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## **Ikamva Youth: Tutor Engagement Plan**

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# Tutor Engagement Plan

Kate Lassalle-Klein & Jake Prince  
November 19, 2015



**Santa Clara University**

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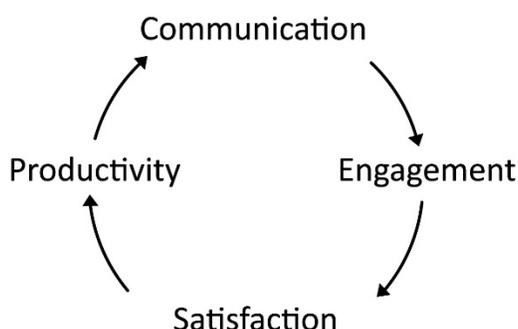
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## Executive Summary

As expressed by tutors and staff alike throughout the various interviews and discussions that we conducted, there is great potential for IkamvaYouth to improve its approaches to solving problems through communication. It appears that issues relating to tutor engagement are amplified by breakdowns in communication, permeating throughout distant aspects of the organisation. By solving inefficiencies at the ground level, mainly the exchanges between branch staff and tutors, IkamvaYouth should expect to see returns in volunteer satisfaction and productivity that outweigh the initial investments of time and resources.



We believe that the above figure models the cyclic interactions between communication, engagement, tutor satisfaction, and productivity in IkamvaYouth. Currently, breakdowns in communication between tutors and staff lead to a lack of engagement as tutors withdraw from the portals through which they are meant to be supported. Tutors become frustrated when they feel underappreciated and are less likely to contribute to the organisation or adhere to key policies, causing decreases in productivity. As tutors lose interest in contributing to IkamvaYouth, communication breakdowns become even more strained and the process continues. We believe that, by solving a few fundamental issues with tutor engagement, this negative feedback loop can be reversed.

Implementing a customized variation of quality circles, a participative management technique described in the *Literature Review* (p. 10) and *Quality Circle Implementation Guide* (p. 14), may allow IkamvaYouth to leverage tutors' desire to be engaged in an inclusive, democratic process. By further involving tutors in making decisions that directly affect their lives, they will experience an increased sense of ownership of their actions and autonomous empowerment within IkamvaYouth. As a secondary effect, we anticipate that the tutors will adopt an even more supportive outlook of the organisation. Finally, by relieving branch staff of some of the challenges in engaging with and satisfying their tutors, they will have more time and resources to be receptive of the solutions produced by quality circles.

Quality circles formalize one approach to achieving sustained improvements in communication and engagement. Yet, they will require valuable time and resources in order to fully develop and achieve their intended impact. Since tutor retention is such a pressing issue, we recommend that IkamvaYouth begin by reviewing and implementing the more broad and informal goals described in the *Group Discussion Guide* (p. 19).

## Project Summary

IkamvaYouth empowers South African students from under-resourced and under-performing secondary schools to achieve academic results competitive with those of the best-funded schools in the country. The organisation is able to offer extensive tutoring services free of charge due to the hard work of its committed volunteer tutors. As more students, called “learners,” flock to join the programme and IkamvaYouth grows, it faces challenges in attracting and maintaining an optimal amount of volunteer tutors.

We conducted a quantitative online survey of tutors’ demographic information, backgrounds, and experiences with the organisation. Of IkamvaYouth’s approximately 300 tutors, 223 responded. We conducted tutor and staff interviews and group discussions with a total of 37 individuals within the organisation, initiating critical dialogue on topics such as tutor recruitment, engagement, retention, communication, and the tutors’ overall conception of IkamvaYouth.

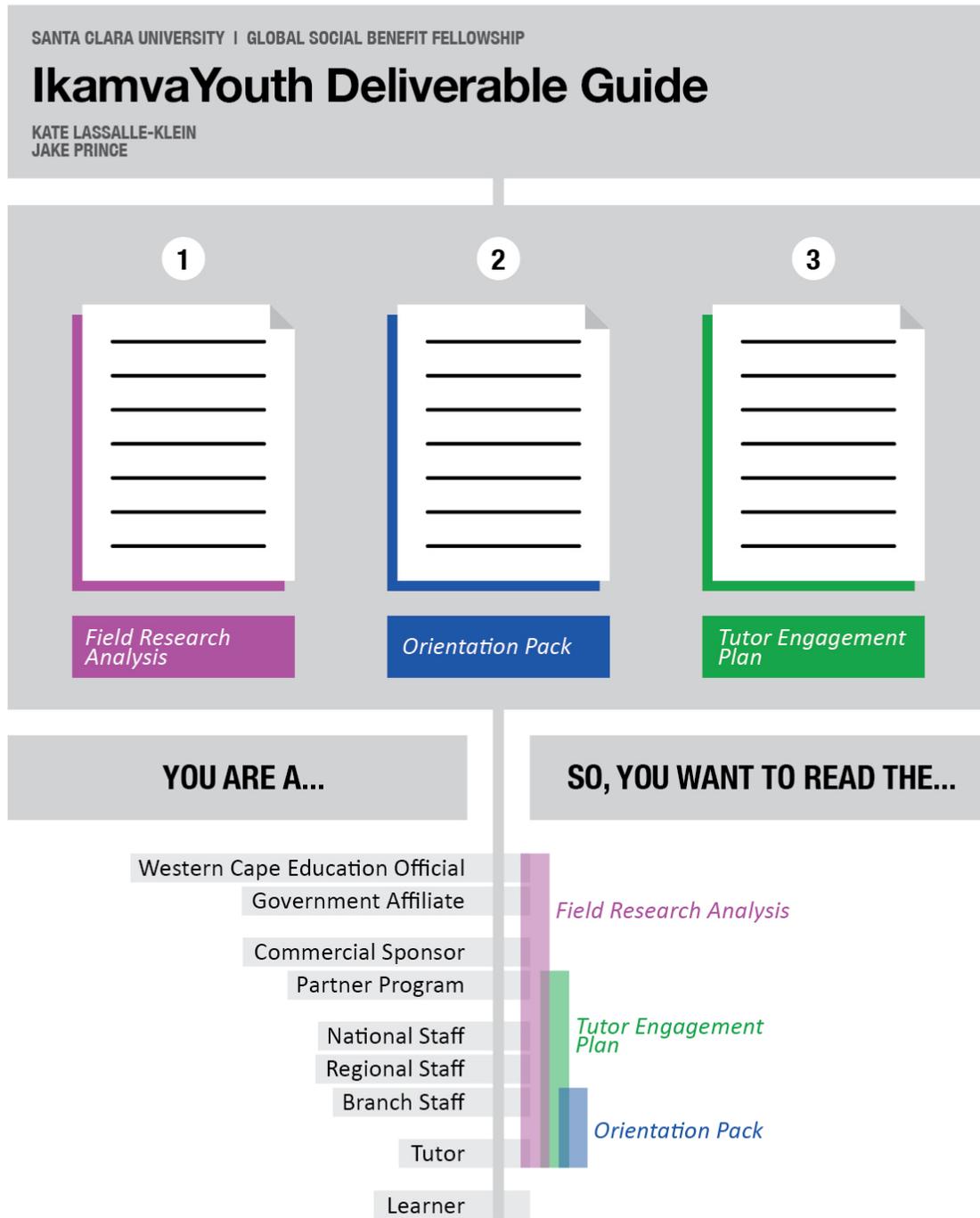
Our in-field research activities conveniently coincided with IkamvaYouth’s Winter School, a two-week tutoring intensive hosted by all 10 IkamvaYouth branches during the learners’ winter breaks. At Winter School, tutors assist the learners in reviewing the learners’ curriculum before the upcoming national exam period. At most branches, Winter School is held at a neighbouring university. For some, it is co-operatively hosted by multiple branches. We conducted the individual tutor interviews and tutor group discussions exclusively during these two weeks of Winter School.

