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Introductory Module - A User's Guide

UNIT ONE

Demands on School Managers

Introduction

Effective management of a school depends on the efforts of a number of agencies that are closely interlinked. The regional or provincial office, the district office, the local community and the school staff, to name the obvious, all play a part in the daily operation of the school. The head is the pivotal link in this network and, ultimately, plays the most crucial role in ensuring school effectiveness. This role is, however, complex and demanding. It involves management of financial, human and material resources in a dynamic situation affected by many internal and external forces. This situation is frequently made more difficult by decreasing levels of government funding, in real terms, at a time of increasing demands for education.

The school head in Africa is, therefore, in a difficult position, being expected to deliver 'better quality' education in a period of diminishing resources. In spite of the complexity of problems surrounding the majority of school heads, very few countries have seriously addressed issues relating to their appointment, training and support. Most countries continue to appoint heads from within the ranks of senior classroom teachers with little or no preparation for the onerous and complex task of school headship. It is indeed amazing that school heads in Africa have achieved any success at all given this background. Handy, in Dadey and Harber (1991, page 2) describes this situation well when he says:

Given all the difficulties that schools have to cope with as organisations, I find it truly inspiring that so much good is achieved by so many of them. I also find it encouraging that so many teachers still aspire to be head of such a complicated and difficult organisation as a school.

The need for training and support for heads is probably far stronger in Africa than in more developed and better resourced education systems as the cost to the system of school management by trial and error can be considerable.

This unit attempts to help you reflect on the realities of the situation in your country and on current levels of training provision for heads in the light of their increasingly complex role. It is also designed to raise your awareness of the need for self-development and life-long learning if you are to be an effective head. It is hoped that you will extend this awareness to your staff so that your school, as an institution,

becomes committed to self-development as it strives to achieve the expected levels of performance.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- explain the job description of a school head
- distinguish between recruitment and selection
- identify the various groups to whom the head is accountable
- identify and prioritise your own personal training needs.

The nature of school headship in Africa

A school head, to put it simply, is a person who is appointed by the legitimate authority to manage a school. The authority responsible for appointing school heads differs from country to country and even within the same country, the authority may differ depending on the kind of school. The responsibility for appointments may lie with a Teaching Service Commission, the Public Service Commission, the Ministry of Education or School Boards.

Whether you were appointed by a Teaching Service Commission, the Ministry of Education or a School Board, on appointment you entered into a contract, written or unwritten, with your employers. The contract binds you to be responsible and accountable for the proper management of the school.

In some countries all promoted staff sign a contract and undergo a probationary period. Even after completing the probationary period there may be mechanisms to downgrade promoted staff if they fail to meet expected levels of performance.

Given the practice in most African countries, where heads are appointed from the ranks of classroom teachers, it is possible that you did not receive any preparation on appointment to headship and had to learn on-the-job by trial and error and intuition. You probably experienced much hardship in the process and still have a lot to learn in terms of the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed for effective school management. Your situation is similar to that faced by thousands of other school heads across Africa. You are, therefore, not alone in your attempts to improve your managerial skills.

Problems faced by heads

Heads in Africa operate in diverse economic, political, social, cultural and geographical settings. These environments present unique demands and challenges. Thus, the circumstances in which you find yourself operating present both opportunities and constraints in the realisation of projected plans. However, an awareness of limitations and possibilities informed by careful examination of your context of operation is more empowering than it is discouraging. The activity that follows asks you to study your present work context carefully with a view to establishing your constraints and opportunities.

Activity 1.1

What factors would you say are constraints in the performance of your duties?
What can you do to change the situation?

Comments

The constraints for many heads may include:

- the scarcity or poor quality of resources (time, money, space, facilities, staff)
- the awkward size and location of the school
- unqualified and underqualified teachers
- a lack of continuity resulting from a high turnover of staff
- an absence of strategic planning at school, district, regional and national levels
- poor career planning for heads
- large classes
- lack of support for articulated policies (local or national)
- poor communication between:
 - head and community
 - head and ministry
 - head and some sections of the school
- difficult conditions of service
- the slow pace of change in the system
- diverse norms and values (cultural, managerial).

