

The Effect of Batho Pele Principles on Mediating Internally and Externally Directed Knowledge-sharing Practices in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

All public service organisations in the world use social policies as a guide to render services for the greater good of their citizenries. Operating in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) implies that schools need to reinvent their role (administratively, pedagogically and otherwise) to ensure that they become catalysts for transferal of context-specific knowledge, problem-solving skills and creative thinking. Also, amidst a growing call by indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) scholars, governments and tribal authorities throughout the continent, for African organisations to consider infusing indigenous epistemologies into their daily professional practices, this qualitative study investigated how Batho Pele (a Sotho word meaning “people first”) principles moderated participants’ execution of internally and externally directed knowledge-sharing practices at three selected public schools in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The sample constituted 20 participants, namely teachers, heads of departments, administrative clerks and principals. Based on a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and documents, the study found that two of the selected three schools did not consistently comply with the Batho Pele principles (BPPs) of (a) consultation, (b) access, courtesy and redress, (c) encouraging and rewarding excellence in innovation, and (d) leadership and strategic direction. Only one school was found to have satisfactorily complied with all the prescribed BPPs in how it fostered internally directed (or collegial) knowledge-sharing practices. However, in terms of the infusion of BPPs in externally directed knowledge-sharing practices (more especially towards parents, education officials, stakeholders from the public and private sectors and the school community at large), all three schools were found to have satisfactorily engendered a climate of (a) consultation, (b) access, courtesy and redress, (c) information, openness and transparency, and (d) value for money. The study recommends that the fervency with which schools practise externally directed knowledge sharing must also be replicated in internally directed knowledge-sharing practices.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge sharing; externally directed knowledge sharing; internally directed knowledge sharing; Batho Pele, public schools

INTRODUCTION

The widely used yet underrated prism “knowledge is power” speaks volumes about the competitive edge that knowledgeable individuals have over others in different social settings. Moreover, in an organisational setting where knowledge has increasingly become a means of productivity. It is within this point of view that the sharing and transferal of knowledge to people who might be in a position to utilise it wisely (to propel the organisation to greater heights) is of paramount importance. In a strategic sense, knowledge sharing can be considered to be the only activity to ensure that nuggets of knowledge are extracted from adequately experienced, skilful and technically astute individuals’ minds for the benefit of both the organisation and its human capital (Majid et al., 2022). When speaking about organisations, it is also worth bearing in mind that this also applies to schools. Schools are not only “the cradle of innovative knowledge” but are also agents for knowledge sharing and “intangible assets” (Omigie et al., 2019, p. 21) whose role is tied with the production of a contextually trained crop of technocrats, entrepreneurs and artisans to ply their trade in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Nkambule, 2022). Unfortunately, in the context of what happened in the apartheid years, most rural and township schools are unable to perform maximally. To describe the architecture of the apartheid education system and how it still affects most schools today, Khumalo and Mji (2014) commented:

During that era schools were funded along racial lines and the quality of the schools’ infrastructure, financial wellbeing, teachers’ qualifications and curriculum was not the same between the white minority and the black majority of South Africans, the majority of the country’s schools are still plagued by some of these past challenges (p. 1522).

In concurrence with this view, Mashiane-Nkabinde et al. (2023) and Pretorius (2014) opine that apartheid left the functioning of rural and township schools in disarray. By implication it can be argued that these contextual challenges do, from time to time, obstruct attempts to carry out effective and (in some respects) ethical knowledge-sharing and management practices. Literature suggests that challenges of implementing effective knowledge-sharing practices in schools pervade almost all the world’s education systems (e.g., Kalema et al., 2016; Min, 2017; Nkambule, 2020; Perez-Soltero et al., 2019; Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011). In concurrence with these scholars, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010) declared schools “bad knowledge sharers”.

Having also observed this problem, Kalema et al (2016) supported by Mkhize (2015) have called for regulation of knowledge management (KM) in schools and in all public sector organisations so that KM activities are conducted within the parameters of best practices. In addition, there is a view that such policies ought to take full stock of “the Constitution, common values systems, common leadership/management skills, and professional values, inherited language skills and cultural knowledge” (Osborn et al., 2020, p. 1). Hence this study considered *Batho Pele principles* (a Sotho word meaning “people first”) as sufficiently embodying all these traits (Nkambule, 2020).

Research Questions

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do the Batho Pele principles of consultation, access, courtesy and redress, encouraging and rewarding excellence in innovation, and leadership and strategic direction mediate internally directed knowledge-sharing practices in three South African schools?
- How do the Batho Pele principles of consultation, access, courtesy and redress, information, openness and transparency, and value for money mediate externally directed knowledge-sharing practices in three South African schools?

