

# South African Public Secondary School Administration Machinery: A Case of Three Educational Institutions

NS Modiba

University of Limpopo, South Africa

---

**Abstract:** This paper examines how a public secondary school administration machinery could be made more responsive to the attainment of an institution's mandate of quality instructional practice. The paper is both conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. Narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were employed to generate data. Out of the population of 15 public secondary schools in Mopane District in Limpopo Province, South Africa, three were conveniently sampled and in each secondary school, a school principal and a deputy principal became research participants. Research findings revealed that lack of accountable institutional leadership contributes to unaligned administration machinery. Secondly, the absence of ethical institutional leadership contributes to administration machinery being in disarray. Thirdly, the absence of solidified work ethic contributes to unaligned administration machinery. Lastly, lack of consequence management for derelict of duty promotes utilisation of inappropriate administration machinery. The researcher recommends for the repurposing of administration machinery to contribute to its efficacy.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Administration, Consequences, Machinery

---

## 1. Introduction

Schooling comprises the primary, the secondary and the tertiary sector. Of these three sectors the middle one is more than critical in view of its positioning. This is the sifting sector in terms of checking as to whether the preceding sector, as well as the succeeding sectors, are fit for purposes (Leshoro, 2022). Administration machinery of a secondary schooling sector has to operate like a well-oiled machine which is efficacious. Any gap of dysfunctionality by this sector is likely to be a recipe for disaster for the other two sectors. Ill-prepared learners from the primary schooling sector has to be identified by the secondary schooling sector and remedial intervention be applied on that scholar to get a learner ready for the next schooling sector. A secondary schooling sector is the refinery sector for the primary schooling sector and the tertiary one. A solid administration machinery is indispensable (Lee, 2022). This underscores the importance of the secondary schooling sector getting its administration machinery to be vivacious and efficacious. Administration machinery is likely to bring about a secondary schooling sector that is characterised by institutional efficacy. That occurs where the principles of good governance like openness, transparency, consultation and participation are observed at all times (Fox, 2010; Theletsane, 2014).

Many educational institutions have poor administration machinery. Placing inadequate attention to accountable and ethical governance of administration machinery has to be avoided (Moyo, 2015).

Masina (2015) narrates that where there is an ethical, healthy and responsive administration machinery, the delivery of educational service to the recipients is likely to be satisfactory. A will-power by headmasters and headmistresses of educational institutions, and their subordinates, to accountable, ethical and solidified work ethic plus ethical leadership matters (Khoza, 2015). To keep a secondary school's administration machinery contributing to the good performance of a school, is imperative to address the absence of an unaligned governance structures which are known to be compromising the efficacy of administration machinery. Administration machinery persists to operate with inherited meek and strange governance patterns that are based on their erstwhile colonial masters, something deserving to be eradicated (Tisdall, 2015). That perpetuates subjugation and delivery of poor educational standards to learners.

Nkuna (2015) remarks that untransformed administration machinery whose governance is shaky and at times unethical and leaderless in nature, instils in organisational incumbents a sense of self-doubt and

inferiority complex. Accountable and ethical institutional leadership in educational administration machinery is indispensable (Yukl, 2006; Motsepe, 2015). Where administration machinery operates with unaccountable and unethical institutional leaders that are indescribably inefficacious after nearly three decades of independence, deserves to be avoided. Siswana (2007) asserts that conspicuous indicators of unaccountable and unethical institutional leadership in secondary school administration machinery are the dysfunctional institutional systems and structures applied. Their manifestations could be the unending inability by educational institutions to attain their mandate. There is an amount of reluctance by myriad administration machinery of educational institutions, to transform and reposition themselves through placing adequate attention to accountable and ethical institutional leadership and appropriate governance structures to operate differently (Khoza, 2015; Shejvali, 2015).

