

## Chapter 6

### Factors influencing policy implementation:

#### The saga of policy implementation in further education and training

##### 6.1 Introduction

In order to consider the structural and cultural factors influencing policy implementation it is important to acknowledge the fact that there are multiple role-players. If we are to understand how policy implementation is influenced at the operational level then it is important to consider the individual perceptions of the various role-players in the implementation chain. In this chapter I explore the intentions of the FET policy as expressed in the various documents, as explained by national and provincial departments of education officials, as voiced by policymakers and as described by union representatives.

The chapter is arranged in four sections. In **Section One**, I analyse the FET policy and the two implementation framework documents, i.e. *National Strategy for Further Education and Training 1999-2001; Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training and Work* (Department of Education, 1999) and *A New Institutional Landscape for Public Further Education and Training Colleges: Reform of South African Technical Colleges* (Department of Education, 2001). The focus of my analysis will be on the policy intentions and the implementation plans for this policy. The information will be supplemented with data from interviews conducted with policymakers and national department officials who were involved in the development of the FET policy and the drawing up of the implementation framework documents.

**In Section Two** I document brief narratives built on the semi-structured interviews conducted with department officials, policymakers and union representatives. This will be supplemented with documentary analyses of various submissions made to the Department of Education and minutes of meetings held. The spread of stakeholders is a way of reducing the bias, as well as allowing these individuals an opportunity to provide perspectives from their various portfolios.

**In Section Three** I present brief narratives of semi-structured interviews conducted with the provincial department officials to provide their perspectives of a department to which implementation has been assigned in the face of a multiplicity of new policies competing for attention.

The data in this chapter is arranged in two categories. First, a category which includes the national department officials, union representatives and consultants who were policymakers and a second comprising provincial department officials. In Sections Two and Three my focus is on the elements of the structural and cultural factors as identified in Chapter 3.

Finally, in the last section I summarise each section of this chapter by comparing patterns and trends that emerge with the intention of the FET policy as expressed in the policy document, and explained by policymakers, national and provincial department officials, and union representatives. Having identified the structural and cultural factors influencing policy implementation at the macro-political level, I then proceed in the next chapter (Chapter 7) to analyse the data collected from the Rectors and staff operating within the ambits of the technical colleges. My objectives in keeping the college data separate from that of the other sectors is that, firstly, it enables a more visible picture of how culture and structure influence policy implementation in the three case study colleges, and, secondly, it makes for easy comparison between the three categories.

## **Section One**

### **6.2 Policy objectives: As indicated in the documentation**

#### *6.2.1 Methodological considerations*

In this section I provide an analysis of the FET policy as presented in the official documents identified earlier in this case study. In order to present a methodological framework which I could utilise I have drawn on literature on policy and policy analysis. According to Silver:

*The analysis of policy ...is concerned with its origins and intentions – the complexities of competing and conflicting values and goals, the explicit and implicit representations of objectives which spring from diverse economic and social realities. It is concerned with the policy choices that are made, the decisions made – by whom, with what timing and with what authority. It is concerned with the guidelines, the rules, the regulations, the machineries of information, the interpretation in practice, the outcomes. At its most theoretical the analysis is concerned with what happens and why; at its most pragmatically historical it asks what, in known instances, seems to have happened (1990: 213).*

Drawing on Silver I found the following guidelines to be useful in the analysis of policy. Firstly, policy construction is grounded in a specific time and place. Secondly, a study of choices seeks to offer an understanding of human preferences and action, either as a group or independently. Thirdly, the history of the policy development process helps to determine the connection between policy intentions and policy outcomes across time, and fourthly, policy analysis helps to identify alternatives for the future.

“Policy” may be defined as “whatever governments choose to do, or not to do” and “policy analysis” may be considered as “the study of what governments do, why and with what effects (Taylor et al., 1997:35)”. According to Taylor et al. (1997), policy construction and analysis are both broad in scope and highly complex. They explain that policy is more than merely text and therefore the nuances and subtleties of the context in which the text is written must be considered when interpreting the textual meaning. The text represents “political compromises between conflicting images on how educational change should proceed” (1997:15). In addition, policy is multi-dimensional and the contributors to the policy construction bring particular, contestable and different worldviews. Another characteristic of policy is that policy is value-laden, and a range of stakeholder values permeates its construction. At the same time, policies exist in context and therefore “there is always a prior history of significant events, a particular ideology and political climate, social and economic context – and often, particular individuals as well which together influence the shape and timing of policies as well as their evolution and their outcomes” (Taylor et al., 1997:16). Furthermore, policymaking is a state activity and the state should be regarded as a complex and non-unitary entity of competing parts. It must also be borne in mind that education policies interact with

policies in other fields. Finally, policy implementation is never straightforward and results in both intended and unintended consequences.

I have used Silver's (1990) historical perspectives and Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry's (1997) understanding of policy analysis as a framework for my analysis.

### *6.2.2 Policy process*

I commence the policy analysis by reflecting on the origins of the FET policy. In South Africa, a country undergoing great political change since the newly elected democratic government in 1994, the challenge was to redress historical inequalities. The newly elected ANC-led government reacted in its first five years of governing with a proliferation of policies at a rapid pace so as to gain the confidence of the masses that had voted for it. The Department of Education set out to develop several policies to reform the education and training sector. The immediate priority, because of the excessive pressure from civil society, was the urgent reform of the school sector and the amalgamation of the nineteen apartheid education departments into one department. The Department of Education vigorously put in place policies to change the school sector. Thereafter the emphasis shifted to the development of policies to reform the Higher Education and Training sector. In terms of public education, the FET sector was the only sector for which policy had not been developed by the beginning of 1998.

A senior Department of Education official explained that the lack of public interest in the technical college sector stemmed from the racialised past of these institutions. Given the history of technical colleges these institutions were virtually unknown to black communities in South Africa. Technical colleges had played no substantial role in the emancipation of civil society in the fight for freedom. On the other hand, several schools and universities were regarded as icons of liberation that had provided a platform for political engagements and activities in the apartheid era. Nearly everyone in political leadership since 1994 could claim affiliation to a particular school or university in the country and point out the role that these institutions had played during the apartheid era. Technical colleges, on the other hand, had served the needs mainly of the white community in the country and protected specific interests; they also embodied the conservative core of institutional culture as described in Chapter 2. The Department of Education official emphasised that:

*... the colleges are the least known institutions within the system ... and there wasn't any public pressure, so we saw this as an opportunity for us to draw lessons and experiences from the Higher Education process and to then fast track the FET (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

At the time it was accepted that FET was a new concept that would be introduced into the South African education system. In addition there were other imperatives that had to be considered. Of equal importance was the recognition of the requirements of the NQF and the fact that both senior secondary schools and technical colleges offered programmes that covered levels 2 to 4 on the NQF. Technical colleges offered N1 to N3 programmes that were considered equivalent to grades 10 to 12 in the senior secondary school phase or levels 2 to 4 on the NQF. The technical colleges also extended their curriculum to include N4 to N6 programmes, which were considered to fall outside the FET band. This compounded the dilemma faced in transforming technical colleges, as consensus could not be reached as to which level the N4 to N6 programmes could be equated to on the higher education band.<sup>129</sup> The general assumption was that the N4 to N6 programmes would equate to level 5 in higher education.

