

Leadership and Change Management in a Rapidly Changing Environment

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Abstract: The Heads of Departments (HoDs) in the South African public sector are appointed on a five-year contract and not on a permanent capacity and there is also a high turnover of HoDs. The frequent change of HoDs is further exacerbated by the rapid changes taking place in the environment, which means that change management has to be implemented fast and efficiently, any delay or disruption can have an adverse effect on the change process. The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect that the high turnover rate of HoDs in the South African public sector has on maintaining the momentum at which government programmes are being undertaken specifically focusing on the implementation of the Outcomes Approach. The Presidency in South Africa implemented the Outcomes Approach in 2010, which monitors government performance in the country. The intention of the Outcomes Approach is to enhance service delivery, therefore all government departments in the country have a role to play in the Outcome Approach. As with any new project or programme, there is the need for a rigorous change management process with committed and supportive leadership. This research study looked at how change management was implemented and sustained, for the Outcomes Approach, with the frequent change of leadership. A qualitative approach was used for this research. The findings showed that in some cases the change of HoD influenced the department in a positive manner while in other cases it had negative results. Change management was conducted, to varying extents as there was more reliance on the National Development Plan. Most change management models were developed before the onset of rapid change and frequent change of HoDs; therefore, the Triple I Change Management Model was developed for this study where there is frequent change of leadership in a rapidly changing environment.

Keywords: Change management, Frequent change of leadership, Outcomes approach, Rapidly changing environment

1. Introduction

The monitoring system of a country helps to strengthen its governance by enhancing transparency, improving accountability, and promoting a culture in government to improve policymaking, budgeting, and management practices (Talbot, 2010). The main aim of the Outcomes Approach is to improve service delivery for all South Africans. It will help the different spheres of government to make sure that the results improve service delivery, which in turn creates a better life for the citizens. The Outcomes Approach will track progress of what is supposed to be achieved, identify the successes and failures, and establish how to progress over time with planning and implementation on an annual basis (The Presidency, 2010). When a new and major programme like the Outcomes Approach is being implemented, it needs to be introduced to the participating institutions to obtain buy-in and support from all the stakeholders. Before rolling out the Outcomes Approach, a change management process should have taken place. The

aim of change management is to obtain buy-in and to change the mind-set, behaviour, and skills of individuals (Luecke, 2003; Okumus & Hemmington, 1998). A major factor in the achievement of government programmes lies with leadership in the public sector. A report produced by the Public Service Commission (2008), stated that public service managers must be responsible for transforming the strategic vision, goals and objectives of government into efficient and effective service delivery. To assist the public service managers in attaining this goal it is essential to have a certain level of stability in the leadership of the country. This will assist in sustaining the impetus with which government's programmes are being provided and is not compromised by frequent change in leadership. For the purpose of this study leadership will refer to the Heads of department in the South African public sector.

When a major government programme is introduced, there is usually a lot of attention, excitement, and publicity within the public sector departments

and the public in general. With time the excitement and attention dies a slow death and it is 'business as usual'. It is critical that the change management process ensures that the new behaviour and way of doing things continue. Leadership thus plays a fundamental role in maintaining the momentum of the change effort; however, the frequent change in HoDs can have an effect on the change management process and the achievement of government programmes. Currently, HoDs are appointed on a five-year contract. It has been shown that when a new HoD joins a department, they tend to introduce new strategies and plans; or their priorities may not be the same as the previous HoD, this may subject the department to a process of numerous change-overs. The short tenure of the HoD means that just when they understand the operations of the department it is time for them to leave the department and the cycle starts again with a new HoD. Apart from the frequent change of HoDs, we are living in a time of rapid change and departments need to adapt continuously to the changes taking place. It is essential for a HoD to be agile and operate with speed and flexibility to keep abreast with the changes taking place in the environment. The frequent change of HoDs operating in a rapidly changing environment means that they can no longer work in a strategic planning mode they must operate in real time in order to achieve the goals of the department.

2. Literature Review

Leadership as defined by Yukl (2009) is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. In order to transform organisations, a critical success factor is for leadership to drive the process of its implementation. There are several different styles of leadership of which transactional and transformation leadership are two of them. Transactional leadership inspires people mostly through some form of incentive and dynamic management. They set out expectations for employees through suitable mechanisms to achieve the desired goals and feedback is provided so that the tasks of employees are kept on track. Transactional leaders specify at the outset how employees will be compensated for their achievement and commitment, (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 2002). Transformational leaders are charming, inspiring,

intellectually stimulating, and thoughtful (Avolio *et al.*, 1995). They help members to put the vision of the organisation first before their own interests. They are driven by a strong value system, which will ultimately result in influence over organisational performance.