In the next sections, the literature review, theoretical framework, methodological and ethical approaches, the thematic layout of the findings and recommendations are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Development

Knowledge is hard to define. In the absence of a uniform way of defining knowledge, Nonaka (1994) defines it as a justification of people's worldview of what they consider to be the truth (Nonaka, 1994). Davenport and Prusak, (1998) perceive knowledge as a human-led pursuit to give meaning to their surroundings and existence. Professional knowledge is contextual in nature and has to do with people's quest to understand the internal state of affairs of an organisation and how external affairs might have a bearing on it (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In his seminal literature, Nonaka often talks about tacit and explicit knowledge. The best way to characterise tacit knowledge is that it is the knowledge that resides in people's minds and appears in a form of a skill and experience. On the contrary, explicit knowledge rests in documents, knowledge repositories and databases and is "easily codifiable and easy to share" (Afolayan et al., 2016, p. 8). Since tacit knowledge is personal, its extraction from people's minds is a mammoth task (Basit & Medase, 2019), organisations must have a systematic way of ensuring that there is an atmosphere of trust, motivation and interpersonal undertakings among members (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In the management field of study, that systematic way of creating conditions for people to explore each other's tacit knowledge is called "knowledge management" (KM). According to Holm (2001, p. 9), KM is about "getting the right information to the right people at the right time, helping people create knowledge and sharing and acting on the information". KM is underpinned by the following processes.

Knowledge Acquisition and Learning

Knowledge acquisition is tied to the discovery of information, and a systemic way of allowing a computer system to enhance people's access to professional skills, best practices, training and policy guidelines. It is unarguably one of the tedious KM processes, which when executed with the precision it deserves, can enrich the knowledge capital of the organisation by consolidating contributions made by technologies in facilitating people's sharing and consumption of each

other's knowledge (Potter, 2003, p. 1). Its success is largely dependent on people's commitment to sustaining a culture of continuous learning and dialoguing.

Knowledge Exploration and Exploitation

Knowledge exploration and exploitation are usually paired together (Vidal, 2005). Knowledge exploration speaks to the discovery of new knowledge (Mäki, 2008) through the "non-local search beyond that of the organisation's existing capacity" (Lou et al., 2018, p. 870). Meanwhile, knowledge exploitation is concerned with the use of pre-existing organisational knowledge (Vidal, 2005). Knowledge exploration addresses issues of aligning the organisation with new trends and best practices in the sector in which the organisation operates, whereas knowledge exploitation harnesses organisational productivity by making the most of the already available organisational knowledge (Azyabi & Fisher, 2014).

Knowledge Sharing and Transfer

Knowledge sharing entails a transaction between two or more individuals that culminates in the acquisition and creation of new knowledge (Gill et al., 2010). It denotes the acquirement, arrangement, "reuse" and transmission of "experience-based knowledge" and the creation of its access (Lin, 2007, p. 27). A growing number of organisations do all they can to encourage knowledge sharing among co-workers to avoid the loss of workers' tacit knowledge (Thielfoldt & Scheef, 2016). Several studies classify knowledge sharing as the most important of all KM processes (Nkambule, 2022, 2023d). Knowledge transfer is an extension of knowledge sharing. It ensures that the shared knowledge does not go to waste but influences the productivity of the organisation and its employees. Despite its propensity to improve school effectiveness and knowledge innovation by identifying knowledgeable experts and ensuring that they are given the platform to impart their skills/knowledge (Nkambule, 2023a), existing studies indicated several challenges with knowledge transfer in a school context (Nordholm, 2016).

Knowledge Creation

Knowledge creation is based on the productivity of individuals within the organisation to discharge their competencies and inclinations to contribute to the production of a context-specific new body of knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Its success is tied to creating a climate that sufficiently keep workers stimulated to apply creative thinking and problem-solving skills on a trial and error basis (Audia & Goncalo, 2007; Taylor & Greve, 2006).

Barriers to Knowledge-Sharing Practices

In the context of this paper, barriers should be understood as disturbances that directly affect the overall outcome or productivity of knowledge-sharing in an organisation, as concisely discussed below.

Individuals in Organisations

It is widely accepted that the limitation of people's involvement in knowledge-sharing and decision-making processes by school management teams (SMTs), which comprise heads of departments (HODs) and principals, destructs their knowledge-sharing efficacy and diminishes their potential to think creatively and contribute to problem solving (Romm & Nkambule, 2022).

Kalema et al. (2016) found that Senior teachers hoarded tacit knowledge instead of transferring it to their novice or mid-career counterparts, as they were of the view that giving away too much knowledge would render them powerless and replaceable. Doing so denies novice and mid-career teachers a wealth of tacit knowledge that rests in Senior teachers' minds (Nkambule, 2023b). Rismark and Sølvsberg (2011) further point out that teachers who do not share knowledge with their peers are a barrier to their respective schools' aspirations to become learning organisations.

