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Collaboration practices between the two tiers of school leadership in eradicating underperformance

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Collaboration between the school governing body (SGB) and the school management team (SMT) in underperforming schools remains the crest for successful action taken to turn around performance as envisaged in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Their interaction is crucial in advancing the course of performance improvement. In the study reported on here a qualitative method and an interpretivist approach was used to explore how shared leadership collaboration practices between the SGB and SMT can improve performance. A case of 3 purposefully sampled underperforming schools in the Gauteng West district was undertaken. Interviews with 3 principals (individually) and 3 focus group interviews with parent SGB members, SMT members and teachers were conducted. Findings show that when developmental needs of SGBs are considered significant and stakeholders are mobilised towards collective effort (*letsema*), collaboration and interaction enable school performance. It is recommended that SGB development be contextualised to enable swift interaction with stakeholders; the essence of the SGB and SMT collaboration in providing leadership and dealing with issues impacting on performance should be highlighted, so that they can plan activities that bring about improved performance. Employing courageous conversations to achieve institutional goals should be through collaborative endeavours that are inspired by ubuntu leadership practice.

Keywords: collaboration; common purpose; courageous communication; interaction; school leadership

Introduction and Background

International studies confirm the significance of collaboration between school governing bodies (SGB) and school management teams (SMT) (Farrell, P 2009; Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002). This is mostly the case in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and some states in the United States of America (Botha, 2010). Lemmer (2007) attests that global trends in education are to offer parents a leadership role in governing schools. In South Africa, parents' participation in school leadership through involvement in the SGB and cooperation with the SMT is enacted (South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 24 (1) (a); (20 & 21)), forming the two tiers of school leadership (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to Mbokodi and Singh (2011), collaborative efforts seek to discover means to weave most resources and strategies to achieve outcomes. Collaboration between parents participating in governing structures and teachers (in particular those in leadership positions) and their interaction is considered essential for improvement of results in schools (Bechuke & Nwosu, 2017). Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) established that sound collaboration between the SGBs and SMTs can be attained if members of the two structures understand their roles and observe boundaries while pursuing good performance. A study by Khuzwayo (2007) found that both SGB chairpersons and principals lacked clear understanding of their collective and individual roles in leading their schools. The aspect of collaborative practice, which ought to be an ubuntu-inspired leadership to achieve success in performance, is undermined in this case. Basson and Mestry (2019) gather that the success of collaboration between the SGBs and SMTs can lead to effective leadership by the two leadership groups.

The SGB forms one tier of leadership and the SMT the other. The two leadership groups need to cooperate and provide essential leadership to offer desirable service to its clients. According to SASA (sections 20 and 21), the SGB tier provides oversight support, whereas the SMT provides daily operational leadership. The SMT's responsibility is to implement the plans and policies of the school (developed by the SGB) aligned to those of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) through sound management (Botha, 2010). The implication is that these two levels of leadership require some form of development to acquire effective collaborative skills in their quest to provide quality service, enabling desired performance.

Professional development creates an enabling environment where professionals can consider their practices and allow room for constructive criticism which will result in correction and improved capacity (Dajani, 2014). The same rings true for SGB development. In Gauteng, efforts were made through the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG) to train members of school governing bodies to empower them with skills that make it possible for these structures to accede with SASA sections 20 and 21 functions (Mestry & Grobler, 2007). These functions regulate the responsibilities of the SGB in relation to enabling SMTs as leaders responsible for daily activities to perform their functions in agreement with what the SGB has envisioned for the school. This extends to oversight support for interacting and operational purposes, working together with the SMT towards effectively leading through collective action and effort, and communication challenges (Department of Education, 2010); in this case, to improve performance and provide service to their clients. The training offered was meant to empower parents in the SGB, in particular, to gain governance skills and to understand their

oversight and support role. Members of SMTs were trained to implement adopted policies and plans while tackling the problems of underperformance.

