders, especially parents, whom he encourages to assist their children with schoolwork.

### **School Committees**

Activities taking place at a school are vast and require a lot of planning to execute them. School principals are strategically placed to innovatively apply their managerial skills to engage all their staff in all these activities gainfully. School committees can benefit the schools in various ways and are set to harness the efficiency and effectiveness of systems within the schools. Many committees can be established to achieve specific goals depending on the school's needs. For this study, the focus will be only on those committees that enhance instructional leadership and promote effective school management.

One of the most critical committees in a school is the School Development Committee or Team (SDT). This committee is responsible for all development programmes of the school. It comprises members from the staff and the SGB and may also include RCL members at secondary schools. Development programmes may vary, ranging from human resource development to physical resourcing and academic development and improvement. Members of this team are democratically elected based on their skills and competencies. The school principals are also members of this team although they do not occupy any leadership positions. The South African Schools Act mandates every school to establish a safety committee, which looks after the safety of all the learners in the school.<sup>30</sup> This committee must develop programmes that highlight the importance of creating conditions suitable for a safe environment conducive to effective instructional leadership. It is followed by the sports and culture committee, which looks after the school's physical development and recreational activities in promoting a healthy mind and a healthy body. Other committees like the subject committees, are strategically poised to effect delivery while supporting teachers in various school subjects.

### **FINDINGS**

The preceding discussions above have shown how complicated schools have become and most importantly, how critical each of the components of this dynamic system is for it to function effectively. The Department of Basic Education in South Africa has identified the need to formalise these structures and, therefore, mobilised schools to establish and use them. However, the use and deployment of these structures did not prevail equally in all schools visited. The researchers realised that their effectiveness depended mainly on the type of leadership a school had. It was unsurprising to find that in all the narratives, the principals mentioned the same structures they employed in their day-to-day functioning, but how these structures operate differed.

Their roles were not necessarily the same. For instance, at two schools, principals mentioned the role played by SGB members and highlighted some of their activities at their schools. In contrast, others only mentioned their involvement in policy formulation and did not involve them in several other functions like committees as mandated by the South African Schools Act.<sup>31</sup> This Act dictates that all committees within the school must be chaired by the SGB members (The parent component in particular).

To comply with and raise the bar and improve conditions in his school, principal Mosiuwa reached out to every stakeholder he could find and this is what he said, with a giggle:

*I cannot do it alone. I held meetings with the management team and addressed learners and the SGB to say let's work together. So, when I give them tasks to do, they don't complain. But it was not easy to get them on board.*

The School Management Team (SMT) was very helpful, and it began to allocate certain sections and blocks of the school to each of the members. Having two deputy principals also proved helpful, as they were

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<sup>30</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*.

<sup>31</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*.

made to head different sections and phases in the school such as the Further Education and Training band (FET) and the General Education and Training (GET) bands. The FET comprises Grades 10–12, while the GET focuses on Grades 8–9. Each of the deputy principals had several HoDs they supervised and were allocated to the blocks as Grade heads, as he explained further:

*We have the FET and GET bands that have been allocated between the two deputies. The curriculum, instructional leadership, your discipline, your leave because there are teachers under him, your infrastructure, broken pipes, your cleanliness of the whole block and classrooms.*

This relates favourably with Sammons et al.'s assertion that the task of instructional leadership implementation would best be placed in the capable hands of the HoDs in schools.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, research suggests that adequate opportunities must be created to promote and encourage collegial relations among teachers for curriculum improvement initiatives to succeed. Mr. Mosiuwa distributes duties to his SMT and other educators, and this allows him time to focus on Instructional leadership:

*The magic word here is delegation. Let me give an example. We have the FET and GET bands that have been allocated between the two deputies. One is dealing directly with the GET band. Everything there! Curriculum, instructional leadership, your discipline, your leave and your infrastructure. because there are teachers under him,*

On the other hand, Principal Sonny appeared to be on cloud nine when he spoke fondly of the support he often gets from his SGB and the parent community. While he sounded doubtful about some of them, he was generally happy. Principal Sonny further intimated that he goes out of his way to engage all stakeholders in whatever he does. Apart from the school management team (SMT), he mentioned a few structures to which he can distribute work, and these collectively enable him to have time for the many activities in his school, including teaching History to his Grade 12 learners. There is the LTSM committee, which looks after resources for educators and learners, and the Faith Based Organisations, which he asserts help with moral regeneration in the school, thus assisting with learner discipline. The SBST also works with NGOs and other partners to deal with all the socio-economic challenges of the learners in the school. This is how he intimated:

*I have a very strong Deputy Principal who heads the SBST. She is such a marvel to watch...you know...This lady goes out of her way to solicit support from outside for the benefit of these learners. We work together with the local clinic, and sometimes we host members of the Correctional Services, who come here to give talks to learners, especially those who are involved in criminal acts like drugs and dangerous weapons.*