Technology

Technology can be the most viable method of ensuring that communication is unhindered by distance (Nkomo et al., 2021). Teachers who are not literate in end-user computing are likely to struggle with facilitating computer mediated teaching and knowledge sharing. For example, Mokwena (2011, 2014) established that teachers' KM proficiency is largely inhibited by their low interest in learning to use the South African School Management System (SA-SAMS), which is a portal where school-related information can be stored, created, retrieved and shared both internally and externally. Similar findings were documented in Ghana (Gyaase et al., 2015), Kenya (Nyariki, 2013) and South Africa (Kamalizeni & Naidoo, 2018; Tsolo, 2019).

Organogram

The shape or arrangement of the organogram (i.e., organisational structure) can present a challenge to social dynamics and productivity (Luvalo, 2017). Hierarchical organograms (present in all public schools) are a sanctuary for authoritative leadership and one-way communication, as well as a lack of trust between leadership and subordinate staff (Riege, 2005). Research shows that in schools where the flow of knowledge is predominantly top-down and less bottom-up, teachers, administrative staff and education stakeholders are likely to feel excluded and undervalued (see Min, 2017; Perez-Soltero et al., 2019). This suggests that educational leaders must consider distilling one-way communication with bottom-up initiatives so that communication can be inclusive of all members of different occupational levels (Luvalo, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To frame the study within a theory, the *Batho Pele principles* (BPPs) were adopted. The term "Batho Pele" was chosen because it was found to complement the democratically elected South African government's intention to move away from rolling out social services based on race, religion, gender and many other factors that can be classified as discriminatory practices (Moran, 2002). The injustices and discriminatory practices that were perpetuated by apartheid public service policies (Moran, 2022), precipitated the adoption of BPPs to reinvigorate the need for public sector employees to pass on the Ubuntu-oriented sense of "we belong" to co-workers, stakeholders and their clientele (Pietersen, 2014). There was also the need for actions of public servants towards the citizenry to embody the "we care" attitude (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014). It was further envisaged that supplementing the "we belong" and the "we care" traits with the spirit of "we serve" would ensure that, when citizens entered public

service departments in need of services, their needs would be addressed and their dignity would be restored (Pietersen, 2014).

When contextualised within a schooling milieu, the BPPs advocate for the actions of the personnel to embody the following descriptors (Nkambule, 2020):

1. *Consultation*

Widely dispersed and non-hierarchical consultation must characterise school operations, in which all occupational levels are exhaustively consulted prior to the adoption of decisions that are likely to affect their role in the school. Since parents are recognised as part of the school community, they need to be consulted on the developments and the direction that the school proposes to take. Learners must be represented through elected structures to ensure that their voice is heard.

2. *Access*

A school must ensure that learners are given access to quality teaching and learning, through the provision of learning aids, tools and consultation with subject experts, including but not limited to teachers, counsellors, health practitioners, and pastors. Also, staff, especially the subordinate layer, must be granted access to all labour related entitlements including fair leadership practices, ongoing professional development and support, employee wellness assistance programmes and a host of other miscellaneous support systems that may have a bearing on their agency to perform their duties diligently.

3. *Courtesy and Redress*

Staff is expected to be conscious of being in a social space so that they are able to extend courtesy, and even in instances where there are misunderstandings, they must see themselves as part of the solution. Misunderstandings must be resolved through reciprocal dialogue. In cases where there is no real consensus, parties must agree to disagree in a courteous manner.

4. *Information*

To sustain a culture of accountability, access to information must be granted to stakeholders. Inquiries made by staff, learners, parents and the broader school community must be responded to in a manner that gives them the impression that they too are an essential component of the school community.

5. *Openness and Transparency*

All stakeholder and including the public have every right to know how decisions are made and how the decisions affect them. Parents and other stakeholders need to have an overview of the state of administrative and leadership affairs as well as curricular and extra-curricular programmes in the school. They also have a right to add to the construction of knowledge that should contribute to nation-building.

6. *Value for Money*

External stakeholders must be assured of delivery of quality service. Learners have the right to quality education which requires that schools must go the extra mile to ensure that learners can compete with their peers nationally and internally.

7. *Encouraging and Rewarding Innovation and Excellence*

There is a need for the organisational climate and operational functions to occur in a manner that is complementary to creative thinking, team-oriented undertakings and innovation. Leaders and the management of the school must at all times recognise and reward efforts made by others, especially subordinate staff, towards making the school an excellent learning platform. The rewarding of excellence and innovation must be regarded as motivating factors for the school to be a learning organisation that allows for inter-epistemic ways of knowing to contribute to its growth and stability.

8. *Leadership and Strategic Direction*

As stipulated in their job description, the SMT must be seen to be a catalyst for the formation of networking forums among groups of staff so that they can equally contribute towards making the school an inclusive knowledge society.