The lack of knowledge of the sector, coupled with the unresolved programme desegregation and the limited capacity and resources, restricted the extent to which the national and provincial departments were able to respond to the new FET policy. General public consensus mandated that the school sector needed immediate attention before efforts could be directed towards the higher education sector. A senior Department of Education official explained that the reason for the delay was to a large extent based on the negative perception of the sector:

*... not only the number of people with dedicated capacity within provinces to deal with this issue, but it was also a reflection of the attitude of the system towards the institution. It reflected a lesser priority compared to the other subsystems (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

It was definitely not the intention of the Department of Education to neglect the FET sector, but it was apparent that the history of the technical colleges placed these

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<sup>129</sup> This required an investigation and evaluation of the programme content by the South African Certification Board (SAFCERT) that was later renamed UMLASI.

institutions in a peculiar situation. The limited knowledge of the newly appointed officials (bureaucrats) in both the national and provincial departments made it virtually impossible to develop policies for an institution about which there was little known in terms of its educational role and value in a society that was redressing historic racial imbalances. The Minister of Education proceeded by appointing the National Committee on Further Education<sup>130</sup> to investigate FET<sup>131</sup> provisioning in the country. Although the investigation entailed FET provisioning as a whole, emphasis was placed on policy development for technical colleges. The National Committee on Further Education's brief was to make recommendations that would inform policy to transform the sector.

According to a Department of Education official, the political mandate was that, as the end of the first five years of the new government's term of office drew closer, it was imperative to ensure that all the necessary transformational policies were in place in order to secure the confidence of the people who had voted for the new government. The NCFE Report showed that the technical college sector had a vital role to play in increasing and ensuring the country's skill and human resource base in line with global trends. It was deemed necessary that new policy be required to change the status and function of the technical colleges in order to meet the skills shortage and high rate of unemployment prevalent in the country. However, the Constitution had divided the function of human resource development between the Departments of Education and Labour (explained in Chapter 2 page 34). By the end of 1997 the Department of Labour had more or less finalised the Skills Development Act, but had to delay the parliamentary process of having the Skills Act enacted, as the complementary FET Act was not in place. Pressure mounted on the Department of Education to deliver the FET policy.

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<sup>130</sup> The choice of a committee as opposed to a commission as specified in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) was explained in Chapter 2 (Page 31).

<sup>131</sup> The definition of FET as provided in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) includes secondary schooling, education and training in colleges, and a range of other training programmes. Internationally we find that there is a distinction between schooling and (vocational) further education and training

The Green Paper on Further Education and Training was released in April 1998. A vigorous public consultation process led by the Department of Education throughout the country followed. Appropriate feedback from the consultation process was incorporated into the policy. Consultation workshops on the Green Paper were hosted by the Department of Education in most of the major cities in the country. The technical college sector was poorly represented at several of these workshops. Those representatives from the technical college who did attend generally displayed a great deal of bitterness towards the newly appointed Department of Education officials. The technical college staff believed that they had made a valuable contribution to the socio-economic needs of the country thus far, and that the colleges had proved themselves in the past. They were of the opinion that initiating and implementing a new policy would disrupt a structure and system that was working properly and serving a purpose. One of the Rectors at a meeting referred to the imminent suggested changes to the sector, in particular as referring to the technical colleges, as wanting to “kill the goose that laid the golden egg”. It was obvious that the college staff held these institutions in high esteem, and were proud of their colleges. They believed that change was not necessary.

From April 1998 the Department of Education maintained a dual process with the development of both Education White Paper 4 (1998) and the Further Education and Training Bill (1998). The intention was to fast track the process well ahead of the 1999 government elections. The Education White Paper 4 (1998), which outlined the government’s vision, mission and objectives for FET, was released in August 1998, and the FET Act, which provided the legislative parameters for change, was proclaimed three months later in November 1998. The Department of Education was confident that the FET policy had gone through sufficient consultative processes in order to be claimed a legitimate process that carried public credibility. These processes included consultation on the NCFE Report, the Green Paper on FET and the FET Bill. Notwithstanding the political pressure, limited capacity and challenges that lay ahead, the Department of Education introduced the FET policy. A senior official of the Department of Education recalled that:

*... from a financial point of view, the state was introducing a policy that was unfunded, and we referred to it as an unfunded mandate. ... so that was very much up front , ... the first four or five years was great for policy, but on the other hand few resources (Rob, 16/07/2003).*

From the very outset it was obvious that this policy had come into effect with no additional funding, even though resources are absolutely vital in order to initiate and implement any form of change in the sector. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the sector and the changing global trends in FET created an arena for heavy borrowing from other policies, both nationally and internationally. The FET policy mirrored the Higher Education and Training policy and legislation in several aspects.

It was imperative that the changes made to the technical college sector be in line with international trends, and the concept of providing life-long learning. Technical assistance to develop the policy framework was elicited from anti-apartheid alliances built with Australia, Canada, Holland and the United States of America. According to a senior Department of Education official the help of external consultants was brought in:

*... to assist in areas that were completely new, because we do not have that kind of experience and knowledge. The people in our system have never been involved in such major changes – the old civil servants included. The old civil servants have some knowledge but that is not what we want, they have a narrow racially based expertise (Brad,23/10/2002).*

The FET policy was one of the key policies put in place to address the human resource development needs of the country. The challenge would be to coordinate the policy and concomitant activities with the various subsectors of the education system, as well as those in the different government departments, and to ensure that the human resource and skills' needs would be addressed.

### *6.2.3 Rationale for the FET policy*

The FET policy<sup>132</sup> was developed with the intention of establishing a co-ordinated FET system at the national and provincial levels. In line with global trends it is of paramount importance that the sector be responsive and flexible in order to meet the economic, social and human resource needs of the country. By definition FET in South Africa is provided in both schools and other institutions, including technical colleges. Despite the fact that public FET is provided by several different types of providers (see Chapter 1,

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<sup>132</sup> Education White Paper 4 (1998).



page 10), the FET policy focuses in particular on the technical colleges.<sup>133</sup> The reason for this is that the school component of FET falls under the jurisdiction of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996). The policy also further regulates the provisioning of FET by making it obligatory for private providers to register with the Department of Education as private FET providers.

The anticipated changes to be brought about through implementing the new FET policy would ensure a new image, status, demography, governance, funding, organisation, management and leadership in the FET college sector. The policy highlights the reorganisation of the technical colleges through the declaration<sup>134</sup> of public FET institutions. The purpose of declaring the technical colleges to be FET institutions is to dispose of the inherited legislative difference between state and state-aided technical colleges by bring them under a single piece of legislation.<sup>135</sup> The legal parameters within which the declaration of FET institutions is to take place is provided for in the FET Act. There is also provision made in the FET Act for the merger<sup>136</sup> of two or more FET institutions. The rationale for mergers is “to optimise the use of scarce resources and to achieve economies of scale” (Department of Education, 1998b:36).

The FET policy provides the following four main pillars for change:

- A new governance framework
- A new framework for programmes and qualifications
- A new quality improvement and assurance institution
- A new funding system envisaged as a key lever for system change (Department of Education, 1998c).

The new governance framework is based on the principles of co-operative governance, with advisory structures at the national and provincial levels, substantial powers

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<sup>133</sup> The technical college sector was characterised by unequal access, differences in the quality of programmes, infrastructure and funding based on race, as already explained in Chapter 2.

<sup>134</sup> Declaration entails the acquisition of a public FET institution status once an institution has satisfied the prescribed national criteria – this serves as a quality control mechanism.

<sup>135</sup> The differences were explained in Chapter 2.

<sup>136</sup> Mergers will take place with a view to rationalising institutions with the objective of increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

accorded to the FET institutions, and partnerships between government, organised business, labour and communities. A National Board for Further Education and Training is to be established as an advisory statutory body. College Councils will be appointed at the institutional level.

The new programme for programmes and qualifications will aim at providing a range of transferable skills and knowledge. FET institutions will also provide remediation services, counselling and job placement facilities.

The new quality improvement and assurance institution includes the introduction of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the establishment of several new structures such as an Education Management Information System (EMIS) and a FET Quality Authority (FETQA).

Funding will include programme-based funding, funding for special purposes and private funding. The challenge will be for FET institutions to offer programmes that attract financial support through the National Skills Fund and Sector Education and Training Authorities.

