SECTION 2. Management in firms and organizations

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Resistance to change in impoverished schools of a South African province

Abstract

After the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, changes have taken place to eliminate the previous racially discriminating practices in the education system. These changes, among others, included the desegregation of schools, the establishment of the South African Schools Act (SASA), the introduction of no-fee schools, and feeding schemes. Despite these measures to counteract the detrimental circumstances of previously disadvantaged schools, some of the impoverished schools are still not performing according to expectations. A quantitative method with a post positive view was used. The purpose of the research reported in this article was to determine whether such schools demonstrated a resistance to the change initiatives in education introduced in South Africa. An investigation into the underperformance of impoverished schools revealed that impoverished schools that underperformed might have suffered from some form of resistance to change.

Introduction

Many historical and new challenges have existed in the South African education system since 1994. Challenges are mostly found in impoverished schools which are situated in the townships, informal settlements and in the rural areas of South Africa. These areas are commonly characterized by poverty and illiteracy. In order to address these challenges, numerous efforts have been made by different persons and institutions to improve the conditions of the impoverished schools in South Africa. However, it seems that these efforts have not come to fruition in the impoverished schools (Van Wyk, Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2014). Some of these challenges and efforts will be referred to in the next section.

1. Statement of the problem

Many authors have written about the historical and existing challenges in the education system of South Africa. Recently, the Legal Resource Centre (2013), Moyo (2013) and Equal Education (2015) reported that most impoverished schools do not have basic services such as electricity, water supply, ablution facilities, stocked libraries and laboratory facilities to help them function well as a school. Moreover, these schools are mostly situated in areas that are characterized by poverty, hunger, illiteracy, drug abuse, school violence, gangsterism and teenage pregnancies (Prew, 2010; Gaza, 2012; Modisaotsile, 2012). Data from the World Bank indicated that, as a result of these conditions in and around impoverished schools, half of all learners who have started school drop out before they complete the grade 12 examinations (Chetty, 2014).

Research indicated further that in most cases these schools do not have enough and appropriately trained teachers, a state of affairs that result in overcrowded classrooms (Spaull, 2013; Prew, 2010; Modisaotsile, 2012). According to Gaza (2012), Mthiyane, Bhengu and Bayeni (2014), part of the problems facing impoverished schools is the lack of commitment from teachers to do extra work to help learners with their school work. This further complicates the unfortunate situation of these schools. Modisaotsile (2012) and Gardiner (2013) aver that teachers' personal problems such as late-coming, absenteeism and the inability to embody the basic roles of teaching are common in some of these schools.

Researchers further attribute the underperformance of these schools to the lack of leadership and management. They maintain that the position of principalship is so fundamental that countries such as England, Germany, Singapore, Australia, and the United States expect from their principals to take part in a mandatory training program or to have a licence to be appointed as a principal (Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2007; Huber & Pashiardis, 2008; Van Wyk, Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2014). Researchers also hold the view that part of the problems in the education system can be ascribed to the presence of the trade unions (Deacon, 2014). On the other hand, according to Heystek and Lethoko (2001) and Msila (2013), trade unions can be a source of motivation if their role is correctly understood and practised.

From the above it is clear that some of the challenges in impoverished schools have been

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sufficiently researched, and the upshot is available in the public domain. The latter could be the reason why Government and others have put much effort in to address the shortcomings and challenges that these schools face. Some of these efforts are briefly alluded to in the following paragraphs.