Not only does using BPPs as a theoretical lens provide a yardstick for evaluating the effectiveness of service delivery in public schools, but it also expresses how the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and values systems into social policy can ensure that the public service delivery occurs within the contours of best practices.

South Africa's adoption of BPPs as one of its public policies is consistent with international public policy and management trends. For example, in Indonesia, public sector organisations including schools are guided by the *Pancasila*, which is a set of legislative principles drawn from ancient socio-cultural values of relational accountability, collaboration and co-dependence (Herlambang, 2017) to instil a sense of nation building, care and dedication among members of staff in schools (Septiani & Kurniawan, 2022) and other public sector organisations. Similarly, in China, most educational policies are influenced by the ancient Confucius moral values, which inter alia, call on schools to render quality education, embed social responsibility and social justice in their dealings with learners, parents, families, and the communities of the schools (Bahtilla & Xu, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand participants' worldview of the mediating role of BPPs on internally and externally directed knowledge-sharing practices in three South African schools, a qualitative research approach was applied. Participants (i.e., teachers, HODs, administrative clerks and principals) and objects (i.e., schools) were purposively selected for the study (White, 2004).

Twenty participants across four occupational levels, as stated above, were spread across three schools in the South African province of Mpumalanga. In terms of paradigmatic orientation, the study was situated within the social constructivist worldview. Aligned to qualitative research, social constructivism enabled the researchers to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge (McKinley, 2015) by interviewing the participants to understand their experiences of the research problem. The researchers requested the principals of the selected schools to recruit

potential participants. They were given a brief to select participants of different age groups, occupational ranks and years of experience.

Interviews were held in the locations preferred by the participants (Bergh & Van Wyk, 1997) within the school; these included classrooms, teachers' staffrooms, HODs' and principals' offices and the administrative blocks for administrative clerks. The audio-recorded interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes each. The researchers also had a notebook for recording participants' facial gestures, expressions and a range of body language movements. A transcription from the audio-recorded interviews was created to identify the emergence of themes. Subsequent to that, the researchers read through the transcripts to gain familiarity with the content and identify recurring patterns containing elements of data aligned to the research questions. The patterns were then transformed into preliminary themes. Finally, after doing a comparison between the interview data and documentary data, themes were formalised. Among many documents at the researchers' disposal were files containing policies, codes of conduct, curriculum content, minutes of meetings and reports (De Vos et al., 2011; Jansen, 2006). Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the researchers had "thick" coatings of data upon which to cross-check the findings (Patton, 2002). This technique of cross-checking data is called data triangulation, which Finlay (2002) regards as the researchers' attempt to arrive at a conclusion that mirrors the truth about the phenomenon by considering multiple perspectives of data.

The study was declared ethically compliant, following which the obtained ethical clearance certificate, research proposal and interview guide were forwarded to the provincial ministry of education for assessment, which also deemed them fit for purpose. Participants were oriented on the value of their participation and the researchers' expectations, and they were guaranteed protection of identity using numbers and letters to refer to them and their schools (Creswell, 2013). They were also informed that in the event that they felt aggrieved by the study, their participation was on a voluntary basis, implying that they were free to withdraw their participation.

Participants in the study included six teachers, six HODs, five administrative clerks and three principals from the three selected schools in Emalahleni 1, 2 and 3 Education Circuits in Mpumalanga, South Africa. At schools A and C there were two teachers, two HODs, two administrative clerks and one principal. At school B there were two teachers, two HODs, a principal and one administrative clerk (because at the time of the interview, there was an unfilled vacant position for the second administrative clerk). Participants were allocated the first letter in their occupational rank (**T** for teacher, **H** for HOD, **C** for administrative clerk, **P** for principal), a number and the @ sign to situate them in one of the three sampled schools. For example, T1@A is teacher participant number one (in the sequence of teachers that were interviewed) and is attached to school A. C3@B simply means the third administrative clerk participant in the sequence of administrative clerks that were interviewed, attached to school

B, and so on. For the principals, only the letters A, B and C were given next to the first letter of their occupational rank; for example, P@A refers to the principal of school A.

Table1.