Principal Sonny, unlike Mathapelo, Gomolemo, and Mosiuwa, did not stop talking about his ICT coordinator and his team, who he said assisted him with data analysis using the departmental software SA-SAMS. Using a programme called the dashboard, he can comparatively scrutinise all learner performance across all grades, which alerts him to red flags when they emerge. Sonny can then use this data to drive change in relevant areas of need, which resonates well with the United States Department of Education's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which made it compulsory for schools to use data to support their decisions. This was vividly summed up by Spellings:<sup>33</sup>

*Information is the key to holding schools accountable for improved performance every year among every student group. Data comprise our best management tool. I often say that what gets measured gets done. Once we know the contours of the problem and who is affected, we can put forward a solution. Teachers can adjust lesson plans. Administrators can evaluate curricula. Data can inform decision-making; thanks to No Child Left Behind, we're no longer flying blind.*

Mrs. Mathapelo also showed creativity in her deployment of structures at her disposal. When looking at the systems and structures in her school, she showed her willingness to share responsibilities with other staff members, considering that she highlighted her heavy workload. She has divided sections of the school according to the SMT members. Therefore, she can manage better by monitoring and following up on the deputy principals' reports, allowing her the time to focus on some pertinent issues and attend meetings outside the school. Unlike

<sup>32</sup> Sammons, Thomas, and Mortimore, *Forging Links: Effective Schools and Effective Departments*.

<sup>33</sup> M. Spellings, "Letter to Chief State School Officers Regarding the 'Highly Qualified Teacher' Provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act," <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/051021.html>, 2005.

her other three colleagues, Mathapelo went on to vent her frustrations about parents' involvement in the school's activities. In her case, it is not only those in the SGB who are difficult but the entire parent community. She noted that:

*Parental involvement ... we have 1 014 learners, and our parents' roll goes to something like 800 and something. But when we have general parent meetings, we do not even have half of those parents coming to the meeting.*

Her lamentation stems from the fact that parents in her school do not have an interest in attending parents' meetings, which makes communication very difficult:

*Even if we say we are not going to give learners their reports, the parents are the ones who are supposed to come and get them; we will remain at school with those reports until the last day of the fourth term.*

Gomolemo stands out among the three and is followed by Sonny, who inculcates teamwork among all structures and staff in general by "caring". His caring involves, among other things, supporting teachers when they are sick by sending them messages of support and speedy recovery and showing interest in their wellbeing. He further supports his staff during their bereavement by attending funerals of their deceased close relatives.

*I make follow-ups when a teacher is sick. I would phone if a teacher has been absent for two or more days, and I would ask how he is coping, you know ...*

He further added,

*... that shows them that you care for them because it is said, "If you want them to work for you, make sure you win their hearts, and they will give you their hands". So, I think it's important to show that we care for each other, even when there are funerals of their next of kin.*

The structures that exist in schools are essentially meant to support and promote curriculum delivery and instructional leadership. Most of these structures are statutory and, therefore, common in all secondary schools in South Africa. This study found that school principals used the existing structures in their schools mainly to extend their authority and to share some of their responsibilities. All participants were willing to share roles with their fellow management team members, SGB, RCL, and school committees. However, the current study established that while these structures were active in all the participant's schools, they did not function similarly. Some tasks were performed by the SBST in one school, only to find the same being done by SMT, SAT, or any other committee in another school.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) outlines the roles and structures necessary to ensure effective school instruction.<sup>34</sup> These findings also corroborate the findings of Bottoms and Fry, who argue that there is a need for structures in schools to be interconnected and operate as a unit to collectively make a more significant impact on learner achievement.<sup>35</sup> It also emerged from this study that the effectiveness of these structures and the devolution of their scope of work depends entirely on the school principals. This highlights the managerial skills and subsequent bias of some principals, where the most important tasks may often end up being allocated to certain preferred and favoured structures and individuals. Hence, the same structures were found to be engaging in different activities among the chosen schools.

## DISCUSSION

The functionality of structures within schools is also anchored on the distributed leadership model adopted by the principals. According to Yan, Dillard, and Shen, there is a need for mutual trust among members of the school management teams and, indeed, across all the structures.<sup>36</sup> The principals need to trust their colleagues and ensure that they gain their 'buy-in' into the set goals of the schools and those of the education departments. This will encourage everyone serving in whatever structure in the school to be confident that their efforts were not in vain and that they were contributing to the institution's overall success.

The functioning of these structures and the lack of coordination reflect the capacity of members to carry out their duties. Education departments need to prioritise the professional development of teachers through the operational structures within schools. This will encourage more teachers to participate and strengthen the

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<sup>34</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Gene Bottoms and Betty Fry, *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Atlanta, GA: Wallace Foundation, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Changmin Yan, James P Dillard, and Fuyuan Shen, "Emotion, Motivation, and the Persuasive Effects of Message Framing," *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 4 (2012): 682–700.



Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where such training will focus on specific instructional leadership tasks of each structure and the critical role, they can play in Instructional Leadership structures such as the School Assessment Team (SAT) and the School Based Support Team (SBST).

