



SCHOOL LEADERS' ROLE IN PROMOTING ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY FOR SUCCESSFUL CHANGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE MANZINI REGION, ESWATINI

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated how school leaders promote organisational identity for the successful implementation of change initiatives in secondary schools in the Manzini region, Eswatini. Organisational identity is the shared perspective on an organisation's purpose, values, and culture. The study was anchored on social identity theory. The mixed methods approach was adopted using the concurrent triangulation design. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The study revealed that most school leaders often fail to promote organisational identity during change in the schools. This was evident in that some of the schools do not have well-defined cultures. School leaders lack the ability to drive the vision for change and the mission as their schools as organisations go through change. Most schools fail to promote organisational values, purpose and goals for successful change. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school leaders need to familiarise themselves with the concept of organisational identity and then promote it in the school to create a balance between what their schools stand for and how they deal with their constantly changing environments. Teachers are to be included in the crafting of the vision and mission with the support of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) through professional development workshops on change management for school leaders.

KEYWORDS: Organisational identity, School leaders, culture, Organisational School goals, Vision and Mission.

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever there is change in an organisation, there is a high likelihood that an organisation's identity gets lost and individual's sense of connectedness to the organisation gets shaken. Members may lose their vision and mission if caution is not taken, or if there is poor leadership. Organisational change is inevitable and schools, like all other organisations, must adjust to this changing environment if they are to continue serving their intended purpose. Change has the potential to enable schools to revise and implement new strategies that will help them achieve their goals (Mahyoob, 2020). However, research indicates that the

majority of organisational change initiatives fail (Bonnor, Kidson, Piccoli, Sahlberg, 2021; Schaffer & Thompson, 2019; Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2018; Bentley & Savage, 2017). “The failure of organisational change has been attributed to lack of employee and cultural integration and lack of leadership” (Aitken & Von Treuer, 2020, p. 311). Several studies show that promoting organisational identity may improve the success of change initiatives in organisations (Aitken, 2019; Aitken & Von Treuer, 2020; Boutwell, 2004; Witting, 2006). Organisational identity is important during change because it influences how school leaders and the employees react to the change.

School leaders have an important role to play to ensure the success of the change initiatives in schools. They are expected to assist employees through the change process and without effective leadership the change initiatives are likely to fail (Aitken & Von Treuer, 2020). Without support and guidance from the leader, employees may resist the change because they do not understand it (Aas, 2017). Research shows that promoting organisational identity may improve the success of change initiatives in organisations (Lin, 2004; Aitken, 2019; Aitken & Von Treuer, 2020; Boutwell, 2004; Wei & Clegg, 2018; Witting, 2006). Since they are seen as change agents, school leaders are expected to make sure the changes are successfully implemented in the schools (Aitken & Von Treuer, 2020). Therefore, school leaders should promote organisational identity.

Statement of the Problem

In Eswatini, schools are going through myriad educational changes. However, most change initiatives in the education system fail. The blame for any failure or partial success in implementing change initiatives is placed on the shoulders of the school leaders. Critical to these changes is the 2018 Education and Training Sector (EDSEC) policy goal, which advocates for equal and inclusive education that gives all learners access to high quality education (EDSEC, 2018). However, it is evident that education falls short of this policy objective since Eswatini schools struggle to provide high quality instruction that equip young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the job market (World Bank, 2021). Seemingly, schools produce students who can only qualify to pursue teaching at tertiary level. The Eswatini government even decided to reduce teacher production and instructed colleges to reduce admissions (Sukati, 2020). This shows change is necessary for schools to improve. If schools keep forgetting who they are, they are likely to lose their identity and their sense of connectedness, which is their organisational identification.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

School leadership and successful change

There is a consensus about the need for effective leaders in schools. Since most change initiatives in organisations fail, educational changes need effective leaders who can manage the change successfully (Gayef, 2014; Day & Sammons, 2016; Miller, 2021). Successful leaders must be able to steer change in the right direction and address organisational transformation difficulties in the most appropriate ways (Abbas &

Asghar, 2010). To effectively lead and manage change initiatives, school leaders must have a thorough understanding of the change processes. Once the leader understands the change, then the leadership has to influence other members of the organisation to understand and accept the change. Brock, Peak and Buch (2019) mention that effective school leaders are expected to inspire and support change so that the school can develop. They have the responsibility of guiding the school through the change by serving as both a leader of change and a manager of change (Shvndina, 2017). School leaders are expected to adjust to many changes in their school environments. Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) assert that school leaders must include other stakeholders in the change process and comprehend the dynamics of the change within their own school context. Mehta (2014) mentions that change initiatives fail because leaders fail to understand how the change will affect other organisational members. To be effective, the change must be understood and accepted by all stakeholders involved in its execution. Leaders have an obligation to assist staff members in comprehending the change, especially if it affects the organisation's identity.

