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Analysing significant needs that South African institutions have in respect of staff professional development: a closer look at the challenges, mechanisms, and impact thereof

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Abstract
This paper identifies and discusses the significant needs that Higher Education Institutions have in terms of professional development for their staff. Firstly, the article analyses what professional development in higher education institutions means and argues that professional development is process that strengthens and extend knowledge, skills, and conceptions of academics. This can be accomplished by gaining access to education and training opportunities in the workplace, through a third-party organization, or by observing others perform the job. As a results professional development is essential if institutions of higher learning. want to remain relevant professionally, academically, economically, and socially. Secondly, using the review of the literature this paper identifies external drives such as relevance, neoliberalism, managerialism, internationalisation, globalisation, and decolonisation that have an impact on staff professional development. The paper critically comments on these key needs and the challenges that staff members face in this regard. Lastly, the paper concluded that the institution should always revise and evaluate mechanisms that institutions have put in place. The study recommends that there should be a collaboration between academic staff and management.

Key words: Professional development, managerialism, decolonisation, globalisation, internationalisation.

1. Introduction and background

Professional development (PD) denotes many types of educational experiences related to an individual's work. (Mizell, 2010). Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, educators, accountants, engineers, and people in a wide variety of businesses participate in PD to learn and apply new knowledge and skills to improve their performance at work. (Mizell, 2 010). To this end, Mizell (2010) indicates that PD can mean a 'formal' or informal process. PD is a formal process when people attend a conference, seminar, workshop, collaborative learning among members in the same workplace, a course at a college or university (Mizell, 2010). Whereas an informal PD takes place in a discussion among colleagues, independent research or reading, observation of colleagues' work, or any other form of learning from a peer. (Mizell, 2010).

From the above statement, it is worth noting that this essay discusses PD in the context of Higher education. Similarly, institutions use different connotations of PD such as staff development, in-service, training, professional learning, or continuing education (Mizell, 2010; Mabalane, 2001). That is to say, the connotation herein is used interchangeably 'staff development or professional development. While focusing on the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. One should bear in mind that the HEIs encompass both support or non-academic staff and academic staff. (Bouhey & McKenna, 2021). Without undermining the role played by support staff within the institutions (Baltaru, 2019).

This essay focuses more on academic staff. As Teicher et al (2013) allude 'academic profession strongly drives by intrinsic motives who concentrate primarily on the substance of teaching and research' (p.180). Furthermore, Inamorato et al (2019) designate 'academics' as 'teaching staff working in higher education (p.9). In the same vein, putting it in this context, PD relates to any activity that aims to strengthen and extend knowledge, skills, and conceptions of academics (Kneale et al, 2016).

Ideally, PD is portrayed as a vehicle of empowerment that focuses on assisting academics to improve their knowledge, understanding, and skills. (Mabalane, 2016). To this end, several HEIs have made progress in respect of academic staff development programs, however, this PD does not address the specific needs of staff. Mabalane (2016) emphasizes that managers in the institution often plan this program without consulting the envisaged participants or conducting a proper need assessment. Similarly, Clegg (2003) points out that 'top-down institutional and quality agendas shape the context for much continuing professional development (p.42). To this end, it avers that there are driving forces that influence institutions to impose specific training on academics. It is against this backdrop that this essay focuses on the key needs of HEIs on staff development and the challenges thereof. Having said that, this essay uses desktop analysis research. Precisely, despite the introduction, the next section discusses the key needs of higher education institutions, followed by the identified needs and challenges encountered thereof, the mechanism put in place comes as the following section and then comes the conclusion. Let us discuss the key needs below.

2.   The key needs of higher education institutions

Ultimately, Higher Education Act states that institutions should focus on teaching and learning, research, and community service (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997; Mubangizi, 2005). These are considered as the core functions of the University. South African higher education line recognizes three university types: classical universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology (Teicher et al, 2013). These universities share the common core functions as mentioned above. It is relevant to note that these core activities done by universities are no more perpetual they have taken a new direction. Since universities cannot work in isolation, there are aspects such as partnerships at the international level, social engagement (for example engagement with business and industry), and developmental issues that impact the university. Consequently, this new development upsurges the needs that the university has in respect of staff development. The following are the key needs that are identified by several scholars respectively relevance, neoliberalism, managerialism, internationalisation, globalisation, and decolonisation (Pillay,2019; Ntshoe et al, 2008; Teicher et al, 2013; Nsizwazonke, Y, 2020).