#### *6.2.4 Objectives of the FET policy*

An analysis of FET policy (Education White Paper 4, 1998) reveals that the explicit and implicit objectives of the policy in terms of *restructuring* the sector are as follows:

- To establish a new governance framework, programmes and qualifications, quality improvement and assurance institution; and funding system
- To provide the support and training necessary for successful implementation, particularly to historically disadvantaged institutions
- To build capacity within the sector to fulfil the new roles and responsibilities
- To ensure that the relevant guidelines and regulations will be made available by the Department of Education
- To provide leadership from the Department of Education and the provincial departments of education to facilitate and manage the change agenda

Some of the underlying structural and cultural assumptions of the FET policy are the following:

- There is a general understanding and acceptance of the FET policy and change trajectory.
- Implementers' beliefs and values are aligned with the policy intentions.
- Implementers share a common meaning of the moral purpose of the change innovation.
- Implementers embrace the change innovation.
- There is trust, commitment and motivation among implementers for successful change.

Even though the policy acknowledges the shortages of skills and capacity in the sector, the policy is obscure about how skills and capacity will be built to implement and sustain the changes in the sector. The policy is also unclear about how the necessary cultural transformation will be brought about. Neither did the Department of Education provide any indication of where and how resources will be made available to overhaul the inherited fragmented, unresponsive FET sector.

#### *6.2.5 Theory of action*

The introduction of the FET policy framework generated optimism about the creation of a new FET college sector. However, the policy is obscure in regard to a number of issues that I will highlight in my subsequent discussion on the theory of action. Like other policies<sup>137</sup> that emanated from the Department of Education, the FET policy appears to be more a statement of intent. There are several unresolved issues, *inter alia*, the inclusion of schools in the new FET system and the application of programme-based funding in senior secondary schools. The role of the national Department of Education, as defined in the policy, is to steer and co-ordinate the development of the FET system. The constitutional responsibility of the Department of Education is the development of policies, norms and standards for the transformation of the sector. Provincial departments are expected to implement national policy, as indicated in the national guidelines, through reorganising FET institutions, developing strategic plans, and

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<sup>137</sup> Reference is made for example to the policy on Education for Learners with Special Needs (ELSEN).

supporting institutions to manage allocated resources according to a programme-based funding formula.

Immediately after releasing Education White Paper 4, (1998) the Department of Education embarked on a process of developing a strategy for the implementation of the FET policy. The document was developed in collaboration with the national and provincial departments, and culminated in the *National Strategy for Further Education and Training 1999-2001: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training and Work*<sup>138</sup>. The FET Strategy was released in May 1999 and outlined four broad strategic objectives for systemic change viz. Organisational Development, Learning and Teaching, Resourcing FET, and Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, as the areas of intervention or change. This document served as the first implementation plan that outlined where priorities would lie for the next five years in transforming the sector.

The FET Strategy identified key priorities with timeframes and expected outcomes. The intention was to provide a vision for addressing the systemic weakness and deficiencies that existed, including a strategic direction for the transformation of FET. This was the national plan. All initiatives were to be directed towards changing the FET sector so that it responded to the education and training needs nationally, kept up with international trends, served as guide for the development of provincial plans,<sup>139</sup> and provided a reporting and accountability mechanism to evaluate the performance of the system.

The new proposed governance framework as outlined in Education White Paper 4, (1998) is based on the principles of cooperative governance with a “strong steering, coordinating and developmental role” for government, substantial authority for colleges, and partnerships between government, organised business and labour, and communities (Department of Education 1998c:19). Cooperative governance is reflected in various committees and sub-committees such as the National Board for FET (NBFET) that was established as a statutory body to advise the Minister on all aspects of FET. The other

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<sup>138</sup> Referred to as the “FET Strategy” in my case study.

<sup>139</sup> MECs will have to appoint provincial advisory bodies as required by the FET Act to advise them on FET transformation and growth within the province, including the development of the provincial strategic plans for FET.

committee that plays a substantial role in shaping education and training, including FET, is the Heads of Education Department Committee (HEDCOM). The role of the Department of Education is to plan, coordinate and monitor activities on a national basis, while implementation is delegated to the provincial education departments.

Considering the role FET would play in providing a skills base, and the principle of partnerships between government, organised business and labour, and communities, the Colleges Collaboration Fund (CCF) was established in 1999 by the National Business Initiative (NBI), in partnership with the Department of Education. The CCF was the implementation agency for a five-year programme of targeted business interventions in the public FET sector. An amount of R12 million was pledged by the business community over the five-year period (June 1999 to July 2004) to kick-start the transformation of the technical college sector, with the intention that technical colleges become responsive to the needs of business and industry. These were the only new funds that were made available to implement the FET policy.

A senior official of the Department of Education explained that this arrangement was necessary to bring the skills, competencies and capacity, as well as models and ideas from the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector, and to transfer these skills to the FET sector at the provincial and institutional levels. He explained that

*... when we were building a state outside the state, the NBI had set itself up as a body that has the competence and skills to be the intermediate, to bring on board business, business skills, business approaches, together with accumulated knowledge of the sector, the college sector, together with the international experience in effect to support the implementation of this policy. This was a case of a consortium being brought together to help government implement its plan (Rob, 16/07/2003).*

Rob explained that the role of NGOs prior to 1994 was to build the necessary capacity and skills within these organisations in order to be able to take over the new roles and responsibilities when the time came. The Department of Education officials reiterated several times that the constraints the national and provincial education departments faced in terms of capacity and resources necessitated the need to bring on board additional expertise and skills to assist in the implementation of the FET policy. The partnership with business through the CCF was a collaboration arrangement tha

*... was intended to help build a new conduct of management and leadership in the organisation (FET colleges) so that they could take over leadership of this new merged organisation. The idea was to introduce business practices and sufficient management practices so that they could be managed more effectively and in a more targeted manner (Rob, 16/07/2003).*

The CCF commenced with research and data collection on the technical colleges in the nine provincial departments of education. The first of these reports to be published by the CCF was the report on the Gauteng province in October 1998, entitled Knowledge and Skills for the Smart Province: An Agenda for the New Millennium. Reports for each of the other eight provinces followed. This culminated in a report known as the “Situational Analysis”, which provided the first authentic data on the technical colleges in the country. The data contained in the Situational Analysis report on each province formed the basis for the planning of the reorganisation of the sector. Other activities undertaken by the CCF included a labour market analysis, project planning; partnership survey report; training for College Councils and senior management; placement of potential middle managers under mentors in UK colleges; the establishment of a college wards system together with the Department of Education; the establishment of National FET conventions; partnership training programmes; research; dissemination and publicity; merger facilitators training and workshops; advocacy and communication; and monitoring and evaluation of the project that it implemented.

At the inception of the CCF programme the Department of Education delegated all the identified implementation activities to the CCF, which reported on a quarterly basis to the Department of Education on its achievements and progress in the technical college sector. The reason for this arrangement was the lack of leadership capacity within the Department of Education as there were not sufficient people with the necessary skills employed in the Department of Education to be involved in these activities on a day-to-day basis.<sup>140</sup> The Department of Education assumed that provinces understood the FET policy and would initiate implementation as outlined in the FET strategy. However,

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<sup>140</sup> At the time I was an official of the DoE and was aware of the capacity constraints that the DoE faced. Reforms in the school sector had sapped all the available capacity leaving little resources free for the implementation of the FET policy. The arrangement with the CCF seemed to most appropriate since the CCF had the necessary resources, capacity and skills to initiate changes in the FET college sector.

what the Department of Education did not take cognisance of were the gaps that existed in the policy and the FET strategy. The inability of the Department of Education to produce the necessary guidelines inhibited the provinces from implementing the policy. Instead the Department of Education opted for the use of technical assistance. The intention was that the CCF would use the capacity and skills at its disposal to supplement the scarce human resources in the provincial departments, and to build the necessary capacity and skills at the institutional (college) level. According to Rob (16/07/2003) the assumptions on which the partnership was based were that “within the first few years sufficient capacity would be built at the national, provincial and institutional levels for colleges to have a reasonable degree of autonomy”.