It is likely for the change to be unsuccessful if leaders fail to clearly explain the change (Ibeawuchi, Nwagbara, Alhassan & Brown, 2021). Employees might reject the change because it affects who they are. Concerns from stakeholders regarding the changes should be acknowledged and addressed by the school leader. To produce favourable results, the people implementing the change need to be motivated and encouraged (Kotter, 2012). School leaders may support employees by communicating throughout the change. To help employees comprehend and embrace the change, they should listen to their concerns. Even though they are not the ones implementing the change, school leaders should understand that they are ultimately accountable for it. Change failure is often equated to leadership failure. It is therefore important that school leaders ensure that changes are successful in the school. To be successful, leaders should not just be leaders, but they should be change leaders.

Conceptualisation of organisational identity and change

The original definition of organisational identity is what is central, distinctive and enduring about an organisation (Albert & Whetten, 1985). It is the members' shared answer to the questions "who are we as an organisation?", "what are we doing?", "what do we want to be in future?" (Ellis, 2016 p. 216). According to DiLeonardo, Jurisic and Schaninger (2021) organisational identity includes the purpose, values and culture of the organisation. It involves how individuals define and experience themselves in the organisation. Organisational identity is important during change because it guides organisational members through difficult decisions (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton & Corley, 2013). "Who they are" as an organisation will show members which decision to take. Organisational identity influences the success of organisational change (Ackerman, 2010).

Therefore, an organisation's identity should be promoted because it keeps any transformational change effort on track (Mdletye, Coetzee & Ukpere, 2014). Clarity of an identity is considered essential for the effective operation of any organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Identity informs the day to day responses to the changes that arise in the organisation (Gioia et al, 2013). When used effectively, organisational



identity can aid organisations in achieving successful change by influencing members willingness to change and acceptance of change interventions (Lin, 2004). Brown, Manning and Ludema (2016) assert that it is important to build identity during change and complete identity includes purpose, values and culture of the organisation. Organisational identity is important for stabilising organisations. Change interventions may be designed in such a way that they are aligned to the identity or can alter the identity to accommodate the change (Brown et al, 2016). Therefore, organisational leaders play a crucial role in influencing the culture of an organisation and in the process, create organisational identity among the employees.

Leadership in promoting organisational identity

Successful organisations, including schools, are often linked to leadership's capacity to carry out the change successfully and ensure that it is maintained overtime. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) assert that leaders are entrepreneurs of identity in organisations. In order to ensure that change is successful, school leaders must comprehend, emphasise, develop and strengthen the concept of organisational identity (Akbari, Sayed, Hani & Javad, 2019). Hao and Yazdanifard (2015) argue that to promote organisational identity during change and maintain the organisations' culture, effective leadership skills are essential. They argue that the culture should be aligned to the values as this can help build organisational identity. Moreover, employees' participation in shaping the school's vision is also recommended since it will make them own it.

Ravasi and Schultz (2006) support this notion as they mention that in order to promote organisational identity, organisational members need to be engaged in building the shared vision. They need to construct or revise shared values and purpose of the school to accommodate the change. It is crucial to communicate the vision to teachers, so that they will be committed to its successful implementation. Errida and Lotfi (2021), argue that a well-defined vision establishes both long term and short term goals, empowers and motivates stakeholders in implementing change. Leaders should establish the organisation's identity and lay the groundwork for the decision-making process. They ought to lead by example throughout the transition and successfully encourage and persuade employees to embrace the changes (Erat, Kitapci & Akcin, 2020). A leader's influence can limit the group if the leader does not represent shared group norms, values, goals and ideals (Roy & Houser, 2022).

Theoretical Background

The concept of organisational identity has its foundations in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978). The social identity theory (SIT) was formulated by Henri Tajfel in 1978. Tajfel, (1978) cited in Ashforth et al (2008) defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from the individual's knowledge of his or her membership to social group or social groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (p. 327). It explains how individual behaviour is influenced by others in a group or organisation (Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004).