Given the above, SGBs and SMTs still face difficulties in synchronising roles and harmonising activities, particularly in underperforming schools. Reports by whole school evaluation (WSE) teams indicate that schools grapple with pertinent issues requiring collective stewardship by the SGBs and SMTs (Department of Education, 2010). Uppermost is a lack of and/or a haphazard planning void of collective effort that lacks creativity and inadequate inclusion of all critical stakeholders (particularly the SGB and SMT members). Although planning forms an integral part of collective leadership decision making, in some cases, the process is limited to the principal and a few individuals picked to do the planning. Nkengbeza and Heystek (2017) affirm that development and sustenance of progress can be strengthened when principals share power and authority and take collective decisions with all stakeholders. Individual planning reflects failure to equalise power and implies that the decision-making process is done unilaterally by the principal – thereby, unwittingly excluding inputs by and dialogue with other stakeholders. This results in complications with compliance because there is no shared vision, which leads to the absence of buy-in and could be the main cause of performance troubles. Collective power sharing and problem solving is necessary to bring about desired change (Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hämäläinen & Poikonen, 2009). Parents realise the need to be engaged in their children's schooling and to be part of the school community (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2019). The objective of this study was to investigate how shared leadership collaboration practices between the SGB and SMT through effective interaction can amass action that permeates development and evoke collective action to eradicate underperformance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was Farrell's collaborative circles (Farrell, MP 2001). It offers a significant frame in relation to the dynamics within collaborative circles. The theory was used to illustrate the dynamics at play in enabling or constraining group dynamics in relation to collaboration (Corte, 2013). It has been used in other studies as a methodology to illustrate how teachers and learners use e-collaborative learning circles through information communication technology to facilitate learning and to encourage learning circles (Ardil, 2010). In this context, the theory was used to explore the manner in which shared leadership can improve performance through the identified circles suitable to be applied within collaboration groups.

Farrell collaborative circles

The theory advances circles of collaboration used to map out occurring processes within circles by its members. Therefore, it is applicable to expound on the dual leadership of the SGB and SMT because it presents related collaborative loops that illustrate the suitability of collaborative leadership, in this instance, towards improving performance (Farrell, MP 2001). In this article I focus on four of these circles, namely, group formation and development, the quest stage, the creative work stage, and collective action, as these are relevant to collaborative practices of SGBs and SMTs aimed at improvement of performance. MP Farrell (2001) maintains that through these circles members within a circle define themselves and offer courage resulting in valuable work achieved because of the prevailing climate (to improve performance) during the formation stage, the desire to improve the status quo, innovations to change the situation, and shared action taken (Schechter, 2015).

The circle of development considers the conditions under which advancement stalls and the circumstances promoting or impeding development within the prevailing environment is compromised (Farrell, MP 2001), particularly in underperforming schools. The collaborative circle of development looks at the forming of prevailing dynamics, in this case, between the SGB and the SMT and how these crystallise into altered conduct that impedes collaboration and results in undesirable performance (Farrell, M 2008:5). Circumstances under which members of the circle in underperforming schools operate influence their relationship positively or negatively.

The purpose of coining circles of collaboration was for people to elucidate interaction through development and taking action within collaborative initiatives to achieve a particular purpose. The intention should be facilitation of participation (Setlhodi, 2019). In this context, involvement of SGBs and SMTs in development initiatives offered by MGSLG was to engage in critical dialogue and consider issues that cause underperformance in their schools (Dajani, 2014:143). Collegiality allows people to tune in and participate in activities that empower them to be agreeable to work collectively and initiate programmes that enable their school to turn around its performance. Arafat (2016) asserts that collaborative circles derive from circles of influence emanating from an indigenous African way of rallying energies through a process called *letsema* – a Sesotho word meaning, taking collective action to achieve a particular purpose. In underperforming schools, the leadership should be responsible to create a platform where all stakeholders participate through dialogue by reflecting deeply on issues that debilitate performance. Through acquired develop-

ment, the two tiers of leadership are empowered to initiate a platform for ideas to flow, to support creative thinking and persuade people to be critical about what they do and wilfully opt to act according to shared agreements. They (SMT and SGB) too, initiate an approach to develop others, which in turn, strengthens their understanding of what they have learned, and increases the likelihood of operational and interactive purpose. Basson and Mestry (2019) submit that collaboration between SGBs and SMTs can make facilitate development initiatives and enhance participation, decision making and collective effort.

