

Book Reviews

De Bruyn, P.P., Erasmus, M., Janson, C.A., Mentz, P.J., Steyn, S.C., Theron, A.M.C., Van Vuuren, H.J. and Xaba, M.I. (Edited by: Van der Westhuizen, P.C.)
Schools as organisations. (3rd Edn) 2007.

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Raj Mestry

This edited book is a collection of contributions on ‘schools as organisations’ written by prolific authors with strong background in the field of education. In my view, this book is interesting and effective; not only to educational practitioners but also to anyone that has an interest in school education. The editor has selected papers that are relevant and they are a coherent whole with recurrent themes identified. In fact, the cover page has been strategically selected to explain the central theme of the book.

The cover depicts an inverted pyramid reflecting that learners, one of the most important components in a school organisation, are placed prominently at the top. The educators are placed below the learners in this pyramid, not because they are of less importance than the learners, but their contribution to the education of children is undoubtedly of great importance. At the bottom of this inverted pyramid is the principal. The ‘new approach’ advocated in this book, emphasises the new role of the manager. For schools as organisations to be managed effectively, the manager should take on the role of supporter and motivator. Furthermore, the manager should be vision-driven and service-driven, especially to the educators and clients (learners and parents). This service to the stakeholders in a school reflects a bottom-up approach. Therefore, the cover page symbolises the transformation in education from the top-down style to the bottom-up style using the ‘best practice approach’ to effective management and putting the human being back into the organisation.

The book has moved away from the traditional approach of tasks of the leader/manager as controller and supervisor to a ‘new’ task that is of caring and supporting. This is also depicted on the cover page.

South African education is undergoing rapid changes and it becomes imperative that educational organisations effectively manage these changes. In the context of educational management, change implies that school principals are exposed to new controls and regulations, growth, increasing competition, technological developments and changes in the workforce. Further, changes in legislation, the availability of resources, market demands, and social priorities often force principals to redesign the organisational structure and procedures, redefine priorities and redeploy resources.

The collection of papers in this book comprising of 415 pages, focuses not only on the education system as an organisation, but also different perspectives of organisational theory in education. A further perspective is put forward to indicate that schools as organisations is not merely a grouping of structures with a particular characteristic, but rather that it is a unique grouping of people with ontological status. Without people there can be no organisation. It is important for any educational manager to have basic knowledge of the school as an organisation, in order to manage it effectively. This is undoubtedly a strong feature of the book

The following are new or revised sections:

- Contextualizing the South African/African management to include African Management Philosophy with strong emphasis on Ubuntu.
- A revision of the whole chapter on Organisational Culture and a new framework/classification/theory is put forward.
- A new chapter on strategies for the management of diversity with the key point of departure that a multicultural approach in education can be viewed as separatism and neo-conservatism.

This book is unique in that it provides the life perspectives on educational management that have strongly influenced thinking on management.

This book has been divided into four important sections. The first section deals with the education system as an organisation. Various concepts such as lifelong learning, training, education and development are clarified and a concise explanation on the structure of an education system and the education system policy is given. The second section ‘organisational theory of the school’ includes interesting papers on the perspectives on the school as an organisation, an ontological perspective and general characteristics of the

school as an organisation. In section three the organisational ecology of the school is discussed. The papers in this section deal with the organisational culture, organisational climate and organisational health of the school. Finally, the editor selects to deal with an aspect that affects everyone in education, namely, organisational change and development. Carefully chosen topics in this section allow the reader to reflect on the changes in South African education. Themes include change in organisational structures, resistance to change, organisational development and the quality of working life in schools are discussed in-depth.

I strongly recommend that anyone who has an interest in education should have a copy of this book and those academics that are involved in higher education should recommend this book to students embarking on a career in education. This book is very interesting and well worth reading.

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