

COP MEETING 11 MARCH 2020 PHILIPPI VILLAGE

LEARNING BRIEF: BUILDING STRONG AND MOTIVATED TEAMS IN AFTER SCHOOL

This learning brief was produced by The Learning Trust in partnership with the After School Programme Office, which drives After School programming as a priority project of the Western Cape Government. The brief emerged following the last Community of Practice (CoP) meeting held in 2019, which marked the 13th CoP organized by the partners, since they started in 2016.

Last year, the community of practice focused on Monitoring & Evaluation, and more broadly on communicating the collective impact of the sector. Building on this, our discussions in this CoP revolved around strengthening the people who drive the impact of our work.

These “Humans of the After School Movement” are the Coaches, Facilitators, Tutors, Coordinators, Managers and Directors who support hundreds of After School Programmes based in the Western Cape alone, and thousands more at a national level. Many of them give voluntarily or are modestly compensated staff who earn little for their tireless work; a persistent constraint to the sector’s growth.

Research conducted by UCT in partnership with Instant Grass International in 2019 indicated that the positive relationships that learners form with volunteers and staff of After School Programmes are the central reason that they continue to attend and reap the benefits of such programmes. Therefore, attracting talented professionals to the sector and reducing staff turnover is essential to maintaining high learner participation rates, which are a proxy for intended outcomes.

This CoP explored ways that the sector can retain high performing individuals, unpacked the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) as it pertains to After School and identified some key practical strategies that ASPs can employ.



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DOCUMENTATION

It is expected that a well-functioning organisation should have documented and built awareness around key HR policies, processes, and procedures. These records are particularly useful for ensuring transparency and clarity, protecting staff and beneficiaries, maintaining institutional knowledge, and holding people and the organisation accountable.

By way of illustration, with a growing number of learners, volunteers, and staff using social media on a regular basis, a policy would help guide expectations and regulations about such use as it pertains to the organisation. For example, it is illegal to post pictures of children publicly without consent from their guardians. Having an organisational protocol regarding the publishing of photographs, and more generally defining the scope of behaviours that are acceptable for employees to exhibit online will protect the rights of the children you serve, as well as protect staff and the organisation from legal action and consequences.

HR policies vary from organisation to organisation as they are created to align to your core values and mission – they effectively govern the unique way in which your organisation operates. Generally, you would include clauses or specific policies under the following categories: hiring procedures, training, performance assessment, rewards and dismissals.

While there will be differences in policy formation and structure, there are common standards that should be applied. It is advised that any policy be constructed in

compliance with and draws from South Africa's Labour Relations Act (www.gov.za/documents/labour-relations-act). The Act provides the framework for your policy document, which then provides details as is applicable to your organisations. In the absence of a well-developed internal policy, emerging organisations can refer to the Labour Relations Act, particularly in relation to elements such as conflict and disciplinary processes.

Another important element of HRM is to put in place binding contracts or enforceable Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with staff and volunteers. Many NGOs do an enormous amount of work with small teams or rely heavily on volunteers to deliver on their mandate. While there is often overlap in work responsibilities, it is advised that the person ultimately accountable for key deliverables is clearly stated and assigned in a Job Description.



IMPLEMENTATION

It is not merely the development of the policy or the signing of a contract that supports staff well-being and retention. Staff, old and new, must be regularly made aware of all policies and how they apply to them. Read the Policy Awareness Activity at the end of this brief for ideas on how this could be facilitated.

The application of such policy must be consistent across the organisation and across time. For example, if a policy or contractual agreement stipulates a set work time of 9am -5pm, this must be upheld as an expectation for all staff. Should one staff member arrive late and be reprimanded and another continue to arrive late yet suffer no consequences, this can easily under-value the policy and its regulations, and cause team disfunction as resentment builds between staff members who are being held to varying degrees of account.

Setting clear boundaries and expectations for ALL staff and volunteers can play a huge role in creating psychological safety, which has been identified as the number one common factor of high performing teams. Harvard Business Review elaborates on these findings [here](#). To ensure uniform and consistent implementation of policies throughout the organisation and across time, it becomes important to keep records of key meetings and discussions, which can also be referred to along with policy documents and contracts to mitigate disagreements and to enforce expectations.

The key is to have a) an accessible documented policy and b) clearly articulated expectations to all members of staff induction, during performance reviews, incorporated into team-building workshops, and reviewed periodically with maximum participation.



The reality is that the After School sector is fast-paced and ever-changing. Staff and volunteers in this field are notoriously over-worked and prone to burnout. Therefore, organisations must actively strive to support staff well-being, development and motivation. One leading idea from Daniel Pink, supported by MIT, is that beyond a monetary reward, professionals are motivated primarily by opportunities for mastery, autonomy, and purpose. This is detailed in an insightful animated video [here](#). It is important to be cognisant of whether we are providing these opportunities for our staff and volunteers.

MASTERY

To fuel this growing sector, there is a need to collectively create a pipeline of high-performing individuals who can assume important positions at all levels of an organisation. This means investing in a volunteer or staff member's career journey from the very beginning: identifying skills development needs; investing in external training; and taking the time to provide internal coaching to younger more inexperienced members of the team. Fortunately, the desire for progress, professional and personal development is often central to human beings. It is the role of leadership to construct a safe space for such development and mastery to actively occur.

The After School Programme Office provides a variety of professional development opportunities. Find out more [here](#).

People generally perform better when they are in a safe and comfortable environment. One of the challenges of working in economically impoverished areas is a lack of access to space. Schools very often serve as communal spaces that community members can rent or use free of charge. This can drive competition amongst organisations. Schools also may be reluctant to have programmes running

after school due to lack of security personnel in out-of-school hours. These are all factors that need to be considered when thinking about where and how staff are expected to work.