2.1 Leadership Theories

Trait Theory according to early theorists were born leaders that were endowed with certain physical traits and personality characteristics which distinguished them from non-leaders (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016). Trait theories ignored the assumptions about whether leadership traits were genetic or acquired. Jenkins identified two traits; emergent traits (those which are heavily dependent upon heredity) such as height, intelligence, attractiveness, and self-confidence and effectiveness traits (based on experience or learning), including charisma, as fundamental component of leadership (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991).

Contingency theories (Situational) recommends that no leadership style is precise as a stand-alone, as the leadership style used is reliant upon the factors such as the quality, situation of the followers or a number of other variables. According to this theory, there is no single right way to lead because the internal and external dimensions of the environment require the leader to adapt to that particular situation (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016). In most cases, leaders do not change only the dynamics and environment, employees within the organization change. In a common sense, the theories of contingency are a category of behavioural theory that challenges that there is no one perfect way of leading/organising and that the style of leadership that is effective in some circumstances may not be effective in others (Greenleaf, 1977).

Transformational Theory distinguishes itself from the rest of the previous and contemporary theories, on the basis of its alignment to a greater good as it entails involvement of the followers in processes or activities related to personal factor towards the organization and a course that will yield certain superior social dividend. The transformational leaders raise the motivation and morality of both the follower and the leader (House & Shamir, 1993). It is considered that the transformational leaders engage in interactions with followers based on common values, beliefs and goals. This impacts

the performance leading to the attainment of goal. This theory conforms to the Maslow (1954) higher order needs theory. Transformational leadership is a course that changes and approach targets on beliefs, values and attitudes that enlighten leaders' practices and the capacity to lead change (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016).

2.2 Change Management

Gayef (2014) defined change management as the process of continuously reviewing and changing an organisation's strategic direction, structure, and competencies of employees to keep abreast with the constantly changing needs of its customers. Ledez (2008) pointed out that change would never end, it is ongoing; it is the natural life cycle of man, nature, and business. An organisation must be willing to undertake change, which if not carried out, could result in the downfall of the company. Barnard and Stoll (2010) highlighted that in the present time of economic instability and changes in government priorities, change in public departments has become a key priority. Some of the well-known change management models are Kotter's Eight-Step change management model developed in 1996, which consist of increase urgency, build the guiding team, Get the vision right, communicate for buy-in, empower action, create short-term wins, do not slacken, make change sustainable. Kotter's eight steps have been highly praised by Joshi. (2013) as being a systematic model, which is simple and easy to apply, however Sarayreh, Khudair and Barakat (2013) criticised Kotter's (2012) change management model, as all eight stages are about changing people's behaviour and not about changing strategy, systems, or culture. Joshi (2013) stated that the model is perceived to be very rigid, as the steps in the model should be followed in a particular order. If a step is omitted, the implementation of the change will not be effective and if the process has started, it is difficult to change the direction of the project. Another model is Kurt Lewin's 3 Step change management model developed in 1947. It consists of 3 steps that are unfreeze, change and refreeze. The benefits, as cited by Smith (2013), are that Lewin's model is the simplest available for the implementation of change management. According to Burnes (1996:2004a) and Senior, (2002), the approach's emphasis is on small-scale and incremental change, and it is therefore not appropriate to situations that require rapid and transformational change.

There are a number of excellent change management models but none take into account that the landscape has changed to one where the changes are rapid. It is therefore essential that when change requirements are identified, the leaders must emphasise its urgency; any time lapse would be detrimental to the change initiative achieving its goals. Dixon (2015) stated that history is changing at a very rapid pace, it often does not give businesses enough time to apply changes; there are changes taking place in every aspect of the environment. Dey (2017) stated that survival of the fittest is about adaptability to a changing environment and adjusting to new competitive realities, in short 'agility'. Annunzio (2001) stated that there has never been a time in history that has witnessed so much change, occurring so rapidly, and affecting so many people. Soon, businesses that were considered staples in our youth may become extinct or completely reinvented. eLeadership means letting go of being in the comfort zone in search of a new direction that will survive the eRevolution. To be competitive today, the eLeader must have a sound strategy and must be able to implement it well. With today's focus on speed, the lag time between idea and implementation must be zero (Annunzio, 2001).