According to Gaza (2012), Modisaotsile (2012) and Motsai (2015), the South African government has the highest budget spending on education in the world. Moreover, a no-fees system was introduced for the poorest schools (Phakathi, 2013; Moyo, 2013). In order to help poor households, a national nutrition program was introduced in primary schools and further expanded to poor high schools (Education Policy, 2002; Anon., 2014). Furthermore, the new National Land Transport Transition Act (NLTTA) requires from provincial governments and local governments to develop strategies for the transport needs of learners that live four (4) kilometres and further from their schools (Mngaza, Dhlamini & Van Zyl, 2011). The Department of Basic Education formed partnerships with, among others, businesses like Vodacom (2014) and Earth House (2015), to help with free stationery for learners in primary schools. The implementation of the new curriculum since 1994 brought with it various challenges, and the retraining of teachers became a necessity. The Departments of Basic and Higher Education held a summit on the development of teachers, called "The new, strengthened, integrated Plan for teacher development in South Africa" (2011). This plan aimed to respond effectively to the current challenges being experienced by teachers.

In terms of leadership and management in schools, the Department of Education has since 2008 embarked on a campaign to train members of the School Management Teams (SMT) in theory and practice-related leadership and management aspects of schools. This training is done by various institutions of higher learning, which issue a learner an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE: School Leadership) upon successful completion of the program. Lastly, in order to decentralize the interests of schools and enable them to govern their own affairs, the government introduced the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996). This Act introduced the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) consisting of parents, teachers, general workers as well as learners, and their main responsibility is to govern their own schools.

The abovementioned is indicative of the fact that the government and others did in fact do something to counteract some of the challenges that pertain in impoverished schools. Some of the poor schools benefited from these interventions, but it appears as if the interventions have not come to fruition at the majority of the impoverished schools. It is not only about a shortage of money to address the challenges in impoverished schools in the South African education system, but there might be other aspects in the internal and external environment that prevent impoverished schools to improve their output and achievement. The problem addressed by the research reported on below was as follows: *Do impoverished schools in South Africa exhibit resistance to the change initiatives introduced?*

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

This section contains the conceptual and theoretical framework on which the empirical research regarding the reasons for the underperformance of impoverished schools was based. The section thereafter contains a report of the empirical investigation that was done, followed by an outline of the findings, the discussion thereof, a number of recommendations and a final conclusion.

2.1. Change and resistance to change. Change is normally necessary when there is a need for renewal and also when organizations are not functioning well (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 2014). Lewin's theory maintains that change is completed in three stages: firstly, unfreezing where people realize that change is necessary in an organization. The second stage is where the actual change happens, and lastly, refreezing, where the organization has adopted new ways of doing things in the organization. Van der Westhuizen and Theron (2014), state that adjustment and non-adjustment to the aspects relating to organizations come with resistance to change, something which is more common than the acceptance of change.

According to Lewin's theory, people in the organization are usually in equilibrium with their work environment. Disturbing the equilibrium that people find themselves in, might be a source of anxiety and hence impact negatively on people, with the result that they try at all costs to restore the status quo in their work environment. Attempts to restore the status quo in their work environment can be seen as defying the new initiatives introduced in the organization and are referred to as resistance to change. People resist change initiatives for various reasons, but the following reasons are worth mentioning: inertia, mistrust and serious lack of information, clarity, capabilities and incentives (Napier, 2009).

It was decided to interpret these aspects that might play a role in resistance to change against the backdrop of Lewin's change theory. The following aspects were identified in the literature which might play a role in resistance to change.

2.2. Systemic aspects. The systemic aspects deal with the procedures and systems that a specific organization follows, and fall within the domain of the internal environment of the organization over which people have control (Van Wyk, 2012). Furthermore, they deal with supporting structures from, among others, parents, colleagues, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and School Management Teams (SMTs). People fall in a state of inertia (inactivity) when they are comfortable with procedures, systems and the supporting structures at their schools. They are at ease with the status quo at their workplaces, and if there are no major risks if they do not change, they go on as usual. Altering things at their workplace (unfreezing) might result in people attempting to maintain the status quo by increasing the resisting forces against the proposed change. In addition, the resisting forces against the change increase when the organizational system is struggling with existing systemic problems such as poor communication, secrecy and the inappropriate management style of their principal (Van der Merwe, 2013). The defiance of the change process might have such a negative effect that change never happens and therefore no refreezing can take place as a result of the overwhelming resistance against the proposed change.

