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The Interplay between Structure, Culture, Agency and University Staff Development

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ABSTRACT Using sociological concepts of structure, culture and agency, this paper interrogates the uptake or otherwise of ten staff development workshops by lecturers at a formerly disadvantaged South African university. The ten workshops held during the semester under review were: Induction of newly appointed lecturers, study guide writing, handling large classes, research and publication, teaching excellence awards, design outcomes-based assessment, design assessment, assessor, laboratory safety measures and curriculum design and review. It emerges that apathy prevails as 80 (30.7%) of 260 academics attended such workshops. This calls for university structures as in academic hierarchy to ensure that academics imbibe a culture supportive of the attainment of teaching and learning excellence to enhance of the university's throughput, retention and student success rates.

INTRODUCTION

In the quest to improve on throughput, retention and student success rates, South African higher education system has embarked on diverse measures to ensure that students and lecturers alike

are helped. This paper explores the uptake or otherwise of staff development initiatives meant to ameliorate the situation. Makondo (2010) reminds us that many academics have only a rudimentary grasp of the basic principles of teaching and learning since few have studied the educational aspects of their profession. The assertion by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991:309) that “nothing calls into question the reputation of the entire teaching profession as emphatically as the suggestion that anyone with good content knowledge can be prepared for teaching” highlights the shortcomings and criticism levelled at most tertiary institutions which assume that anyone with a degree (masters or doctoral) can teach. Fransman and Rowley (1999:8) argue that, “...staff needs to be supported in their response to [the] changing priorities [in higher education]”. Wilkerson and Irby (1998), agree that relevant professional development is vital if academics are to be successful at innovation in teaching and learning. Gibbons (1998:12) goes further by emphasising the need for continuous professional development and proclaiming that ‘within the context of a learning society life-long study as well as training and re-training become possible’.

Objectives

This paper is premised on two objectives namely to:

- Examine the uptake or otherwise of staff development initiatives by university lecturers.
- Identify the roles structure; culture and agency should play towards the materialization of staff development workshops.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was gathered from participants of ten staff development workshops that were done at a formerly disadvantaged South African university. Workshop attendees were given a five itemed questionnaire that they responded to and it is from this that the participants’ insights were got from.

This paper uses sociological concepts of structure, culture and agency as propounded by Archer to explore the uptake or otherwise of staff development capacity building initiatives by academics. Archer (1995; 2000) regards the social world as comprised of the ‘parts’ (culture and structure) and the ‘people’ agents. Archer (2003) submits that the structural and cultural contexts

in which individuals find themselves shape the situations which they confront, how they respond to the objective constraints and enablements from these contexts depending on the nature of their subjective concerns, personal properties and powers which they possess. Within this context, for something “to exert the power of constraint or an enablement, it has to stand in a relationship such that it obstructs or aids the achievement of some specific agential enterprise” (Archer 2003.5).

Archer (1996) regards structure as being about material interests, primarily dependent on physical and human material resources. The material relations referred to are often legitimated and maintained by ideas from the cultural system. This relationship then suggests that changes in the structure might culminate in changes in the culture of an institution. It is within this milieu that faculties, deans, heads of departments, academic hierarchy, external examining (Boughey 2009), Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning and Deputy Vice-Chancellors of teaching and learning (Quinn 2012. 37-38) among others are structures, this paper contends, that play significant roles in defining the context of academic development and roles of educational practitioners at the case study university.

In addition, Archer uses the term ‘culture’ to describe the ideas, beliefs, theories, values, ideologies and concepts which are manifest through discourses used by particular people at particular times (Quinn 2012). Discourses, from a social realist position, are part of the cultural system with enabling and constraining causal powers to affect things in the world in general and in higher education institutions like the case study university in particular. This is exemplified by Quinn’s (2012.29-36) discussion of how the transformation discourses, quality assurance discourses and discourses around teaching and learning can be constraining and or enabling factors for professional development activities in higher education.