Participants Description

Participant	Age	Gender	Area(s) of Specialisation	Field Experience
T1@A	34	Female	Afrikaans First Additional Language	10 years
T2@A	33	Female	Life Orientation & Economic and Management Sciences	07 years
T3@B	37	Female	English Home Language	15 years
T4@B	51	Male	Technology & Creative Arts	24 years
T5@C	47	Female	Natural Sciences & Creative Arts	23 years
T6@C	46	Male	Social Sciences	18 years
H1@A	57	Male	Afrikaans Second Additional Language	35 years
H2@A	29	Male	Mathematics & Natural Sciences	3 years
H3@B	52	Female	Creative Arts & Economic and Management Sciences	28 years
H4@B	54	Male	English & Social Sciences	19 years
H5@C	38	Female	Maths & Science	12 years
H6@C	47	Male	Economic and Management Sciences	23 years
AC1@A	27	Female		05 years
AC2@A	39	Female		13 years
AC3@B	44	Female		21 years
AC4@B	51	Female		29 years
AC5@C	42	Female		18 years
P@1	55	Male		35 years
P@2	55	Male		32 years
P@3	50	Male		27 years

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Theme 1: The Mediating Role of BPPs in Internally Directed Knowledge-sharing Practices.

a) Consultation

Consultation refers to keeping all stakeholders abreast of the strategic vision the school aims to adopt (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014). Since decision-making is usually initiated at the SMT level, it was appropriate to interview participants who work under the supervision of the SMT, such as teachers and administrative clerks, to understand their perceptions on the extent to which their dealings with SMT encapsulates consultation. T5@C stated:

Yes, we are very involved in whatever the SMT decides to do. We meet regularly for briefings. Transparency from the leadership is our strength.

Contrary to the above comment, in school A, T1@A stated that “some efforts were made to consult us about decisions taken, but usually not in the right way.” T1@A felt that decisions were communicated to them, often very late, and distorted because there were too many SMT members communicating the same message differently, to which T2@A added:

I think that information gets lost between the principal, the vice-principal, and the HODs before it comes to the teachers.

A similar view emerged in school B, wherein T3@B commented:

What I have noticed especially at my school, communication gets lost in that pyramid of communication. When it gets to you, it’s no longer how it was initially meant to come out.

Clearly in schools A and B, there were inconsistencies in how teachers were consulted and decisions were imposed on them without due consideration for their views and opinions. Meanwhile, [in school C] habitual consultation among all members of staff in the school (DBE, 2014) sustained an atmosphere of collegiality and shared vision and values (Owen, 2014).

b) Access, Courtesy and Redress

In school B, accessibility to management was limited to HODs. The principal was purported to be fixated on conducting a public relations charm offensive on external stakeholders and was less frequent in redressing problems among staff.

H3@B commented that:

The principal is a very busy man. People from the circuit come to visit him in need of some advice about something, so we as HODs deal with these problems from teachers, not the principal. But when things get very bad, he does not mind assisting us.

T2@B stated:

We discuss things as adults when the need comes for everyone to sit around the table as adults and work things out.

Principal@2 confirmed this:

They will tell you themselves that I spend a lot of time in my office doing work. Sometimes I am unpopular for this high work ethic.

In school A, despite the principal giving the impression that there was access to mechanisms for resolving issues through discussions, subordinate staff did not seem to agree with his point of view. He confidently asserted:

Yes, we do argue sometimes, but eventually, we set our differences aside (P@A).

However, subordinate staff did not share a similar sentiment. T2@A opposed this view as she stated:

I think there isn't really much of a platform. People are just left to their own devices.

In support of the prior statement, A1@A divulged that she often had to tolerate "HODs' shouting at you for being slow or for a minor typing error." "That is why we say the principal does not protect us from exploitation by HODs and some of the teachers" (A2@A).

Concerning the affairs of his school, P@C stated:

We communicate effectively and we have an open-door policy which makes it easy for the SMT to be engaged. We meet regularly as staff to discuss a range of issues with all members of staff because to us communication is the key to success.

Similarly, T5@C added:

Yes, we are very involved in whatever the SMT decides to do. We meet regularly for briefings. Transparency from the leadership is our strength.

In school A teachers felt that the principles of accessibility, courtesy and redress did not constitute the ideal *modus operandi* of the SMT, while in school B participants felt that access was given only when there were pressing issues that needed to be addressed and redress and courtesy occurred when situations were dire and needed to be solved.

c) *Encouraging and Rewarding Excellence in Innovation*

In any knowledge production endeavour, rewards are a precursor to a collaborative culture (Allameh & Zare, 2011). Rewards can either be intrinsic (i.e., intangibles such as a congratulatory comment) or extrinsic (i.e., physical such as a bonus or a bunch of flowers) (Mabaso, 2017). Participants were probed about how they considered the appreciation shown by the SMTs for their participation in knowledge sharing and innovation in their school. In school B, P@B remarked,

I show appreciation for the effort they have put in doing something.

T4@B commented, referring to one of the HODs, in school B:

When you do things according to your agreement with her, she will say well done.

T6@C concluded:

Because he [referring to P@C] speaks sense we listen and really work together. That is why now our matric results are very high compared to other schools who don't have enough facilities like us. This comment proves that when knowledge sharing is inclusive the school is poised to become a learning organisation (Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011).