Following the conclusion of Winter School, Grade 12 learners attend IkamvaYouth’s Matric Camp, a one-week tutoring intensive that prepares the graduating students for their matriculation exams, a deciding factor in university admittance. We conducted the individual staff interviews exclusively during Matric Camp, gaining staff members’ perspectives on some of the same topics that we had already discussed with tutors.

Our findings suggest that IkamvaYouth can improve three facets of tutor retention. First, tutors can be better prepared for the realities of tutoring by accessing standardized, comprehensive orientation and training. Second, branch staff can more efficiently communicate with tutors to achieve meaningful, sustainable impacts on tutor satisfaction. Third, IkamvaYouth can engage tutors in participative initiatives that inspire ownership of their roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

We present three deliverables to address these potential improvements. The *Field Research Analysis*, written specifically to address the needs of IkamvaYouth national staff, includes analyses of the results of the survey, interviews, and discussion groups, and can be leveraged to better understand tutor identities, motivations, and needs. The *Orientation Pack*, written specifically to address the needs of IkamvaYouth tutors, provides convenient access to the standardized resources necessary to their success. The *Tutor Engagement Plan*, written specifically to address the needs of branch staff, frames the necessity for and means of achieving meaningful, solution-based discussions between tutors and staff.

The below image graphically depicts the relationship between these three primary deliverables. It explains the intended target audiences of each of the documents, such that any individual or organisation affiliated with the organisation, from tutors to staff to government officials, can easily understand towards which of the documents they should focus their attention.



# Document Guide



This guide frames the necessity for and possible means of achieving meaningful, solution-based discussions between tutors and staff for IkamvaYouth. The document begins with the *Research Methods*, a summary of our activities in the field. Then it explores some of the relevant themes that emerged from our research in the *Engagement Analysis*. Please pay special attention to the “Engagement Conclusions” subsection at the end of the *Engagement Analysis* (p.8), as it is concisely explains the foundations upon which this document was created.

In the *Literature Review*, we provide some context for how other organisations have improved engagement, productivity, and satisfaction in the workplace and how their successes can be incorporated into IkamvaYouth’s model. This section will be most valuable to IkamvaYouth national staff in understanding the conceptual ties between the results of our research and the suggestions made in the following section.

The *Quality Circle Implementation Guide* proposes a procedural outline for implementing a formalized tutor engagement solution on a broad scale. This section will be most valuable to branch staff attempting to improve tutor engagement.

The *Group Discussion Tips* include detailed, practical guidelines for organizing and facilitating tutor discussions. The recommendations in this section are based on our experiences in the field and are designed to complement IkamvaYouth’s open, democratic approach to progress. This section will help branch staff organize group discussions and help group facilitators conduct them in a solution-driven manner.

# Engagement Analysis

This section outlines the trends we gathered from the tutor interviews, tutor group discussions, and staff interviews. We investigated a range of topics, but, for the purposes of this document, we will only explore those related to tutor engagement: BranchCom, communication within the organisation, and the relationships between tutors and staff. As it appears in this document, engagement refers to IkamvaYouth's ability to occupy, involve, and attract tutors to be active participants in the organisation beyond the scope of tutoring.

All of the information in this section is based on the explicit opinions of tutors and staff, unless otherwise stated. It is important to note that many of our interview and discussion questions targeted core problem areas in which IkamvaYouth has the potential to improve. As a result, the below trends may give the impression that tutors are very dissatisfied with IkamvaYouth when, in reality, their overall opinions of the organisation are much more balanced. For transcripts of the interview guides and full discussions of all the interview and discussion trends, please consult the *Field Research Analysis*.