In terms of agency, Archer (1995.198) reckons that the most important property possessed by people is that they have “intentionality” which enables them to “entertain projects and design strategies to accomplish them”. It also emerges that the systemic context shapes the situations in which individuals find themselves and creates “strategic guidance” (Archer 1995.210) for people which predisposes them to act in certain ways. Chambers (2005.108) refers to agency as the

ability which individuals possess to make difference through their actions. Archer proceeds by identifying primary agents as collectivities sharing the same life chances (Archer 2000.263) and corporate agents as groups who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others and have organized in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question (Archer 1995.258). Furthermore, the ability of primary agents to transform into corporate agents and the ability to exercise their power, is either enabled or constrained by the nature of the systemic (cultural and structural) context in which they find themselves in (Quinn 2012). Within the Archerian discourse, agent refers to groups of people (for example, academics) while actor refers to individual people (for example, academic practitioners).

RESULTS

Ten staff development capacity building workshops were done at the case study university during the period under review. Table 1 presents the list of the workshops and the total number of attendees who participated.

Staff development workshop	Number of participants
Induction of newly appointed lecturers	36
Study guide	20
Handling large classes	53
Teaching excellence awards	32
Research and publication	19
Assessor	12
Design outcome-based assessment	15
Design assessment	17
Curriculum design and review	4
Laboratory safety measures	9
Total	217

The subsequent discussion section is dedicated to in depth examination of the emerging trends.

DISCUSSION

Induction of newly-appointed lecturers' workshop

The participants of the newly appointed lecturers' induction pointed out the need of proper popularisation of the workshop. They submit that the invitations should be sent out on time so that they can make arrangements to attend. This observation speaks to the organisers as well as to the line managers (structure) of the participants who should have communicated to the prospective attendees (agency) of the existence of such a standing workshop on induction of newly appointed lecturers/academics. This remark identifies a structural constraint as the induction programme, during the time under review, was not scheduled on the university calendar of events. This then meant the resultant preferred dates do not get the same weight as of events placed on the university calendar.

Some participants spoke on the need of presenters respecting them by keeping to time as advertised. A case in point was that the workshop was scheduled to start at 8.00am and some participants arrived exactly by such time only to realize that a presenter was not yet present. This sends signal to the newly appointed teaching staff that the induction workshop should not be taken seriously. This perception would be cemented for the newly appointed when they note that the majority of the scheduled presenters do not turn up to make their presentations. The culture of not prioritising events of this nature speaks to the need of proactive structures and agency to ensure that mindset change is imbibed for the attainment of academic excellence (Makondo 2012). Conversely, some participants submitted that everything went fairly well during the workshop.

Some participants spoke on the timing of the workshop. They note that an induction workshop could be of great use if it is done before they formally start facilitating teaching and learning as the majority do not have teaching training background (Makondo 2010). According to Maharaj (2011), this speaks to the expansion of higher education, the concomitant demand for suitably qualified faculty and the putative internationalization of higher education. This observation is raised amidst constraints like failure of having time to contact the newly-appointed lecturers as one has to wait for the opening of the university to establish and get the required data. Also, the prevalent culture, maybe acceptable within the operations of a university which has teaching

staff not turning up for workshops scheduled during semester breaks as they take these to be their time to recover need be revisited. Indeed, modalities should be worked out to ensure that an induction should be done before teaching as this workshop orients the newly appointed lecturers on discourses on module/course design, study material design, university teaching, national qualifications framework and assessment among others.

The 36 newly appointed lecturers who attended the induction pointed out that the presentations were very much an enablement to their professional growth. The participants note that the presentations that were made clearly spelt out to them the resources that are at the campus and how they could benefit from such provisions. In addition, the newly appointed lecturers submit that the course presentations could be facilitated during the first day thereby leaving the second day for hands-on activities. The identified hands-on activities include the design of course material, assessment activities and study material/study guides. The rationale for such request is that almost all of the newly appointed lecturers who attended were discipline experts who were not trained to teach. To them, they reckon, the induction was their first opportunity of being exposed to teaching and learning discourses within higher education.