SGB and SMT development formation stage

Armed with insight into the interplay between improvement and empowerment, shared development advances the collective learning process (Graaff, 2016). In this instance, decisions are taken on what needs to be developed, who will develop it, how this will happen, when the development will take place and which aspect requires development first. A discussion on collaborative development involves attitudinal attachment since the roles of the SGB and the SMT are questioned within the diverse levels of understanding and capacity within a given school environment. M Farrell (2008) suggests that development should enhance collaborative initiatives. Decisions on what development is offered have to be according to how the development schedule is structured in relation to the capacity needs analysis done. The scheduled training ought to be socially acceptable, benefit participants and strengthen operational quest (Schechter, 2015).

The leadership quest stage

The fact that the two tiers of leadership need to collaborate to turn around performance and provide effective direction implies that they have to rethink their vision and strategies to create a considered shared purpose (Setlhodi, 2019). During this period, they take collective responsibility for the state of performance in their school and initiate operational activities for improvement. They acknowledge their interdependence and support mutually agreed upon initiatives to achieve their vision. Their symbiotic relationship and quest to account collectively for results makes them a social unit, taking responsibilities to realise the purpose of their school (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2017), thereby enabling a deep relationship to form a fundamental collaborative circle to achieve in all their efforts (Farrell, M 2008).

Two tiers of leadership: Creative work stage

School leaders who desire an improvement in the school's performance need to rethink their vision and strategy, reflect on what initially caused the underperformance. They need to agree on useful practices that will enable them to focus on collective responsibilities and common situations that could serve as an improvement programme. MP Farrell (2001) maintains that participants within collaborative circles develop routines centring on particular practices – to initiate the leadership's creative ideas and invite inputs that support the refinement of improvement ideas. This process warrants collegial action that is agreeable and can sustain collaborative efforts by the SGB and SMT.

Collective action: Collaborative circle

It is essential for leaders to know how to successfully influence people, inspire collaborative action and oversee collaborative initiatives. The will to improve and knowing how to persuade people to agree to a call for action are strategies that facilitate the development of an action plan. Arafat (2016) acknowledges the relationship between improvement and capacity to influence, and argues that formation of circles of influence happen when those charged with leadership responsibilities use their ability to encourage people to volunteer their services for a purpose. He sees an interdependent relationship between capacity development, cognitive development, cognitive growth and the capacity to influence people in various circles to advance social capital and strive together for a good cause. In this instance, eradicating underperformance by initiating the *letsema* process of rallying efforts towards activities that may cause improvement in performance (Setlhodi, 2019).

The value of collaboration in schools

Group effort enables the promotion of organisational responsibilities that may be difficult to carry out (Cameron & Green, 2015). Collaboration is important to address challenges that deal with matters such as improvement of performance, and social and institutional culture issues that are complex to tackle adequately without support (Jimerson & Wayman, 2012). It constitutes a significant component for schools to continue improving performance (Fleming, 2013).

The SGB and SMT should opt for collaborating and involving other stakeholders in their mission to change and respond to the demands by the Department of Basic Education to improve results. Their role should be to heighten social capital and get everyone's opinion in planning for improvement of performance. Planning could be done in sub-collaborations or commissions that each tackle a specific performance area that contributes towards the compilation of a comprehensive school improvement plan (SIP) (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2017). This could be an interactive, internal evaluation process based on key performance deliverables encouraging reflection for the purpose of improving performance.

Collaboration for interactive social and operational purpose

When a school is in disarray and reflects disunity, collaboration becomes a significant connector to ensure whole-school improvement. The cooperation within the two tiers of leadership contribute towards developing strategic objectives, formulating activities, identifying people to actualise these and crafting a suitable budget by creating a web of social teams that interact for agreeable planning purposes.

Interactive social purpose

The school has to offer a social and caring environment that provides for the needs of its learners and supports teachers to work together to meet objectives (Bush & Glover, 2012) and possibly develop a community of practice. The purpose is to increase support for teaching and create a beneficial environment for learning, and to enable interdependence that contributes towards mutually beneficial collaboration. Partnerships are interactive and dependent on effective communication.

