

Western Cape – Microsoft Leaders for Change



Background to the project

Microsoft SA wished to implement a change leadership process in a selected number of schools as a proof of concept pilot in the Western Cape. While educators are sometimes reluctant to integrate technology into their teaching, they can readily adopt a positive attitude when encouraged and influenced by their senior management. Strong

School Transformation Process
A guide to formulating and implementing a vision for change

support from senior management team (SMT) members or from the principal, can provide the necessary impetus for technology integration to flourish at a school, to enhance teaching and to develop a vibrant community of practice. Sometimes all the staff at a school, including SMT, are eager to embrace digital learning but might not have a clear idea of how to implement such an innovation or perhaps they do not fully anticipate the extent of the change this will require. In order to develop this vibrant community of practice that is ready to accept the changes that learning technologies inevitably bring, SchoolNet South Africa had developed a *Change Leadership for Technology Integration* course.

SchoolNet SA's *Change Leadership for Technology Integration* course is endorsed by SACE and carries 20 professional development points. Microsoft requested SchoolNet to adapt the existing courseware to include elements of Microsoft's course materials, *School Transformation Process*. SchoolNet SA disseminated the customised materials to their core trainers and scheduled a series of clustered workshops for senior management teams from each school.

The programme was designed to include a monitoring element consisting of a follow-up mentoring visit, onsite at each individual school.

1. Workshop Content

The course starts by establishing the moral purpose for change. Schools map out their vision for the future and while they might have developed these before, on this course, it is not just a statement on paper that justifies, it is a call to action that will actually take place in the school. The vision justifies the effort and commitment that is required to make new initiatives a lasting success in the school. The *Change Leadership for Technology*



Integration course focuses on practical challenges that can arise in South African schools and promotes the notion that change needs energy, ideas, commitment and ownership rather than a controlling top-down management. Participants were encouraged to engage with the key principles of change leadership and for them to implement where appropriate. They strategized around several practical and authentic elements of change leadership, such as capacity building, managing resisting teachers and the culture of learning and evaluation, which help to sustain change and continue growing a sense of ownership of the e-learning vision. The course also addresses ongoing implementation issues regarding support and maintenance and facing challenges adaptively.

The objectives of the course aim to achieve the following outcomes where participants will be able to:

1. Describe how the traits of a visionary technology leader foster sustainable change in the school technology landscape;
2. Drive the process of building a shared vision in the school;
3. Describe the focus areas of the change process;
4. Plan and implement a capacity building process;
5. Develop a communication strategy to build a sense of ownership of the vision for e-learning in the school;
6. Describe how to develop and exploit a culture of learning in the school;
7. Describe a strategy for facing implementation challenges;
8. Develop a culture of evaluation in the school;
9. Evaluate the achievements and benefits of e-learning in the school.



2. Impact of the change leadership programme

Understanding Change

While it is evident that the majority of the schools are facing serious challenges, such as school safety and heavy teaching loads, it has been encouraging to see that many schools have been able to adopt a positive and optimistic attitude towards the integration of learning technologies into their schools. Many schools expressed thanks to Microsoft for providing this Change Leadership Course simply because they either had not anticipated the challenges of change brought about by the introduction of learning technologies at their school or because they were unaware of how they were going to be able to cope with them. One of the quotations from the participant online evaluation forms:

“The content was relevant, it helped us think about how to address the changes coming, and how to implement change successfully. The trainer was exceptional, she knew her content well and how to read the room. Her broader knowledge was fantastic to experience and learn from” .

The wisdom of collaborating

Many participants had laboured through the exercise of creating a school vision before. However, on this course, they suddenly realised that, apart from having previously excluded mention of technology, they also found that the process of developing their vision had not been a collaborative one. Principals reported that they had not previously appreciated the impact of having comprehensive stakeholder buy-in to the vision; they had previously thought that their school community would have admired the vision that they or their senior management teams had developed “for them” but not “with them”. Obviously the wisdom of collaborating on the development of the school vision had resulted in a much higher rate of implementation, once there had been widespread ownership and buy-in. Participants in the programme, soon realised how beneficial it was to collaborate with colleagues from other schools as well. In response to the question, what I liked most about the course, a number of responses echoed this one, *“Interaction with colleagues, ideas, best practices as well as challenges shared.”* A number of examples were cited of issues that they would not have thought of if they had not shared ideas at the workshop. These included learning of apps in isiXhosa, establishing a school help desk and benefitting from the WCED intern employment programme.

Tackling practical authentic scenarios

Almost every school remarked on how valuable it was to be tackling serious problem-solving scenarios that they knew they were going to experience or that they had experienced already. What made it more valuable was that they were able to collaborate with senior management colleagues from their own and other schools.

“ I liked the fact that we were given the theoretical and led to explore the practical implementations in order to bring about a changed mindset.”

“The content covered was relevant to our situation. It also gave practical examples of how to implement strategies. Some of the strategies were modelled by the presenter. The involvement of participants made it an interactive space.”

“Problem solving activities and scenarios, working with peers in similar situations. Very useful and insightful course.”

SMT members felt that the course gave them the confidence to solve problems. They appreciated that each module addressed a different challenge and provided useful practical tools for resolving them. Some of the practical solutions to problems that were mentioned were: appointing subject heads and champions within subject groups to drive ICT integration and having the school ICT champion acting as a peer coach to those subject heads; step by step guidance through a delegation meeting; plans for capacity building, communications strategies that included WhatsApp groups.