The participants further point out that the newly appointed lecturer's induction was a structure that called for the support of different program directors or programme coordinators so that their teaching personnel should be capacitated. The agency that the offices of the programme directors, programme coordinators or heads of departments execute is core as this ensures that all newly appointed teaching staff members would attend the induction programme. In addition, these offices would ensure that the newly appointed teaching staff members would be assigned disciplinary mentors who could further facilitate their professional integration. The materialization of such symbiotic professional relations would be aided by proactive academic development practitioners who strategically promote collaborative interactions with established and newly appointed teaching staff members. As McKenna (2013) notes, this calls for those involved in staff development to,

provide an important disruptive space in which academics can interrogate their identities and negotiate their roles in the academic project. Staff development can encourage academics to reflect on their practice and to theorise their approaches in a shifting terrain.

The total number of participants for the two inductions was 36 for the whole year against fifty-three teaching staff members who were appointed by the university that year. The failure of the larger number of the teaching staff to attend was due to a range of factors. The first structural constraint is that the campus Human Resources and the respective faculty directors/heads of departments seem not to take requisite initiative of ensuring that the newly appointed teaching members attend the inductions. Coupled with this, the academic advisor tasked to facilitate the induction does not easily get the information about the new appointments. Also, by the time email invitations are sent to teaching staff members, some of the newly appointed lecturers might not yet be connected to the university email system due to reasons beyond the immediate scope of this discussion. In addition, when they see the posters placed at some strategic points in the campus, some newly appointed lecturers might fail to appreciate the urgency of the contents as none of their line managers would have alerted them of such. Conversely, university policy, as a structural enablement states that it is mandatory for academics to attend such induction, yet, the line managers responsible to see to it that this has been done, seem to fail to observe it. This speaks for need of culture change and agency to ensure that provisions are adhered to so that staff development can be enhanced at the university under review.

Study guide writing workshop

It is a standing policy requirement for the university of the case study that all teaching staff members produce study guides which ought to be available to students upon the opening of every semester. The policy further states that the programme owner, usually a director, should ensure that this is done in liaison with academic development advisor. This structural requirement, within the Archerian discourse, requires timeous execution of agential roles by school director, subject lecturer and academic development advisor and the related structures to ensure that it materializes. Of note is the realization that this is being done in a ‘super complex’ modern world that has given rise to an “age of super complexity, marked by new accounts of the world, new images, new technologies, new texts, new discourses, new forms of professional life” (Barnett 2000.417). This means higher education has to respond to this ‘super complex’ world through pedagogies that would “provide the knowledge and skills for coping with super complexity” (Barnett 2000.409). Therefore, in the design of the study guides, there is a dire need for innovative, student centred approaches to teaching and learning that would inculcate in

students skills such as self-directed learning, critical and creative thinking and problem-solving (Barr and Tagg 1995; Swenson 1998; Candy 2000).

The study guide development workshop was attended by 20 lecturers during the period under review. 17 (85%) and 3 (15%) participants note that the workshop contributed to their professional growth very much and much respectively. The participants further reckon that further assistance should be given by academic advisors to directors and lecturers on addressing problems pertaining to the design of study guides beyond the two days' workshop. In addition, some respondents submit that the workshop should be strategically held so as to give lecturers time to work on their submissions. This would also cater for the required time to factor in the review time by the academic advisor, logistical matters till the delivery of the finished product. Similarly, some newly appointed lecturers queried the timing of the workshop as they necessarily needed to write a study guide within a week. Relatedly, this observation raises concern about the need to have study guide 'bank' for newly appointed lecturers to use whilst they will be settling.

In terms of the facilitation of the workshops, the attendees felt that a more practical approach would be most beneficial. This has to be understood against a background of the majority of teaching staff members who seem not to have full appreciation of higher education teaching environment. Added to this, the majority of the teaching staff does not have training in curriculum design and review. This made it imperative that the study guide workshop cover issues pertaining to module credits, nocturnal hours, National Qualifications Framework level descriptors, assessment design (formative and summative tasks). The responses of workshop attendees highlight their great need of training in Bloom taxonomies so that they could appropriately design aligned module outcomes and assessment tasks. Within this context, attendees submit that follow-ups on the workshop should be conducted to monitor whether the attendees understood the concept of how to develop the study guides.