Engaging in constructive conversation requires courage. Courageous conversation ought to reinforce, recognise and appraise action. To arouse courage, people should be acknowledged, affirmed and considered when they talk and participate in initiatives to improve performance. Courageous conversations are clearly articulated and can be characterised by three distinct deliberations, namely, what happened or not, how it has been received or interpreted, and how it affords the other party an opportunity to explain and/or justify themselves. It is about cautiously presenting the truth about the situation (Wyle, 2015) while encouraging reciprocity. Conversing courageously should be about saying what has to be said precisely to maintain the interconnectedness of the collaborative network (Rozen, 2015). In ensuring accuracy, leaders should use four words: when, then, because and therefore (Mann, 2012:88), because dealing with various personalities requires courage, preciseness, consistency and honesty to sustain the collaboration and promote a community of practice. Courageous conversations offer reliability and truthfulness, can be validated because of their clarity, succinctness and importance to maintain collegial interaction, and have grit in authority (Full Circle Group [FCG], 2015). Clarity denotes distinctness. Leaders need to be clear about what they communicate by first making it clear to themselves and then to others (Mann, 2012:19). Collectiveness flourishes when intentions are clear and everyone understands what is expected, which requires understanding. The level of development of all parties determines the extent of clarity and understanding, and can either support or collapse discourse. Inexperienced people require a significant amount of development to bring them on par with the rest of the team for successful participation in school operations.

Operational purpose

Collaboration as an operational function enables cooperation within the leadership structures (SGB and SMT) and extends to all stakeholders to effect change. Operational purpose allows for the process of collaboration to extend to teachers supporting each another, particularly for teaching purposes, and for learners to form learning teams. Firstly, teachers embark on collaborative teaching practice where those teaching the same subject agree to teach a section they are strong in and then swop when they get to sections they struggle in. Secondly, learners group together and embark on peer teaching and learning. This encourages social obligation and strengthens the collaborative purpose. According to Benoliel and Berkovich (2017:924), social networks in schools are "highly interconnected with strong ties, promoting shared understandings at the team level." Strong bonds encourage commitment and enable trust-based relations to grow (Schechter, 2015), encouraging acceptance of operational changes and embracing of new approaches.

Approach

In light of exploring the manner in which shared leadership collaboration practices between the SGB and SMT can improve performance, a qualitative study using the interpretivist approach was undertaken to determine subjective insiders' views on the SGB, principal, and SMT members to understand participants' experiences of their institutions (Basson & Mestry, 2019), thus, enabling investigation without the limitation of pre-determined categories of analysis (Bechuke & Nwosu, 2017).

A case of three underperforming schools in the Gauteng West district, in the Gauteng province, South Africa, was examined. Two (cases A and B) of the schools were township schools based in different municipal areas within the district. The third (case C) was a rural school based in another municipality bordering Gauteng and North West provinces. The schools were purposefully selected from the District Director's National Senior Certificate result reports which indicated a consistent drop in performance over a period of three consecutive years between 2013 and 2017. From the schools' result we could glean an understanding of why their performance declined (Zainal, 2007). The schools' details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Cases, particulars and location

Schools	Municipal area within the district	Type and quintile	Enrolment	% Pass
Case A	Mogale City	Township – 3	972	53%
Case B	West Rand City	Township – 3	1,593	70%
Case C	Merafong City	Rural – 2	845	61%

The district in which the schools were located had been the best performing district in South Africa for two years and second best in the country for the other year in that period. One of the three schools was included because the school had obtained the lowest results in the district for three of the four years indicated. Documents such as minutes of SMT meetings, school improvement plans, quality assurance reports, and national senior certificate (NSC) results for the district were analysed to establish whether these schools were diligent in improving their performance.

Sampling and Data Collection

Three focus groups were interviewed using open-ended questions: one focus group per school comprising of two parents from the SGB who had served for more than one tenure (three years) in the SGB in the same school; two SMT members whose subjects (under their tutelage as either deputy principal or head of department) had the lowest pass rate in the NSC examinations for three years; and one teacher whose subject was the lowest performing in the NSC examinations on average over the three years. The three principals were interviewed separately (Creswell, 2014; De Vos & Strydom, 2011).