The same conclusion could not be reached in school A, where T1@A argued:

It is a challenge to get everyone's buy-in on certain processes and procedures, the management is at times, resistant to change and tends to be loyal to their old ways, especially the knowledge that comes from new/younger teachers. Leader's failure to motivate, reward and recognise workers' [i.e., teachers] knowledge sharing efforts (Šajeva, 2014) exposes their lack of knowledge leadership skills (Kazak, 2021; Nkambule, 2023b).

d) Leadership and Strategic Direction

For a school to perform maximally it requires leaders who can provide strategic leadership. Based on the understanding that individual knowledge leaders adopt different leadership styles (Nkambule, 2023b), participants were asked how they felt that the leadership of their respective schools promoted effective knowledge-sharing practices. H6@C felt that the leadership practices were implemented by themselves (as middle management, also known as HODs) and the deputies and the principal set the tone for disseminating effective sharing practices in the school. He based his narrative on the school's prerogative to ensure that all strategic decisions, either taken at the SMT, school governing body (SGB), circuit, district, provincial or national level, are documented and cascaded to staff:

From where I stand I would say it is conducive because from the top there are circulars as a means of communication, and then now the principal will take the circular down to the deputy principal. The deputy principal will take it to the HOD. HODs must ensure that the teachers receive the circulars (H6@C).

This statement demonstrates that the leadership of the school understands the importance of encouraging all members of staff to play an active role in knowledge sharing events (Kazak, 2021). Syndicated meetings and spontaneous briefings appeared to be the most viable methods of cascading or sharing knowledge with co-workers who did not occupy management positions. The principal explained that:

Before we implement [anything] we have discussions. All duties are discussed with educators and the rest of the staff, and sometimes we also discuss things with learners..... I use "we" because this is not my school, it is ours, so it does not make sense for me to say "I" when I am not the only one responsible for what is happening around here (P@C).

T6@C considered the principal's democratic leadership virtues as the ones which shaped the SMT into what it had become:

The SMT does not keep secrets. If there is some information, they send everything to us so that we can know about it.

These comments prove that teacher satisfaction largely depends on the principal's style of leadership (Alkhyeli & Ewijk, 2018). However, in schools A and B, there appeared to be dissonance between SMTs and subordinate workers. In school B, participants expressed that, while they had greater freedom in their classrooms, HODs tended to exercise curriculum leadership through authoritative means. They said this with reference to the principal spending most of his time in the office and not paying enough attention to the practical curriculum

delivery issues on the ground and yet he expected them to perform their duties diligently under work repressive conditions. The principal's behaviour typifies a *transactional leadership style* (Hickman, 2017). T3@B argued:

We are constantly told what to do [by HODs]. They sit and discuss things and impose them on us. When you suggest something they purge you. They call you a bad influence.

Likewise, T4@B added:

If our SMT can stop taking decisions on their own, then they have more cooperation from us.

The principal's tendency to delegate almost all-important functions to the SMT was said to have caused anarchy in the school, as every SMT member felt that they were at the helm and had to be listened to. Khan et al. (2015) diagnosed this mentality to leading people as a *laissez-faire leadership style*, which by implication, gives rise to the abuse of power by the SMT, as expressed by T2@A.

The organisational culture does not allow one to develop and to even share knowledge. Instead, it's quite the opposite, whenever you feel that you want to impart certain knowledge to your colleagues, it makes you feel like you are doing something wrong (T2@A).

It can thus be deduced that in school C all participants spoke with one voice and endorsed the school as a democratic space, whereas in schools A and B there were split views about the practice of the BPPs for internal undertakings. In both schools there was a sense that HODs did not conduct teacher supervision within the contours of the BPPs. In both cases, teachers felt alienated from decision making and strategic planning (Nkambule, 2023b). There was a rift between teachers and HODs that was worsened by the ineffectiveness of both principals in entrenching values that stimulate widely dispersed knowledge-sharing practices (Nkambule, 2022).

Theme 2: The Mediating Role of BPPs in Externally Directed Knowledge-sharing Practices

Participants were asked to reflect on the selected BPPs and how they applied them when engaged in knowledge-sharing transactions with parents, education officials, sponsors, health practitioners, and so forth. Their views are reported as follows:

a) Consultation

Schools that understand the value of maintaining close ties with their communities tend to be more productive (Myende, 2014). Consultation implies that not only do such schools communicate regularly with their communities but also apply Ubuntu oriented relational ethics in their communication with individual stakeholders. Across all three schools, there was a sense that external stakeholders were consulted exhaustively on the developments that took place in these schools. P@2 commented:

Today we have bulk SMSs, you just text once then you send it to all the parents of the database. This is a good way of reaching as many people as possible. We have WhatsApp groups as teachers and members of the SGB. If there is an urgent issue or emergency, we communicate through it to arrange meetings. We just opened a Facebook page for the school with our

learners in mind, and we post assignments and learning materials, and learners can reach us if they need to, even school during holidays when we are in recess (P@2).