The above list is by no means exhaustive. However, it is important to remember that some constraints may only be temporary setbacks provided you try to:

- be positive in your outlook (remember negative thinking is destructive)
- be creative and innovative
- pick the brains of peers
- be realistic about what you and your school can achieve
- adopt continuous improvement as a philosophy
- take full advantage of your opportunities
- accept that you are not in competition with your staff, community, other schools or the education authority (education is a co-operative enterprise).

The above hints should assist you in coping with some of your problems.

Activities of heads

You are probably familiar with the old adage that 'experience is life's best teacher'. Whatever the lessons and advice that induction to your job as a school head may have come with, the everyday reality must bring many experiences and tasks that are not expected.

Activity 1.2

(1) Draw up a list of your typical activities in a school week, as a head. (2) Comment briefly on each, indicating those that you are able to plan and schedule and those that are more irregular and occur out of schedule.

(3) What is the proportion of scheduled to unscheduled activities, in your circumstances?

Comments

Your list of activities might include:

- visiting teachers' classes
- attending to parents
- procuring supplies
- holding assembly
- meeting heads of departments.

Depending on your individual circumstances, the proportion of unscheduled activities may be relatively high.

If you wish to see a pattern of daily events in your school, that satisfies you, your staff and your clients, you need to have not only a clearly perceived and defined job description but also a working environment in the school that enables you and your staff to apply your energies where and when they are most beneficial to all.

[Module 1, Unit 4](#) mentions some ways of achieving this situation. For example, the unit breaks down the list of activities in the head's job description into four broad areas and considers the desirable balance between these. One such area of the head's functions is 'dealing with pupils, teachers and parents'.

Teachers also have their share of the normal and the abnormal in the teaching day. If you are to build an effective team to share the many and varied tasks in the school, you will need to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the teacher's working situation, as well as a perception of the teacher's view of you as head.

Activity 1.3

Ask teachers on your staff to draw up a list of the functions and tasks they think the head should perform in the normal course of duty and analyse the returns in order to spot any mismatches.

Comments

The range of activities and tasks that teachers describe will in many ways resemble those that you described earlier yourself. The teachers may want you to:

- visit classrooms and advise them
- ensure maintenance of rooms and teachers' houses
- call more frequent meetings
- consult them on all school matters.

if you wish to build an effective team to run the school, you should analyse these returns carefully and attempt to identify real or perceived mismatches between what you actually do as a head, and what the staff feels you should do. A demonstration of corrective action by you, taken in response to their opinions, will go a long way towards achieving a working situation in the school that reveals high levels of staff morale and motivation.

Personnel responsibilities

Recruitment, selection, appointment and induction of staff

From experience of your education system, you probably agree that one indicator of quality in education is the calibre of staff appointed to positions of responsibility in the system. Accordingly, the process of hiring personnel must be designed to sift the best candidates from the pool, as vigorous and reliable staff selection procedures contribute to the quality assurance process. [Module 3, Unit 1](#) refers to the stages in the staff selection process.

Let us now look at the appointment of staff within the school:

Activity 1.4

Describe the process of appointment of promoted or newly appointed staff in primary or secondary schools in your system.

Comments

You may have mentioned some of the following:

- vacancy circular
- advertisements of posts in the public media
- seniority short-lists
- interviews
- letters of appointment.

The items above relate to the procedures of recruitment, selection and appointment.

The following section is designed to supplement [Module 3, Unit 1](#).

Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of securing internal and external applications from which can be drawn the additional employees that your school system may need. Such applications may be in response to internal vacancy circulars or vacancy advertisements in the public media. Internal applicants may be staff already working in the system within which you work. Applicants from other countries or alternative educational systems in the same country would be regarded as external applicants.

Selection

Selection is the act of making a decision on the suitability of one or more applicants from a pool.

Part of the selection process might involve:

- discarding applications that do not meet the requirements
- short-listing applicants according to seniority / experience
- interviewing short-listed candidates at various levels of the system.