Data were collected through reviewing literature, observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to prompt responses, feelings and views in order to elicit in-depth discussions and the interviewees' points of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). The questions sought to probe the research problem; how shared leadership collaboration between the SGB and SMT could develop agreeable practices to evoke collective action for improving performance. The following questions captured the problem:

- What measures can the two tiers of leadership take to lead collaboratively?
- How can the SGB and SMT collaborate in their quest to improve performance?

Trustworthiness was ensured by eliminating bias through being consistent when collecting data and asking questions (Basson & Mestry, 2019). This was a triangulated study because different data collection methods (interviews, document analysis and observations) were used (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012).

Ethical clearance was acquired from the College of Education's ethical clearance committee at the University of South Africa. All participants consented to recorded interviews after undertaking that clearance was approved and ethical considerations would be observed (Creswell, 2014). The interviews, which lasted on average 60 minutes, were audio recorded (with the participants' permission) and then transcribed and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2014). After the transcription of the data from the six interviews, a general impression was gained through reading the transcripts. This involved interpreting the data in its basic sense to obtain a better understanding of what it meant. Ideas about possible categories were jotted down in the margin. I indexed and categorised the data and began an ongoing data analysis process. During the analysis of the different categories, themes and patterns emerged regarding the need for capacity development for SGB and SMT members and the impact it would have on generating collective action to improve performance (Creswell, 2014).

The following themes emerged from the data: (1) developmental needs of the SGB as principal leadership tier in schools, (2) the significance of influence in amassing collective effort, and (3) the need to overcome communication constraints. These arose from a culmination of responses from all participants, document analysis and observations. They were also consistent with the reviewed literature. The themes, descriptions, coding and reading data presented a map to generate findings (Creswell, 2014).

Findings and Discussions

The themes are discussed by way of inclusively intertwining reviewed literature and the theoretical framework.

Developmental Needs of the SGB for Daily Management Support

SGBs are instituted to provide oversight leadership and support of daily activities. From the responses, the significance of the role of SGBs in improvement of results became clear. However, it also became clear that SGBs struggled to carry out their responsibilities as enacted in the SASA. Although they were trained by MGSLG, the majority of the SGB members had not grasped their competencies. Bechuke and Nwosu (2017) attribute this challenge to a lack of appropriate training to assist members to cope with the leadership and governance complications brought about by change. This could be based on their struggle to initiate sustainable collective activities and implement these (Fleming, 2013). All

participants agreed that the ability to lead and govern effectively depended on the continuous development of the key leadership cohort, particularly the SGBs. Participants from Schools A and B emphasised that attendance of developmental workshops was crucial to achieve their quest for operational purpose. Nonetheless, parents who had attended training sessions by MGSLG complained about the level at which the training was pitched. Parents complained that training was not effective because trainers read from manuals most of the time. One parent confessed that "*I attended SDP* [school development plan] *and IWSE* [internal whole school evaluation] *workshop, but I can't remember most of what we trained on because it was a lot to take in*."

Another parent shared that she did not understand what to do most of the time and therefore "*... I rely on the teachers and principal*."

Responses from the two schools highlight challenges afflicting effective development and subsequently daily operational support by SGB members. Mestry and Grobler (2007) are of the opinion that appropriate and shared decisions can only succeed if everyone is sufficiently knowledgeable and have information available to them. The minutes of the SMT of School B exposed that the SMT members were concerned that they had to carry the SGB because the SGB members lacked the requisite skills to lead and govern effectively, which had a bearing on their competitiveness. However, they were appreciative of the SGB members' willingness to participate effectively in the planning and supporting (of the SMT) role.

Parents at School C lamented not being timeously invited to attend training or not being invited at all. One said: "*One time I was informed about training after I had asked because my friend from another school informed me about SGB training*."

Parents generally complained about a lack of interaction by the principal and were concerned about their ability to support the SMT because they lacked the requisite skills. Such lack of inter-relation can arguably cause withdrawal of participation by parents. Lemmer (2007) claims that unfavourable home-school relations have a propensity to discourage participation by parents.

I observed that the principal of School C kept to himself most of the time and did not mingle much with other members of the staff, even during sports activities. The minutes of the SMT and SGB meetings revealed that the principal was the key player during meetings and only gave instructions or shared expectations from his team, which confirmed an odd collaboration or lack thereof. Uneasiness in collaboration brings about tension and discord (Clase, Kok & Van der Merwe, 2007). Govindasamy (2009) maintains that collaboration between the two tiers of leadership is affected by a lack of shared vision and aspirations for the school, particularly when parents are not trained. Bechuke and Nwosu (2017) maintain that leadership collaboration can suffer a huge blow if parents are not empowered.