3. Methods and Materials

This research adopted the qualitative methodology but utilised some elements from the quantitative research methods. Information was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the Outcome Facilitators, which took the form of words, impressions, and sentences, and contributed towards the qualitative method of this research. The Outcome Facilitators are employed in the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation and have been involved with the Outcomes Approach from the onset when the Outcomes Approach was developed in 2010. They are appointed on an executive level and are the main officials responsible for supporting and liaising with the lead coordinating departments. The lead coordinating departments are responsible for leading various other departments to achieve the set outputs and targets for a particular outcome. The responses obtained from the questionnaires distributed to officials in the 12 lead coordinating departments for the Outcomes Approach, were in the form of hard data, which contributed towards the quantitative element of this research. Quantitative data was collected to complement the narratives from the interviews. Purposive

sampling was used for this research whereby people were chosen for a particular purpose. The interview participants chosen for this research were based on their area of expertise and the survey participants were chosen based on their experience in the implementation of the Outcomes Approach in their own departments. Only 5 officials were chosen in each of the 12 lead coordinating departments to participate in the survey and 7 Outcome Facilitators were interviewed as some of them were responsible for 2 outcomes and some of them were not available as they no longer worked in the department. When the Outcomes Approach was developed there were 12 outcomes and in 2013 an additional 2 outcomes were added which will not form part of this study. The study sought to find out if the change in the Head of Department (HoD) affected the implementation of the Outcomes Approach and if change management took place when the Outcomes Approach was introduced in the department.

4. Results and Discussions

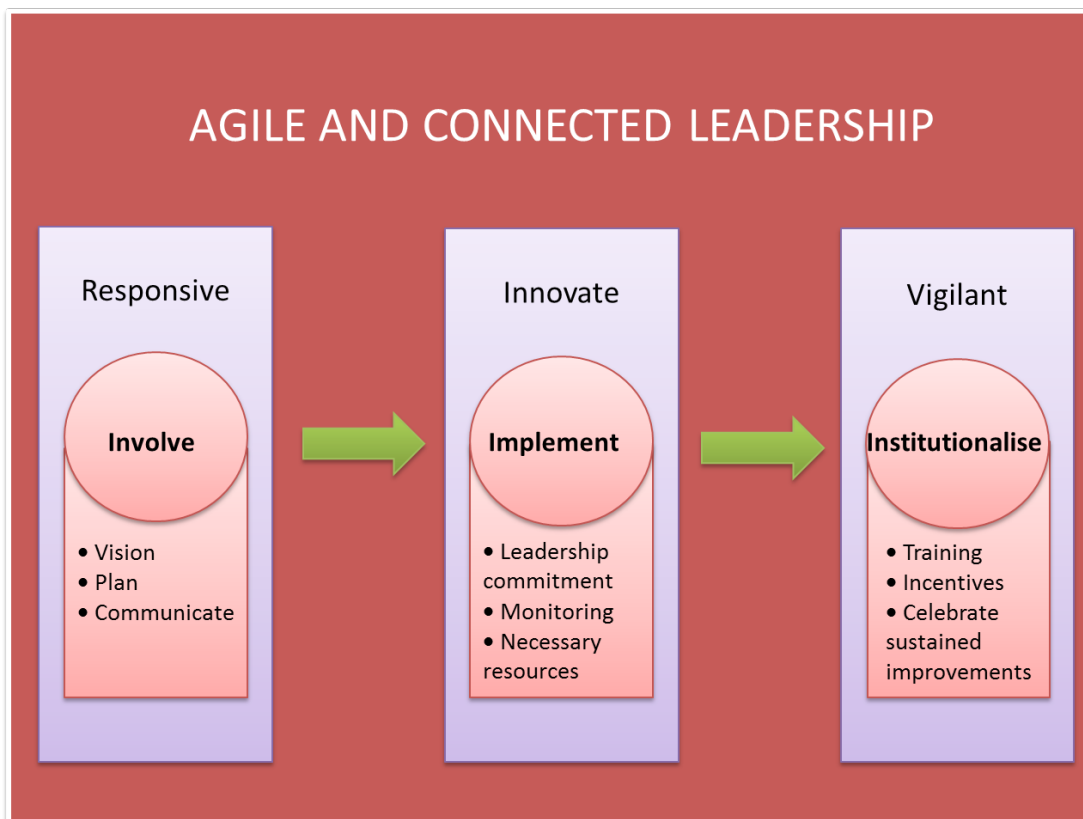
Responses from the questionnaires received from officials working with the Outcomes Approach were positive; the majority of the respondents indicated that in their departments there were no big changes in top management, which allowed for the continuity of the outcomes work when the HoD exited the department. A number of respondents indicated that the Outcomes Approach was institutionalised in their department, which is highly significant because even if there is a change of HoD it was still business as usual. It also means that there are documented practices and processes that contribute to continuity of work when officials working with the Outcomes Approach leave the department. 75 per cent of the survey respondents agreed that HoD stability is important for the successful implementation of the Outcomes Approach. Interviews held with the Outcome Facilitators showed that HoD stability is not necessarily good; if the HoD is not effective then a change in leadership would be beneficial. From the interviews held with the Outcome Facilitators, it was clear that in most lead coordinating departments change management did not take place as the Outcomes Approach emanated from the National Development Plan, which was part of the reporting structures, and departments were compelled to implement the Outcomes Approach. Even though the Outcomes Approach is compulsory, there should have been change management when the Outcomes Approach was implemented,

