# MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPING UNIVERSITIES TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Duma P. T.\*, Nnadozie R.C.\*\***

## Abstract

Management development is one of the critical capacity development areas in South Africa, more so in the wake of the vision of transformation of the country. In certain South African Universities, there is a challenge of promoting lecturers to managerial positions without any support of development. This paper reviews this practice particularly in the context of Universities of Technology. The findings reveal that universities in particular need to invest in its management development for purposes of sustainability and continuity.

**Keywords:** Management Development, Higher Education, Heads of Departments, Learning Organisation

\* Department of Human Resources Management, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Umlazi, South Africa
Email: ptduma@mut.ac.za
\*\* Directorate for Planning, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Umlazi, South Africa
Email: nnadozie@mut.ac.za

## 1. Introduction

According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) there are about 50,000 instruction and research staff in all of South African Universities including permanent and temporary staff. This number is against almost 940 000 student head count enrolments (CHE, 2010). This translates to instruction and research staff to student ratio of I:19 in South Africa, whereas some Universities in Europe like University of Buckingham has 1 member of academic staff for every 11.4 students.

The report by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) on development of next generation of academics indicates that South African universities face a multi-dimensional challenge of attracting and retaining academic staff (HESA, 2011). The report alluded that young professionals perceive academia as particularly not attractive career option due to relatively low salaries, expanding student numbers and consequent high workloads (HESA, 2011). The study observed that another major challenge to the staffing of Universities is the aging of academics and current limited output of masters and doctoral graduates, which constrains the production of adequate numbers of next generation of academics (HESA, 2011).

In view of the above challenges, the higher education employment environment is becoming increasingly competitive, especially to the detriment of historically under resourced institutions and smaller Universities of Technology which cannot compete equally with the richer and established Universities. Currently, the proportion of academic staff at MUT with PhD qualification is 9% for one of the Universities of Technology against the national average of 37%. There is the dare need for capacity enhancement both in terms of discipline specific professional development as well as management development of academics especially those that assume leadership roles as heads of academic departments.

This paper seeks to explore the extent of management development amongst South African universities' Heads of Departments in the country. Universities are considered to be knowledge banks for all countries where future leaders and a workforce of a country are molded for various careers. It can also be safely assumed that leaders and managers of such institutions, as by-products of these same centres of excellence, are afforded world class training and development to enable them to direct and lead effectively. Some studies have been conducted in United Kingdom (UK) in this regard: in 1980 *'Higher Education: by St. Edward P. And 'Developing University Managers' by Alison Bone and Tom Bourner -1998 respectively*, focused on the issue of management development of university managers. The angle taken in this study was a comparative one, of management development issues that were raised before the millennium both the UK and in the millennium in South Africa.

## Management Development

Having been a practitioner at the Human Resource Department and particularly at different skills unit for different employers respectively, an observation has been made that there is a great need for management development in organisation. The success of organisations heavily lies on their management attributes (Strydom; 2011). According to Meyer (2012; 3) "training is an important function in any organisation...if your employees are not competent, there may well be failure awaiting your company". This statement is further confirmed by Lowies & Somera (2012; 4); Babajide (2010) where they stated that; "one common factor to the success of an organisation is the skills, knowledge and experience of the employees." The South African legislation also promulgates the training and development of employees (SDA 1998) and (NSDS 2011). Management and therefore management development is in the agenda of government as the Sector skills plan of 2011 depicted it as one of the critical skills. There is a strong assumption that effective management has a direct loop to sustainable organization which may have a direct impact on country's economy (Strydom;2011). Thompson, Mabey, Storey, Gray &Isles (2001) in Lowies & Somera (2010); Babajide (2010) emphasize the vital role of management development. They took a holistic approach that views it as a process which includes formal learning of skills and knowledge as well as informal and experiential modes of human capital formation. Whilst, Mc Cauley et al (1998) in Wahat et al (2013; 1) explore management development/leadership development and sum it up as 'expanding the collective capacity of organisational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and purposes'. There is a strong belief that managers in organisation which are managers at different levels ought to lead the process of learning.

McGurck, (2009:458) contends that there is an assumption that all managers, whatever their levels in the organisation require 'leadership' skills to communicate objectives to staff and motivate them to deliver or surpass expected levels of performance". He further asserts that management development cannot be divorced from leadership development as the cognitive skills and soft skills are essential as well. This argument is supported by Herbst & Conradie (2011) who take a further angle on the matter where they mention that, for leaders to be able to transform their organisation to become more effective, they first need to understand themselves-personal mastery.

## Management Development in the Context of Learning Organization

From the argument and expectations that have been tabled above, these studies enable one to conclude that management development may not exist in an organisation where there is no learning culture (Meyer; 2012). In learning organization context (Senge; 2007) it encourages working as a team, sharing the vision of the organisation, understanding own potential (personal mastery) and capabilities, mental models and systems thinking. Such combination is what is thought to be desirable in organizations who aim to pursue the process of management development actively. It circumference management development as it cut across the argument of where exactly learning should take place, how and what aspects should be covered.

A learning organization as a learning system is an 'ideal' learning that organizations aspire to achieve. It is a long journey of learning where all kinds of learning are incorporated, and it is where employees and employers learn to be productive, and to respect and value each other with the purpose of achieving a common goal. It creates the synergy that all organizations desire to overcome their respective challenges. Functioning in the learning context, organisations; could reap benefits of involvement and engagement as functionalist view (Jackson; 2007) encourages 'hands on' model.