On the other hand, researchers have also realised that in organisations where collaboration and learning were promoted there was bound to be improved commitment toward the organisation. Structures such as professional learning communities are classic examples where leadership constitutes an important resource for teachers' commitment.<sup>37</sup> According to Berjaoui and Karami-Akkary,<sup>38</sup> participative approaches to leadership where teachers have more authority to influence decision-making on issues that matter to them were associated with effective leadership leading to (1) a greater sense of teacher efficacy; (2) increased level of trust; (3) greater job satisfaction; (4) greater sense of ownership and commitment to the organisation.<sup>39</sup> Principals are also cognisant of the fact that they need extra hands, sharper brains, ears on the ground, open eyes, healthier bodies, and nimble feet to cover all bases in the mandatory roles of instructional leadership and management of their schools. Therefore, distributed leadership may be a viable option, and answer to their challenges.

Spillane argues that distributed leadership is primarily anchored in leadership practice. He asserts that instead of traditional roles and structures, a genuine, distributed perspective extends far beyond positions towards multi-interactions throughout the school community and not only the actions of heroes. He believes leadership should be distributed not only by delegating it away, but by purposefully connecting people, materials, and organisational structures for the attainment of common goals.<sup>40</sup>

This leadership concept asserts that the focal point of leadership rests on the commitment and capacity of the members of the organisation. The higher the levels, the greater the potential to accomplish the set goals.<sup>41</sup> Studies have shown that delegation of duties is a skill. All participants in this study indicated different ways in which they shared their workload with their colleagues. Regular training and capacity building on policies, understanding and implementation, and interpretation must be provided to school principals on an ongoing basis. Variations in terms of implementation patterns of policies as discussed in this study demonstrate a dire need for capacity building and training for principals. In their findings, Bottoms and Fry also confirm that education departments through their districts have failed to generate guidelines that empower school principals to focus their attention on instructional leadership.<sup>42</sup> The availability of proper guidelines and correct implementation of policies may go a long way towards eradicating some or all these stereotypes and challenges. In a nutshell, what is lacking at schools to enable the structures to perform optimally is (1) alignment of instructional leadership tasks, (2) support and professional development by education departments, and (3) policy review to assert principals as instructional leaders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the same vein, this study recommends that there is a need for the realignment of all structures within schools, and there should be a clear demarcation of roles and articulation of specific tasks to be performed by each. This will enable the principals to have time to focus on strategic issues, thus bringing balance to their work and functions.

## CONCLUSION

The study has investigated some strategies school principals employed to manage and lead their schools. Furthermore, due to the relatively wide scope of the work of the principals, as articulated by all participants in this study and supported by various scholars, there was a need to find out how these principals could deploy various structures existing in their schools. The sharing of responsibilities varied from school to school and depended entirely on the individual principals' delegation skills. It emerged during the interviews that at certain schools, some tasks were delegated to deputy principals while at other schools, such tasks were performed by heads of departments or school committees. This reflects on the school principals and suggests many issues that may need further investigation. It has been recommended that realignments need to take place within the school

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<sup>37</sup> OECD, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Roula Rafic Berjaoui and Rima Karami-Akkary, "Distributed Leadership as a Path to Organizational Commitment: The Case of a Lebanese School," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 19, no. 4 (2020): 610–24.

<sup>39</sup> Pamela S Angelle, "An Organizational Perspective of Distributed Leadership: A Portrait of a Middle School," *Rmle Online* 33, no. 5 (2010): 1–16; Geert Devos, Melissa Tuytens, and Hester Hulpia, "Teachers' Organizational Commitment: Examining the Mediating Effects of Distributed Leadership," *American Journal of Education* 120, no. 2 (2014): 205–31.

<sup>40</sup> A.L. Peters-Hawkins, L.C. Reed, and F. Kingsberry, "Dynamic Leadership Succession: Strengthening Urban Principal Succession Planning," *Urban Education* 53, no. 1 (2018): 26–54.

<sup>41</sup> K. Leithwood, D. Jantzi, and R. Steinbach, *Changing Leadership for Changing Times* (UK: Open University Press, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Bottoms and Fry, *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning*.

structures so that roles are clearly demarcated. If this is done, it will ensure the efficient and effective performance of duties.

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## ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr Thokolosi J. Tshabalala obtained his PhD in Instructional Leadership at the University of the Free State in South Africa. He is an accomplished school principal with over three decades of leadership experience. Currently, he is a lecturer in the Department of Education Management, Policy, and Comparative Education (DEMPCE) at the University of the Free State. He is also the Program Coordinator for the Teaching Schools Project which links educational theory with practice. He has so far presented papers at the Postgraduate Students and the Staff Conferences of the University of the Free State over the past three years.

Prof. Loyiso C. Jita obtained his PhD in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy at Michigan State University, USA. He is a Professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Higher Education. He is the SANRAL Chair in Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Technology Education at the University of the Free State. Professor Jita has published over 120 articles on instructional leadership, teacher development, curriculum reform, and Science and Mathematics education. He has presented over 50 papers at local and international conferences. He is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Education and the editor-in-chief of the accredited journal, *Perspectives in Education* (PIE).