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Towards Improving Service Delivery through Continuing Professional Education and Action Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show the significance of continuing professional education at different work environments. The researcher shows that poor service delivery is one of the consequences of the ignorance of continuing professional education as well as lack of action learning. The work rate can be changed through continuing professional education and action learning to accelerate service delivery. This empowers professionals to reform their work environment. This also gives opportunities to professionals to deal with any condition that can arise at their work environment. Educators are encouraged to work in groups and form professional networks to exchange information about their schools and their work. According to the researcher, the quality of service delivery may improve. The researcher opted for qualitative study to collect the data.

Key words: Continuing Professional Education; Service delivery and Action learning.

1. Introduction

Since the advent of the new democratic South Africa, there is an overwhelming outcry for quality service delivery. Quality service delivery is the role expectation of all sectors of Government and non-Governmental organizations. Although the Government has prescribed the fundamental principles of batho-pele to regulate service delivery, communities and clients are still unsatisfied.

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The inefficiency prevails in all Departments, Higher institutions, Schools, Municipalities, Hospitals and in all local service centres. The role prescriptions (principles of botho-pele) seem to be ignored, if not the lack of adequate knowledge which is predominant. Botho-pele principles can be promoted through action learning. Professionals protect one another even in a clear cut case of wrong doings. The members of profession feel that they must present a united front to the general public or community. Workshops alone are not enough for the improvement of service delivery or effectiveness at work. After each workshop, one knows a great deal about very little and almost nothing about anything else. Mabade suggested that action learning and continuing professional education may contribute towards changing work rate for the betterment of quality service delivery.

According to the Author in [1], the principal stakeholders for education worked together to produce National and Provincial plan for educators development. The principal stakeholders included South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers' organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), the Suid- Afrikaanse Onderwysunie/ South African Teachers' Union (SADU/SATU), Professional Educators' Union (PEU) and the National Teachers' Union (NATU), the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), South African Council for Educators (SACE), the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDPSETA) and the Higher Education South Africa Education Deans' Forum (HESA-EDF).

The aim was to improve the quality of the Teachers Education and Development in order to improve the quality of service delivery. According to the plan, educators would be able to attend short continuing professional development courses and activities at local centres such as Provincial Educators Development Centres. High quality qualification programmes were increased at Universities and some FET colleges, the Author in [1]

2. Discussions

Through continuing professional education and action learning, professionals can acquire knowledge to change the work rate. Where people are engaged in Continuing Professional Education, service delivering may also change from effectiveness to improvement. Below are the discussions of different contributing factors towards changing work rate.

2.1 The growth of the knowledge base

The growth of the knowledge base at the institution can play a major role towards changing the work rate and pattern. The growth of the knowledge base happens as the ultimate result of continuing professional education. According to the views of the functionalist theory, one of the purposes of continuing professional education is to help professionals to provide high quality services to the clients, Authors in [2]. Quality in education refers to the quality of the work undertaken by a teacher, which has significant effects upon his or her pupils or learners. In some countries teachers are required to reapply periodically for their licences to teach, and in so doing to prove that they still have the requisite skills. Teachers' assessment is done for two reasons: to identify teachers' needs and to identify teachers who should leave profession due to incompetence, Author in [3]. Through Continuing Professional education, professionals can improve their knowledge, competence and performance

hence the growth of knowledge base. There after professionals become experts of their jobs. The implementation of the knowledge gained will enrich the co-workers through participatory action learning, Authors in [2].

Therefore professionals can share their knowledge till one would realise that one's knowledge is not enough for positive responses to the client or community's demand. Knowledge is crucial for the utmost service delivery. The structural changes to work have positive contributions towards changing work rate. The number of employed people with bachelor's degree or higher will increase in percentages.

Again, conflict at most of work places is the impediment of service delivery. There is always a struggle of power at most of the work place. Therefore this is a clear indication of a need of the balance of power which can be possible through continuing professional education. This can establish a situation of more equal relationship between (learners) clients and professionals, Authors in [2]. Therefore this can happen as a result of the growth of knowledge base at work place. Unless one of those struggling for power has adequate knowledge to advise the colleagues, there will be poor service delivery.