Handling large classes workshop

53 participants attended this workshop. The handling large classes workshop was identified through the university wide needs analysis conducted by the academic development advisor during the beginning of the year. To foster collaboration with academics in diverse schools, the

academic advisor invited academics to prepare presentations on how they facilitate learning in their academic discipline. Put in the words of McKenna (2013), staff development practitioners in this regard conceptualise themselves as deeply committed activists who provide the spaces for academics to theorise their contexts, make sense of their norms and develop their ability to provide students with access to the ways of making knowledge that the discipline demands. In response to this call, fourteen presentations on teaching Accounting, English, Chemistry, Biology, Business management, assessment among others were made by teaching staff members alongside two that were done by the academic development advisor for the two days of the workshop. In terms of relevance and depth, respondents note that the workshop was very crucial and suggested that such a workshop must be done at least once a semester. They reckon that it sharpens their skills as academics would learn from best practices as exuded by their colleagues.

Furthermore, handling large classes workshop was done under the university teaching series meant to continually assist teaching staff members on pedagogical matters. Also, shifts in higher education around massification, globalisation and the discourse of ‘high skills’ have brought a changed workplace for academics in which they have to negotiate new expectations and identities (Quinn 2012.1). These international changes have particular nuances in the South African context where historical disadvantages, social justice and transformation need to be addressed. The national call for improved teaching, learning quality and better throughput has focused the lens on academic staff development, simultaneously academic staff themselves are seeking ways to improve their practice and understand their contexts in more pedagogically informed ways. Relatedly, Clegg (2009.408) speaking from the UK perspective points out that the “craft practices of teaching, which had been capable of sustaining elite education [are] severely strained by mass education”. This led Scott et al. (2007.viii) to contend that one of the ways of addressing this risk of failure and ensuring greater success for more students in higher education is through “building education expertise in the sector to enable the development and implementation of teaching approaches that will be effective in catering for student diversity”. To achieve this, academic staff development need to be a priority for the higher education sector in South Africa.

In addition, attendees note that the workshop was a value adding experience as it encouraged adoption of a stance of questioning, challenging and critiquing taken-for-granted ways of doing

things in higher education (Quinn 2012) in line with Foucault (1988.265) in Zembylas (2012.14) who argue that;

...the job of the educator at all levels of education...[is] 'to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way we do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions'.

Within this context, attendees reckon that these presentations would guide and transform their future facilitation and assessment roles. In essence, it came to the fore that the workshop was a great relief to many academics who were grappling with how to handle large classes of above 300 students. The importance of inculcating personalised study skills, lifelong learning skills, group study ethos, mentorship, tutorship, seminar presentation and supplemental instruction were all explored. Also, lecturers were encouraged to come to terms with the reality that now requires them to manage the learning environment in a student-centred approach. As observed by Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo (2006.79), this means teaching and learning theories, concepts and methodologies should be derived from and nourished by African historical conditions and socio-cultural practices and imperatives. This then calls for a radical overall of the whole epistemological paradigm underlying the current educational system.

Teaching excellence awards workshop

In order to encourage teaching excellence and in line with international practice, the university introduced the institutional teaching excellence awards. This award would be participated in by teaching staff members who had completed the university induction processes so that they would be fully acquainted with the expectations of the university. In addition, one should have completed a full calendar year teaching. As other sister campuses were yearly having between ten and twenty participants, the campus structure namely the DVC Academic made sure that deans would be assessed during their performance evaluation on the extent to which they have managed to convince their staff members to participate in this exercise. This mandate was cascaded down the structures to the directors and heads of departments. Coupled with this, Teaching and Learning policy was improved to include clauses on teaching awards. Here is an

example of the interplay between structure, culture and agency as expounded by Archer. This saw academic development advisor being required to facilitate workshops on teaching excellence awards so as to bring prospective participants to speed on the expectations of the process. It is also within this context that three institutional teaching excellence award workshops were held in January and February and were attended by 11, 6 and 15 teaching staff members in the junior lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer and associate professor grades. This also marks the highest attendance and participation within 5 years since inception as this year saw 19 participants successfully completing in the four categories.