In practice, ownership of the reform interventions undertaken by the CCF seemed to shift from the Department of Education to the CCF. As soon as each of the provincial reports was completed, the CCF undertook to disseminate the information to the respective provincial departments and colleges in the nine provinces. The Department of Education was not actively involved, and the general impression created was that the CCF had taken over government’s responsibilities and was driving the FET reform agenda. The Department of Education was not visible and the impression formed was that “the CCF had taken over from the Department of Education” (Tom, 12/11/2003). The CCF assumed a more dictatorial role in marketing its own reform strategy to provincial departments,<sup>141</sup> and began prescribing the process and procedures to be followed to implement the changes. The CCF became synonymous with the FET change agenda. This lack of direct involvement on the part of the national and provincial departments of education created a great deal of anxiety and tension among technical college staff. Provincial departments saw their roles and responsibilities in implementing national policy being usurped, and this caused “a great deal of tension” between several provincial departments of education and the CCF (Tom, 12/11/2003). The matter was referred to the Department of Education which reassessed the situation. It was evident that the CCF was seen to be capitalising on government’s incapacity to implement the reform agenda. A senior Department of Education official referred to the

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<sup>141</sup> This fallacious relationship was as a result of the CCF having access to funds that could be used to facilitate the change agenda – funds contributed by business and funds that neither the DoE nor the provincial departments could afford within their already heavily committed education budgets.

CCF as seeing itself as a “government outside the government” (Brad, 23/10/2002). By this he implied that the CCF had assumed that the responsibilities of government had been handed over to them. The CCF, on the other hand, believed that it was filling the gap in terms of the capacity, skills and resources needed to build the foundation for the new FET sector. The agreement between the Department of Education and the CCF was amended to bring ownership back to the Department of Education, and to redefine the role of the CCF, ensuring that the CCF would be responsible for reporting quarterly on all identified projects.

The dilemma that provincial departments faced was that, for several reasons, they were not in a position to devote a substantial amount of capacity, time and resources to the transformation of the technical colleges under their jurisdiction. This inability included the limited knowledge, skills, capacity and financial resources available within the departments. The FET policy was thrust upon already pressurised provincial departments of education amidst a multiplicity of competing policies. Given the dynamics and urgency of transforming the school sector, provincial departments had postponed the implementation of the FET policy until such time that resources could be freed from other subsections, and there was more clarity on the FET implementation strategy. The assumption was that the Department of Education would provide provinces with guidance and support to establish a coordinated FET sector based on national guidelines, norms and standards regarding the declaration of FET institutions. A provincial department official was of the opinion that the Department of Education was aware of these impediments, but instead alluded to “a lack of capacity in provincial departments to drive the FET transformation agenda” as being the reason for the non-implementation of the FET policy (Morris, 10/11/2003). I want to argue that non-implementation stemmed from the absence of capacity in the sector, and more particularly, in the Department of Education to share the vision. It was evident from the numerous queries raised by provincial departments that, had provinces received the criteria for the declaration of FET colleges, they would have gone ahead to capacitate colleges to meet the criteria. This was the intention of the policy (Department of Education, 1998:35).

Three years had lapsed since the Education White Paper 4, (1998) was adopted in August 1998. The only visible change activities undertaken in the FET sector were



those undertaken by the CCF. Not one of the technical colleges had been declared FET institutions. Pressure was also mounting on the Department of Education to deliver on the FET policy, as increasing public attention was being drawn to the high rate of unemployment prevalent in the country.<sup>142</sup> As political and social pressure on the Department of Education increased, it became imperative to create some visible sign that change in the sector was inevitable, and that the government had done something to address the skills shortages and unemployment problems. FET was seen as the key to addressing the skills shortages faced by the country and a means of reducing unemployment. This required political intervention. A high level decision was taken that intervention by the Department of Education was necessary to set in motion the reorganisation of the FET sector. Once the Department of Education had a plan, it was certain that it would have the necessary political support and be able to mandate change. In June 2001 the Minister of Education appointed the National Landscape Task Team (NLTT) to advise him and other political counterparts on the *restructuring* of the technical colleges. The NLTT comprised eight members of whom two representatives were from the Department of Education - the Deputy-Director General (DDG) for FET and the Director for FET Colleges, two representatives from the nine provincial departments of education, an international consultant, a national consultant and a representative from the CCF. The task team was headed by the DDG from the Department of Education. The NLTT's report entitled *A New Institutional Landscape for Public Further Education and Training Colleges: Reform of South African Technical Colleges*<sup>143</sup> (Department of Education, 2001) provided the implementation strategy for the declaration of the former 152 state and state-aided technical colleges as FET institutions, and also the merger proposals for the nine provincial departments to merge the 152 technical colleges into 50 FET institutions nationally.

The Report was developed in close negotiation with senior management in both the national and provincial departments of education. Provincial departments were provided with the parameters within which to base their merger configurations. The Department of Education assumed that there would be vigorous interaction and negotiations between the provincial departments of education and the technical colleges about the

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<sup>142</sup> There is a 40 percent rate of unemployment in the country.

<sup>143</sup> Referred to as "The Report" in the case study.

objectives and intentions to restructure the sector. The NLTT reviewed provincial submissions, and provinces were requested to incorporate the suggestions and amendments provided by the NLTT in the finalisation of the Report.

The pace at which the Report was developed left no time for provincial departments to engage with technical colleges on the objectives, intentions and proposed recommendations of the mergers. Discussions in the provincial departments of education were confined only to a few selected senior managers within the departments. The finalised merger configurations were based on the personal convictions of the selected few within the provincial departments, and ratified by the NLTT. The provincial department officials who were not involved in the planning process felt disillusioned and perceived this as a lack of confidence in their abilities since they were at the forefront of implementing the mergers of which they had no knowledge. Having been excluded from the process they had had no opportunity to have any input into either the plan or the process. I want to argue that this resulted in a lack of ownership, commitment and motivation at some levels in the provincial department level. Neither the Department of Education nor the NLTT had taken the initiative to share the plan and explain the rationale for the mergers, or the process to be followed, to “foot soldiers” at the forefront of the action. The Report was embargoed until it was released at a public launch on 17 September 2001. How did the Department of Education anticipate the mergers being implemented without disseminating the information to those most affected? What was the Department of Education’s understanding of the skills and capacity needed to implement the reform?

Stakeholders at the launch comprised mainly national and provincial department of education officials, technical college Rectors and representatives from the College Councils. It was obvious from the uncanny “silence” that the Rectors were unhappy with the plan. When asked on what this assumption was based Brad (23/10/2002) replied that from his experiences with the sector he was sure that none of the Rectors or College Council members were brave enough to air their views aloud. He referred to the whispers and the way in which the Rectors and Council members congregated in small groups after the official function, as being indicative that the plan had not been well accepted. The provincial department officials indicated that it was the culture of colleges which dictated that the Rectors would not challenge the Department of

Education or the provincial department by questioning the rationale for the mergers, or openly display resistance. According to the plan the CEO of the merged FET colleges would be appointed only after the mergers had been completed. Tom (12/11/2003) felt confident that the Rectors were not going to jeopardise their chances of being appointed as head of the new merged colleges by displaying resistance. Even though it was not mentioned, the Rectors' main concern was whether their jobs were secure. Tom referred to "the white college staff feeling threatened by the secretive manner in which the plan was conceptualized". The irony however, was that in the apartheid era planning was just as secretive, yet college staff had not manifested distrust nor shown resistance to policy changes. The fears emanated from the deep-seated culture of mistrust about change that was embedded in the sector (Engelbrecht, 1982; Esterhuyse, 1982). In the old dispensation change had always been accompanied by limitations, restrictions and job reservations. Brad was perturbed at this reaction from the college staff as "there was no mention at any time that jobs would be threatened, yet the white staff feared that they might lose their jobs".