## BRANCH COMMITTEE

BranchCom, short for Branch Committee, is IkamvaYouth's flagship, democratic solution to facilitate meaningful discussions and find solutions to pressing issues within the organisation. It has been a key component of IkamvaYouth's structure since the organisation's inception. BranchCom was designed to create a space for learners, tutors, parents, and staff to discuss issues, forge solutions, and ensure that all members of the IkamvaYouth community felt connected and valued. Some of the issues or ideas discussed at BranchCom are passed upwards and discussed at a more broad level during either the Regional Committee or National Committee meetings. This interdependent ecosystem of communication relies heavily upon its foundation—BranchCom—to ensure that the individuals at the very base level have the ability to steer the course of the organisation.

Both staff and tutors agree that BranchCom is currently failing to fully achieve its goals. In fact, staff and tutors have disparate conceptions both of what BranchCom is and what it should be. Many tutors and staff currently understand the most common use of BranchCom to be an outlet for delegating tasks that the branch staff cannot, in their limited time and resources, complete without the help of tutors. However, while some staff support the continued use of BranchCom to fulfill this need, tutors believe that BranchCom should primarily be an avenue for working towards solutions to the issues they face.

Regardless of how they envision BranchCom's purpose or current uses, most staff and tutors agree that BranchCom is failing and is not taken seriously. Experienced tutors and staff who have seen BranchCom grow and change feel that it is creating as much confusion and frustration as it is producing solutions. Staff feel that BranchCom is failing to engage tutors, many of whom attend inconsistently because they feel that it is a waste of time. The overwhelming consensus is that there must be a serious overhaul of BranchCom in order to realign its function with the current needs of the organisation.

## COMMUNICATION

Most of the many small organisational and operational issues that the tutors identify are rooted in communication failures between themselves and staff, in both directions. These communication breakdowns exacerbate other problems rather than help to solve them. For example, as IkamvaYouth grows, it needs to thoroughly organize and facilitate tutor attendance to guarantee that there are not too few tutors on any given day. Yet, the media through which branch staff routinely contact tutors—email, phone, messaging services, social media—are not well defined and can be both confusing and inefficient. When staff have to use a muddled array of media to communicate with tutors, organizing attendance becomes even more consuming. As a result, staff are often forced to call upon the same tutors repeatedly, unfairly overtaxing those tutors while underutilizing others.

Tutors and staff are frustrated by the detrimental consequences of communication breakdowns that occur during meetings and discussions. For example, during informal weekly briefings, structured forums like BranchCom, and yearly meetings that follow Winter School and Matric Camp, controversial topics on which the tutors and staff tend to disagree are brought to light. These topics range from organisational protocols, such as rules banning the use of languages besides English during tutoring, to local operational policies, such as stipulations that punish poor attendance or tardiness by taking away transportation reimbursements.

Discussions of divisive topics currently hinder productivity because they produce more complaints than solutions. According to most tutors, staff tend to imply that complaints are unwelcome and will not be addressed. Unfortunately, as made apparent by staff, tutors are generally unskilled in respectfully articulating their complaints or expanding them to thoughtful solutions and recommendations for improvement. Tutors need to be empowered to have confidence in their ability to identify issues and rectify problems without relying too heavily on staff.

Staff discussed the need for more structured approaches to communication, including establishing agendas, keeping records of meetings, and establishing meetings as solution-oriented processes. They feel that this would lessen the pressure they feel to “police” tutors and, instead, provide an equal space for everyone to voice opinions.

## TUTOR-STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

Some tutors feel that the branch staff maintain favored tutors who enjoy special privileges and treatment. This often includes experienced tutors who have more administrative roles than their younger counterparts. This stratification of tutor roles creates a communication breakdown; the tutors who feel excluded are less likely to interact directly with the branch staff. Furthermore, less experienced tutors often feel that the senior volunteers do not share or value their opinions on how the organisation should be run, further inciting tension. We saw the result of this tension during group discussions in which the senior volunteers forcefully opposed criticism of IkamvaYouth’s policies. Their opinions overpowered those of the novice tutors who then stopped contributing to the discussions, likely out of frustration that their opinions were underappreciated just because they had not been with the

organisation as long. We witnessed, on a small scale, the harmful effects of unequal tutor engagement. Tutors are silenced and stop contributing their potentially valuable, constructive ideas.

Tutors feel that newly hired staff undervalue the potential of existing tutors to contribute to their orientation and integration into the organisation. These staff, who may face stressful and challenging circumstances when they arrive at a branch, often fail to adequately consult with tutors on topics with which the tutors are experienced and knowledgeable. As a result, when problems inevitably arise which the tutors feel they could have prevented, they are reluctant to offer their support for solutions.

## ENGAGEMENT CONCLUSIONS

One of the most profound observations we had throughout our eight weeks of field research was the positive effect that the group discussions had on the participants. The tones of the group discussions were generally critical and reserved to begin with. Yet, as the discussions developed and tutors began to talk with one another rather than to us, the tones of the discussions became more passionate and supportive. Tutors thanked us for taking the time to hear them out without criticizing or devaluing their ideas, even if we could not guarantee that any relevant solutions would be reached as a result. They left the discussion rooms with a clearer understanding of their peers' opinions and, perhaps, feelings of validation that their contributions were relevant and valuable.

As expressed by tutors and staff alike throughout the various interviews and discussions, there is great potential for IkamvaYouth to improve its approaches to solving problems through communication. It appears that issues relating to tutor engagement are amplified by breakdowns in communication, permeating throughout distant aspects of the organisation. By solving inefficiencies at the ground level, mainly the exchanges between branch staff and tutors, IkamvaYouth should expect to see returns in volunteer satisfaction and productivity that outweigh the initial investments of time and resources.



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# Literature Review



This section explores some of the models and methods used in industry to inclusively boost employee engagement. We believe that the vast majority of ideas presented in this section are already informal components of IkamvaYouth's unique model. Examining these formalized concepts in context reveals an intuitive potential solution to IkamvaYouth's issues with tutor engagement.