## 2. Literature Review

The review of literature highlights that the South African secondary schooling administration machinery needs to be healthy to cope with its mandate (Nkosi, 2022). A secondary schooling sector resembles a refinery for the wrongs that occurred at the primary schooling sector in preparation of the graduates for the tertiary schooling sector. That is possible where a school's administration machinery is sufficiently aligned to institutional objectives (Mzileni, 2022). That could be possible in case an administration machinery of an educational institution is structured in such a manner that it at all times promotes the principle of meritocracy within the incumbents. That can better be served where an administration machinery is ever responsive to the faced institutional hurdles, be they of learner indolence to their studies, lack of teacher devotion to their work and the experienced leadership and management vacuum as created by organisational heads (Pelo, 2022). An administration machinery could demean a secondary schooling sector when not appropriately structured. This will be evident as an administration machinery is seen creating an increase in trust deficit within the institutional incumbents. The review of literature emphasises that with no strong administration machinery, an educational institution could show its true twisted face (Sobuwa, 2022). Literature review shares that where poor administration machinery is missing, an education sector is unlikely to afford sufficient

attention to any emerging concerns and interests of institutional incumbents and those of others. The other side of a coin is that with dubious administration machinery in place, an education sector could experience a level of unprofessionalism, job dissatisfaction by teachers and low learner morale which could precipitate institutional under-performance and a general hostile schooling environment for institutional members (Dooms, 2022).

Literature reviewed shows that a strong administration machinery in an education institution is necessary due to its ability to transform an organisation into a champion of humanism. This is where institutional incumbents are adequately motivated to carry out their organisational responsibilities out of no coercion. Where an administration machinery is shaky, there could be manipulation of institutional incumbents' emotions and contamination and exploitation of their natural desire for organisational harmony (Monyooe, 2022). With proper administration machinery in place, a secondary schooling sector could have morally upright institutional members. That is essential in view of its ability to place the well-being of organisational incumbents above everything else (Mzileni, 2022).

The review of literature reveals that of the available theoretical perspectives, in view of the nature of this research, together with the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study, the Critical Theory was exposed as the most relevant theoretical perspective for this paper. The theory sufficiently illuminates issues of how an appropriate administration machinery serves as a cornerstone for the excellent teaching and learning delivery by a secondary schooling sector (Allen, 2015). The Critical Theory helped the researcher to make meaning from the whole notion of the partnership of the performance of a secondary schooling sector and the prevalence of a solid administration machinery in a school. Briefly, one of the principles of Critical Theory is that very often the truth serves the status quo. The other principle relates to the question of: why is it that certain groups of people are so privileged? These fundamental principles were helpful in clarifying how lack of good institutional and ethical leadership, delay the enhancement of administration machinery of a secondary schooling sector (Motsepe, 2015). The selection of Critical Theory in this paper, is informed by its encouragement of reflective and analytical thoughts about inefficacious administration machinery. It is the Critical Theory

which is better placed to adequately respond to a question of whether the relationship between the performance of a secondary schooling sector and its administration machinery is a permanent or a temporary one (Moyo, 2015). The Critical Theory reveals that poor performance in a secondary schooling context could be entrenched if the administration machinery is weak. The Critical Theory serves as a basis for understanding and interpreting the whole issue of secondary schooling administration machinery at times demonstrating lack of accountable and ethical institutional leadership. Higgs and Smith (2010) advise that knowledge and how we understand truth, including scientific truth, moral truth and historical truth should not be separated from everyday life. The Critical Theory helps in the better understanding of strong and weak administration machinery in schooling. The Critical Theory assists in arriving at the root cause of the absence of accountable and ethical institutional leadership in some secondary schooling administration machinery (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009). The Critical Theory emphasises ethics in administration machinery of secondary schools. It has a potential of uncovering whether the process of inability to create structures and systems by some administration machinery of the secondary schooling sector, in order to service learners well, is deliberate or unintentional.