2.1 Relevancy

In respect of relevancy, Teicher et al (2013) insist on the way the academic goal has shifted from 'the scholarship of discovery to the scholarship of application'. While the

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former's goal was to create fundamental knowledge, the latter involves 'the pooling and meddling of insights from several disciplines and tends to focus an on outcomes that have a direct impact on everyday life (Teicher et al, 2013, p,18). These authors claim that relevancy creates more options for employment for future scholars outside academia. However, this paradigm shift 'relevant academy' can cause recruitment difficulties in fields such as science, technology, and engineering and will impact on national goals of widening access in aforesaid disciplines (Pillay,2019). Moreover, it is argued that this transformation can influence academic values systems, work practices, and the very nature and location of power and control in academia (Pillay, 2019).

2.2 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism in higher education is considered as the knowledge economy, it consists of the view that education is simply another market commodity (Lynch, 2006). The corporatisation and marketization of the universities have their origin in neoliberalism politics that is premised on the assumption that the market can replace the democratic state as the primary producer of culture and value (Lynch, 2006). The neo-liberal model considers education as just another service to be delivered on the market especially to those who can afford to buy it (Lynch, 2006). There is a drastic change in the institution from being a centre of learning to be a business organization where productivity is the target (Saunders, 2007). Olssen and Peters (2010) pinpoint that traditional professional culture of open intellectual inquiry and discourse has been adjusted with the institutional burden on performativity as evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurances measures, and academic audits (Olssen & Peters, 2010). It is worth noting that neo-liberalism has a close link to managerialism that is discussed below.

2.3 Managerialism

Managers in higher education nowadays are influenced by the ideology of management style in the private sector (Davis et al, 2014; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). University managers endeavour that their organizations evolve into entrepreneurial, flexible, and commercially responsive (Davis et al, 2014). In order words, managerialism implies that universities should work on a more market economic perspective where the primary aim will be economic rationalism and absolute profit (Adams, 2006). Managerialism is more concerned about the productivity, efficiency, sustainability, and competitiveness of the institution (Davis et al, 2014). This trend motivates institutions to become more responsive and fulfil their needs conveniently (Davis et al, 2014). This statement is considered as a positive aspect of managerialism, in addition, academics rely on managerialism as a driver of performance, professionalism, and status (Kolsaker, 2008). In the same vein, Pillay (2019) refers to new managerialism that instigated completion

between employees in the HEIs using internal cost centres to fan this competition and evaluate the performance of academics.

2.4 Globalisation

Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) refer globalisation to as 'the economic, political and cultural processes whereby a borderless world, the so-called global village, is created by economic, political and cultural processes, supported by the communication revolution of the mass media and the internet' (p.120). According to Adams globalisation is based on capitalism, and can, consequently be portrayed as the current phase of capitalism (Adams, 2006). The rapid advances of information and communication technologies had played a huge role in international flows of capital, consumer goods, people, and products of culture and knowledge (Adams, 2006). In the South African context, the connection between globalization and managerialism is evident in institutional governance (Adams, 2006). Therefore, managerialism will always aim at economic rationalism and the profit ideal (Adams, 2006).

2.5 Internationalisation

Higher education has undergone drastic changes which are considered a revolution (Jowie, 2012). Among those changes are the issues of the emergence of the Knowledge Economy and the development of internationalisation (Jowie, 2012). Internationalisation is the main driver of changes in the higher education system universally (Jowie, 2012; Knight, 2008). Ntshoe explains internationalisation as 'a policy or process that refers to the patterns of interaction and interconnections that develop between two or more nations' (Ntshoe,2002, p.84). Furthermore, Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) point out that 'internationalisation entails a complex process of an institution engagement with other international institutions for academic, cultural, political, and economic reasons' (p.120).

Teicher et al (2013) emphasise that 'the international mobility of students and staff has grown; new technologies connect scholarly communities around the world...' (P.17). In as much as internationalisation creates an opportunity for academic collaboration in the world. It is worth mentioning that the shift is turning towards the promotion of African values system such as Ubuntu specifically within South African's higher Education. (Nyoni, 2020). Nyoni (2020) opines that 'it is important to put adequate support towards that aim at promoting greater cooperation and integration of individuals and institutions of higher learning in Africa in general and South Africa in particular' (p.122). The author that epistemologies should derive from international engagements that are subject to indigenous societal requirements. Having said that decolonisation is another key need that is identified in HEIs operation.

2.6 Decolonisation.

Although decolonisation does have a universal definition (Fredua-Kwateng, 2021). It becomes a trend a HEIs in South Africa cannot turn a blind eye to it when planning for

staff professional development. Fredua-kwarteng (2021) indicates that every definition of decolonisation is 'context–embedded'. The author attempts to define decolonisation in the African University as 'the process of undoing all legacies of colonialism.' (Fredua-Kwarteng,2021, P.1). It has been argued that colonialism is killing and erasing indigenous knowledge. (ibid). Nsizwazonke (2020) believes that education has been westernised and globalisation, as well as internationalisation, are portrayed as 'the elephants in the room. Globalisation always presents an opposing view in promoting Africanisation. (Nsizwazonke, 2020).