The decision might be made on the basis of:

- suitable qualifications
- previous employment record and accompanying recommendations
- potential of the candidate for success in the new job
- performance in a selection interview.

Appointment

This refers to the formal notice assigning a successful applicant to a specific post in a given location; for example, when you were appointed head, you were assigned to a specific school and post out of possibly several posts for which you might have applied.

Induction

Induction refers to the process by which a new appointee is assisted in understanding his new assignment on assumption of duty. Induction can be formal or informal depending upon existing arrangements and procedures in your system. Formal induction is a systematic programme organised for new personnel in a system. The programme is characterised by:

- clear objectives
- a schedule of activities
- an evaluation of the programme
- follow-up activities.

Activity 1.5

Detail the type of activities which might be included in a formal one day induction programme for either newly-promoted staff or for newly-qualified teachers appointed to your school.

Comments

Activities provided in a formal induction process might be:

- an individual or group briefing on or off the school site -might cover matters of school policy or the expectations of the Ministry of Education or any other responsible authority
- a comprehensive workshop organised by ministry officers at school, district, province, or national level- might provide an overview of departmental or other managerial responsibilities as well as survival skills for newly-appointed staff.

Informal induction, on the other hand, is less structured.

Activity 1.6

Outline an informal introduction to your school for newly-qualified or appointed staff. Which members of staff might be delegated responsibility for some of these activities?

Comments

Activities included in an informal induction might be:

- a hand-over/take-over discussion with a predecessor
- a guided tour of the school by an assigned member of the school staff e.g. the deputy head or a year / subject head
- self-directed induction through reading relevant documents and the current file of correspondence to and from the school
- discussions with critical personnel in the school or those closely associated with it (the caretaker or senior groundsman, school suppliers).

In short, without some form of induction, staff are likely to take a little longer to settle down thereby undermining efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in the new job. A common criticism of heads in Africa is that they get so involved in trivial administrative issues that they are left with little time, energy or inclination for the real management issues. A further criticism is that because of inadequate training and support, school heads tend to lack confidence and trust, especially in their promoted staff. They feel threatened and may be reluctant to delegate authority. Consequently, there is very little in-house preparation for continuity of management and when the head is away, there may be 'no one in control'. One of the important management skills you need to acquire is delegation. This concept is discussed fully in [Module 2, Unit 5](#).

Activity 1.7

- (1) What is delegation?
- (2) Explain why it is necessary for you as a school manager to delegate some of your responsibilities.

Comments

Delegation could be defined as a process by which a manager transfers some of his responsibilities to his subordinates.

It is essential to note that when you ask a subordinate to perform a duty on your behalf, you need to give him the necessary authority and power to enable him to perform the task.

For Question 2, you will find some useful ideas in [Module 2, Unit 5](#). It is also important for you to remember that part of the reason for delegating your responsibilities is to give yourself time to concentrate on the key management functions of:

- planning
- organising
- directing
- supervising
- evaluating
- preparing your promoted staff for management roles.

It is hoped that your current efforts at self-development will help to improve the image of school headship in Africa.

Accountability

Who are heads accountable to and how?

Education is a service provided to meet specific national goals.

Notwithstanding the inadequacy of resources in schools, governments spend a large proportion of their annual budget running this service. In addition to government resources, other sources contribute to the system's needs.

Activity 1.8

Your school has probably received funding in cash and kind from a number of sources

during the last twelve months and consequently these sources have a direct interest in your school.

- (1) List these sources.
- (2) What does each source expect out of your school?
- (3) List other sources which have a direct interest in your school.

Comments

You will probably have included the following in your answer:

- the government
- the local community
- the local authority or other responsible authority, such as a church organisation or a private trust
- parents and pupils.

In subsequent paragraphs, we will look at the various groups that may have a direct interest in your school, to whom you may be accountable. These groups have a bearing on the skills and knowledge you may need to acquire in order to improve your effectiveness as a school head.

In most countries, the provision of education is the collective responsibility of a variety of agencies and institutions.