Even though SGB members of all three schools conceded that development was significant, not all of them attended these workshops, thereby influencing the intended interactive purpose. Some sighted other commitments, for example, "*the workshops were conducted over the weekend*." This competed with other priorities and the majority of parents choose to attend to other matters (Lemmer, 2007). Four of six SGB members across the schools complained about short notice for SGB development workshops. All principals agreed that training of SGBs lacked impact because these members, particularly the parent component, still relied on them (principals) for assistance because training was more generic and not needs specific. Development that lacks impact is a fruitless exercise (Mbokodi & Singh, 2011) and affects the quest for the creative initiative process. Subsequently, the pursuit of collegial spirit is compromised because those who have limited skills may not participate fully in attempts to improve performance, which may lead to difficulties of implementation. This means that the envisaged provision of collaborative leadership might be lopsided because parents lack the capacity to lead, as they could either agree to everything they are told or disagree, causing undue tension, which in turn could inhibit collaboration and affect the pursuit of interactive and operational purposes. Bechuke and Nwosu (2017) state that disagreements affect development in school because focus is diverted due to personal strains and destruction. Loss of focus on work at hand inadvertently results in poor performance.

This study revealed that the majority of parents were of the opinion that they lacked skills to exude confidence in coordinating initiatives for planning and directing governance-related activities that are meant to support daily operations to improve performance.

> *I don't feel confident to do what we are expected to do as the SGB if the principal does not say anything. He normally brief us so that we know what to do. But at least he can also take our comments when we suggest something.*

SGB members with inadequate skills face serious problems regarding the governance and leadership of their schools (Bechuke & Nwosu, 2017). This has a possibility of weakening interaction and operations because opportunities to initiate are limited, and the SGB places its trust in the SMT. According to Clase et al. (2007), shared trust, sound interaction and cooperation among school partners define the level of achievement gained and the extent of success. Therefore, if SGBs are unable to function efficiently, the leadership of the school is affected and effective collaboration may be lacking (Bechuke & Nwosu, 2017; Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018), thereby preventing chances of a successful collec-

tive effort.

Amassing collective effort

Collective effort can be referred to as the development (generation, production, execution) of experiences and environments that will mediate defined institutional outcomes. All principals and 11 of the 15 participants agreed that to develop their schools, they had to all put effort into activities planned to improve performance. Some had this to say:

> *I think we need one another to succeed. They need us as much as we need them to work together.*
> *There's no way we can succeed if we don't work together with the principal and teachers.*
> *When we attended the SGB inauguration, the MEC* [member of the executive committee] *said we have to cooperate if we want our schools to perform like the ones in town. So, it means we have to sit together and decide what we want to do, you know, make a plan …, it's not easy. I think we have to learn a lot.*

Collaborative determination thus refers to the execution of the plans produced and agreed to during the planning process (Mestry & Grobler, 2007). All participants yearned for a team approach and cooperation, and expressed the wish for everyone (including learners) to make an effort to turn around performance. One said: "[w]*e and teachers are parents and so we must work together, otherwise these children will take advantage*."

Such an effort could be likened to the indigenous process of *letsema* (Setlhodi, 2019). Arafat (2016) posits that the value of *letsema* is a collective endeavour to achieve a particular mission. Schechter (2015) assents that it is an African tradition of volunteering and embarking on a collaborative indigenous project characterised by belonging among African people. Parent's yearning to support the children's school resemble a community of practice, *letsema*, employed through the principle of ubuntu to bring about change.

Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) uphold that open practice, inspiring, sharing, reflecting, and taking risk, is essential for the desired change to happen. Ntsimango (2016) suggests that the principal is suitably positioned to bring together the SGB and SMT for collaboration to take place and chances of collective effort to flourish. Parents in two schools (A and B) confessed that the principals served as glue, thus ensuring collaboration. These assertions suggest that the principal is strategically positioned to initiate a collective effort. According to Mestry and Grobler (2007), requisite performance develops from an environment characterised by trust, sound interaction and support from the SGB. A report by the DBE, Republic of South Africa (2019) identified that SMTs acknowledged the important role played by the SGBs, particularly in communicating covert issues that they may not be aware of, thereby, also serving as gatekeepers of their blind spots. Working together for the good of the institution strengthens support and magnifies communication channels (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). Webb et al. (2009) submit that teamwork and shared problem-solving initiatives boost morale and inspire confidence and encourage effective conversations.

Courageous conversations

Collaboration comprises participation by all parties involved. Getting involved is two-pronged; a continuum of efforts that support common purpose, and sharing information on how this can culminate in shared responsibilities. Shared information stems from shared values, supportive leadership, collective creativity, personal practice and conditions supporting the vision (Nkengbeza & Heystek, 2017), and is a source intended for a call to collective action. All the parents from Schools A and B confirmed that their schools called parent and stakeholder meetings for sharing information or getting views regarding their schools, whereas parents from School C bemoaned rare meetings and attributed this to the parents' lack of interest in getting involved in school matters. Lemmer (2007) subjects a lack of shared responsibilities by the school and home to an absence of sufficient coordination, cooperation and complementary involvement by all parties, thwarting chances for audacious conversations. SGB members expressed a desire to engage SMTs regarding problematic issues about the school. A parent from School C said: "*Sometimes I get frustrated when he does not communicate, because I am not sure whether to report staff happening here or what*."

Another parent from School A said; "*we are in constant talk with our principal because we want to help him turn around the school*."

Conversations can be harnessed through intentional involvement of all role players (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2019).

Conversations happen through dialogue. It takes collaborative nuances such as dialogue, involvement, sharing and conversation to communicate plans and intentions for cooperation to succeed, further bestowing authority. Basson and Mestry (2019) suggest that collaboration needs to be intentional yet volitional, to encourage dialogue and determination to participate. Communicating increases the chance to prosper and enable operational success. All SGB members expressed a desire to be kept in the loop about occurrences in their schools. Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) argue that communication eases the possibility of a domination of one party by another such as the principal over the SGB, and strengthens chances of collaboration. Various means of communication are used to invite people to workshops for development purpose and to initiate a collective effort. In both instances, people are involved and people connect through authentic talk, which was confirmed by participants from School A. Sincere discussions are gritty and succinct.

Having grit yields courageous conversations and further strengthens authority. Rozen (2015) confirms that courageous conversations reinforce, recognise and value desired action and proclaim leaders' authority. Courageous dialogue clearly authorises what is acceptable and why by affording others to explain their version of events. SGBs and SMTs need to be courageous in their conversations for sustained cooperation, seeking development and staying tuned to their responsibilities. One SGB member from School A confirmed that it was easy to engage in hard talk when things were not going well because of the relationship established between the SGB and SMT members.

A deep sense of attuning to development, collective action and courage underpins the cultivation of a culture of values such as reasonableness, resonance, courage, compassion, ubuntu and integrity to leverage the gears propelling the frames of collaboration.

Framework for a leadership collaborative approach



Figure 1 The collaborative leadership approach triad

Collaborative leadership couples essential collective direction concerning governance, headship, accountability, guidance, support, development and management (Basson & Mestry, 2019). With the pressures of performance mounting and the need to offer development and support, leaders are now expected to cooperate to accede to the demands of their positions. With this article proposes a conceptual framework of a leadership collaborative approach that consists of the three main cogwheels, presented in Figure 1. Firstly, it specifies that the quality of collaboration be prodded by four diverse but coupled constructs. Secondly, it advances that critical aspects of collaboration are reliant on courageous conversations and courageous authority. Finally, it argues that distinct cardinal features pertinent to improvement of performance impel collaboration.