The social identity theory has three basic elements which are, categorisation, social identification and comparison. The assertion during categorisation is that people categorise people so that they may understand them better and then decide if they want to join that category or not. According to the social identity theory, people identify with groups that share their interests (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Social identification is whereby people adopt the identity of the group they have categorised themselves as belonging to (Islam, 2014). They behave according to the group they have categorised themselves into. The third stage is social comparison whereby people compare the group they have categorised themselves to other groups. (McLeod, 2008).

The three basic elements of this theory were relevant to the study in the sense that social identity theory enables employees to classify themselves into groups. When someone identifies with a group, they will behave in a way that benefit the group (Burke, 2017). This theory helped in explaining how organisational identity is formed and maintained in schools. The theory indicates that people classify themselves into groups and the group will give them the self-concept of who they are. According to the theory, a person's self-concept consists of a personal identity (Ellemers, 2017). Therefore, organisational identity is part of social identity. SIT is relevant for this study because it can make leaders understand why organisational identity is lost during change (Trepte, 2006). School leaders therefore may understand how to promote organisational identity because of this theory. The theory points to school leaders and teachers to understand that showing solidarity within the school in times of change is important.

METHODOLOGY

The study used pragmatism as the research paradigm. Creswell (2014) mentions that research under pragmatic paradigm uses "what works" as it allows the researcher to address the question being investigated without worrying as to whether the questions are wholly quantitative or qualitative. The study used a mixed method approach. Mixed methods research (MMR) involves using multiple methods for the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources in a single study (Dawadi & Giri, 2021). The concurrent triangulation research design was used as the data was collected almost the same time. The concurrent triangulation research design uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single phase (Almeida, 2018). It attempts to map out or explains more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) This design allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data to be given priority. The data were collected from the same participants or similar target population to obtain different but complementary data that validate the overall results. Data collection and analysis was done separately but merged afterwards. The primary purpose was confirmation, corroboration or cross-validation within the study. In interpreting the overall merged results in concurrent triangulation one looks for convergence, divergence and contradictions or any relationship the separate data analysis reveal.



The study covered school leaders (headteachers and deputy headteachers) and teachers in secondary schools. Non-probability sampling was used for selecting 7 secondary schools in the Manzini region. Convenience sampling was used, where the researcher used certain schools because they were easy to recruit based on their location. Moreover, purposive sampling was used to select headteachers and deputy headteachers. One headteacher and one deputy headteacher were chosen per school. Simple random sampling, which is a type of probability sampling was used for the selection of teachers. Fifteen teachers were given the questionnaires per school. Stratified random sampling was used to select teachers for the focus group discussions comprising of 8 teachers in each school.

For the qualitative data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews for the school leaders and focus group discussions for the teachers. The interviews contained open ended questions and were conducted face-to-face. The interviews were digitally recorded with the researcher simultaneously taking down notes to ensure that in case the digital recorder malfunctioned, some information would still be safely available. For the quantitative data, questionnaires were used and they were hand delivered by the researcher to the teachers. The purpose of using different data collection instruments in the study was to ensure triangulation as a central aspect in the research design. The researcher managed to get 7 semi-structured interviews with school leaders, 5 focus group discussions with teachers and 90 questionnaires.

Data analysis was done using both quantitative approach and qualitative approach since the study intended to employ the mixed methods approach. The collected data was cleaned first to remove errors, incorrect and unwanted data. After cleaning, data collected through the use of semi-structure interviews and focus group discussion were analysed thematically by identifying information from the data which was important for the study. The recorded data was transcribed then content analysis was used in extracting systematically important information in the documents that were analysed (Singh & Masuku, 2014). The data collected through questionnaires were analysed descriptively. Answers to the questionnaires were coded and analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Code 1 was used for agree, code 2 strongly agree, code 3 for disagree, and code 4 for strongly disagree. A frequency table was used to tally the responses. The purpose was to indicate the number of school leaders and teachers who chose each of the coded responses per item. For each response the frequency was written in percentages based on the total number of participants who completed that item. The percentages were used to measure a certain tendency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main objective of the study was to examine the role of school leadership in promoting organisational identity during change. Specifically, the study sought to investigate how school leaders promote the relationship that exists between organisational identity and employee performance during change in selected secondary schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini. The findings are discussed in accordance with the sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis. Table 1 indicates the sub-themes which

emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1: Theme and sub-themes derived from the data analysis

Theme	Sub- themes
School leaders in promoting organisational identity during change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders in promoting the school culture during change. • Addressing the core values and purpose of the school during change. • School leaders in promoting the school goals during change. • Promoting the vision and mission of the school during change. • School leaders promoting discipline during change.