While governments, to a large extent, bear the bulk of educational costs through payment of salaries, grants and subsidies, local communities in Africa are generally responsible for infrastructural costs.

Each of the sources you listed in Activity 1.8 will expect certain outputs and outcomes from your school and will hold you accountable for these.

The government

Schools are generally accountable to the government for their effectiveness through their ministries. [Module 6, Unit 3](#) describes how this is done through the various sections of the Ministries of Education.

You, as head, have to account for:

- the professional competence of your staff
- the management of the curriculum
- the management and use of all resources
- the quality of graduates from your school.

You need to be clear about ministry expectations and the reporting structures to be followed.

The local authority or other responsible group

The provision of physical structures may be the responsibility of a local authority, such as a city council or it may be some other authority, such as a church group or private trust. In this respect you, as head, will find yourself accountable to this authority for, among other things:

- the maintenance of the school plant
- the management of resources

- developing or maintaining a school ethos consistent with the mission of the responsible authority.

You need to clarify with your authority the 'accounting' procedures to be followed. You may be required to submit reports or returns at regular intervals or carry out an audit of some kind.

The local community

While you are accountable formally to and have a contract with the two groups first discussed, the local community is a very powerful group to which you are also accountable even though you may have no formal contract with it. The local community usually contributes a great deal in cash and kind to the development of the school and you draw your clients from it. The school, in this sense, is part of the community. You as head are, therefore, accountable to it for:

- imparting skills, knowledge and attitudes that are relevant to its needs
- bringing about desired change while maintaining the desirable values and norms
- rendering some form of 'community service'.

You will need to establish formal and informal links with the community so that you become aware of and anticipate its needs. You have probably noted that the majority of schools serve rural communities and these communities are fairly solid and homogeneous with clear authority structures. The influence of these authority structures extends into the school. You will benefit from acknowledging the local community leadership and communicating regularly with it. You may have noticed that all that is required is to keep the leadership informed of developments and not necessarily seek their permission. Overlooking local leadership could lead to tension which can hinder school development.

The parents

The parents of your pupils are a special group of the local community to whom you are particularly accountable. Because of the simplicity of most of the rural folks who form the bulk of the parents, school heads do not always regard this group with the seriousness it deserves. You need to appreciate that you are accountable to individual parents for the achievements of their children and in ensuring that they get value for money in terms of learning gains for their children.

The pupils

Your school and you, as head, would not exist if there were no pupils.

Pupils are all too often taken for granted and few heads see themselves as being accountable to pupils. You owe it to your pupils to ensure that:

- a healthy school tone and discipline prevail in your school
- opportunities for guidance and counselling are afforded to every child
- pupils are kept informed of what is expected of them and what is happening in the school.

It is not often that pupils will demand that you account to them for these and other issues but if you are consistently insensitive to their expectations you could be sitting

on a time bomb which could find expression in strikes and destruction of property.

We hope that you now appreciate the complexity of your job as a head if only from the point of view of having to handle a wide range of interest groups and accounting to these groups for the effectiveness of your school.

Training for heads

The need for training for school heads has remained strong in Africa through the years. The complexity of schools as organisations and the demands of the job have been clearly described in the foregoing paragraphs and are acknowledged by all in the field of education. Recognition of this fact is partly responsible for the training trends that have emerged in many countries. Let us examine these briefly.

Activity 1.9

- (1) How many training courses have you attended in the last three years?
- (2) How were these organised and what was the content of the courses?

Comments

Did the course(s):

- arise from consultation with local heads?
- address matters to improve your performance as head?
- arise from some general ministry plan?

An honest assessment will help you to consider the next set of ideas.

What is training?

Case study

Two circuits in the same district were fortunate to find themselves scheduled for training activities. Both heads received two invitations, one from their education office to attend a three-day workshop at the district training centre on the theme 'School Development Planning' and the other from the National Heads Association (NHA) to gather at the same venue a fortnight later. The Association invitation stating plainly that the purpose of the meeting was to: 'exchange and share experiences in the area of staff motivation and morale'.