Provincial department officials were startled at the tight timeframes set by the Department of Education. They assumed that the capacity, support and resources necessary to implement the changes would accompany the top-down mandate. The Report included the National FET Implementation Plan that stipulated activities, levels of delegation of responsibilities, and timelines. According to the plan, the merging of the 152 technical colleges into 50 FET institutions nationally was to be completed by the end of December 2001. The activities from January 2002 entailed the appointment of Rectors and Councils by March 2002, the development and approval of institutional plans by August 2002, and other relevant structures to be put in place by April 2003. It was apparent that no consideration had been given to the unique contexts of each of the nine provinces and the 152 FET institutions (Taylor, et al., 1997). However, the history of the sector revealed the huge disparities (see Chapter 2 pages 36-39) that existed within technical colleges and even across provinces.

What was evident from the outset was that the NLTT saw the implementation of this plan as a rational, linear process, and assumed that the prevailing circumstances in all nine provinces would be the same. The assumption was that there was sufficient understanding, capacity, resources and buy-in for the 152 technical colleges to be

merged within the specified three-month period. The NLTT had omitted the vital communication loop essential to alleviate fear, address resistance, and build trust and vision. Where and when did the NLTT expect communication to happen? How should it have been communicated to the colleges?

Implementation was delegated to the provincial departments, while the Department of Education understood its role as providing support to the provincial departments through the establishment of the Merger Operational Task Team<sup>144</sup> (MOTT). The MOTT comprised one representative from each of the nine provincial education departments and representatives from the Department of Education. The CCF provided the secretariat support to the MOTT. A member of the Department of Education chaired the MOTT. The terms of reference of the MOTT<sup>145</sup> were as follows:

- Design an implementation template for all activities necessary to establish the 50 FET colleges in a nationally coordinated and supported manner.
- Develop and maintain provincial FET Strategic Plans in line with the National Implementation Plan.
- Ensure that resources can be procured to achieve the merger process.
- Develop FET operational plans, steer and report on implementation.
- Identify issues that need to be considered by the Department of Education.
- Provide the national and provincial departments of education with updated reports.
- Assist with institutional audits.
- Develop a profile of each proposed FET colleges, including a SWOT analysis.

The MOTT meetings served as a forum to operationalise the plan in terms of implementing the mergers. The Merger Manual was the guideline provided, however there were several structures, regulations and unresolved policy issues that were not

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<sup>144</sup> The terms of reference of the MOTT were to guide and assist provinces in the implementation of the national FET plan. The MOTT met on a weekly basis to monitor the implementation of the new landscape plan.

<sup>145</sup> Terms of reference were developed by the DoE for the MOTT.

considered at the time of developing the plan. Most times provincial departments were “fire fighting” as colleges raised questions about issues that impacted on them as a result of the mergers. The issues raised included the finalisation of staff complements for the merged colleges, Education and Labour Relation Issues, work study exercises on the evaluation of the CEO posts, funding for the new CEO posts, identification of skills and capacity needs in the new institutions, audits of colleges and so forth. The major benefit of holding the MOTT meetings was that these meetings created unity and a team spirit among firstly, provincial department officials, and secondly, between the Department of Education and the provincial department officials of the same rank.

The initial step and support in implementing the merger was the appointment of merger facilitators to assist colleges with the development of their merger plans. A national advertisement was placed for the recruitment of fifty merger facilitators. The short-listing, selection and appointment of the facilitators were done by the provincial departments of education. Each province appointed the same number of facilitators as the number of merged institutions to be established in that province. Although the provincial departments appointed the merger facilitators, the funding for the merger facilitator was provided by the CCF. This was the only “financial” support that colleges received to implement the merger.

It was the responsibility of the merger facilitators to provide colleges with the context and the rationale for the mergers, and to facilitate the development of a merger plan. It was apparent that the merger facilitator was considered a key player, and that the success of the merger plan process depended on the merger facilitator’s ability to guide the process, and motivate the members of the various structures that were established within the colleges to be merged. The NLTT in its planning assumed that the facilitator would be accepted by colleges to co-ordinate the merger activities. The role of the provincial department was to support the colleges and the merger facilitator, through providing and disseminating information, solutions to problems, and serving as negotiators when there were disagreements or consensus could not be reached. Yet the provincial departments did not have the necessary resources, capacity and skills to carry out their duties effectively.

Prior to commencing with their tasks, merger facilitators were familiarised with the processes and structures that the merging entailed. Between 30 September and 2 October 2001 a three-day Merger Facilitator Workshop was held to familiarise merger facilitators with the contents of the Merger Manual. The processes, structures and timeframes had been outlined in a Merger Manual prepared by the Department of Education. The intention was to coordinate merger activities across all nine provinces. The Department of Education hosted the workshop that was attended by provincial department officials and all fifty merger facilitators. Merger facilitators were appointed for a period of one month, during which time the merger plans were to be developed by the colleges for submission to the provincial departments for evaluation.

Provincial departments immediately established the Provincial Merger Teams (PMT) as identified in the Merger Manuals. The PMTs were departmental line function teams comprising members from the provincial FET directorates. The PMTs were required to develop provincial FET plans, and to oversee and monitor the merger process within their provinces. The PMTs also played an advisory role in the provinces by making recommendations to senior management in the provincial departments to advise the provincial MECs for education on the merger process.

At the institutional level, an Institutional Merger Team (IMT) comprising all the Rectors of the technical colleges in the cluster, the merger facilitator and representatives of the stakeholder groupings appointed to the total number of Rectors plus one had the responsibility of steering the process. The role of the IMT was to oversee the development of the merger plans, to coordinate and monitor working group<sup>146</sup> activities and receive reports from the working groups. The ultimate responsibility of the IMT was to ensure that the merger plan reflected the attributes<sup>147</sup> listed in the new FET landscape plan. The IMT was required to work closely with the merger facilitator in the development of the merger plan.

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<sup>146</sup> There were 8 working groups viz. Governance and Management, Administration and Business systems/EMIS, Finance, Programmes, Human Resource Development, Learner Affairs and Support, Facilities and Infrastructure, and Marketing and Communications.

<sup>147</sup> These are: large multi-site FET colleges, greater authority for colleges, a quality assurance framework, specialised niche and multi-purpose colleges, open and distance learning, articulation and collaboration with higher education, and student support services (Department of Education, 2001).

**Photo 4: Merger facilitators at a training workshop held by the Department of Education and CCF**



Merger facilitators assumed duty on 1 October 2001 on a one-month contract with the provincial department of education. A provincial department official introduced the merger facilitator at a meeting with representatives from the three colleges to be merged. The Rectors were not present at this meeting. The process commenced with the establishment of the interim council for the three colleges, and the establishment of the IMT and the workgroups as identified in the Merger Manual. From this point provinces and colleges proceeded at their own pace taking their individual circumstances into consideration. Several provinces were not able to achieve the milestones within the set timeframes. Gauteng province, the province in which the case study colleges are situated, achieved the milestones as set out in the plans as follows:

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<sup>146</sup> There were 8 working groups viz. Governance and Management, Administration and Business systems/EMIS, Finance, Programmes, Human Resource Development, Learner Affairs and Support, Facilities and Infrastructure, and Marketing and Communications.

<sup>147</sup> These are: large multi-site FET colleges, greater authority for colleges, a quality assurance framework, specialised niche and multi-purpose colleges, open and distance learning, articulation and collaboration with higher education, and student support services (Department of Education, 2001).