School leaders in promoting the school culture during change.

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative results revealed that school leaders did not understand the concept of organisational identity. Most people interviewed mistakenly believed that organisational culture and organisational identity were the same. They mentioned that promoting organisational identity meant promoting the culture. During the semi-structured interviews school leaders mentioned that schools are different as organisations because of their culture. Even during the focus group discussions some teachers mentioned that organisational identity meant “culture.” Organisational identity is different from organisational culture. On one hand, organisational identity is about how an employee perceives and views the organisation. According to Albert and Whetten (1985) organisational identity is the organisations uniqueness; the distinctive aspect of the organisation that make them stand out from other organisations.

On the other hand, organisational culture are the factors that determine an organisations uniqueness like its shared beliefs, values, mission and its structure (Bamidele, 2022). Organisational culture is the ethical standard behaviour of the organisation in the way they do things therefore organisational culture can be manipulated whereas organisational identity cannot be faked and this make the concepts different from each other because organisational identity is determined by different external policies. However, there is a relationship between organisational identity and organisational culture because organisational culture is seen as a determinant of organisational identity. Hatch and Schultz (2002) argue that it is even problematic to see where organisational identity ends and where organisational culture begins and vice versa.

Therefore, it appears that the participants’ recommendation to strengthen organisational identity through the school’s culture was sound. The findings demonstrate how some school leaders inadvertently foster organisational identity in their schools. The results also showed that not all school leaders support the school culture during change, despite the school leaders’ claims that they do to help strengthen



organisational identity. The quantitative findings revealed that more than half of the participants 59(65.6%) agreed that school leaders promote the culture during change. The findings show that some school leaders do not promote organisational identity in their schools. The respondents indicated that school leaders frequently imitate practices of other schools, which may be the primary cause of some schools lack of clear defined cultures. This was exemplified by one leader who said; “most of what we are trying to do we get from other school, especially the successful schools. I don’t know what I can pinpoint and say this is it.” (School leader, school F, 24 Feb, 2023). As a result, they are unable to promote what they do not have. The number of teachers who agreed is unimpressive because only 59(65.6%) agreed that school leaders promote the school culture during change. The 31(34.4%) who disagreed is still a significant number to be ignored. It is important to note however, that the responses from the school leaders assert that they acknowledge their obligation of promoting the school culture, especially during change.

Addressing the core values and purpose of the school during change

The findings from the questionnaires showed that a significant percentage of respondents supported the promotion of the core values and purpose of the school during change as a way of promoting organisational identity. Out of the 90 teachers, 63(70.0%) agreed that school leaders promote the core values and purpose of the school during change. According to Gorenak and Kosir (2012), organisational values provide an elaborate and generalised justification for how employees behave in an organisation. The core values guide employees in the school. However, the 27(30.0%) who disagreed is still a huge number and its shows that some school leaders ignore the core values and purpose of the school during change.

Some school leaders indicated; that their schools are not guided by any values; they just copy what the successful schools do. Even some of the teachers during the focus group discussions indicated that their schools do not have well defined values and purpose, all their leaders do is just to copy what other schools do. The teachers said they get confused and then some will lose their connection to the school because when employees identify with the school, it means they identify with what it stands for, its core values and its purpose.

This indicates a serious problem because schools can never be the same and the problems they face are completely different from one another. This suggest that school leaders should ensure employees understand the school values and also ensure that they are not just empty values statements because “empty value statements create cynical and dispirited employees, alienates customers and undermine managerial credibility.” (Lencioni, 2002, p. 113) The key findings reveal that school leaders are aware that the core values and purpose of the school are important and should be promoted during change because that makes them who they are. However, the results indicated that some schools ignore these values and fail to promote them during change.