Institutions of higher education environment have become turbulent and 'more complex to manage' lately (Hesa; 2013). This has been exacerbated by students' demands and up risings which have become another norm, more especially at the beginning of each academic year. Management development becomes a critical and crucial exercise at this juncture, especially in higher education where transformation is still at infancy stages (Herbst & Conradie; 2011). In the early 2000s, Institutions of Higher learning were thrown into a merger processes with other universities which generally came with acute challenges and resistance. It was further complicated by the fact that South Africa had been transformed to a democratic governance which for some was still a bitter pill to swallow. This is further aggravated by the fact that the Baby-Boomers are exiting the world of work, with lots of experiences, and the millenniums are entering the exciting world of work with limited experience (Schreuder & Coetzee; 2011). Considering the said challenges one may presume that there are many underlying issues that management in universities need to be prepared for, the assertions made here reflect the diversity of issues and allude to their intensity to which all managements should rise.

In 2011 Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) conducted an audit to analyse all systems in place at a particular University of Technology in South Africa. After a thorough analysis they made recommendations, amongst which two point are highlighted for the purpose of this paper. These read: (HEQC; 2012 report). First point - "Stakeholders, moreover, recognise that the strategic goals are unattainable without having an effective and

competent management team to drive infrastructure and resource development. Second point- "The absence of effective institutional planning; a dysfunctional institutional culture; characterised by fear for a range of reasons, including low staff morale also added to this demoralising situation." These recommendations were cautioning that particular Institution of Higher learning to pay attention to its management development so that they can respond effectively to those concerns. Are these concerns exclusively to this institution or is it a common issue?

Management, specifically in Higher education in South Africa, as related literature indicates, points to the fact that there is a special need to develop management skills of Heads of Departments (HODs). This assertion comes with the normal practice of just promoting them to management level based on the years of service and high qualifications they possess (Herbst & Conradie; 2011). The newly appointed and promoted individuals' job description basically entails the following responsibilities:

University management
- Academic leadership
- Financial management
- Strategic planning
- People management
- Governance
- Marketing and communication
- Physical resource management
- Health & Safety
- General

It is interesting and of note then to know how these incumbents are prepared for their new roles and capacities; as they will be required to perform at the strategic level of the organization. There are critical questions around the development of HODs that need special attention like the following. Is management development mandatory for newly appointed managers or specifically academic managers? If the opportunity of development is availed, is it ever utilised? How are they mentored, coached and motivated? Are there any clearly articulated programmes for management development as applied within the parameters of the basic education principles?

St.John and Weathersby (1980; 113); Bone & Bourner (1998; 286) (Herbst & Conradie; 2011) hold that 'traditionally, colleges and universities have promoted people successful in their academic pursuits, usually with advanced training in a specialised academic field, to positions of leadership- department heads, academic deans, and presidents.' The study revealed no record of proper induction and development into these newly acquired positions of power. The transition and change from one position to the next may come with insecurity and fear of the unknown.

Plakhotnik, Maria S. Rocco, Tonetter, (2011) suggest that employees in this new phase should be taught processes and procedures required of an administrator and manager of people. Nancy Reardon also (2011; 6) states that new managers need to be taught to manage complexity, remove barriers, negotiate requests, build partnership, build accountability. These individuals are not inducted well into these positions and according to Partington (1994) in Bone & Bourner (1997; 297) and these individuals are expected to perform duties like:
- The changing resource base allocation systems
- More robust accountability at all levels
- The encroachment of government
- The influence of employers and other organisations
- The impact of technological developments
- Fluctuating policies on entry to higher education

Bone & Bourner (1998; 295) highlight the findings that were made in 1997 in UK alone management development has increased though there is an insignificant increase in universities. Another remarkable finding that was made was; "Management development programmes that run successfully in other business organisations have a slow take-up rate in universities and personnel professionals are fighting an up-hill battle in their attempts to promote continuous professional development for managers." South African Skills Development Facilitators (SDF) in public universities are still encountering similar challenges; in the millennium. University SFD or rather skills development unit will draw a skills development calendar for the subsequent year which emanate from skills needs analysis for each individual, this is normally communicated in advance to individuals concerned. However there are always challenges with attendance of such courses or programmes. This results in frustration for the organizer (SDFs), wasteful and fruitless expenditure for institutions.

It is generally held that the effectiveness of a manager lies in her or his ability to:
- Maintain a favourable work environment
- Create opportunities for all employees to perform at their best
- Act as a leader (and a follower, depending on the situation)
- Communicate continuously with other employees and motivate them, and
- Acknowledge and reward good performance considering the limited resources

The authors of Leadership and Management magazine (July 2012: 31) advice those, promotion of employees need to be planned in advance to avoid frustration to incumbents and disappointment to the employer.

## Conclusion

It is thus evident that there is work cut out for institutions of higher learning in this country. Preparedness for the new dispensation is the key

attribute to all that intend to hit the ground running and be sustainable in future. A close exploration of practices in an institution of higher education is needed, to analyze management roles thus enabling the institution to move forwards as over recommendations and all that the project will throw up, which can also be a learning curve for sister institutions in the country which also find themselves in the same boat.

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