## SOCIAL MANAGEMENT MODEL

Management models are designed to complement the industrial, economic, and cultural landscapes in which organisations exist. IkamvaYouth utilizes a "social management model" in which each staff member, volunteer tutor, and learner is afforded the right to think and learn independently, analogous to individuals within a complex society.<sup>1</sup> These individuals not only constantly interact, but also heavily depend on one another for adaptation and survival.

IkamvaYouth, since its inception, has championed the ideals of democracy, responsibility, and collaboration. As the social management model prescribes, IkamvaYouth's success is contingent upon its ability to continuously develop and "learn from experience."<sup>2</sup> This model is well suited to fluid environments in which change is unpredictable. Three fundamental pillars support it: trust, transparency, and real-time feedback. According to the results of the aforementioned interview and group discussion trends, the vast majority of tutors feel that there is room for improvement in these three key areas. They want to be trusted to act autonomously and contribute to a shared vision for IkamvaYouth. They want the organisation's weaknesses and decision-making processes to be more transparent. And, perhaps most importantly, they want to be kept in the loop when decisions are made that affect their roles in the organisation.

In the social management model, the manager's role, which is somewhat analogous to that of branch staff, is to "design a desirable future and to find ways to achieve it by managing individuals and organisational components."<sup>3</sup> One of the most profound challenges for these managers is balancing leadership and empowerment. This struggle surely resonates with IkamvaYouth branch staff, who are responsible for virtually every facet of their branch's success, including the management of both tutors and learners. They are expected to simultaneously act as strong leaders and give volunteer tutors the space and support to create their own success. Although combining coherent leadership with empowerment may create tension, there exists a great potential for the two pursuits to be complementary and highly productive.

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1. Steiss, *Strategic Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*: 101.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

## PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

In order to ensure that IkamvaYouth's democratic culture is maintained as the organisation grows and changes, volunteer tutors must share the responsibilities of identifying problems and implementing solutions with staff. Participative management, a system in which workers are empowered to actively participate in making operational decisions, offers a variety of potential benefits for an organisation and its workers' mental health and job satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

Participative management promotes co-operation and interaction between managers and workers. Although branch staff are not "managers" in a traditional sense, they face some of the same challenges that any organisational leader faces. By involving the workforce in designing, maintaining, and improving key operational processes, participative management initiates feelings of ownership in workers: "...when responsibility for change is shared among executives [branch staff] and employees [tutors], the latter do not see the former as a figure of authority to rebel against..."<sup>5</sup>

## QUALITY CIRCLES

One solution to the challenge of balancing leadership and empowerment within an organisation is a participatory management technique referred to as "quality circles" (QCs). This term refers to a process in which small groups of workers voluntarily meet at regular intervals to discuss problems of quality and devise solutions for improvements. The practise originated in manufacturing industries in the 1950s, when statisticians noticed that managers were given 85% of the responsibility for quality control while line workers were given only 15% of the responsibility.<sup>6</sup> When the roles were reversed, the production process redesigned, and the line workers educated in quality control, productivity soared. They also led to improvements in employee attitudes as an indirect, secondary effect.<sup>7</sup>

QCs have since been applied to a far wider range of industries, including education. Yet, over the past few decades, QCs have fallen out of favor and are no longer employed as a standard management technique. They failed largely due to two broad categories of obstacles. First, hierarchical management structures distanced top-management from the conclusions reached by QC members. Second, organisations failed to fully implement, support, and value the QCs, leading to inconsistent attendance, lack of problem-solving skills, and high turnover rates.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, QCs were often abandoned well before their anticipated benefits could be measured: "if QCs are evaluated too early (i.e., less than a year [after being implemented]) the effects [will] be small, and evaluators will arrive [at] the conclusion that QCs do not have an effect."<sup>9</sup>

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4. Pascale Benoiel and Anit Somech, "Who Benefits from Participative Management?" 286-287.

5. R. Zeffane, "Dynamics of strategic change: critical issues in fostering positive organizational change." 38.

6. "Quality Circles."

7. Pereira and Osburn, "Effects of Participation in Decision Making on Performance and Employee Attitudes: A Quality Circles Meta-Analysis." 146-147.

8. Tang and Butler, "Attributions of Quality Circles' Failure: Perceptions among Top-Management, Supporting Staff, and Quality Circle Members." 1.

9. Pereira and Osburn, "Effects of Participation in Decision Making on Performance and Employee Attitudes: A Quality Circles Meta-Analysis." 151.

The same studies, which identified the factors that contributed to QC failures, also identified a list of conditions that limit the risk of QC failure. These studies support the effectiveness of QCs under certain circumstances:

- QCs must consist of a small group of coworkers (5-12) with similar jobs who voluntarily commit to participating.<sup>10</sup> The QC members should not be seen as an elite group within their work area. Rather, they should actively solicit suggestions from non-members in order to stimulate support, participation, and ownership.
- Both management and workers must be firmly committed to this co-operative approach.<sup>11</sup> QCs are doomed to fail if management devalues them to a role of stress relief rather than productivity improvement.
- Members must receive appropriate training in problem solving.<sup>12</sup> Many individuals are not accustomed to investigating and critically analyzing problems but have the potential to be valuable assets to QCs. It is management's responsibility to give all potential QC members an equal opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills. Doing so will pay dividends as those members become more active contributors both within and outside of the QCs.
- A concept of measurement must be established to serve as a baseline for the impact and effectiveness of QCs.<sup>13</sup> Trends in worker productivity and satisfaction are not easily tracked unless consistent feedback protocols are established. Furthermore, the implementation of QCs may initially lead to more complaints than solutions if either the workers or management resist changes.
- The problems addressed by the QC should be chosen internally, not by management. The choice should be honoured even if it does not coincide with a management goal.<sup>14</sup>
- The circle must choose a leader from within its own members to facilitate discussions and pass recommendations to management. Management must not facilitate the QC but should mentor the team to help them achieve their objectives.

## POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF QUALITY CIRCLES FOR IKAMVAYOUTH

IkamvaYouth is certainly not idle in its struggle to successfully engage with tutors. Staff members recognize the dire need to prove to tutors that they are valued members of the decision-making process.