When the two heads met and one asked the other if he was also going to attend both meetings, his counterpart replied, 'Oh no, I am going to attend the three-day workshop at the district training centre. I do not think it will be necessary for me to go to the NHA meeting as well'.

How might we explain the different attitude of the two heads?

In our part of the world the formal training course, seminar or workshop is often a rare and precious commodity because funds just do not permit a systematic and regular cycle of programmes. The result is that the formal training course has tended to become highly sought after and has acquired a halo of prestige. The more informal alternative -meetings of heads, an exchange of visits or consultation with peers in a neighbourhood -is viewed by some heads themselves as of less importance.

However, such meetings are:

- simple to organise
- do not cost much
- deal mainly with everyday matters.

Heads should consider the implications of such meetings for their professional growth and performance very seriously. Research in the region has shown that national coverage, in terms of formal training for heads, ranges from as little as 2 percent to no more than 10 percent in most countries.

With the sheer growth in numbers, this proportion is not likely to improve. In view of current economic trends on the continent, few countries will be able to improve let alone institutionalise in-service training budgets. It is almost a certainty that formal training, as it is commonly perceived, will remain sporadic and inconsistent.

Activity 1.10

We said in the earlier case study that 'training' implies a formal affair that is external to the individual head.

How would you define the other type of forum whereby heads get together and initiate their own learning experiences?

Comments

Your ideas may include expressions such as:

- staff development
- professional development
- on-the-job training
- self-development.

Whatever the term used, heads need to consider carefully the benefits of these alternative approaches to 'training'.

The Headteacher Training and Support Programme for Africa is one example of such an alternative approach. You will see in [Unit 2 of this module](#) a full account of the programme. Let us consider its benefits:

- It provides the head with a set of hands-on materials.
- It taps the available resources in the district, the region or province both in terms of materials, facilities and funds as well as expertise.
- The programme is viable and sustainable and cannot disappear overnight (unless heads allow it to).
- It is flexible in terms of delivery and is determined by the head or group of heads.
- It is situation specific.
- It addresses both individual and group needs.

As a head you will need to consider whether the occasional funded gathering or the local or school-focused staff development or self-development programme is likely to see you develop and grow in your career.

One solution to the problem is to identify clearly the training needs of heads and the system as a whole from the outset.

Nations, their institutions and the personnel manning those institutions are linked in an interactive relationship. As nations develop and grow so will their institutions and personnel, giving rise to a variety of training needs.

[Module 1, Unit 3](#), pages 15-24 will assist you in identifying the needs of various stakeholders in the educational enterprise. In order to ensure the survival, efficiency and effectiveness of the educational enterprise, training should play an important part in addressing and harmonising the needs of key personnel like yourself with the needs of your institution and with national needs as determined by policy-makers. In this context personal needs are to be consistent with institutional needs. In order to understand training needs properly at the personal, institutional and national levels, you should examine the factors that dictate these needs.

Activity 1.11

List the factors that give rise to training needs at the three levels identified above.

Comments

In your list of factors, you probably identified some of the following:

- the desire to be a more competent head
- the variety of experiences heads bring to their schools on appointment
- the different levels of maturity in heads
- a desire to keep abreast of the knowledge explosion
- changing educational trends
- social changes reflected in the enactment of new laws (affirmative action legislation, for example)
- new directions charted by new governments taking office
- changes in societal, professional, managerial attitudes
- changes in relationships of accountability; for example, is the head in Africa more or less accountable to parents and pupils today than ten years ago?

In addition to the above factors, you will have noticed from reading earlier parts of this unit that training needs could be determined by:

- the nature of your job and the responsibilities it entails
- the selection and induction process
- accountability relationships and expectations arising therefrom
- operational problems.

The paragraphs above provide some indication of the factors that underscore training needs. However, it is important for you to understand your specific training needs in areas accepted as constituting the core of your managerial activities (refer to [Module 6, Unit 1](#), page 9).

To this end, part of a needs assessment instrument is provided for you overleaf. You will see in the instrument that:

- a critical behaviour is identified, in this case leadership
- the behaviour is broken down into components, ten for leadership
- a rating key is provided (low /moderate/high).