In addition, the growth of knowledge base at work places can serve as another purpose of continuing professional education. Continuing professional education helps professionals to understand the ethical, political as well as technical dimensions of their work according to the critical point of views. Managers are afraid to execute the managerial duties to their utmost best due to political diversity of affiliation. Continuing professional education can help them to understand the political dimension at work to can supervise any subordinate. This helps the professionals to achieve knowledge, skills and improve their attitude to understand their work places. This helps the professionals to change the work rate. Continuing professional education prepares for a changing professional workplace to compete effectively in a dynamic global economy. Change is needed within the workplace to facilitate the new breed of professional that is now clearly vital to the New South Africa, Author in [4].

Therefore continuing professional education is imperative in the growth of knowledge base in the institution or any department. Through participatory action learning professionals can learn from one another.

2.2 Adoption of innovations in practice

I believe that at all work places, vision is a target to achieve. The vision can not be achieved if the mission is not clear and well understood by all professionals as well as non-professionals at that particular work place. It is crucial to adopt the innovations in practice to change the work rate and patterns by achieving the set vision. The adoption of innovations in practice can be easy through participatory action or action learning, Author in [5]. The interest in participation is greater when peers are enthusiastic about innovations and growth and less at work places where peers resist change, Author in [6].

Quality improvement approaches recognize the influence of teamwork among work associates for increasing productivity. Patterns of organizational life such as relationship between managers and operators influenced the introduction of computers and computerisation influenced organizational life. This is equally important to the

patterns of any managerial life between a manager and the subordinates.

2.3 Competition amongst staff members

Competition amongst staff members can also contribute towards changing work rate. Due to the changing needs of work places and the increased competition for jobs and further education, the changing work rate can prevail. Continuing professional education prepares professionals to compete effectively in a dynamic global economy. Learning is a catalyst that makes a truly empowered professional workplace an exciting possibility. According to the Author in [4] an empowered workforce brings to a changing workplace. All who want to be seen as professionals need to change their attitude and mindset.

Continuing professional education helps professionals and non-professionals to have positive thinking towards competition. Competition by professionals can remain a competition but not a fight. The main purpose of competition is to encourage one another to achieve the best not in the expense of others.

2.4 The quality of control

Quality control prevails only if the leader can demonstrate the attributes of leadership. Anyone who is a leader should understand what leadership is all about. One of the fundamental attributes of leadership is knowledge. This includes knowledge of the institution or department and all the subordinates. Quality control is crucial, therefore any leader should have knowledge to enhance quality control hence quality service improvement. If a leader has ability to influence the subordinates towards the achievement of the set target quality control will never be a problem. An empowered professional becomes a true leader for a changing tomorrow. Empowered people create their lives and take responsibility for them.

2.5 Significance of action learning

- Improved strategic thinking ability
- Understanding change process
- Understanding group process
- A concrete outcome of benefit to the organisation
- Improved understanding between sections of the organisation
- The development of new skills
- Ideas for future projects and programmes and
- High proven returns on investment

Author in [7]

3. Theoretical framework

In studying the theories related to this research, books, dictionaries, conference proceedings and articles were consulted. The focus is on the effects of continuing professional education in service delivery. According to

these theories, continuing professional education can contribute towards improving service delivery.

According to the Author in [4], Continuing Professional Education increases the effectiveness of professionals and the value of the knowledge to the community. Learning can change the balance of economic power and alters the competitive playing field considerably. Learning creates and builds confidence in one's total abilities not just one's professional capabilities.

Continuing Professional Education of teachers is the process by which teachers reflect their competencies, keep them up to date and develop them further because the world that teachers are preparing young people to enter is changing so rapidly, the Authors in [8]. Teachers are encouraged to work in groups and to form professional networks to exchange information about their schools and their work. This also helps to view professional development as a part of the larger process of institutional and organisational change that must accompany any school reform effort, the Authors in [9].

The reform of the work environment includes finding new ways of sustaining a process of change that has the potential to eventually encompass. This brings new ways and approaches to change the environment (workplace). The effort needed to improve workplace conditions are professional themselves influenced by patterns of work organisation. Each organisation changes through participation of all stakeholders, the Authors in [10]. Action learning is generally planned and implemented by one staff member or a small group of them and the goals are improved performance at individual, group or organizational level. Therefore action learning is discussed below to help the reader to separate traditional learning from action learning.

Action learning is learning from concrete experiences through group discussions, trial and error, discovery and learning from one another. It is a process by which groups of people whether managers, academics, teachers, students or learners work on real issues or problems, carrying real responsibility in real conditions, the Author in [7].