Implementing a customized variation of quality circles may allow IkamvaYouth to leverage tutors' desire to be engaged in an inclusive, democratic process. By further involving tutors in making decisions that

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10. Chase, "Quality Circles in Education." 19.

11. Steiss, *Strategic Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*: 105.

12. "Quality Circles."

13. Steiss, *Strategic Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*: 105.

14. "Quality Circles."

directly affect their lives, they will experience an increased sense of ownership of their actions and autonomous empowerment within IkamvaYouth. As a secondary effect, we anticipate that the tutors will adopt an even more supportive outlook of the organisation. Finally, by relieving branch staff of some of the challenges in engaging with and satisfying their tutors, they will have more time and resources to be receptive of the solutions produced by QCs.

Even those tutors who do not participate in quality circles will benefit from their existence. They will see their peers making an impact on the organisation. They will have a neutral conduit through which they can contribute ideas or express dissatisfaction without immediately involving branch staff. And, by extension of the tutors who participate in quality circles, all tutors will become more familiar with the rigorous research and discussions which preface key decisions within the organisation—a process which is currently less overt and leaves many tutors wondering how and why IkamvaYouth comes to important conclusions.

Of course, it is important to remember that quality circles are just one distinct form of participatory decision-making. There is no valid reason to assume that QCs are a perfect fit for IkamvaYouth or that they will solve all problems. Furthermore, it is unfair to assume that any QC guide procured from another source will sync harmoniously with IkamvaYouth's unique business model, culture, and existing engagement measures. Yet, basic QC outlines give insight into the structured, logical flow of leadership and empowerment that might be of use to branch staff interested in participating in an experiment to improve tutor engagement. For any variation of quality circles to have a measurable impact on the effectiveness and attitudes of tutors, IkamvaYouth must support their implementation in a sustained and consistent manner.

# Quality Circle Implementation Outline

This section details an outline for implementing quality circle discussions within an organisation. The recommendations in this section are based on examples of successful programmes in industry, as discussed in the Literature Review. The outline is tailored to accommodate IkamvaYouth's open, democratic approach and need for improved tutor engagement. This guide should be updated, revised, and expanded to suit the needs of the organisation as a whole and of each individual branch.

Procedure for Establishing Quality Circles:<sup>15</sup>

## I. INITIATION

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### A. Obtain organisational commitment from branch staff

- Consider piloting with one or two branches that are willing and able to provide a long-term ( $\geq 1$  year) commitment to the programme.
- Be sure to communicate the fact that the programme is not just intended to assist tutors, but to make tutor engagement and communication more efficient for the entire branch.
- The potential impact of this programme relies heavily on the branch staff's willingness to implement and support it. We believe that, by doing so, they will see long-term advances in productivity throughout all branch activities.

### B. Locate tutor-level interest and participation

- We believe that tutors are strongly in favor of such a programme but did not specifically gather any statistical evidence of the proportion of tutors who would actually be willing to participate. It will be valuable for IkamvaYouth to conduct its own internal survey to gauge interest.
- IkamvaYouth must ascertain the most efficient frequency with which to hold quality circle meetings. The circles should likely meet more than once every three weeks or tutors will probably lose interest. Meeting more often than once every two weeks will likely overwhelm the participants.

### C. Plan for circle member training

- Incorporate explanations of the need for and uses of quality circle into existing tutor training.
- Underscore the value of the new programme to all members, regardless of their interest in participating.
- Choose a date and location for the member training to take place.
- Choose an individual within the organisation to conduct member training, preferably someone other than the branch staff to create the impression that the programme is tutor-led and not controlled by staff.

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15. Adapted from: Steiss, *Strategic Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*: 106.

#### D. Develop goals and objectives for the programme

- For the programme to be successful, there must be clearly defined objectives and structured goals that can be tracked, measured, and assessed for impact.
  - One direct goal of the quality circles should be to increase the rate at which problems are identified and solved. This can be approximately measured by tracking the number of proposals submitted by tutors to staff and the number of solutions implemented.
  - One indirect goal of the quality circles should be to improve tutor satisfaction. By conducting simple, periodic surveys with tutors, their satisfaction can be approximated.
- Although there should be goals established at the national level, each branch should also consider recording their own personal goals suited to the local atmosphere.

## II. DEVELOPMENT

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#### A. Solicit names of tutors interested in becoming circle members

- Be sure to stress that the programme is completely voluntary.
- Seek tutors with a range of experience levels, skills, and personality types.
- Underscore the importance of the programme to IkamvaYouth's development.
- Communicate to interested tutors that they can freely attend the preliminary training session before making any commitment to the programme.

#### B. Conduct circle member training

- Train members in group dynamics, group leadership, and problem-solving techniques.
- Conduct a mock circle to exemplify the procedures, rules, and expectations. Do so by soliciting issues the tutors want to address, preferably starting with small, specific problems that can be easily addressed without the guidance of staff.
- Encourage group members to speak openly and without any fear of repercussion.
- Take the ideas produced and walk tutors through the process of evaluating the urgency, importance, and value of solving each issue.
- Democratically choose one issue to pursue. Ask members to spend the next week recording notes and ideas related to the topic.
- Meet the following week to discuss possible solutions. Decide on the best course of action. Prepare a written summary of the problem and solution.
- Present the proposal to staff.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION

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#### A. Establish circles and resolve mechanical issues: name, minutes, proceedings, rules, logistics, and communications

- These details need to be fully resolved prior to the installation of the circle in order to ensure its success and longevity.
- Keeping notes will expedite the training and orientation of new group members and allow IkamvaYouth employees to understand the inner working of the meetings.
- Consider either asking that one of the tutors volunteer as secretary or asking all the members to serve on a rotating basis.
- Provide the members with a notepad to record minutes and a binder and folders to organize their notes. Allow circle members to keep the notes binder in the IkamvaYouth branch office and ensure that it will be kept private and confidential.
- Stress the value of recording notes and the fact that it's often difficult to recall all of the discussion topics once a meeting has ended.