- The declaration of the 152 technical colleges to bring them under the FET Act by 1 August 2001
- Provincial departments of education to publish their intentions to merge the FET institutions by 1 August 2001
- The declaration of the 50 merged FET institutions by 11 December 2001
- College Councils and Rectors to be appointed by the end of March 2002

The political dynamics within the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to effect the changes in the FET sector were so strong that it was certain that the FET colleges would be merged within the set timeframes, despite the uncertainty, resistance and unhappiness prevalent in the sector. The senior officials in the Gauteng Department of Education saw the mandate to implement the reform as a legitimate justification to address the numerous problems that beset the technical college sector.

#### *6.2.6 Synthesis*

There are several conclusions that may be drawn from the foregoing analysis:

Firstly, the policy formulation process was not straightforward and simple when one considers the context in which this policy was developed. There were several causal factors that influenced the FET policy. These include the extent to which globalisation and the forces of economic modernisation played a major role in the reconstitution of the FET college sector while redressing historic injustices. The impetus was to put in place a policy that would transform the FET college sector so as to be responsive to the challenges of globalisation while at the same time be able to address the human resource needs and skill shortages that South Africa faces. Historic imbalances were to be redressed by ensuring that the policy and strategy upheld the importance of equity. This could only be achieved through eliciting sufficient political will to activate an interventionist state planning, coordinating and steering role while the policymaking process entailed a vigorous consultation process in order to elicit support and credibility.

Secondly, gaps in the policy implementation plans are referred to as “policy refraction” (Taylor et al., 1997:119). Policy refraction refers to the distortion of policy, a distortion which comes about as a result of the interaction of competing interests and sets of



values. Policy becomes disjointed and less coherent as it goes through the “encoding” and “decoding” processes, in other words, it is refracted. This was evident in the several unresolved issues which resulted in numerous ambiguities in policy intentions. Accordingly, predicting the FET policy effects is not easy.

Thirdly, the FET policy, like several other educational policies in South Africa, could be described as a “symbolic policy”, which the state, conscious of its human, financial and other constraints, put in place (Jansen, 2001). The FET policy was developed at a rapid pace with the objective of reinforcing the credibility of the ANC government before its end of first term of political office. The adoption of the FET policy succeeded in reinforcing the leadership image and instilling quiescence among others - a dulling of a critical response from the electorate that the government was not committed to transforming the entire education system. This was less about practical change than to legitimise the role of the FET policy in the government’s redress and equity agenda.

Fourthly, the shortcomings in the implementation of policies in the South African context represent a process of “policy ambiguity and slippage” (Kraak, 2001), with the state appearing unsure of its direction, and the conflicting discourses on the establishment of a “single coordinated” FET sector. This is of particular relevance when one considers the characteristics of technical colleges and senior secondary schools.

Fifthly, the FET policy relies heavily on several underlying assumptions about the change. Some of the underlying assumptions in the FET policy are that stakeholders would willingly embrace the *restructuring* of the sector; there would be sufficient training and capacity building, that sufficient resources would be available; that roles and responsibilities would be clearly defined; that implementers would have a common understanding of the policy intentions and expectations, and that implementing units would be adequately staffed to provide support and leadership.

Sixthly, the FET policy was introduced in an environment of a multiplicity of competing policies. The political emphasis was directed at reforming the school sector, and the FET policy, which was associated with a lesser political and social status, was bound to be accorded less significance.

### **6.3 Policy intentions: Views of policymakers and union representatives**

I conducted audio-taped interviews with the national department officials, union representatives and consultants to elicit their understanding of the FET policy, ascertain the policy goals, provide reasons for the implementation strategy, and identify the factors that facilitated or inhibited the implementation of the FET policy. The interviews were transcribed and responses to questions described in narrative form. Data from the interviews and documentation was analysed to produce a comprehensive picture of the stakeholder understanding of the FET policy. All similar and divergent responses were categorised in order to identify response patterns in the different groups of stakeholders who were interviewed. In my analysis of the data collected I used the elements of structure and culture as identified in Chapter Three.

#### **6.3.1 Characteristic of change**

In general, there was consensus among the Department of Education officials, union representatives and consultants that change initiated through the FET policy was extremely complex. FET, as outlined in policy, was a new concept introduced into the education and training system. The technical college sector, in particular, was virtually unknown for its role in the previous system. Both an official from the Department of Education and a consultant concurred that there had been a great deal of consultation and engagement in stakeholder forums during the policy development process to clarify issues that were unclear. Reflecting on the vibrant and dynamic policy development process the consultant noted that:

*There was to a large extent strong external inputs, such as the NCOP<sup>148</sup>, and there was also a lot of input from other external role players (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

And, even although there was this level of interaction, it was further noted that:

*... I was not sure that there was the level of understanding of what this policy was about in terms of the responsiveness to the external demands (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

FET is essential to provide skills for employment and to address the human resource needs of the country. In order to achieve these objectives, FET provisioning needs to be

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<sup>148</sup> National Committee of Provinces

responsive by providing a wide and flexible curriculum and different modes of learning that suit the diverse learner population and satisfy the socio-economic needs of the communities they serve. At the same time public FET is provided through both schools and technical colleges. A second consultant indicated that:

*... I don't think that anybody on the ground really understood or was actively pursuing the full integration of FET at the senior secondary phase and the technical college phase (Paul, 12/05/2003).*

The union representative concurred with the consultant that the unresolved issues in Education White Paper 4 (1998) compounded the challenges associated with implementing the FET reform agenda. Stakeholders were unclear as to whether the FET Act was explicitly for the technical colleges, or whether it also included the senior secondary schools. The union member recollected that college staff experienced a high level of frustration because of the differences in opinion between themselves as practitioners and provincial department officials, who were the bureaucrats responsible for overseeing and steering the policy implementation process. He expounded that it was only after the Department of Education clarified its intention that the *restructuring* applied only to the technical colleges that emphasis moved from schools to technical colleges, and that the provincial departments began focusing some attention on the technical colleges as well. Provincial departments were under the impression that both senior secondary schools and technical colleges were affected by the FET policy. The Department of Education was unclear about the role that schools would play in providing FET. The issues around the role of schools was one of the unresolved policy issues noted in the Education White Paper 4 (Department of Education, 1998c:14-15).

Implementing the FET policy implied changing the technical college sector within an environment of competing policies. A Department of Education official maintained that the intricacy of the intervention, and the limited human and fiscal capacity, required political intervention to drive the FET college change agenda. He went on to describe the technical college sector as “very weak,” and because of this, there was no concern from the Department of Education’s perspective about resistance from the sector towards imposing a political mandate to merge the technical colleges and redefine the FET landscape. The Department of Education official recollected that a decision was taken that:

*A nationally driven collaborated process would be adopted to drive this change. It was going to be a political mandate and we knew that there would be no contestation. If the restructuring of the technical colleges was left to the provinces it was not going to happen (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

The Department of Education official indicated that the institutional culture prevalent in technical college was not innovative and it was therefore unrealistic to expect colleges to initiate the change from within. He was sure that without external intervention nothing would change. Brad maintained that political pressure left little option but to take a bureaucratic stance and mandate changes in the FET college sector. The prevailing situation warranted a different approach and stringent intervention by the Department of Education to the effect that

*... given the limited fiscal and human resources available to the sector within provincial departments (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

The FET Act, which provided the legal basis for the implementation of Education White Paper 4 (1998), was promulgated in November 1998. Because of the time lapse from 1998 to 2001 policymakers, as well as officials from both national and provincial departments of education, assumed that college staff were aware of and understood the implications of implementing the policy. The CCF held several workshops with colleges throughout the country to explain the transformation of the FET landscape. Rectors and representatives from the College Councils generally attended these workshops. The organisation representing Rectors, known as the Association for Further Education and Training Institutions in South Africa<sup>149</sup> (AFETISA), also held numerous meetings at which the transformation of the technical colleges was discussed. The Department of Education as well as the Gauteng Department of Education were often invited to make presentations at these workshops yet college staff still pleaded ignorance of the FET policy.