It appears as though schools recognised the need for networking and the sharing of knowledge and other resources to support one another. T2@A commented:

Because we have better resources than them they come here for exam copies and they use our netball and soccer fields. We are friendly, we accommodate people, we are open to student teachers for their practicals, and we are open to different ministers coming to share their word. So I believe that we are open and receptive to the community (T2@A).

Based on the comments made by teachers, HODs, administrative clerks and principal participants, they themselves in their varying occupational ranks intermittently consulted external stakeholders by telephone, through social media and face-to-face contact. In this way, they were content with the effectiveness of their knowledge-sharing practices toward external stakeholders. This is proof of the presence of the Ubuntu element in the BPPs which encourages people to grow together and acknowledge that: “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” [a person is a person through other persons]. The flair with which all three schools consult and liaise with parents, learners and other stakeholders is in tandem with the prescripts of the South African Schools' Act no. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996), which stipulates that “the education of a child should be the joint responsibility of the school, parents and other community members” (Myende, 2013, p. 78).

b) Access, Courtesy and Redress

Sustenance of effective stakeholder relationships is based on respectful undertakings. Hendry (2010) points out that access, courtesy and redress are some of the characteristics that sustain respectful relationships between schools and stakeholders. Participants were unequivocal in extending courtesy to external stakeholders. They also regarded the issue of creating access as of fundamental importance. This attitude permeated all layers of staff. P@A stated:

We treat parents as our clients, they are always right and we do not discriminate, and everybody is treated the same. Normally, when people come to this office they come in when they are unhappy but after having met me they go out with a smile.

P@3 added:

Even when they are not happy with the response they got and start losing their temper, I remain composed.

Administrative clerks remarked that dealing with people from different walks of life is something that requires “dedication and caring for the people you see around you” (A3@B) and not taking “your frustrations from home and bring them here because you will be more frustrated when working with demanding staff and parents” (A4@C).

These statements speak to how highly all three schools valued the creation of access for stakeholders to air their views. They thus insisted on the need to pay attention to the plight of their clients by offering remedial actions. This finding demonstrates that for a school to succeed

in implementing the BBPs' aspects of courtesy, access and redress, all members of staff must be bound by a common attitude, vision and mission (Nkambule, 2020).

c) Information, Openness and Transparency

Public access to information is widely accepted as a key to greater transparency and accountability in education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018). With open data, education officials – and the public-at-large – can monitor educational progress and identify any bottlenecks and malpractices in the system (UNESCO, 2018). In relation to the studied schools, it was generally agreed that information was being provided to external stakeholders in different ecologies of the schools including the classroom, office block and staff room. The schools adhered to the open door policy which allows parents and other stakeholders to acquire information that they deem important to them about the strategic direction of the school. T6@C indicated that parents would come to his class to tell him they hardly slept at “night because their kids talk a lot about me”. “Parents would come and say wow you are that teacher and our child loves you” (T1@A).

Participants' comments indicate that parents (as one of the key external stakeholders) were kept abreast of any little or big problem which involved their children in the school.

Even in instances where the child had transgressed, parents were informed about the incident and, if need be, they were requested to come to the school to hear a full account of what wrong the child had committed. Depending on the regularity of this transgression I act, and parents must know about this because they entrust us with their children's future (H2@A).

Also, when there were projects in the school, external stakeholders were kept abreast of the turn of events. Usually, external stakeholders were represented in some way through SGBs or community forums. T4@B shared how this unfolded:

The SGB and SMT meet on a regular basis to discuss issues regarding school infrastructure, hiring of employees, etc. The fact that we see development in terms of building new classrooms, paving the schoolyard, and installation of JoJo tanks. I mean that people are talking to one another about these things, and these are some of the benefits of KM in our school.

There was a clear indication that the promotion of information, openness and transparency occurred within the legal provision for disclosure of school data (UNESCO, 2018).

d) Value for Money

Value for money refers to getting the most out of a school's limited income and ensuring that finances are spent wisely on appropriate expenditure, by ensuring that the school does not over stretch or under-utilise its resources when rendering a service (Sparling, 2012). Despite the challenges that confront the schools, all three can be regarded as performing schools. This shows the maturity with which staff handled their work. For example, T1@A insisted:

I am employed to transfer knowledge to children so that they are empowered to stand on their feet one day.

In terms of teaching and learning and its monitoring and evaluation, one HOD explained:

I am also managing the teachers in terms of how to do their work as there is monitoring and controlling, as you are calling it moderation, and every term we need to moderate the work that is being done by the teachers (H2@B).