#### B. Utilize problem-solving techniques within the quality circle process

##### 1. Problem Identification: *"What issues can be addressed?"*

- Tutors will likely have varied, diverse ideas for how IkamvaYouth can be improved. Encourage them to focus on issues that they believe are the most important, not just what learners or staff might suggest.
- Group members need to be able to identify the root cause of organisational and operational problems rather than simply pointing out the symptoms.
- Group members must understand that solving one fundamental issue can alleviate many secondary problems, which arise from it.

##### 2. Problem Selection: *"Which issue should we address?"*

- Quality circles do not have the capacity to propose solutions for all of the issues that their members identify. Therefore, there must be a democratic process of selection in which the most pertinent problem is determined.
- Members should assess several factors, including the urgency of each problem, the feasibility of proposing a viable solution, and the probability that their proposal will lead to measurable changes within the organisation.
- Members must consider the scope of the problem, whether it is a specific local issue or a more fundamental IkamvaYouth policy.
- Group members should vote to determine a single issue to be addressed.
- Once an issue is selected, unanimously or not, all members must proceed supportively and not split off to pursue their own project.

##### 3. Problem Analysis & Information Collection: *"What is the nature of the issue and how might we address it?"*

- This step might not be intuitive for group members, most of whom do not have experience in research.

- Encourage members to speak openly about their activities with their fellow tutors, learners, staff, and even outside sources.
- Empower them to be their own advocates, using their creativity to analyse the issue without being hindered by the politics or conventional operations of the branch.
- Force them to ask tough questions and to critically analyse all aspects of the issue.
- Provide group members with small notebooks such that they can collect and record information related to their selected topic. This process should take 1-2 weeks to allow members to collect evidence, discuss their research, and then follow up with more refined research.

#### 4. Develop Solutions & Make Recommendations

- Group members must compile the data from their research, in whatever form it exists.
- Then, they must find common themes or trends and analyse how they fit together to form a cohesive narrative of the problem.
- Group members will likely have differing opinions on how best to solve the problem. Additionally, there will likely be a range of potentially viable solutions.
- Members should, again, vote democratically to select the most valuable potential solutions.
- Then, they will produce a brief document (1-2 pages), which outlines the problem, research trends, and proposed solution.

#### 5. Present to Branch Staff & Review

- This is a pivotal step in the process and may be challenging for group members who lack experience in public speaking or presentations.
- After working hard to prepare a presentation, group members will be very disheartened if the branch staff is unsupportive or uninterested.
- Even if branch staff disagree with aspects of the proposal, they must remain accommodating and respectful of the circle members' work.
- There is no obligation that the staff accept the solution immediately, but if they feel strongly against it, they should clearly articulate their reasoning and help point the circle in a more productive direction.
- Regardless of the results of the presentation, the proposal should be forwarded to the regional and national staff so that they can be kept up-to-date on the circle activities and general welfare of the tutors.

#### 6. Implementation by members of the circle

- Because the main focus of quality circles is the operational issues their members face, it is intuitive that those members take part in implementing the proposed solutions.
- If the circle proposes a solution, which involves changes to IkamvaYouth's policies, they may be unable to implement a solution themselves. In this case, branch staff should communicate with regional and national staff in order to bring the proposal to the attention of a broader audience and gauge the level of support in pursuing a solution to the problem.
- Regardless, the group should be given a specific time frame in which they can expect to receive feedback from staff on the state of their proposal.

- The group should be given a feasible time frame in which to implement their proposal. They should be given clear guidelines on what is expected of them in terms of implementation and how the responsibility will be shared with the staff and non-member tutors.

## IV. EVALUATION

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### A. Follow-up on circle activities

- Throughout the predetermined implementation period, staff should keep track of how the members' activities are being received from the general organisation, including learners and non-member tutors.
- If non-member tutors are highly resistant to any changes, it is the staff member's responsibility to explain and support the necessity for the changes.
- Of course, if at any time the staff member senses that the changes are bringing about more detriments than benefits, he or she is free to halt the implementation or alter its course. If so, the staff member should again articulate his or her reasoning to the circle and inform the regional and national staff of their intent to alter or halt the implementation.
- At the conclusion of the predetermined implementation period, the staff should meet with the circle to discuss any further action that is needed and to ensure that they are prepared to pursue another issue.

### B. Assess impact of the circle's recommendations

- As expressed in the "Initiation" phase (p. 14), the impact of an implemented solution is very challenging to detect if there are no measureable metrics for the changes.
- If metrics are measured, continue to compare them with the baseline in the months following the implementation in order to understand how the changes affected the selected variables. For example, a solution targeting tutor attendance could be evaluated by measuring individual attendance, tardiness, total number of unique tutors per week, or number of days in which there were less than enough tutors to satisfy a 5:1 learner: tutor ratio.
- Measuring impact metrics might be far too challenging or cumbersome for staff or group members to track. Even so, staff should still make an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented solution, perhaps by bringing up the subject at BranchCom and getting feedback from learners and non-member tutors.

### C. Evaluate organisational impacts on circles

- Branch staff should, especially at the conclusion of an implementation period, be very sensitive to the needs of the circle group and consider what can be done to make them more effective.
- Staff should bring to the attention of the regional and national staff any organisational obstacles limiting the effectiveness of the circle.
- As these obstacles are removed, staff should expect to see the quality circles become even more effective in bringing about empowered, researched proposals capable of improving the organisation.

# Group Discussion Guide



The section includes detailed, practical guidelines for organizing and facilitating tutor discussions. The recommendations made in this section are based on our experiences in the field and are designed to complement IkamvaYouth's open, democratic approach to progress. This guide can be used either completely independently from or in conjunction with the preceding section, the *Quality Circle Implementation Outline*. This section will help branch staff organize group discussions and help facilitators conduct them in an efficient, solution-driven manner. This guide should be updated, revised, and expanded to suit the needs of the organisation as a whole and of each individual branch.