Learning how to answer questions in the examination only is not enough but this should be supplemented by learning in order to be acquainted to deal with the conditions which can arise tomorrow or in future. Therefore learning is equalled to programmed knowledge plus questioning insight. Action learning is learning by doing and sharing with others which add to the traditional learning. According to Mabade, when starting to learn, the following questions can help you:

- What do you know about yourself?

There are people who don't even know themselves. These are people who don't know their strength and weakness. This question can help anyone who can realise that with other people one can learn better through doing. This question can also help to encourage anyone to undergo continuing professional education or life long learning. Unless you know your name you can hardly react to any call related to your name. Therefore knowledge about you is crucial in the improvement of service delivery. Knowledge begins when one is conscious of one's little knowledge. The little knowledge you have is equal to your friend's little knowledge. The fact that no one knows everything is equally important to no one knows nothing hence action learning.

- What do other people know about you?

If you are a manager, ask yourself the following question;

- What is a good manager?

Whatever you are, ask yourself such a question.

Then try to answer all the questions and try to put them in black and white. Share your answers with your closest friend or spouse. After your friend's answer and yours you will learn a lot. Unless professionals could adhere to lifelong learning they cannot change the work rate and community outcry can hardly stop.

Learning helps the professionals to change their behaviour. The changed behaviour is shown in every sphere of their lives, especially in the workplace and the workplace begins to change as a result of professional challenging the socialised status quo and wanting more for themselves and for others, the Author in [4].

4. Problem statement

The researcher plans to encourage both professionals and non-professionals to improve their knowledge through knowledge development. Knowledge development can happen through continuing professional education or lifelong learning.

5. Research methodology

The researcher opted for qualitative technique to collect the data. The qualitative technique refers to interviews which were conducted with professionals including school principals, deputy principals, educators, nurses, admin-clerks as well as non-professionals. The respondents were given the same questions. The interviews were conducted at their respective work environments and homes.

6. Results

The responses to the interview questions were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. The respondents used their experiences to respond to the interview questions. The purpose of the interviews was to find out if the respondents have knowledge about Continuing Professional Education and its impact to the service delivery. The aim of the research was to inform the reader that knowledge can be developed now and then to respond to the challenges at different work environments. The respondents appeared to have different understanding and views on Continuing Professional Education (CPE) and Service delivery. The interview questions were based on the understanding of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) and Service delivery as well as work environment. Below are the responses to the interview questions:

6.1 What do you understand by a professional person?

The first respondent indicated that a professional person is a person who has qualifications. The respondent

further showed that such a person has advanced degrees and certificates, framed and hung on the office wall. The second respondent pointed out that a professional person has acquired the standard of education and training that prepared him or her with knowledge and skills to perform the role of a professional. The third respondent showed that a professional person is one who adheres to the ethics of the organisation or institution. According to the fourth respondent this is a person who earns living by working or doing a specific job which is morally or ethically of high standard.

The fifth respondent pointed out that a professional person refers to a person who had undergone formal training and compelled to act or do things in a professional way. Such a person is engaged in a full-time job which pays because he/she has acquired high standard of skills. The sixth respondent indicated that a professional person is any person whose type of job needs a high level of education and training such as educators, doctors and engineers etc. The seventh respondent pointed out that a professional person is someone who has a job that requires advance education and training.

The respondents appeared to have knowledge of a professional person. According to the views of the respondents, a professional person is one who has undergone formal training in a particular job and has certificates and degrees to show one's competence.

6.2 What do you understand by continuing profession education?

The purpose of this question was to find out if the respondents understand what continuing professional education is.

The first respondent indicated that continuing professional education is a type of education that is conducted for participants from various professional areas which aim towards updating (enriching) professionals with knowledge and other information that will help the individuals to attain broader understanding of their chosen careers. The second respondent shows that the service of a professional person is continuous. The respondent further pointed out that community leaders work with people to help to build relationship with responsible people and organisations to identify community-based problem. The third respondent described continuing professional education as one who always does research in order to find how best ethics can be changed to modify current practice. The fourth respondent pointed out that continuing professional education refers to the upgrading of one's professional skills or qualifications while one is still at work environment.