In the South African context, decolonisation is associated with the growing student's dissatisfaction which led to fees must 'fall campaign'. (Nsizwazonke,2020). It is suggested that South African institutions include indigenous African ways of knowing. (Fredua-Kwarteng,2021). This means to say that decolonisation also forms part of the key needs in staff professional development. The next section discusses the identified key needs and the challenges thereof.

3. The identified needs and challenges encountered by HEis.

It should be noted that higher education institutions must meet the needs in respect of the professional development of staff, however meeting these needs comes with challenges (Pillay,2019). Firstly, regarding the relevance academics cannot confine themselves in their specific disciplines. Pillay (2019) claims that the mere fact of abandoning one discipline and work in professionally oriented disciplines can be challenging for researchers. It averts that the driving forces negatively impact academics research interest.

Secondly, in respect of neoliberalism and managerialism trends, it can be stated that the idea of making higher learning institutions 'business-like by drawing on the management model from commerce and industry (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) has drastically impacted Academic perfomance. In the same vein research conducted by Ntshoe and others (2008) shown that managerialism and corporatism have negatively impacted the academic profession in South Africa in the following areas: 'increasing workloads and the low morale of academics; an increasing emphasis on performance, professional standards, and external accountability; revenue-generating programmes; specialisation and the complexity of university work, and the diffusion and blurring of roles' (p.395).

Thirdly, pertaining to globalisation, while this trend is promoting efficiency and accountability of the higher education sector, reinforce and reproduce inequalities and injustices within and between nations (Ntshoe, 2002). For example, in South Africa, historically disadvantaged institutions and communities do not have the capacity and sufficient resources to survive in a competitive national and international context (Ntshoe, 2002). Notably, globalisation tends to undermine equity, redress, social justice and social reconstruction and development (Ntshoe, 2002).

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Fourthly, with regards to internationalisation, it is argued that this process is driven by many dynamisms namely institutional dynamism on one hand and external dynamism on the other hand (Neale-Shutte & Fourie,2006). Relating to institutional dynamism this depends on the institution understanding of internationalisation which might be for example overseas study or ideas exchanges, enrolling international students, foreign language, international colleagues, international links, income generation languages (Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006). Globalization, government funding, the internet, marketization of education, and distance learning are examples of external dynamisms. (Neale-Shutte & Fourie,2006). As result, there is a need for each institution to set its goal and strategies to connect contrasting activities and create harmony among them (Neale-Shutte & Fourie,2006).

Lastly, in respect of decolonisation, it is stated 'the current struggle for decolonisation and educational liberation is embedded and deeply rooted in the growing notion that the current educational system does not promote social engineering as a fundamental principle for African scholarship' (Nszwazonke, 2020, p.280). there is a need to focus more on African scholarship. The following section discusses mechanisms that institution has put in place concerning staff professional development

4. Mechanisms that HEis put in place and the impact thereof
To respond to rapid changes in the above-mentioned trends. Universities have put policies as well as managerial structure in place. For example, Unizulu has put in place a policy about internationalisation. The globalisation aspect is included in the mission of the university, which is 'to produce globally competitive graduates. Moreover, academics are also encouraged to publish and attend an international conference. Similarly, in respect of decolonisation, the institution strategic plan is to develop branding and reputation that reflects the African character. Furthermore, it is indicated that the evolution of managerialism has resulted in the establishment of institutional positions such as director of quality assurance, risk management, intellectual transfer, equity, internationalisation and other functions that have arisen as a result of widening conceptions of the purpose of universities and the claimed need to active management of all areas of academic life (Boughey & McKenna,2021). These authors mentioned that the power of these institutional managers is often experienced by academics in negative ways as they feel a shift of focus away from the academic project (Boughey & McKenna,2021). Consequently, the work of academics is not valued.

5. Conclusion

Higher education institutions experienced several pressures due to external drives such as academic relevancy, neoliberalism, managerialism, internationalisation, and globalisation. This essay focused on the challenges, mechanisms, and impact of the afore-mentioned trends about academic staff development. It was revealed that academics are not allowed to discuss their needs. This essay recommends that there should be a

collaboration between academic staff and management. The identified needs should be positively utilised by the higher institution since higher education can benefit in terms of professionalism as well as administrative accountability. However, management must balance between the needs of academics and the institution as the voice of academics is significant for the institution enhancement.

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