T6@C added:

The school has a well-structured approach to ensuring curriculum and its implementation management. HODs try to follow the school approach, which is done in the following ways: lesson planning is monitored though not regularly, learners' books are controlled by HODs, class visits are planned each term but not always done, pre-moderation is done on all formal tasks to ensure that we meet the required standards and is CAPS [i.e., Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement] aligned. Post-moderation is also done on all formal tasks to ensure the marking and recording of marks were done correctly.

The finding shows that the studied schools fully understand their pattern of expenditure (Sparling, 2012) and "recognise the complex interplay" between themselves "and the wider communities they serve" (Bradley & Durbin, 2013, p. 118)

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated the mediating role of BPPs on internally and externally directed knowledge-sharing practices in three South African public schools. It came to light that all three schools did apply BPPs, albeit to varying degrees. Schools A and B were found to be lagging in the principles of 1) consultation, 2) access, courtesy and redress, 3) encouraging and rewarding excellence and innovation, and 4) leadership and strategic direction. They were not consistently enforced to cultivate internal knowledge-sharing practices (Nkambule, 2020) mainly due to the inadequacy of the organisational climate to motivate workers/staff to establish knowledge-sharing groups (Kalema et al, 2016; OECD, 2010). It also became apparent that teacher leaders' failure to motivate, reward and recognise knowledge sharing (Šajeva, 2014) created a series of "bumpy moments during activities that were meant to enhance knowledge sharing across teacher teams" (Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011, p. 156). In both schools (i.e., A and B), teachers stated that their inputs were often undermined by the SMTs, yet they were expected to fully apply passion when implementing programmes. The ignorance of both principals regarding the problems that confronted teachers and administrative clerks resulted in animosity and poor communication between themselves and HODs (Bayat, 2014). Overall, in school A and B the appetite for collaboration, innovation and knowledge-sharing was barely enough to minimally achieve their goals.

In school C, all the BPPs were conspicuous among staff. All the participants, namely teachers, HODs, administrative clerks and the principal, indicated that although they sometimes also had challenges and misunderstandings, they had an open-door policy, in terms of which they would deliberate on issues until they were resolved. In this school, the generation of innovative ideas, the formation of staff collaboration networks/initiatives and knowledge-

sharing practices were reportedly high, which culminated in their learners doing exceedingly well in matric. Based on their comments, the learners' resounding academic performance is the end result of relentless knowledge-sharing practices in the school which enabled teachers and HODs to collaboratively discuss teaching strategies and performance improvement plans.

When turning the attention of the study to the prevalence of the BPPs in externally directed knowledge sharing practices, it was found that across all three schools, all members of staff in their engagements with external stakeholders, fervently applied the principles of 1) consultation, 2) access, courtesy and redress, 3) information, openness and transparency, and 4) value for money. In all three schools, it became apparent that principals' leadership styles affected the staff's contentment and desire to actively take part in communities of practice.

The overall outlook of the findings evinces that once knowledge sharing moves away from the principle of teamwork (Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011) it will inevitably give credence to knowledge hoarding and knowledge loss (Kalema et al., 2016; Nkambule, 2023c). Hence in [both] schools (i.e., A and B), there were noticeable "bumpy moments in knowledge sharing across teacher teams" (Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011, p. 156) and individualistic undertakings. Meanwhile, in school C, it was found that collaborative culture and democratic leadership practices precipitated effective knowledge sharing practices.

Having observed this problem, Ntwasa (2022) commented that individualistic undertakings in Africa's educational institutions have directly contributed to the erosion of indigenous values and the lack of commitment to delivering education as an essential public service for the greater good of the citizenry. He decried how African communities have abandoned their ways of forging social cohesion, interdependence and accountability towards one another. To contextualise the root causes of this anti-collaborative tendency, he argued that,

Africans do not dream as individuals, but we dream as a society; the reformed education system has moved us from the spirit of Ubuntu [which guided the formulation of BPPs] and understanding the knowledge consumption and production and knowing the importance of radical transformation in our societies (Keynote address: Ntwasa, 2022).

With this inference he called upon public servants to infuse ancient laws of co-dependence and care for fellow human beings when rendering a social service. Building on this sentiment, the following recommendations are made:

- To deal with inconsistent application of BPPs, it is suggested that the induction programme of all members of staff should comprehensively cover BPPs.
- It is further recommended that pre-service teachers be re-introduced to the preamble of BPPs on an annual basis as part of their induction programme.
- To alleviate the abuse of power by HODs, principals are urged to look after the well-being of the lower workforce by attending to their plight.
- Most importantly, all members of staff should bear in mind that knowledge undertakings are generally team-oriented, and therefore each one of them must do all

they can to mend broken bonds if they are to derive satisfaction in how their schools facilitate knowledge-sharing practices.

- It is further recommended that all professional relationships and collaborative knowledge sharing transactions must be based on the foundation of trust.

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