School leaders in promoting the school goals during change

The findings from both the semi-structured one-to-one interviews with the school leaders and focus group discussions with teachers indicate that promoting school goals during change can foster organisational identity. Having clear goals will ensure the success of the organisation (Betsurmth & Murthy, 2023). Most school leaders said they definitely promote the school goals during change. They mentioned that during times of transition, they assess the school's position in relation to its objectives. Any change, whether planned or unplanned is then aligned to the school goals. The findings from the semi-structured one-to-one interviews are consistent with what transpired during the focus group discussions. However, the quantitative results show that only 64(71.1%) agreed that their school leaders promote the school goals during change. The significant percentage (28.9%) of teachers who disagreed reveals that even though organisational goals are promoted during change; some school leaders ignore the school goals during change. This demonstrates that not all educational leaders support the school's objectives during change. This is concerning because educational objectives are crucial and are what defines an institution's identity; they are what give it its identity. Incapacity to advance the organisation's aims is equivalent to incapacity to advance the organisations' identity.

School leaders maintaining discipline during change

The findings from the focus group discussions are very consistent with the results from the interviews with school leaders. The qualitative data from all samples show that school leaders promote discipline in the schools during change. The respondents in the focus groups felt school leaders do promote discipline during change and that will help them achieve their goals. These findings are consistent with past research by Teye (2021) where it was discovered that discipline promotes performance and ensures that the purpose of an institute is achieved. Discipline will ensure that they do not forget who they are because of the change. They will introduce and implement the change without forgetting their goals.

The results, however, showed that the employees are forced to comply with the rules without choice since they cannot jeopardize their jobs and that discipline is enforced in a menacing manner. This is exemplified by one school leader who said; "we try to make teachers see they need to identify themselves with the school because they really need their jobs. This is what they have at the moment." (School leader, school A, 10 Feb, 2023) Teachers felt that they have to compromise because failure to do that will risk their jobs. The school leaders' responses also suggested that there are consequences set for those who lack discipline in the school. One leader said; "every teacher and student have to follow all the rules that are set in place to ensure a harmonious work environment (School leader, school B, 13 February, 2023). This implies that there are repercussions for disobeying the rules, employees have no choice but to comply with them.

According to Okolie & Udom (2019) to some leaders discipline is synonymous with force and they also understand discipline as a way of punishing employees who fail to follow rules and regulations in the organisation. The findings in this study thus revealed that most school leaders use discipline as a way to

control employees rather than to bring employees together to achieve their goals. In some way, enforcing discipline can strengthen organisational identity but if done so harshly employees may come to despise the instruction. For this reason, school leaders should exercise caution when enforcing discipline.

Promoting the vision and mission of the school during change

The vision and mission guide organisational members on how to operate (Roblek & Mesko, 2018). The findings from the quantitative results show that 42(46.6%) agreed that school leaders promote the vision and mission during change. Since most respondents could not agree, it appears that most school leaders do not successfully advance the mission and vision during times of change. Furthermore, these findings also contrast those from the interviews, since most teachers and leaders stated that the school leaders uphold the organisation's vision and mission by promoting organisational identity via change. The school leaders said they discuss the vision and mission with employees, emphasising the kind of school that they envision.

However, most of them did not even know what their vision was, some even needed to go and read it somewhere and they would come back and tell the researcher what it was. This seems to contradict what the school leaders said because it would be difficult to discuss something that one does not know. The teachers in the focus groups also mentioned that school leaders promote the school vision and mission when fostering organisational identity. However, their claims contradict the quantitative data and this leads to the conclusion that there is minimal promotion of the vision and mission in schools during change and some schools might not even promote the vision and mission at all because they do not have it, they copy from other schools as they had said. The general assumption therefore is that school leaders fail to promote the vision and mission during change.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that most school leaders fail to promote organisational identity during change in the schools. This is because some of the schools do not have well-defined cultures, they lack the vision and mission to guide their schools and they sometimes fail to promote organisational values, purpose and goals. They fail to communicate and gather support for organisational identity during change. The findings of the study concluded that effective school leadership is necessary during change. An effective leader would be able to promote organisational identity through articulating the organisations identity (that would include articulating the school culture, its values and purpose, its goals and the vision and mission). This is because effective communication is one of the attributes of an effective leader. Instilling a sense of belonging among employees, learner, and even parents becomes crucial when a school, as an organisation experiences change. An effective leader would also be able to include employees in crafting the vision and mission as well as of the school and ensuring that employees own it so that they work hard towards that vision. For effective and successful change in schools, school leaders need to familiarise themselves with the concept of organisational. Since most change initiatives fail in schools, the ministry of

education should find ways to equip school leaders in their understanding of change management. Professional training and development on how organisations reposition themselves in times of change need to be constantly promoted.

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