Activity 1.12

(1) Complete the needs assessment instrument for leadership behaviour on pages 18-19 indicating:

- the significance you attach to a component with regard to your role as a head (importance to this position)
- your current performance in that component (level of proficiency)
- the strength of need for growth in that component (need for growth)

(2) Rate the following leadership proficiencies in the same manner ([Appendix A](#), page 67):

- communication skills group processes
- curriculum management instruction
- performance evaluation
- organisational financial management
- management
- political management

Note: The full set of critical behaviours is attached in Appendix A as adapted from Proficiencies for Principals, National Association of Elementary School Principals.

1 Leadership behaviour		LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
The head must:				
1.01 Exercise vision and provide leadership that appropriately involves staff, parents, students and the community in the identification and accomplishment of the school's mission.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			
1.02 Recognise the individual needs of all staff and students, including those who are at risk because of diverse cultures, backgrounds and abilities.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			
1.03 Apply effective human relations skills.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			
1.04 Encourage and develop the leadership skills of others.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			
1.05 Analyse relevant information, make decisions, delegate responsibility and provide appropriate support and follow-up.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			
1.06 Identify and creatively co-ordinate the use of available human, material and financial resources to achieve the school's mission and goals.	1 IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION			
	2 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY			
	3 NEED FOR GROWTH			

1 Leadership behaviour (cont.)		LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
The head must:				
1.07	Explore, assess, develop and implement educational concepts that enhance teaching and learning.	1	IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION	
		2	LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	
		3	NEED FOR GROWTH	
1.08	Bond the school community through shared values and beliefs.	1	IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION	
		2	LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	
		3	NEED FOR GROWTH	
1.09	Initiate and manage constructive change.	1	IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION	
		2	LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	
		3	NEED FOR GROWTH	
1.10	Participate actively as a member of local, regional and national professional groups.	1	IMPORTANCE TO THIS POSITION	
		2	LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	
		3	NEED FOR GROWTH	
Overall assessment of leadership proficiencies				
Comments related to assessment				
Related professional growth activities: Leadership behaviour				

Comments

The needs assessment has enabled you to:

- determine where you are now in your mastery of desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the management of your school
- establish the extent and urgency of your needs as they relate to yourself, your school, your district, your region and country
- state your training needs.

Prioritising training needs

[Module 1, Unit 3](#) and the foregoing sections of the current module have shown you that you will probably be confronted by a variety of training needs. In practice it is not possible for you to address all your needs at once.

Instead you should deal with some clearly identified needs in a methodical manner.

Activity 1.13

Using the needs assessment instrument you completed in the section above, write down your needs in some form of priority order.
What were your ranking criteria?

Comments

Some of the following considerations might have helped you to rank your needs:

- personal preferences
- strength of current needs
- relevance of needs

- public pressures
- pressure from the employer, education authorities or other interested groups
- inherent interest in learning or acquiring new skills, attitudes or knowledge.

To rank your needs is to place them in priority order. Fig 1 shows a chart you might use to rank your management tasks. You could also ask your staff to prioritise them. Compare the final results and identify specific needs relating to each prioritised task.

Activity 1.14

Fig 1 lists 12 key management tasks most of which you normally perform as head. Using a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), prioritise these tasks. Ask your staff to do the same and compare the results.

Comments

The activity just completed will probably have given you the opportunity to see how much common ground exists between you and your staff with regard to priority tasks. In addition, you will have been able to determine whether your needs in those task areas have been met. While an instrument like the one you used offers a method of prioritising tasks and needs, it is important to remember that the prioritising of needs cannot be divorced from your school's operational context. You must seek to establish harmony between your needs, those of your school, the expectations of public offices and other interested groups.

Summary

In this unit we touched on the complexity and demands of the role of the head in Africa. We discussed the variety of challenges and problems you face. To ensure that you are equal to the job demands, you were presented with modes of training available to you. Without the training that answers your needs, you are ill prepared to meet the expectations of the various groups.

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