A new appreciation for the complexity of digital learning



The levels of ICT integration observed in schools varied considerably. Many schools had made a valiant effort to increase the teachers knowledge and skills in this area. However the Change Leadership course gave members of the SMTs a far broader appreciation of the levels of technology integration and what innovative use of technology might look like. In some schools the SMT were aware that their teachers were only making a start on this journey by using video and PowerPoint; as mentioned at Touwsrante Primary, technology integration had clearly resulted in a more visual approach to teaching for the learners. Even the most competent ICT users were in some cases quite technical-focused and had not been aware of the change that was

required in pedagogical practices. The final module that aims to cultivate a culture of evaluation lists a range of practical actions that have to happen in order to achieve these higher levels of technology integration:

- Recognise all achievements
- Develop capacity for self- and peer-assessment
- Plan effectively
- Focus on how you learn
- Focus on how learners learn
- Focus on classroom practice
- Provide sensitive and constructive feedback
- Foster motivation
- Promote understanding of vision and objectives
- Help you know how to improve

Many participants said they realised that they “did not know what they did not know” and were therefore still very much entrenched in their old thinking. For example one of the primary schools was not aware that there were apps available in isiXhosa. Another primary was proud of its annual excursions for each year group and yet with the advent of technology in the hands of learners, they were going to be able to embark on virtual tours daily. Principals at two of the schools had not made the connection between teaching methodologies and the strategies used in the workshops. In some cases, there was only a gradual realisation that old teaching styles were not going to be appropriate once learners had tablets in their hands. In contrast some participants instantly made the connection, saw how they could adapt the strategies to suit their class size and subject and had already experimented with some of them.

Overall the SMT members found the practical advice mapped out in templates for self-evaluation and for developing performance indicators to be excellent tools that gave them the confidence to start their school self-evaluation process and to promote improvement in a culture of school-based learning and evaluation.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

This Change Leadership was very well received by participants because it was so well-timed. It coincided with the

advent of a seriously large technology donation from the provincial department. Senior management teams were aware of the potential impact this could have but they were further alerted to the change that it would bring to a range of unanticipated challenges. In many of the schools the teachers were eagerly anticipating the changes because this was going to be the first time that the technology had been placed in the hands of learners. Some incredibly gifted teachers had always been trying to involve the learners but were hampered by not having learner access to technology or the only access being limited to learners occasionally using the IAW.

Participants expressed an understanding of why they needed this course and its content. They understood that when new and innovative approaches are adopted in a school and new technologies are identified as resources, then they represent transformation or change in the school. Implementing change requires management of processes as well as people and technology. If process and technology are changing in a school, all stakeholders need to feel ownership of the direction of change if educational transformation is to succeed. Therefore, being a technology leader in the school requires an understanding of the process of change leadership, because ultimately it's all about the people, especially the teachers and learners.

This technological revolution that was about to be unleashed in these schools had been well-conceptualised by the WCED. Schools regularly referred to the skills audit conducted by Saaid Agherdien and the recommended training related to the range of teacher skill levels. Senior management members regularly made positive remarks about other WCED officials, particularly e-learning specialists from the districts but Christelle Barkhuizen was mentioned most frequently as being incredibly supportive and proactive.

It appeared as if the availability of some of the functions of the WCED were not always apparent to all schools. For example some schools were working closely with the Safe Schools Programme to increase their levels of security and a number of schools were very grateful to the Isizwe job creation programme that provided them with a range of assistant posts.

Those dynamic and highly successful schools were those who clearly benefitted from all of the services of the WCED and also took advantage of donor funding, NGO support and a range of sponsors. A characteristic of these schools was their proactive senior management who were in constant contact with the department and engaged in never-ending fundraising and networking.

There were a number of teachers who were identified as making excellent peer coaches for their colleagues and should be provided with the guidelines for becoming peer coach facilitators within their own schools. It is recommended that these teachers who were identified as potential super stars should be trained as facilitators for future professional development roll outs.

Some of the other recommendations for future professional development came from teachers themselves. They knew that technology could extend the range of assessment options for them but were unsure as to how this might happen. There was clearly a need for some schools to more fully understand higher levels of teacher competences for technology integration. For example one school assumed that if their teachers were IT literate then they required no further training. Along the same lines, future training should provide teachers with exposure to the potential impact on learning that digital resources can have, specific to phases and subjects. For example, one school was concerned that Cami Maths might not be available on Android revealing that the school had had little exposure to the massive array of mathematical educational apps that were about to become available to them and which would engage their learners far more effectively than they could imagine.

We can conclude that the future of digital learning in these schools has been enhanced through this change leadership course. Schools have been building ownership of the vision and commitment to the implementation of e-learning at the school. Almost all Senior Management Teams have developed a sense of what distributed or shared leadership means and have taken responsibility for further capacity building and staff development in digital learning. They have been able to analyse adaptive challenges, embrace resistance and plan effective strategies to deal with the change process. Effective and easy dialogue between all stakeholders has been facilitated through the use of an explicit communications strategy and by planning for the evaluation of technology leadership, a culture of

evaluation has been developing in these schools. Most importantly of all, these schools have been motivated by the Change Leadership workshops and by each other; enthusiasm has been infectious.

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