2.3. Environmental aspects. Every organization has an imbedded culture that resulted from the existing values and norms of the people and the surrounding community (Hinde, 2004). This culture influences and reflects all aspects of organizational life, for instance, how the manager deals with staff meetings, what people talk about in the tea room, how people work and also their inclination to change (Van der Merwe, 2013). Hinde (2004) is of the opinion that change initiatives are hampered and negated by sociocultural differences among organizations, an obnoxious organizational environment, and beliefs that the change will ultimately fail. Such an environment is toxic, and is indicative of an atmosphere of hopelessness and negativity amongst people who are unwilling, oppositional and critical to change. It implies therefore that, in order to implement change initiatives, the organizational culture, which is inherent to the organization, must unfreeze. It is a momentous task to first change all the aspects that are related to an existing organizational culture, before change can be implemented. There are some organizations that will change with great difficulty as a result of their innate culture and their innate ability to resist change.

2.4. Personality aspects. Personality aspects revolve around the feelings and experiences of the individuals in the organization, and fall within the realm of the stakeholders of the organization (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 2014). According to Newstrom and Davis (1993), aspects that could be included and form part of the personality aspects are the different personalities of the people involved, their self-interest, levels of stimulation and dogmatism, homeostasis and the fear for change. These aspects have to do with the feelings and habits of people towards change, and might play a role in the failure of individuals to recognize the need for change (Newstrom & Davis, 1993). People will probably resist attempts at the unfreezing of attitudes and habits if they do not understand and realize the need for change in their organizations. Moreover, their interest in maintaining the status quo will certainly take primacy over their willingness to accept change as a result of past experiences with change (Van Wyk, 2012). For example, since the curriculum in South African schools has changed several times from its inception after 1994, it could have affected teachers' security needs negatively. As a result, they might resort to the well-established professional and instructional patterns that are familiar to them.

Furthermore, the prospects of change might threaten their expertise and abilities and their perceived lack of knowledge or skills to implement the change successfully (Gaza, 2012). Since individuals hold traditional decision-making responsibilities, they fear the threat to their power relationships in their workplaces (Badugela, 2012). For example, changes in the organization structure and systems might be reminiscent of the redeployment of staff that has been practised by the government since 1994. It poses threats to the social relationships that teachers have formed over the years at home and schools (Gaza, 2012). It could be inferred from the above that people might not be keen to accept unfreezing attempts for the new, if there is no evidence that the change would be advantageous and better than the existing practices at their workplaces. This could be seen as an upshot of the natural tendency of people to resist change in their workplaces.

2.5. Work aspects. These aspects have to do with the benefits and the way individuals experience the working environment and relate to their status, security, and the authority they have in the workplace (Lientz & Rae, 2007). A proposed change may be accompanied by perceptions of people that they could lose their jobs. Losing one's job means losing the authority that is associated with status and prestige. This is especially true for senior workers who have authority over others in their departments. As a result of the latter, there is reluctance to give up on the

status quo (Newstrom & Davis, 1993). Furthermore, it can be assumed in general that losing one's job causes stress and anxiety as the most basic needs like food and clothing can be jeopardized as a result of the change.

Furthermore, teachers' workload, especially those in impoverished schools whose schools do not have a budget to appoint additional teachers, has increased since the nineties as a result of downsizing and the introduction of the new curriculum (Zimmerman, 2006). The teacher-learner ratio as well as the number of subjects taught by a teacher could cause that the preparation and the administration pertaining to their subjects increase. It can be postulated that teachers will be opposed to any change that threatens their security needs.