Through the Critical Theory, the problem of this paper is better illuminated. The problem centres around explaining the opportunity missed by the secondary schooling administration machinery by taking their own learners for granted through managing and leading their administration machinery without accountable and ethical institutional leaders and managers. The Critical Theory advocates for the critical reflection on society, in order to discover the hidden assumptions that maintain the existing power relationships between leaders and followers (Higgs & Smith, 2010). Embracing a Critical Theory by the researcher, centres around the theory advising against separating the context of unaccountable, unethical and inefficacious institutional leadership in educational administration machinery of Limpopo Province, South Africa and the learnt social oppression which practitioners in secondary schooling administration machinery, have been subjected to during the era of apartheid and colonialism. Administration machinery requires to be emancipated from unethical and inefficacious governance (Arden, 2013; Tisdall, 2015).

The problem in this paper rests on how the secondary schooling sector struggles to produce excellent learner results due to utilising a disabling administration machinery. This is a predicament to overcome because its existence prevents schooling from servicing learners as expected through a solid administration machinery characterised by ethical leadership with appropriate governance systems and structure (Hofstee, 2010; Doods, 2022). The research questions addressed in this paper are anchored on the Critical Theory as the theoretical perspective that underscores this paper (Higgs & Smith, 2010). The research questions are as follow: What are the roles and significance of ethical and good governance structures and systems that are carefully crafted in line with the resoluteness of an administration machinery of a secondary schooling sector, in creating a secondary schooling like no other in terms of perpetually producing above average learner results? What are the ideas, concerns and aspirations of incumbents of educational institutions in maintaining the efficacy of their administration machinery?

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

This is a qualitative case study paper. The problem was found to be researchable along the qualitative school of thought as against the others (Dawson, 2006; Levin, 2005). The choice of the qualitative research methodology was triggered by the fact that the paper is being underscored by the Critical Theory. The combination of the two, helped immensely in terms of illuminating issues of how the utilisation of an improper and disabling administration machinery by some secondary schooling sector emerged being one of the sources of under-delivery of the secondary schools (Masina, 2015). Unaccountable and unethical institutional leadership practised within an educational institution bereft of a solid work ethic within the institutional incumbents and lack of consequence management for institutional incumbents who dodge doing their work, contribute to the poor academic learner outcomes by myriad schooling sectors. With the Critical Theory underpinning this paper, the researcher utilised it, to interrogate how the secondary schooling sector normally understands accountable and ethical institutional leadership as part of the requisite administration machinery capable of generating efficacious governance in educational institutions. The theory was also applied to establish the common reactions by members of educational institutions

that are perpetually inefficacious owing to utilising disabling administration machinery. There was a need to amalgamate the Critical Theory and the qualitative research approach aiming at maximising the ability and strength of the Critical Theory towards the exposure of how inefficacious administration machinery that are manifested through unethical governance, amongst others, rob some educational institutions of the quality educational service (Creswell, 2010). Partnering the qualitative research approach and the Critical Theory enabled the researcher to make an in-depth understanding of how despite many years since apartheid formally collapsed, its effects remain firmly in place. Such effects manifest where certain administration machinery applied does not lead to top performing schooling (Welman *et al.*, 2005). Both the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were utilised to construct data relevant for this paper. To triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with six school principals, two from each, in the three conveniently sampled secondary schools. Responses were audio-taped for transcription later on (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research title whose focus is: how a public secondary school administration machinery could be made more responsive to the attainment of an institution's mandate. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques. Administration machinery was examined with regard to their contribution to good learner performance in secondary schooling sector. Paying attention only to those three secondary schools, where each contributed a principal and a deputy for interviewing, ought not create an impression that they were the only administration machinery that were worse off as regards unaccountable and unethical institutional leadership in Limpopo Province of South Africa. They were selected because down the years, the researcher familiarised himself with issues of poor and inefficacious administration machinery in those institutions. The Critical Theory has been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: the absence of solidified work ethic, lack of accountability institutional leadership and lack of consequence management.