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AUTONOMY

Science shows that human beings want to be self-directed. Treating people humanely moves an organisation beyond the carrot and stick working paradigm and towards an intrinsically motivated future-oriented workforce.

This involves creating an enabling environment for staff and volunteers to take initiative and own projects. Trust and transparency are key components of an autonomous organisational culture and good management practice. But trust needs to work both ways - staff need to trust that they can voice their opinions and ideas, and that they will receive honest, constructive feedback; and management needs to relinquish some level of control and trust that staff will deliver on intended outputs.



Transparency refers to how information flows between management and staff. It is equally important for staff to access information regarding the programme should they ask for it, as it is for management to openly share both good and bad news with staff members in a way that doesn't negatively impact their sense of safety and security.

A simple way to give your staff more autonomy is to be clear about expected outcomes that align to the organisational vision and mission. This provides a framework and clearly defined bigger picture goals that individuals can work towards in their unique, often innovative way. Brief, targeted and frequent check-ins with staff and volunteers can help to build connection and trust, and provide an opportunity to course-correct.

Creating these opportunities to provide feedback against progress made is important and also offers a space for public or private recognition of the oft under-valued work of an After School practitioner. Awards based on progress and outcomes can incentivise and support independent action. With the growing number of After School Programmes across the country, there is an opportunity for sector-wide acknowledgement and advocacy of the work that we do for example [Western Cape Government's Leadership Excellence Award](#).

PASSION & PURPOSE

Thinking in this way, and positioning everyday work as part of a purpose-driven agenda can dramatically improve a staff members commitment and engagement to the job. Teams are a collective of individuals who all have their own passions and purpose. Creating an organisational culture that acknowledges this relies first and foremost on the underpinning values, beliefs and attitudes that guide the organisations operations. It is no small task to rally a collective group of staff and volunteers to buy into and abide by such values, and then to effectively use these as a guide to work together to achieve common goals.

The majority of people entering this field of work will have a clear reason for doing so, often driven by their many passions. Knowing this, as a manager, you can appeal to their own sense of meaning and provide reports to your staff, much as you would to funders. Regularly share progress and measurable outcomes of your organisation with staff and volunteers to motivate them. If a Life Science tutor is dedicating herself three times a week to their work, it is likely that she would be motivated by knowing that her group of 5 learners have all improved by more than 3% over the previous term. This means she is doing her job well, and this gives her a sense of purpose and contributes to her mastery.

As your passionate team becomes more adept at its work over time, they may take on more responsibilities. Ensure that built into intense periods of activity are also periods of rest as overworking the team is ultimately unsustainable. Rest is an important part of consistency and productivity.

USEFUL LINKS & RESOURCES

- Labour Relations Act: www.gov.za/documents/labour-relations-act
- The South African Labour Guide: www.labourguide.co.za
An informative guide to labour practices within South Africa with legal opinions given by legal professionals. It also has up-to-date news on safety that people can access freely.
- After School Programme Office:
www.westerncape.gov.za/after-school-game-changer

ACTIVITY PLAN

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY

Staff, old and new, must be regularly made aware of all policies and how they apply to them. This Activity Plan is designed for Managers to use with their teams to discuss and develop organisational policy.

OUTCOMES OF THE SESSION

1. Understand the key principles of the organisation's HR policy
2. Staff voice their opinions and share ideas re. HR policy
3. Managers and staff are all aware and aligned to the HR policy

MATERIALS

Chairs, scenario print-outs/projector, blank paper e.g. flipchart, kokis.

DURATION

1.5 - 2 hours (a rich participatory discussion extends the time)

TRAINER NOTE

Create your own scenarios based on your organisations own HR policies or the challenges you have had regarding its implementation.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

You read a colleague's Facebook page. You notice that a post that was posted after-hours contains nasty offensive remarks about the supervisors in the organisation.

- What do we think is at the root of the problem?
- Can and should the organisation take any action/s against such a person?
- If so, what action/s can/would you take?
- What could we put in place to prevent this from happening again?

POLICY AWARENESS ACTIVITY

A. QUESTIONS FOR CLARITY

- **SET UP** the room with a circle of chairs for each participant
- **CHECK-IN** by asking each participant to share their answer to a question or conduct a rating activity e.g. How would you rate your knowledge of HR/mood on a scale from 1-10?
- **DISCUSS** the following questions as a large group, ensuring that every member has a chance to contribute
 1. What do we mean by Human Resource Policy?
 2. How familiar are you with your company or organisation's HR policies?
Can you name any?
 3. Are there any HR policies that you think are missing e.g paternity leave?
 4. Are there any policies that are unclear?
- **SAY** it is good to hear some of your thoughts and questions. I have noted these and will try to address them throughout this session. Let's move on to an activity to help us think more about the HR policies in this organisation.

B. SCENARIOS FOR UNDERSTANDING

- **SEPARATE** the group into 2 or more groups depending on numbers. There should be a max of 4 in a group.
- **GIVE** the case study and questions to all groups either on paper or projected.
- **SAY** you have 15 minutes to discuss the scenario and consider your response. The questions will help to guide you.
- **ASK** each group to share their response to the scenario and why.
- **DISCUSS** the scenario, share best practice, and direct participants to specific sections of organisational policy related to the scenario.

C. DEBRIEF

- **REFER** back to initial discussion and make links with the scenario activity and any stand out points of learning. Try to address any outstanding questions and concerns.
- **INVITE** participants to share something they learnt and how they will take this back into their everyday work.