The majority (74%) of the participants acknowledged that the workshops were worthy attending as they reckon that the workshops were eye opening in as far as they made them aware of the expectations of the process. The participants noted that they became aware of the interrelatedness of university policies on teaching, e-learning, study guide, moderation, institutional teaching excellence award, research and promotion among others. It became clear also that if one had not developed a study guide, one would not be eligible for the exercise and that if one has not attended assessment workshops namely assessor, design university assessment and moderation hosted by the staff development unit, one would be found wanting of the specific requisite details. Therefore, the participants came to appreciate that it pays complying with university policy requirements as they are meant to enable teaching and learning.

Furthermore, some participants indicated that they were afraid of participating because of the misconceptions they were holding about the whole exercise. Some disclosed that they were misinformed by their colleagues who also had not participated. Also, the fact that some individuals in administration (agents) did not speak well about this exercise made them fail to have a proper appreciation of the exercise. These participants further submit that they had understood that the programme is not burdensome as it only encourages individuals to reflect on their daily practices so that quality enhancement should be facilitated. The monetary, certificate recognition as well as prospects of promotion on the basis of excelling in teaching was very thrilling to individuals who reckon that their strength lies in teaching and not research. This study then notes that the academic community was coming to terms with this programme and the attendance of these workshops by two deans and five heads of departments was the much needed tonic touch. This speaks to the establishment of a culture of academic excellence (Makondo

2012) and its nurturing, requisite blocks for a nation to have a performing higher education system.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION WORKSHOP

19 participants attended this workshop. One research and publication workshop was held during the period under review. The staff development unit organised this workshop after considering inputs of needs analysis exercise. It emerged that this workshop was needed so that lecturers supervising research students could be assisted in executing their responsibilities. This follows the realization by the university that the majority of students were completing on time taught courses and would remain in the system due to the outstanding mini dissertation component. Also, the high number of students failure and or requirements for resubmissions alerted the system of the need to host this workshop. In addition, the requirement that academics should be published led the staff development advisor to organise this workshop so that a platform would be availed for the seasoned published academics to share their expertise with their novice colleagues. As Moraka and Hay (2007:218) note, one of the biggest challenges is certainly the institutional culture which needs to change to an increase in research outputs and delivering postgraduate students. This follows the observation that in order to do this, those involved in offering staff development need to have strong academic identities themselves and they need to be sensitive to the varied ways in which disciplines and institutions present different contexts with quite different sets of constraints and enablements (McKenna 2013).

The participants suggested that the workshop discussions and feedback sessions need to be given enough time so that participants may provide informative feedback. This has to be understood within the context that at the case study university, the majority of lecturers teaching modules on research methodologies or supervising mini- and or full-dissertations are not published themselves in peer reviewed accredited journals. To this end, the presenters were to address several inquiries on how best to successfully promote student research work as well as balance teaching and research work. The participants then noted that the presenters should be given 15-20 minutes for presentations for the participants to grasp what is being presented before almost same time is devoted to follow-up discussions.

Furthermore, participants recommended that topics and handouts for should be made available to the intended audience in advance so that their subsequent contributions could be meaningful. Therefore, robust academic engagements encouraged during a research and publication workshop, according to Lebakeng and Payle (2003) are meant to ensure departure from mimetism or intellectual dependency or derivative scholarship by having the institutions of higher learning nurturing a domestic intellectual infrastructural capacity to adapt and transalate foreign knowledge for local use. This then calls for the establishment of intellectual traditions, scholarship and research culture that are rooted in contempoarary African imperatives. Therefore, to Africanise, epistemologically should entail jettisoning western epistemological paradigms and mainstreaming indigenous African epistemology into the educational paradigm (Lebakeng and Payle 2003).