The collaborative construct gear propels useful ideas for analysing interpersonal dynamics enabling collaboration and assessing interpersonal dynamics enabling the will for initiating collective action. The DBE, Republic of South Africa (2019) argues that schools that succeed adopt a collaborative approach in making decisions. Four constructs central to the leadership of schools that need to turn around performance serve as cogs of this gear: (1) interdependence signifies the ability to recognise and leverage social processes, tap into the vast knowledge and experiences (Schechter, 2015) and allow people to awaken towards collective reliance; (2) being attuned refers to the art of being in concurrence, harmony and being agreeable to understand the people, situation and the fact that they can rely on team support to achieve the vision (Khoza, 2011); (3) connectedness is a social bond where caring of practices, competencies and people is certain and there is a general feeling of mutual devotion; (4) grit is an attribute based on passion and motivation to achieve

objectives and recognise efforts by being courageous in authority and when conversing.

Courage serves as the fundamental cog that propels authenticity and conversations within collaborative circles. Leaders who employ courage recognise that relating to others enable them to deal with issues involving individuals or a group. They are true in exerting authority with integrity and can take tough stances without fear or favour, while dealing with and sharing issues or vulnerabilities amenably (FCG, 2015). Bold leadership cultivates and encourages participation (Khoza, 2011) that is authentic in the cold face of daily operations. Truthfulness begets dependability to authorise and authenticate practices towards gaining focus, purpose and decisiveness (Mann, 2012). Such leaders communicate clearly and ascertain that what needs to happen with the collaboration of all.

The distinct features to impel collaboration between the two tiers of leadership are collective effort, spurring communities of practice, while bestowing common purpose, and amassing social capital to facilitate social dynamics encouraging *letsema* (volunteerism), and employment of critical values such as ubuntu. Thus, ubuntu-inspired leadership (SGBs and SMTs) serves as power-pull for collaborative common purpose (Setlhodi, 2019). All the cogwheels of a triad pull together in harnessing the circle of collaboration by the SGB and SMT.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this article I argue that collaborative practices by the SGB and SMT serve as significant game changers for improving performance through dialogue and initiating collaborative participation of other stakeholders in operational processes in underperforming schools. Basson and Mestry (2019) maintain that collaboration is essential for effective school leadership. The SGB and SMT have clearly articulated responsibilities stated in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996): that they provide leadership through oversight support. This makes them both liable for school performance and suggests that they need to collaborate in providing collective leadership through strengthening enabling efforts and improving practices that restrain performance. The DBE report states that SMTs appreciate the involvement of the SGBs, particularly in working together with them to resolve learner problems (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2019). Research on SGB and SMT collaboration regarding the improvement of performance and development of SGBs is sparse. From the reviewed literature it is clear that collaboration is essential for the progress of schools and improvement of performance. SMTs need SGB oversight support to run schools effectively on a daily basis. However, SGBs require skills to do this successfully. The development of SGBs, therefore, need to be prioritised in order to have fruitful collaboration.

The study reported on here has also provided realities on the SGB members' perceptions regarding their development in order for them to effectively undertake their oversight support role and lead competently. It suggests that the SMT needs to assist SGB members requiring guidance, set up a suitable approach for working together to improve performance, and through the principal, ensure that their development is embraced in order to build a lasting collaborative leadership relationship. This includes giving SGB members timeous information for training, which implies clear communication channels and dialogue to improve on this matter.

The findings reveal that a clearly outlined leadership approach is desirable to shape collaborative practices and achieve goals. Noticeably, the two tiers of leadership need to stimulate initiatives such as the collaborative cycles of interactive social and operational purpose, which involves all activities within the school. This implies that consideration of the development of the leadership duo has needs be initiated from where creativity can arise, and *letsema* employed to further encourage collective action in the quest of improving performance.

The qualitative method employed yielded the development of a collaborative leadership approach triad and led to the following recommendations:

- Needs-specific SGB development and SMT support need to be prioritised.
- The SGB and SMT collaboration needs to permeate for effective leadership to develop and enable the leadership to plan activities that bring about improved performance.
- Both the SGB's and SMT's leadership should be inspired by ubuntu, serving as an enabler motivating a determination to collaborate for the good of the institution.
- The SGB and SMT should have courageous conversations to achieve their goals.
- The DBE should embark on a longitudinal study on collaboration between the SGB and SMT, team up leaders with those of good performing schools, and provide targeted development for leadership structures.

Future studies related to the topic could probe the extent to which partnering of both leadership cohorts with schools that perform well, within the same district or cluster, through structured development strategies can enable achievement of sustainable performance improvement practices.

Notes

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