## I. PREPARE

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### A. Group Members

1. Leader: each group should have one facilitator capable of maintaining discussions.
  - He or she must keep the discussion moving in a positive, productive direction without being overbearing.
  - They must encourage all members to contribute and ensure that the more vocal members do not overpower the quieter members.
  - The leader should do his or her best to remove their own opinion from the discussions in order to remain neutral and open to other.
  - It is also important that the leader is "politically neutral," meaning that they are not perceived as being a spokesperson for or extension of branch staff.
  - Although staff can select a group leader, it may also be useful to allow the group to elect their own leader or take turns participating on a rotating basis.
  
2. Secretary: It is imperative that one member is able to quickly and accurately record meeting minutes and notes.
  - This person will probably be unable to participate in the discussion as much as others but they should be assertive enough to ask others to ask for clarification on discussion topics.
  - They should record as much of the discussion as possible because it will be very challenging to recall topics and ideas without a written transcript.
  - The secretary should also be tasked with organizing and storing the notes for future reference.
  - Finally, the secretary will forward transcripts of the notes if there is a procedure in place to share the notes with others.
  
3. Members: Group discussions should always be entirely voluntary to ensure that the members actively contribute and do not feel forced to participate.
  - Group discussions will be most productive with 5-8 members. Of course, it is still possible to conduct a discussion outside that range, but members might feel either too much or too little pressure to participate.

- It is essential to assemble a group with diverse members. Try to find individuals of varying backgrounds such as in tutoring experience, educational attainment, employment, age, gender, and whether the tutor was previously a learner with IkamvaYouth.
- Although it will be tempting to seek experienced tutors with proven commitments to IkamvaYouth, it is also important to reach out to inexperienced tutors as they will have fresh outlooks on the organisation and will be able to question established procedures which may be outdated and in need of revision.

## B. Invite Members

1. Informal: On an individual basis, explain the purpose and goals of the group discussion to the potential members. Stress to each person the potential he or she has to improve IkamvaYouth. Be sure to give the recruits at least a week of notice before the group discussion is to be held.
2. Formal: Provide each confirmed member with an invitation card that reiterates the goals of the group and details key information such as date, time, duration, location, necessary items, and whether food will be provided. Consider asking members to sign and return the invitation as commitment to the discussion.

## C. Group Discussion Member Orientation

1. Leader: The group leader needs to understand the fundamentals of group discussions. Training need not be formal or extensive, but should at least include following topics:
  - Explain the “rules” of the discussion clearly before starting
  - Give all members the opportunity to speak
  - Facilitate discussion between members without inserting your own opinion
  - Guide discussion towards solutions
  - Be balanced; respect and address both sides of an argument
2. General Group Members: The entire group should be briefed on the goals for the discussion, ground rules and guidelines, tips for success, who the results of the discussion will be shared with, and how the results of the discussion will impact IkamvaYouth. Either establish a brief orientation session before the first discussion or conduct the training immediately preceding the discussion.

## D. Setting & Materials

1. Location: Secure a room, which is comfortable and can easily fit the 5-8 group members. The room should be well lit and comfortable to create an inviting atmosphere. Remove any potential distractions; turn off TVs and consider closing window blinds if there are people outside. If the room will be relatively warm or cold, be sure to notify the members ahead of time so that they can dress appropriately.
2. Notepad/Computer: Provide the secretary with a means of recording notes.
3. Chalkboard/Large Paper Roll: Provide the leader with a means of visually recording ideas contributed by the group.



4. Seating: Arrange the appropriate number of chairs in a loose circle such that all members can easily address and make eye contact with one another. Place the leader's seat near the chalkboard or paper roll but do not separate or distinguish it from the rest of the group.



5. Name Tags: If, at least at first, not all the group members are familiar with one another, provide name tags so that they can become familiar more quickly. When members are using each other's names to respond to one another, they become more engaged. Furthermore, the secretary will more easily be able to record transcripts of the discussion.

6. Discussion Guide: Although group members will produce the bulk of the discussion content organically, there should be a broad guide with suggested topics or questions. Limit each topic to one or two sentences—anything more specific might limit the ensuing discussion. By keeping topics purposefully broad, the discussions will be determined by members' interpretations.



7. Evaluation Sheet: What makes a group discussion successful? Decide on which factors you would like to keep track of and print evaluation sheets that the group discussion members can fill out after participating. Ensure and communicate the fact that the evaluations are anonymous. You may include some of the following questions but feel free to add or remove questions to suit your needs:

- What were the goals of this group discussion?
- Was this group discussion successful? Why or why not?
- Did you learn anything during the discussion?
- Do you feel that you were given the respect to share your opinions without being criticized?
- Would you participate in another group discussion in the future?

## II. EXECUTE

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### A. Review Ground Rules & Expectations

Consider either posting rules on the board so that tutors consider and reflect upon them during the discussion. Alternatively, ask the members to make suggestions and co-create the rules at the beginning of the session such that they are actively involved in creating an inviting atmosphere. Here are some examples:

- Listen actively—respect others when they speak
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing
- You do not need to agree—the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the range of opinions and ideas
- Focus on ideas and avoid personal attacks
- Challenge one another by asking questions
- Be conscious of your body language and nonverbal cues—they can be as powerful as words
- Participate to the fullest extent—the growth of the community depends on the contribution of all members
- Ensure that the opinions expressed in the discussion remain private

### B. Explore Topic

The leader should propose a topic and encourage the members to openly discuss and explore it.