2.6. Management aspects. These aspects relate to the management of the change and the extent to which individuals experience the management of change in their schools (Van Wyk, 2012). The bureaucratic nature of most schools causes that teachers have perceptions that they are not involved in the change process. The initiating of change always has an element of distrust and as a result of the structure of schools, questions and concerns that teachers might have are not responded to quickly and properly. The latter might result in claims from teachers that principals have poor listening skills and an alleged hidden agenda with the proposed change. Teachers are therefore not keen to involve themselves, and can be seen as lacking motivation for the change process. The poor management of change is another stumbling block during the change process. Teachers are not receptive of change if the aim with or reason for the change is not clear, and this could lead to change being accepted temporarily with serious reservations. It can be deduced that they will not be eager to accept change as a result of their distrust in the change process, and this will eventually result in resistance to change.

2.7. Process aspects. These deal with aspects of change such as capacity, knowledge and infrastructure to implement the change initiatives successfully (Van der Merwe, 2013). Individuals fear change as a result of their perceived poor capacity, skills, knowledge and understanding (Van Wyk et al., 2014). According to them, they are acquainted with the old methods in which they performed very well. The continuous alteration of the direction and aims of the change initiatives and the individuals' maintaining of the past, cause confusion and fear on their part that they will perform weaker and become a failure in the new dispensation (Newstrom & Davis, 1993).

In addition, unavailability of support and resources might derail the change process, and the likelihood to revert to old habits of doing things is strong. This is especially true for historically disadvantaged schools that are characterized by overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of teachers, poor facilities and limited resources. Owing to the state of affairs in these schools, individuals are not keen to move upwards and gratify higher order needs (Maslow, 1943). In the light of this, it can be assumed that the need for achievement and self-realization is not a priority for teachers. There might be unwillingness on their part to undergo teacher development and training for the betterment of their learners, due to their dissatisfaction with the status quo at their schools. This dissatisfaction might also lead to a negative school climate that demotivates teachers to do their best for the learners.

From the above it is clear that there are internal and external conditions that might have a negative impact on teaching and learning in impoverished schools. These conditions can potentially lead to dissatisfaction among teachers in these schools, and ultimately to resistance to change.

3. Empirical investigation

3.1. Purpose of the investigation. Much research has been done in impoverished schools to eradicate the discriminatory practices of the past, but there is evidence that these schools still are not performing as they should. The purpose of this research was therefore to: *Determine whether impoverished schools demonstrated resistance to change initiatives.*

3.2. Research orientation and design. A quantitative research approach, with a post-positivistic paradigm, was followed. This approach was appropriate in that it gets data from different participants at a specific time (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), one of the features of the post-positivistic paradigm is that the relationship between variables could be influenced by various factors and might attribute to the fact that the results of the investigation need not necessarily completely agree with perspectives expressed in the theoretical framework. In order not to influence the outcome of the research, and for practical and economical purposes, a survey was the appropriate choice.

3.3. Study population and sampling. Principals and teachers working in primary and secondary schools in the Northern Cape province of South Africa formed the study population. Most of the principals and teachers were experienced and well educated (62.1% and 86.4% respectively). For reasons of inclusivity, only schools of 500 and more learners formed part of the study population of which a systematic sample was drawn from every

second school that appeared on the Education Management Information System list of schools. In this process, forty schools were selected and questionnaires were distributed by post and hand delivered to forty principals and 530 teachers of primary and secondary schools.

3.4. Instrument. A structured four-point Likert type questionnaire was used to obtain the data from the participants via mail and by hand (McMillan, 2012). The questionnaire was language edited after which thirty principals and teachers who were not part of the research participated in a pilot study of ten minutes to verify the correctness of the questionnaire. The participants were expected to firstly furnish biographical data, and lastly provide data about resistance to change, indicating which of the following options they regarded as appropriate: "no extent; a little extent; some extent and a large extent". The content of the questionnaire was identical for both principal and teacher, except in cases where the question was specifically posed to the principal or teacher.

3.5. Validity and reliability. Validation of the content of the questionnaire was based on the literature about resistance to change, a pilot investigation with thirty principals and teachers, as well as by the statistical service of a South African University. According to Creswell (2012), Cronbach's alpha coefficient must be near or 1 to declare the questionnaire reliable. The same construct was measured by 58 items and there was a medium to high concurrence (Cronbach alpha, 0.6-0.86).