A policymaker explained that the reason could have been that there was not sufficient communication. However, he believed that people were aware of the imminent changes, particularly the merging of technical colleges intended for the sector. Rectors were

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<sup>149</sup> Formally known as the CTCP.

continuously made aware of the challenges that lay ahead of them and the FET college sector as a whole. They were informed

*... through the Situational Analysis, White Papers, workshops at top levels provided to Rectors and council representatives over a period of 2 to 3 years (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The policymaker stated that through these interactions he became aware that some Rectors were accepting the fact that changes were essential. He was sure that there was some understanding at the higher levels of college management of the policy requirements and the change strategy. Nevertheless, his observation was that:

*... if you stepped down from the level of the Rector the staff knew very little (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The policymaker was of the view that the lack of understanding at lower levels in the technical colleges was reflective of the hierarchical structure of technical colleges a structure that was supported by a culture that believed that information should be shared only when relevant. This was typical of the undemocratic way in which the colleges functioned. This practice was justified with the excuse that information was withheld in order to protect junior officials from undue anxiety and fears about imminent changes. He explained that seniority is associated with maturity and a demeanour more capable of dealing with uncertainty. The college management would share this information with the lower levels once final decisions were taken and there was certainty about how the process would unfold.

The Rectors' reluctance to share information with all members of the staff could also be attributed to their fear of change and resistance to the new change agenda. A Department of Education official explained that it was necessary to devise a national plan to coordinate activities and time-frames across the nine provincial departments of education. He was of the opinion that there was no need for further stakeholder consultation about the implementation strategy, since the policy provided clear directions for the intended changes. He recollected that the decision was that:

*There was a political decision that we are going to go the route of merging the colleges and, once the political decision was taken, civil servants have to follow (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

The intention was to bring both state and state-aided colleges under a single piece of legislation and to dismantle the apartheid structural and cultural disparities that existed among the colleges. The consultant, however, disagreed with the Department of Education official in this regard. He indicated that the objective of the FET policy was to establish a regulating system with quality assurance processes around the development of programmes, and a governance mechanism that would interact to regulate the system. He strongly believed that there was no intention of creating a bureaucratic model that decided on a way of systemic change and governance.

The union representative, on the other hand, lamented that there was no stakeholder involvement in the development of the plan, released in September 2001, mandating the merging of technical colleges. The impression he had was that:

*The colleges were put under great pressure to merge, to show that something was happening (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

He went on to elaborate that stakeholders felt very insecure about the merger. He identified the lack of stakeholder participation as the reason for anxiety among college staff. When reminded that the option of mergers had been widely debated during the policymaking process he indicated that too much time has elapsed between the policymaking stage and the real implementation. He indicated that college staff were of the opinion that mergers were no longer under consideration. He expressed his concern that people's feelings had been ignored. He recalled that college staff were not concerned about the real meaning or intentions of the mergers, or what it meant for FET or the country as a whole.

*The staff were concerned about their jobs, they were looking at their own personal concern and that is where the problem came in (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

It was evident from the data that white college staff feared that they would lose their jobs. Implicit in the plan was the assumption that implementation was a linear process in which all the pieces would fit neatly into one another. Implementation in practice, proved otherwise. According to the union as per the union official

*... the national department has good ideas and they want to take it somewhere. I just don't think that both provincial and national department officials share the same vision for various reasons. The national department officials have a wonderful plan, it will work in Gauteng, you don't know what is going on in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, you don't know what's going on in the Northern Cape, where colleges are 300 km apart from one another, and that kind of thing. Those are the dynamics that come in (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

This was an indication of the complexity of the nature of the change. Not only were provinces different from one another, the disparities that existed among the individual colleges even in the same geographic region were huge.

### **6.3.2 Capacity**

Overall, Department of Education officials, provincial department officials and union representatives concurred that one of the greatest challenges posed was the lack of capacity to steer the changes in the technical college sector. Reference was made to human and physical resources. Particular reference was made to leadership, skills, knowledge, know-how and understanding of the change, particularly the merger. Physical and financial resources continued to be a major constraint throughout the merger process.

A Department of Education official acknowledged that new skills were necessary to carry out the reform as specified in the FET policy. He understood that there were new relationships to be forged with different sectors of the community, and it was for this reason that the partnership arrangement had been established with the CCF. He emphasised that there was limited capacity available within the national and provincial departments to implement the various new policies, including the FET policy, and that organisations such as the CCF were in a position to provide the necessary skills and support required to drive the transformation process. A policymaker attributed weaknesses in transforming the technical college sector to the following:

*... the unevenness of capacity in the sector. Definitely there is a discrepancy between capacity in the provinces compared with national. There was capacity in pockets (Paul, 12/05/2003).*

A second policymaker pointed out that external expertise was necessary since

*... the departments were starting from a very limited knowledge base, limited resources and limited expertise (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The Department of Education official recalled that the CCF was recognised as the organisation that had acquired the necessary business skills and approaches together with the international experience needed to transform the FET colleges sector. He pointed out that the intention of the partnership with the CCF was an arrangement to

*... transfer skills at the lowest level. Take the capacity and build on that capacity. This was a case of forming a consortium to help government to implement its plan (Rob, 16/07/2003).*

Accordingly, a component of the partnership arrangement was to

*... start with management training at the college level, so that that will be in place at the time of implementing the mergers (Rob, 16/07/2003).*

In addition international consultants were brought in from countries where there was an already established FET sector, countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. A Department of Education official elaborated that it was necessary

*... to provide expertise in areas that were completely new to us. We required a completely new leadership to lead these organisations into a new role. A leadership that understands the role of these institutions in the new context of the economic, social and political roles the institutions are to play in the future (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

Leadership was not only necessary at the college level but also in the provincial departments. Officials employed in provincial departments had limited knowledge of the type of institutions that were envisaged for the sector. The Department of Education had wavered on its commitment to build capacity in the provincial departments of education, nor did the Department of Education hold discussions with the provincial departments to build a vision for the sector. The discussions that were held with provincial departments were at a very senior level and, unusually, involved officials who were not directly involved in the implementation of policy, but instead were the decision-making bureaucrats.



The Department of Education official lamented the lack of capacity within the provincial departments to implement the policy. He admitted that one of the reasons for the national plan was the

*... incapacity of the provinces, even in terms of their constitutional obligations, to drive this process (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

On the other hand I wish to argue that the ineffectiveness of the provincial department could be attributed to a lack of capacity within the Department of Education to build capacity within and disseminate information to the provincial department. Collaborative structures could have been established so that the Department of Education and the provincial departments could engage in implementation issues, and together find solutions to drive the FET reform agenda with the aim of establishing a coordinated FET sector for the country.

A consultant described the Department of Education

*... as a very small number of individuals in a department in which there isn't the kind of systematic staff work that you would expect to inform the development and implementation of policy (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

He indicated that the FET Directorate in the Department of Education comprised five staff members. The Director FET was responsible overall for the implementation of the national plan and had one staff member assigned to the institutional development of the FET colleges. The other three staff members were assigned to other responsibilities such as the registration of private FET providers and youth programmes in the sector.

When asked how decisions were made the Department of Education official responded that decisions regarding the implementation of the FET policy were taken at different levels within the Department of Education depending on the complexity and severity of the decision. All major decisions were taken by HEDCOM and the CEM. Decisions taken by the Director had to be sanctioned by the Chief Director and Deputy-Director General for FET before they could be put into action.

The consultant lamented that the hierarchical structure of the Department of Education influenced policy implementation in that considerable time would sometimes elapse before decisions could be taken. He was of the opinion that the isolated work ethic in the Department of Education contributed to individualistic thinking among the officials, with very few opportunities for collaboration. The environment was not conducive to decision-making and debate among staff members, and major decisions were based on

*... individual characteristics, temperament and traits, and not something you would expect to find in a more stable and more mature bureaucracy (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The policymaker indicated that this posed several challenges when it came to policy implementation, as individuals often differed about the approaches to be adopted or the sequence that events should follow. He implied that decisions would sometimes change if the senior officials had opposing views, and the person who wielded more power in the hierarchy would make the decision on the strategy to be followed. Tom explained that in a more mature bureaucracy there would be debate and discussions around the various options and solutions and a decision would be taken collectively.