#### 4.1 The Absence of Solidified Work Ethics

For any secondary school administration machinery to be credible and ethical, a display and exhibition of a solidified work ethic by every institutional incumbent is essential and imperative. Embracing the Ubuntu philosophy and the Batho Pele Principles pave a way for the demonstration of devotion to render an impressive and an extra-ordinary educational service to the learner population with aplomb and distinctions (Baloyi, 2019). School Principal 1 of School A complains that:

*"the dilemma with myriad secondary schools is that their administration machinery are tailored along the governance models which were utilised by the apartheid and the settlers' regimes prior to 1994".*

Deputy School Principal 3 of School C responds that:

*"The reality is that the appropriate and necessary administration machinery that resembles ethical governance systems and structures are vital to support a public administration machinery to reinforce the culture of professionalism in its operations, but such is unfortunately missing in the bulk of the secondary schooling institutions".*

Madue (2013) and Khaas (2019) emphasise that the existence of professionalism leads to the sowing of the solidified work ethic which is vital for the competency and productivity of a schooling sector. This distinguishes one public administration from the rest. Operating with structures and systems whose development was foreign to institutional set-ups, was a grave error. Whether current administration machinery itself will ultimately be able to sever the historically established ties with their erstwhile apartheid regimes, it is a matter of wait and see (Tsheola, 2002). Zwane (2015), Mbele (2019) and Musyoka (2019) articulate that structurally, nothing has changed in administration machinery since the collapse of apartheid. Formally, apartheid may have been outlawed but practically it continues to wreak havoc on the lives of many members of the civil society and their institutions like secondary schooling administration machinery. Apartheid appears to have been internalised by some public servants to the level where anything and everything whose genesis is not from the previous regime, is being held with low regard. Small wonder then that it has to be easy for some administration machinery and their

practitioners to marvel and celebrate the persistent use of inherited administration policies instead of having developed theirs that were not alien to the present context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling. These contradictions of certain administration machinery as found in myriad secondary schooling sectors, ought not be countenanced to eternity. Some patriotic African administrators keep on reminding that, 21<sup>st</sup> century was supposed to be an African century in every respect (Mbeki, 2003).

#### 4.2 Lack of Accountable Institutional Leadership

Accountability matters where an administration machinery has to be functional and extra-ordinarily good (Brown, 2019). School Principal 2 of School B emphasises that:

*"accountability and stability of a public administration machinery determine the level at which that public administration would be able to attract the positive image or not".*

Deputy Principal 3 of School C contends that:

*"the fact that the majority of public administration machinery are characterised by either instability or disharmony, is not helping the course in an attempt to have public administration machinery operating in a functional and an efficacious way to enhance the level of educational service delivery to the learner population".*

Arden (2013) & Bell (2019) remark that a fundamental question to pose is: why is accountability as one of the essential elements of ethical institutional leadership missing in myriad of the public administration machinery? Literature review reveals that a large amount of the enemies of accountable and ethical institutional leadership in administration machinery are incumbents themselves. Where there is lack of sufficient accountability as part of good and ethical governance, a public administration machinery stands to lose the positive image it has being enjoying (Omano, 2005; Gobillot, 2008; Owabe, 2013; Mooney, 2019; Musyoka, 2019). This is not ignoring the political influence that keeps on rearing its ugly head that directly or indirectly impacts on the accountability level of administration machinery. Efficacious and ethical governance within a sound administration machinery, creates an environment of accountability where the desire by public servants

to offer excellent service delivery reigns supreme (Cunha, Filho & Goncalves, 2010). Failure to do so may continue to plunge administration machinery in the quagmire of perpetual underachievement manifested in poor academic learner outcomes, particularly from the secondary schooling sector service delivery point of view (Jim, 2019).