According to the fifth respondent's views, continuing professional education is education without an end. The sixth respondent showed that Continuing Professional Education refers to any form of training and learning provided for adults such as independent study and other forms of distance learning on a full-time or part-time basis. According to the seventh respondent's views, continuing professional education is when a professional person keeps on training or studying.

The respondents appeared to have knowledge of continuing professional education except one respondent who appeared to have no knowledge of (CPE). According to respondents' views, continuing professional education refers to a lifelong learning which helps to enrich professionals with knowledge.

6.3 The knowledge that professionals have is adequate to can respond to any challenge at their work environment

The first respondent indicated that the statement is false because they can respond to only a few challenges at their work environment. According to the second respondent's views, the statement is not correct. The other respondents pointed out that the statement is also false. Therefore according to the respondents' views, professionals do not have adequate knowledge to can respond to all challenges satisfactorily.

6.4 How can professionals get adequate knowledge to respond satisfactorily to the challenges?

The purpose of this question was to find out if the respondents have an idea of knowledge enrichment.

The first respondent pointed out that professionals and other people can get knowledge through mentoring process, knowledge enrichment programmes, in-service training and seminars. The respondent further indicated that through further studies people can get adequate knowledge. They must share and critically integrate their practice in an on going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented and growth promoting ways to mutually enhance their learning. The second respondent indicated that through research a person can get knowledge. A person can get knowledge through interaction with other people or stakeholders. Through continuing education one can get adequate knowledge.

According to the third respondent's views, professionals should keep on research studies. The fourth respondent indicated that workshops and further studies can help professionals to get adequate knowledge. According to the fifth respondent's views, lifelong learning can contribute towards knowledge enrichment. The sixth respondent indicated that continuing professional educational can help to empower professionals such as in the form of independent study and distance learning. The seventh respondent showed that professionals should be work shopped more often in a variety of professional areas. Professionals should continue with their studies as well as workshops. The respondent further indicated that consultation with other professional is vital.

According to the views of the respondents, continuing professional education can contribute effectively towards knowledge enrichment.

6.5 What are some of the strategies to encourage professionals to get adequate knowledge?

The purpose of this question was to find out if the respondents can encourage one another to get adequate knowledge

The first respondent indicated that well designed professional development can attract professional to get knowledge. The second respondent pointed out that by conducting research and interact with other people can encourage professionals to get interested in the knowledge enrichment. The third respondent indicated that professionals should be motivated to continue with studies including research. Again they must be involved in the policy-making. The fifth respondent showed that they must be encouraged to think critically and rationally. The sixth respondent indicated that incentives such as bonus, promotions and other token of appreciation after

any achievement can encourage professionals. The provision of bursaries and scholarship may also encourage professionals to get knowledge.

6.6 Who can be the best professional: manager, school principal, HoD, educator or a nurse?

The first respondent reported that as long as one can communicate his/her needs, expectations and opinion with the subordinates, one can be the best practitioner of all the above mentioned professions. One who can send correct messages to others and ensures that they understand him/her. The respondent further indicated that one who can schedule, organise and adhere to the plan such a person is the best practitioner. The second respondent reported out that one who creates opportunity for community members to learn new skills and help them to act together. The third respondent indicated that an instructional leader is the best manager. The respondent further showed that such a person should have high expectations.

The fourth respondent indicated that all of them are the best without motivation. According to the views of the fifth respondent, the best principal provides leadership and management skills in all spheres of the school to create an opportunity and space to deliver quality teaching and learning. The sixth respondent reported that a professional who remains a learner throughout his/her life is the best practitioner. The seventh respondent showed that all the above mentioned professionals can be the best practitioner if they provide quality service to the clients.

According to the respondents' views, each professional can be the best practitioner if quality service is provided to the clients. The responses to all interview questions helped the researcher to complete this research.

7. Conclusion

Unless professionals and non-professionals are encouraged in one way or another the significance of continuing professional education and action learning would be something of less importance. Different departments can review their policies in order to amend them for quality service improvement. Continuing professional education and action learning can change the work rate in any department. The strategic ability can be improved through action learning which will contribute towards quality service delivery. The resistance to change is an obvious reason for the lack of knowledge. Continuing professional education helps to empower the service deliver to render service with the utmost of the ability and knowledge. Continuing professional education and action learning can be supplemented by action research to engage all community stakeholders responsible for the improvement of service delivery.

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