- Upon proposing a new topic, consider going around the circle and asking each member to contribute a couple of supporting ideas, concepts, or phrases.
  - “Without overanalyzing, please share the first thing that comes to mind when you think of...”
  - Write ideas on the board without analyzing or filtering. Allow the members to “brainstorm” and avoid discrediting or questioning any contributions.
- Specifically, ask members to speak to the effects a topic has on themselves as members of the IkamvaYouth community.
- Be sure to bring out both positive and negative aspects of any idea. Try to maintain a balanced discussion, engaging each member early on to dissipate any tension or nerves.
  - “Clearly, there are some strong opinions about this topic. Does anyone have any opinions that they think others might disagree with or that we have not yet heard?”
- Often, a few members will speak frequently while others remain reserved. After a more vocal member speaks, ask a more reserved member to comment:
  - “[Member B], do you agree with the opinion of [Member A]? Why or why not?”
- Feel free to guide the discussion to keep it “on track,” but pay attention to the natural direction of the discussion.
- Do not interrupt members and do not allow members to interrupt one another.

### C. Identify Problem Areas

Any problem areas that were identified during the topic discussion should be highlighted.

- For example, this could include struggles that tutors face in working with underprepared learners, operational issues such as lacking materials, or organisational issues such as rules that tutors disagree with.
- Ask members to discuss the implications of the problems, including both positive and negative consequences.
  - “How might this issue affect the IkamvaYouth community in ways that are not immediately obvious?”
- Encourage members to think beyond themselves to understand that what they view as an issue might actually be an overall positive contribution to the organisation as a whole.
  - “How and why might the learners and staff understand this issue differently than yourselves?”

#### D. Forge Solutions

Once the group has thoroughly discussed a balanced analysis of a specific problem, encourage them to offer possible solutions that might contribute to its resolution.

- Conduct an uninhibited “brainstorm session,” in which all ideas for potential solutions are written on the board.
  - Explain to tutors that their ideas need not be well-developed or comprehensive in scope—any possible contributions are positive and beneficial.
- Encourage open discussion on the positives and negatives of each potential solution.
- Try to group solutions by their underlying themes in order to narrow the list of potential solutions down to just a few key points.
- Be sure to respect the group members by ending the discussion at the time, which was initially agreed upon.

#### E. Gather feedback

At the end of the allotted discussion period, ask tutors to anonymously complete the prepared evaluation sheets.

- To make them comfortable, the leader or facilitator may leave the room and ask the members to place the evaluations on a table facedown.
- Finally, verbally ask the tutors for feedback on the discussion.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Provide them with a phone number or email address such that they can follow up with any ideas that they did not get a chance to express during the discussion.
- Remind them of how the results of the discussion will be used.
- Do not make any guarantees that the discussion will immediately lead to the resolution of the problems that were discussed.
- Finally, thank the members for participating.
- Consider rewarding them with a token of appreciation.

### III. EVALUATE

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#### A. Pass Transcripts to Staff

Staff need to carefully review the group discussion transcripts in order to stay updated on the opinions and ideas of the tutors.

- They should be proactive in pursuing the feasible solutions proposed during the discussions.
- The branch staff should forward the proposals to regional and national staff along with any necessary requests for support.
- Regional staff should be involved in keeping track of recurring trends, which affect tutors on a national level.
- Most importantly, branch staff should provide feedback to the group in order to ensure a closed loop of communication in which the tutors feel that their work is being acknowledged and is having an impact on the organisation.

#### B. Review Feedback

Carefully consider the feedback gathered from group members through the evaluation sheets. Attempt to quantify and track this information in order to better understand the needs of the tutors and trends in their satisfaction with the discussions over time.

# Appendix



## A. RESEARCH METHODS

Our in-field research activities conveniently coincided with Winter School. We spent the first week of Winter School, June 29 – July 3, in the Eastern Cape Province with the Joza branch. We spent the second week of Winter School, July 6 – 10, in the Western Cape Province between the Masiphumalele, Nyanga, and Makhaza branches.

We constructed three interview guides—one individual tutor interview guide, one tutor group discussion guide, and one staff interview guide—to gain a comprehensive, qualitative understanding of IkamvaYouth’s recruitment methods, the tutors’ relationships with IkamvaYouth, and the staffs’ understanding of the tutors’ work.

The individual interviews and group discussions were conducted during Winter School. Most interviews were conducted when the tutors were idle, such as between tutoring sessions, during tea breaks, at lunch, or at the conclusion of the day. Interviews and discussions were held in secluded spaces without any IkamvaYouth employees to encourage tutors to be open and honest. We spoke conversationally and casually to create a comfortable atmosphere and followed the written guides in whatever order was appropriate to the discussions.

We recorded 30 total individual interviews: 15 Joza tutors, 2 Masiphumalele tutors, 7 Nyanga tutors, and 6 Makhaza tutors. We recorded 4 total group discussions with a total of 22 tutors from the Western Cape branches. For each group discussion, we organized the chairs into a tight circle and attempted to facilitate inter-tutor dialogue.

We recorded interviews with a total of 5 staff members from the Western Cape branches during Matric Camp. We interviewed the Masiphumelele Branch Coordinator (BC) and Branch Assistant (BA), the Makhaza BC, and the Nyanga BC and Intern.

Throughout the process of developing and conducting interviews and group discussions, we were very careful to adhere to a few key standards, as described in the following paragraphs.

We remained neutral by explaining to each subject our circumstances and goals. We reiterated that we were not employees of IkamvaYouth. We assured them that their opinions would remain anonymous and would not in any way affect their relationship with IkamvaYouth.

We designed each question and discussion topic to guide the tutors towards suggesting solutions rather than dwelling on problems. Most often, we found that tutors were fully capable of but not accustomed to thinking critically about how decisions within the organisation can have indirect and complex effects that are not immediately obvious. Because the tutors viewed us as neutral moderators, we were able to ask tough questions and force them to consider aspects of IkamvaYouth’s policies for which there are not necessarily simple, convenient solutions.

Most importantly, we established an atmosphere of support by making it clear that we were genuinely interested in their honest feedback. Tutors were remarkably open and transparent and shared with us opinions that were surprising for IkamvaYouth staff to hear.

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