#### 4.3 Lack of Consequence Management

Everywhere in the world, whenever there is derelict of duty by incumbents, there must be consequences. That aims at deterring further derelict of duty. Allen (2014) remarks that as long as the creation of efficacious and ethical governance for sound public administration machinery is not taken as a priority by myriad administration machinery, replacement of underperformance with performance by learners, may take a while to occur. School Principal 3 of School C reminds that:

*"a number of factors account for that state of affairs such as inability to appoint sufficiently dedicated and honest people as public servants, being part of the reason".*

Deputy Principal 2 of School B advises that:

*"lack of alignment of skills, leadership and organisational capabilities to the services to be delivered to the stakeholders, also contributes to dissatisfactory educational services rendered by public administration machinery to stakeholders".*

Mbele (2019) adds that another factor that could make an administration machinery to lack behind from others is permitting the absence of consequence management for the derelict of duty by incumbents. Consequences management could serve as an appropriate deterrent. In addition, an alignment of aims to avoid never compromising the quality of educational service delivered to stakeholder is imperative. Where alignment exists, there is likely never to be business as usual in the form of replacing underperformance (Musyoka, 2019). Application of consequence management becomes practicable where every incumbent is clear about what has to be performed in an educational institution. Thornhill & Van Dijk (2010) remark that bad customer service by administration machinery is avoidable as long as the right basics are in place and organisational practitioners abide by them to prevent arriving at the stage of consequence

management (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sebola, 2012; Brown, 2019). Consequence management has to be applied where institutional incumbents were provided with the requisite resources and skills to do the job (Tisdall, 2005; Khaas, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

Administration machinery in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa, needs to deal with their challenges of unaccountable, unethical institutional leadership and the absence of solidified work ethic in the ranks of their institutional incumbents. This will enable their administration machinery to improve service delivery to their learner population. Administrators need to ascertain that their learner population is in a trajectory of forward development by offering them decent and quality educational opportunities. This is possible with solidified work ethic from institutional incumbents which enables them to prioritise high level quality teaching and learning to scholars. Evidently, administration machinery of substance needs to embrace consequence management for derelict of duty by institutional incumbents. A proper alignment of governance structures and other organisational elements to avoid compromising the success of an existing administration machinery is imperative. The study therefore recommend the following:

- There is a need for public administration machinery to emphasise accountable and ethical institutional leadership at all times by the institutional incumbents to render a schooling service like no other.
- There is a need by administration machinery to promote solidified work ethic within the institutional incumbents with more emphasis on getting every institutional member to offer a quality educational service out of free volition.

Lastly, there is a need to address leadership and management deficit, experienced in myriad administration machinery that prevent the appointment of honest public servants with the good service-oriented attitude and mentality.

## References

Allen, J. 2014. *As a man thinketh*. New York: Dover Publishers.  
 Arden, P. 2013. *It is not how good you are, it's how good you want to be*. London: Phaidon.