Assessment workshops

The design assessment workshop series was held thrice during the period under review. The first one was the assessor workshop attended by 12 participants, design-outcome based assessment attended by 15 participants and the design assessment workshop that drew 17 participants. The first two were outsourced so that participants would get South African Qualifications Authority accredited certificates. It was after the first round of the workshops that the academic advisor, in consultation with the participants, made a decision to have a workshop that specifically targets university assessment context. The rationale for undertaking the series of these workshops was the need to ensure that university teaching staff, as facilitators/assessors are appropriately grounded in the four assessment principles of fairness, validity, reliability and practicability (Makondo 2013). Therefore, through assessment workshop series, in the words of D'Andre and Gosling (2005.179) "it is not the person who needs changing but the role and role relationship they are playing within institutional structures".

Participants of the assessor workshop reckon that it opened their eyes to the divergent roles assessors ought to meticulously execute. They submitted that the design of assessment activities ought to be a well thought exercise so that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed. This speaks also to the need to check with internal or external moderator(s) on the relevance of such tasks beforehand to avoid challenges during the actual assessment sessions. Linked to the moderation workshop, many participants note that the way they were executing such tasks was

way off the norm. Some participants remarked that the timing of the assessor/moderator workshops was good as they can apply the skills for the rest of the year. Some submitted that they were not appropriately assessing their students; that the way moderation was being done in their departments amount to no moderation at all; that their fellow lecturers who did not attend need assistance on how to design assessment tasks and that they need to revisit/improve the design of all their formative and summative tasks designed for all modules. In addition, the need to train participants of similar disciplines came to the fore. In terms of time, participants reckon that assessor and moderator workshops could be effectively done in two days each instead of three days each as was the trend.

In terms of the design outcome-based assessment workshop, participants submit that it helped them to design assessment tasks in the expectation that students would be required to demonstrate mastery of certain skills in line with programme outcomes and NQF level descriptors. The need of having clearly spelt out outcomes was appreciated and tasks were held to assist lecturers design such. Also, participants welcomed the support they got in aligning programme outcomes to module outcomes and assessment activities. The interrelatedness of formative and summative tasks was also brought to the fore and, the participants, the majority of who were not trained to teach, were very receptive and undertook to implement what they have learnt. On the other hand, reservations were held in instances where heads of programmes or heads of departments were not capacitated as the workshop participants. In this context, the fear was that such agency would continue to advocate for the 'wrong way' of doing things. The participants advocated for scenarios that would ensure that all department members are required to attend such crucial workshops so that university assessment would be enhanced, routes other universities have since taken of making mandatory attendance of certain workshops before one completes his/her probation.

Curriculum design and review workshop

4 lecturers attended this workshop at a university with 260 teaching staff members, a scenario which speaks of shocking apathy levels. The workshop was premised on the need to equip academics with requisite skills on curriculum design, skills they need in the design of their programmes. Also, as the wave of educational transformation sweeps across the higher education landscape, few academics have been unaffected by its impact. Hassan (2011.476) argues that it

has been well documented that academics are ill-prepared to cope with the challenges of educational transformation, yet training and development that would provide the appropriate support to meet the demands of educational transformation is often neglected. It is within this realization that a study was done to determine the needs and perceptions of academics regarding their professional development within the context of educational transformation. Respondents in a study by Hassan (2011.476) expressed a need for training in the implementation of innovative methods of teaching and learning such as: outcomes-based education; problem-based learning and technology-enhanced teaching and learning. However, the case study highlight the need to inculcate a culture that imbibes the need to attend capacity building initiatives so that university lecturers would acquire skills that would ensure that they design modules/courses that meet the institution's mission as well as the NQF specifications.