to obtain the buy-in and support of leadership and officials working with the Outcomes Approach. In departments where change management was conducted there has been more buy-in, support, and performance for the Outcomes Approach has been improving year-on-year. From the interviews with the Outcome Facilitators, it seems that the change of HoDs influenced some departments in a positive manner and other departments negatively. Some of the new HoDs brought in fresh ideas and were enthusiastic to bring about positive change in the department. Whilst in other departments newly appointed HoDs came in with their own ideas and, before assessing the status of the department, changed strategies and policies, which caused interruption and discontinuity. In a department, it takes a while to see the impact of strategies; then the HoD's contract come to an end, which makes the departmental goals difficult to achieve because of lack of continuity. The responses from the questionnaires seemed a little biased when compared to the responses from the Outcome Facilitators. The officials from the coordinating departments were leaning towards positive responses, while the Outcome Facilitators were more candid.

5. The Triple I Change Management Model for a Rapidly Changing Environment

Many of the change management models were developed before the onset of rapid changes taking place in the business environment, and contained a step-by-step process, which needed to be followed. In the current period, the one-size-fits-all approach does not apply as each organisation is different and it is important for change to be adapted to a particular organisation. The Triple I Change Management Model was developed to accommodate the rapidly changing environment and the frequent change of leadership. It is essential that when a change management process is underway there is continuity, even when the leadership changes. For this model to achieve its desired effect, it is important that all future leaders and top management attend training in change management so that they can be successful change agents. The Triple I Change Management model has to be championed by the Head of Department together with the top management team in the department. The reason being is that if the HoD suddenly exits the department the top management team can take over the change process without any disruption.

Figure 1: The Triple I Change Management Model



Source: Authors

The model depicted in Figure 1 incorporates the three important phases of change management, involve, implement and institutionalise; hence the name Triple I. Each phase contains three processes and each of these processes should be implemented with speed and flexibility to be able to adjust to the radical and fast changing environment today. In order for the Triple I model to be achieved in an environment that is operating at such a rapid pace, it is important for the leader to be agile and connected.

Each phase of the Triple I Change Management Model contains processes, in the involve phase there is vision, plan, and communicate. it is essential that there is a clear vision and everyone involved takes ownership of the vision. There must be a detailed strategic plan that shows the current state of the organisation and the desired state after change, and there must be continuous communication from the leader and top management. These processes need to take place with the leader, top management, and the employees in the organisation and should not be a command and control environment where it comes from the leader and the people involved have to obey; there must be consensus and agreement

on all the change issues as it concerns everyone in the organisation.

The implement phase contains three processes, leadership commitment, monitoring, and providing the necessary resources. The leader together with the top management team must show commitment to the change process otherwise the employees will not take the change seriously. Monitoring of the plan must take place to ensure that the activities and timeframes are achieved. For change to be successful the necessary resources must be made available. it is important for the leader to be innovative. They need to think outside the box if things are not going as planned and they need to come up with innovative ideas fast to ensure that these processes are achieved.

The institutionalise phase contains the processes of training, incentives, and celebrate sustained improvements. If the change required new skills the employees must be trained. There should be some form of incentive to motivate the employees to maintain the change and it is important that there are celebrations for sustained improvements. It is essential that the leader constantly reinforce that

the organisation is at a place where they do not do business as usual. Weekly meetings ensure the sustainability of change in the organisation and if any challenges are identified it can be resolved quickly. For the rapidly changing environment that leaders are operating in it will be effective for them to adopt the transformation leadership style.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In South Africa and many other countries worldwide, there are frequent changes of leadership in the public sector, especially when there is a change of administration. The high turnover rate of HoDs in the South African public sector can affect the sustainability in the delivery of government programmes. It is important that the new HoDs continue from where the previous HoD left off, so that the goals of the department are achieved. It should be about the departmental goals and objectives and not about any individual's personal goals that need to be achieved. Leaders need to operate with speed and flexibility when managing change in their departments, thus ensuring that the departments are kept abreast of the changes taking place in the environment, and to provide for the needs of the country's citizens. The model developed for this study would be ideal for a government department undergoing any kind of change. This is an era where there are rapid changes taking place; therefore, reliance should not be placed on a single individual on the top but for the Head of Department to work as a team with their top management. If the HoD has to exit the department suddenly the top management team can continue with business as usual and change management is not disrupted or discontinued.

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