Baloyi, B. 2019. We continue being poor. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.  
 Bell, T. 2019. The voters must end the rot of corruption. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.  
 Bell, T. 2022. Unity, not nationality should be the tie that binds us. *City Press*, 26 June 2022.  
 Brown, J. 2019. Execs upbeat about reception of Team SA. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.  
 Creswell, J.W. 2010. *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage Publishers.  
 Cunha, C.M, Filho, T. & Goncalves, R.S. 2010. Accomplishments and limitations: The National Development Plan as a political economic strategy. *Evo Morales's Latin American Perspectives*, 173.37(4):177-196.  
 Dawson, C. 2006. *A practical guide to research methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and projects*. Oxford: How to Books.  
 Fox, W. 2010. *A guide to public ethics*. Cape Town: UCT Press.  
 Hofstee, E. 2010. *Constructing a good dissertation: A practical guide to finishing a Masters, MBA or PhD on schedule*. South Africa: Epe publishers.  
 Glatthorn, A.A. & Joyner, R.L. 2005. *Writing the winning thesis or dissertation: A step-by-step guide*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.  
 Gobillot, E. 2008. *The connected leader: Creating agile organizations for people performance and profit*. London: Kogan Page.  
 Higgs, P. & Smith, S. 2010. *Rethinking Truth*. Juta: Cape Town.  
 Hofstee, E. 2010. *Constructing a good dissertation: A practical guide to finishing a Masters, MBA or PhD on schedule*. South Africa: Epe publishers.  
 Jim, I. 2019. It's time to pursue an agenda for workers, *City Press*, 27 January 2019.  
 Kgobane, G. 2019. The ANC is a soulless shell. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.  
 Khaas, T. 2019. A workable truce is in our interest. *City Press*. 27 January 2019.  
 Khoza, G. 2015. Courage will right the wrongs. *Mail and Guardian*, 26 June 2015.  
 Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. 2007. *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.  
 Lee, N. 2022. Aim of education is to lead the child towards enterprising adulthood. *Sowetan*, 2 February 2022.  
 Leshoro, D. 2022. Poor education and wealth disparity perpetuates inequality in SA. *City Press*, 26 June 2022.  
 Levin, P. 2005. *Excellent dissertations: Student friendly guides*. UK: Open University Press.  
 Madue, S.M. 2013. The role of oversight governance. *Loyola Journal of Social Sciences*, 27(1):37-56.  
 Masina, L. 2015. Corrupt police shake down Malawi. *Mail and Guardian*, 8 May 2015.  
 Masina, L. 2015. Malawi cash scandal reaches SA. *Mail and Guardian*, 26 June 2015.  
 Mbeki, T. 2003. *Public Symposium on Millennium Goals*. Progress Governance Conference in London, 12 July 2003.

- Mbele, S. 2019. At the heart of PICS woes is a lack of ethical leadership. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.
- Mooney, G. 2019. How to deal with bullies in the office. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.
- Motsepe, P. 2015. What the continent needs to prosper. *Mail and Guardian*, 5 June 2015.
- Mouton, J. 1996. *Understanding Social Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Moyo, H. 2015. Greed, corruption leads to poverty among Zim's pensioners. *Mail and Guardian*, 7 August 2015.
- Musyoka, J. 2019. All corruption does is entrench poverty. *City Press*, 27 January 2019.
- Nkuna, S. 2015. Shake off this self-hate. *Sowetan*, 17 March 2015.
- Omano, E. 2005. *A democratic developmental state in Africa?* Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.
- Qwabe, B.R. 2013. Realising South Africa's vision 2030: A capacity building perspective. *Administratio Publica*, 21(2):21-36.
- Sebola, M.P. 2012. Objective role of the South African media industry: The watchdogs for good governance and service delivery. *Journal of Public Administration*, 47(1):407-419.
- Shejvali, A. 2015. Ask the Africans betrayed by their leaders about the ICC. *Mail & Guardian*, 26 June 2015.
- Siswana, B. 2007. *Leadership and governance in the South African public service: An overview of Public Finance Management System*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Pretoria: Pretoria.
- Sithole, P. 2022. The matter of our public service and its deterioration. *City Press*, 26 June 2022.
- Theletsane, K.I. 2014. Drawbacks in South Africa's pursuit of democratic rule and good governance. *Journal of Public Administration*, 49(3):836-846.
- Thornhill, C. & Van Dijk, G. 2010. Public administration theory: Justification for Conceptualisation. *Journal of Public Administration*, 45(1.1.):95-110.
- Tisdall, S. 2015. Burundi on the brink of a cataclysm, *Mail and Guardian*, 8 May 2015.
- Tsheola, J.T. 2002. South Africa in GEAR: "A better life for all" or a zero-sum game of globalization? *GeoJournal*, 57: 15-28. Available at: <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/>. Accessed 24/February 2014.
- Van Niekerk, E.J & Van Niekerk, P. 2009. Managing change in education through a model of long-term leadership and short term leadership. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(1):1- 21.
- Welman, J., Kruger, F. & Mitchell, B. 2005. *Research methodology*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Yukl, G. 2006. *Leadership in Organisations*. New York: University of Albany.
- Zwane, T. 2015. Activism: The ANCWL is out of its league. *Mail & Guardian*, 20 August 2015.