Laboratory safety measures workshop

In addition, during the period under examination, needs analysis established that support staff had training needs they wished should be addressed. Reference here is made to the laboratory technicians. Due to financial constraints and the prevalent view then that only 'academics' were eye-marked for staff development, the university funding policy did not make provisions for these staff members. It therefore meant their training would be funded from 'other' sources, an indication of the limitations of the capacity building policy in operation within the case study university. Also, due to the nature of the required training, the service was outsourced from a registered service provider who was flown to the campus so that 9 candidates would attend the workshop. Within this context, it became apparent that the university funding policy needed to be revisited if this group of support staff is represented.

In addition, it later emerged that the formula used to identify participants was flawed. A director and head of department from the Science faculty were requested to submit names of prospective participants. The selection formula resulted in the concentration of participants from certain sections of the faculty instead of having a participant from 9 sections as funding was allowing the training of 9 participants. Within this context, below are some remarks made by the participants:

- Although it is good that academic staff attended, technical staff specifically laboratory technicians from other departments e.g. Animal science, Crop science, Centre for applied radiation science technology would have gained more from this training due to the technical side of the training.
- It will be great if a similar workshop is arranged for technicians from Faculties of Science, Agriculture and Technology.
- It will be my pleasure if other technicians and staff members in the campus can be given an opportunity to attend this training. Really it was wonderful.

The remarks by participants identified some structural constraints which characterized this exercise which the office of academic advisor had to improve upon by ensuring that the net is cast as wide as possible. This speaks well to the holistic need to improve teaching and learning especially in higher education so that the quality of graduates would be enhanced. To this end, the multifaceted roles technicians execute in supporting students of all levels and academics cannot be over emphasized. The fact that they called for similar workshops to be held for many technicians speaks to the importance they attached to this pioneering workshop.

In addition, the following remarks were also made by the participants:

- The presentation must be focused more on the laboratory scene than industrial one.
- There should be visit to the different working site but this depends on the extension of the workshop period e.g. 1 week period.

These observations speak to the need to have targeted workshops so that specific needs would be addressed. In this case, the service provider mostly ended up offering generic training which at times did not measure up to the needs of a university community. Also, the need to have hands on training came to the fore, a need which talks to the need of proper funding so that the required equipment, material and chemicals would be made available. Notwithstanding, participants reckon that the workshop was a step in the right direction. They further were very impressed and motivated with the certificates they were awarded.

The agents responsible for the successful implementation of staff development initiatives the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic or Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning must play a controlling role to see to it that the academic development unit and line managers

(dean/directors/heads of departments) implemented capacity development initiatives. No capacity building initiatives can be successful if is not driven from the most senior level possible within the university (Moraka and Hay 2007.231).

CONCLUSION

The examination of the uptake or otherwise of staff development capacity building workshops suggests that 217 out of 260 academics at the case study university participated. Yet, in essence, 80 (30.7%) academics attended two or more workshops hence the total number as shown in Table 1 above is 190. This figure suggests that the culture of attending and participating in staff development workshops need be nurtured and sustained at this university. As way forward, clear capacity development policies should be formulated through a consultative process to ensure that everyone in the institution is informed and takes ownership of such initiatives. The staff development unit and related units should not follow a one size fit all approach when offering these interventions but rather the efforts should be needs driven. The university structures and agents should ensure that capacity development activities are used to develop newly appointed and existing staff. This also speaks to the need of a well-established mentorship programme within the university to ensure the attainment of teaching and learning excellence that culminates in improved throughput, retention and student success rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that promulgation of a staff development policy that makes attendance of two teaching and learning works a requirement for tenure and at least two staff development workshops per year would go a very long way in having a culture that popularises teaching and learning discourses. The proactiveness of agents and structures in the capacities of individual teaching staff members, heads of departments, directors, deans, Vice-Rector/Deputy Vice-Chancellor-Academic among others can go a long way in changing the attitude of academics towards capacity building initiatives. Also, academic practitioners/advisors should be properly qualified and experienced so that they could meaningful engage and provide spaces for academics to interrogate their practice.

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