3.6. Ethical issues. Ethical clearance was obtained from the South African University under whose auspices the study was done, and permission was granted by the Department of Basic Education to conduct the research in schools. Ethical issues such as privacy, integrity, professional dignity as well as trustworthiness of the information and the

anonymity of the participants were all part of the ethical aspects explicated on the front page of the questionnaire. The assurance was also given to participants that they could at any time withdraw from the investigation (Creswell, 2012).

3.7. Data collection. The head of Basic Education in the Northern Cape Province had granted consent to distribute the questionnaires to participants. In order to avoid confusion, questionnaires of principals and teachers were printed on different color paper and a cover letter on the front of the questionnaire served to inform participants about the aim of the research as well as to bring the ethical issues under their attention. The participants were informed beforehand, via principals of schools, telephonically what had to be done. The same methods as with the distribution were used, by post or hand delivered, to receive the questionnaires back and a return rate of 98.5% for principals and 83.5% for teachers was obtained.

3.8. Processing procedures. In order to process and analyze the data, the completed questionnaires were given to the statistical service of a South African university. The paired t-test and Cohen's d-values were used to process the data. The following guidelines were applicable to Cohen's effect sizes: 0.2 – practically no significance or small difference; 0.5 – practically visible or medium difference, and 0.8 – practically significant or big difference (Maree & Pietersen, 2011). Only d-values of ≥ 0.50 (medium to large differences) were used for practically significant purposes.

4. Results and discussion

The table below depicts the different aspects that are present in schools. It displays the views of principals and teachers as to which of these aspects demonstrate a relationship with resistance to change in impoverished schools.

Table 1. Impoverished schools and the relationship with resistance to change

Aspects	Average		Standard deviation		d-values	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
Systemic	2.94	2.66	0.41	0.52	0.18	0.31
Environmental	2.10	2.01	0.55	0.56	0.26	0.12
Personality	2.10	2.27	0.47	0.53	0.10	0.20
Process	2.30	2.29	0.36	0.44	**0.50**	0.23
Work	1.91	1.97	0.53	0.56	0.03	0.20
Management	2.14	2.10	0.40	0.55	0.05	0.20

4.1. Systemic aspects. Insignificant differences were found between the responses of teachers (d = 0.31) and principals (d = 0.18) regarding the systemic aspects that could give rise to resistance to change. These systemic aspects fall within the realm of the school and it seems that they are at ease

(inertia) within their own domain and satisfied with the circumstances at their schools. The aforementioned finding is not in accordance with the theory which states that when changes such as curriculum changes are introduced from authorities they will be met with opposing forces in the form of

resistance to change. The finding is an indication that what happens in organizations in general is not necessarily applicable to schools.

4.2. Environmental aspects. Small differences were found between the responses of teachers (d = 0.12) and principals (d = 0.26) regarding the environmental aspects that could give rise to resistance to change. It appears that they are comfortable with their school culture which forms part of the environment in which the school is situated. The findings regarding the systemic aspects in the previous paragraph are also applicable here.

4.3. Personality aspects. Regarding the personality aspects that could give rise to resistance to change, it appears as if there is a small difference between the responses of teachers (d = 0.20) and principals (d = 0.10). On closer examination, one gets the impression that teachers and principals are quite contented with their schools' atmosphere and ambiences and are satisfied with their school as it is. This finding is also not in accordance with the theory regarding resistance to change in organizations, and the same inference regarding organizations in general and schools in particular is also applicable here.

4.4. Work aspects. Small differences were registered between the responses of teachers (d = 0.20) and principals (d = 0.05) regarding the work aspects that could give rise to resistance to change. Work aspects are the responsibility of the employer – the Department of Basic Education. Since the basic conditions of service are applicable to all teachers, it was found that they accepted the status quo. Comparing the theory with this finding, it seems that there is a discrepancy between the theory and practices in impoverished schools. Again, it is an indication of the dynamic aspects of schools which cannot always be compared with organizations in general.

4.5. Management aspects. Concerning the management aspects that could give rise to resistance to change, it appears as if there is a small difference between the responses of teachers (d = 0.05) and principals (d = 0.20). Management aspects are about power, control, bureaucratic organizational structures, distrust, participation and listening skills. These aspects have to do with the school domain it seems that what was already said about the systemic, environmental, personality and work aspects is also applicable to the management aspects of the school. This is not in accordance with what was indicated in the theoretical framework.

The above-mentioned aspects, except the work aspects, fall within the domain of the school and it was found that participants were at ease with the status quo at their schools. It seems thus, that when change must be effected by the stakeholders in their own schools, there is a willingness to accept the circumstances at their schools as they are, and that there is a reluctance to change the status quo at their schools. Regarding the work aspects, it has already been indicated that teachers and principals accept their conditions of service.

Process aspects

A small and a practically visible difference appeared between the responses of teachers (d = 0.23) and principals (d = 0.50) regarding the process aspects that could give rise to resistance to change. It was found that principals from these schools were less sure (average 2.30) whether the process factors at their schools are in order at their schools. These aspects have to do with the change process, are the responsibilities of the employer and fall outside the sphere of principals to train teachers, refurbish infrastructure and provide sufficient resources for teachers to do their work effectively. Considering also the perceived inability of these schools to raise funds due to poor environments, it seems that principals look at external factors to fix the poor conditions in their impoverished schools.

Moreover, taking into account that there are impoverished schools that perform well against all odds, it seems that some principals suffer from a 'blame it on another person' (the scapegoat) syndrome, implying that it is not their problem that schools do not perform but rather the problem of an outside person/institution. This is indicative of individuals who lack commitment, leadership abilities and the courage to do more of what is expected.

From the above-mentioned it seems that not only conditions and funding of impoverished schools are problematic but also other aspects in the internal school environment which are preventing these schools from operating optimally. It also became clear that individuals defended their own domain silently and showed resistance to other aspects which they regarded as not their responsibility. This inclination could be ascribed to wrong attitudes, built-in fear for the unknown, lack of commitment and ultimately, resistance to change initiatives in education.

5. Recommendations

♦ Principals and other education managers should note that theory formulated for organizations such as businesses is not necessarily applicable to schools as organizations.

♦ They should also be aware of the fact that, since teachers and principals fall in a state of inertia within their own schools, it might become

necessary for the Department of Basic Education to appoint an independent expert to help schools on a continuous basis with changes at the schools.

♦ It is recommended that the appropriate person be appointed for the job as principal, a person able to use multiple assessment methods; someone with experience, who has been trained in principalship.

♦ He/she should be interviewed and write psychometric tests.

♦ Change initiatives must be carefully considered; it is recommended that some schools must be first piloted before introducing huge change initiatives.

♦ When change is introduced, the Department of Basic Education must involve and let teachers and principals partake in drawing up training documents since they are the people who know what is happening in schools and who have to implement the change.

♦ Extensive and on-going training to teachers and principals must be done before the actual introduction of the new change.

Conclusion

The problems in schools, and specifically impoverished schools, have been discussed. It became clear that there are, apart from the historical challenges, stumbling blocks in the school environment that prevent these schools from performing as they should. These stumbling blocks include, among others, an innate fear of the unknown by teachers and principals, and as a result thereof, there is resistance to change. Furthermore, there are also commitment and leadership problems, for instance where principals blame others when the change initiatives are not running smoothly at their schools. The appointment of the principal is therefore an important aspect which needs to be carefully considered in order for these schools' results to improve. It is important for the Department of Basic Education to have a bottom-up approach when they introduce change initiatives in schools. Additionally, as long as the authorities do not account for the poor conditions in these schools, the resisting forces will become more and will prevent these impoverished schools to perform as well as they could.

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