The long periods of indecision were questioned by the union representative in terms of whether capacity existed at the Department of Education to implement the policy. He felt strongly that the provincial department did not have the capacity to drive change of this magnitude. He indicated that:

*There are certain individuals who worked very hard to get this thing off the ground. There are many unanswered questions, and I think that is an indication that there is a lack of capacity at national level as well as at the provincial level (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

In his assessment of the situation the union representative referred to the lack of clarity on the curriculum to be offered in both FET schools and colleges, that the funding arrangements for the FET colleges were not agreed to, that there was no indication of when CEOs would be appointed, and that the staff establishments of the newly merged colleges had not been formalised. These were the unanswered questions to which he was referring.

### 6.3.3 Support and training

Representatives from the Department of Education and consultants strongly believed that support and training were available to implement the reform, even though this support and training may not have been sufficient in all aspects. The use of international consultants provided technical support for the development of the policy and the implementation plan.

The representatives from the Department of Education and consultants acknowledged the need to provide support to institutions for capacity building. The Department of Education official recalled that management-training programmes had been provided by the CCF at the institutional level. The management-training programmes were targeted at middle management in technical colleges in all nine provinces. The objective of the management training programmes was to build a cadre of middle managers from designated previously disadvantaged groups. The training programme consisted of a three-month mentorship programme in the United Kingdom for middle managers in technical colleges. All nine provincial departments nominated middle managers for the programme. By the end of 2002 75 middle managers nationally had been trained on the programme. In addition, College Council members were also being trained. These training programmes were offered over weekends to College Council members in all provinces. The effectiveness of the middle management training programme, was still to be assessed. The union representative however, indicated that he had only heard of the training programme but had not met anyone that had gone on the training programme. He was therefore in no position to voice an opinion. One of the middle managers who had undergone the mentorship training programme in the UK was promoted to a managerial position in the Western Cape Department of Education while several others were used as mentors in provincial offices.

A Department of Education official referred to the MOTT as being a support structure to provincial departments. The policymaker described the MOTT as a “symbiotic structure” whereby the national department and provincial departments could

*... get a handle on how to do things – so it was more like a parent- child relationship*  
(Tom, 12/11/2003).

The Department of Education provided direction to coordinate the activities while provincial departments highlighted the realities on the ground. The provincial departments brought their problems to the MOTT where collectively the members found solutions to most issues raised. Another positive aspect of the MOTT was that it helped build and foster a relationship between the Department of Education and provincial department officials, and among provincial department officials. A provincial department official expressed regret in that the MOTT was restricted to just one representative from each province. He pointed out that it would have been far more beneficial if more provincial representatives had been involved in the planning as this would have increased the level of their understanding and support to the colleges.

However the opinions of stakeholders differed from that of the Department of Education official in terms of the support provided by the Department of Education. The policymaker and union representative believed that the Department of Education did very little to support the implementation of the mergers beyond the preparation of the merger manual. The policymaker explained that the Department of Education had taken the leadership initiative to drive the mergers, but felt saddened by the thought that the Department of Education had not succeeded sufficiently in “selling” the idea to the sector as a whole. By this he meant that the strategy and process had not been communicated to the people who would have been at the forefront of implementing the reform. He asserted that once the political buy-in and support had been given, the Department of Education

*... stood back and said to the provinces “Well, you have to implement it” (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The union representative recalled the frustration on the part of the colleges because of the inadequate support and directions provided by the provincial department to steer the mergers. He observed that there were only a small number of provincial department officials available to provide guidance on the process

*... if you look at the capacity in the provincial departments, even at this stage, there is no deadline for them to have certain people in place to assist with the roll-out of the plan. Many provinces don't even have fully fledged FET units within the provincial departments yet, so where are you going to be supported? (Chris, 06/11/2002)*

The union representative alleged that provincial departments were understaffed. In addition the necessary organisational structures were lacking. He was of the opinion that the provincial departments were in no haste to fill posts to ensure that there was the capacity within the departments to implement the FET policy. He was also perturbed that many provinces functioned without the appropriate and necessary structure in the form of a FET unit. He pointed out that without the necessary people and structures in place there would not be support to colleges.

#### **6.3.4 Leadership**

Leadership could have taken various forms such as the sharing of power and influence to facilitate staff commitment. This could have included effective communication, demonstrating trust, showing respect and providing opportunities for training and growth. According to a Department of Education official most provincial education departments were *restructuring* in order to align their functions with the new policies. *Restructuring* also implied the appointment of staff with the necessary skills and expertise to positions identified in the new departmental organograms. Coupled with this was the need to appoint persons from the designated race groups, so that the composition of departmental staff would be representative of the demographics of the population that they served.

The Department of Education official was of the opinion that the leadership provided by the national department played an integral role in ensuring that the technical colleges merged. He was adamant that without the Department of Education's intervention and leadership the mergers would not have been realised as FET was not high on the provincial priority list considering the financial constraints that the provincial departments faced. He maintained that this also one of the reasons why provincial departments were not enthusiastic about filling vacant posts in the FET units.

The Gauteng FET unit was considered to be well resourced when compared to other provincial education departments. However, a matter of concern was that staff was employed at lower levels, and were therefore not in a position to influence policy implementation decisions in any significant way. Senior management staff was seldom assigned to the FET college sector, and where there was senior management

involvement it was usually curriculum specialists who in fact knew very little about institutional change. Curriculum reform comprised only one facet of this major systemic change process. The policymaker felt disturbed that there was a genuine lack of necessary leadership in the provincial department and that

*... the people employed really belonged to the colleges and not to the provincial departments, so there wasn't the kind of capacity and leadership that was needed (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

In line with the government's equity agenda provincial education departments embarked on a policy of appointing people from the designated race groups to positions within the departments. Considering the history of the technical college sector it was not possible to find suitable candidates from the designated race groups to fill these positions. Consequently, several of the officials employed in provincial departments came from colleges where they had been either lecturers or held middle management positions. The policymaker strongly believed that these people should not have been appointed to the provincial departments but should have rather remained in the colleges as they lacked the leadership skills needed in a provincial department to steer the change agenda.

Under these circumstances the consultant understood that it was the responsibility of the Department of Education to steer the process, even if this meant a top-down change agenda. He concluded that there was leadership and will at senior levels of the Department of Education. He was of the opinion that without leadership at the senior levels the mergers in the technical colleges would not have happened. He thought that

*... it took some guts and political stage and leadership to push it in the way that it was pushed. (Tom, 12/11/2003).*

The union representative expressed his disappointment that provincial officials were often not in a position to provide leadership, nor to answer questions posed to them in relation to the mergers. He commented that implementation could have been a little easier had there been

*... people in place who could provide answers and not just show the plans in terms of saying that it comes from national level, we've got to implement (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

It was evident that provincial department officials had not bought into the change agenda. They were not in a position to communicate the essentials of the reform to colleges nor were they committed to the strategy put in place by the Department of Education – a strategy in which they had no say.

The union representative alluded to the fact that a lack of leadership in provincial departments had resulted in a lot of tension among the staff of the various colleges. This in turn often led to a breakdown in the process. However, he believed that leadership was present among college staff. It was evident that Chris had a narrow understanding of what the new leadership attributes for further education colleges entailed. Nevertheless he maintained that even though it had been necessary to assign the administrative leadership to one individual appointed in an official capacity, the merger facilitator was not the person to whom this responsibility should have been given.

#### **6.3.5 Resources**

Financial resources, human capacity and time have been identified as key elements in educational change. Department of Education representatives, policymakers and union representatives unanimously agreed that the human and fiscal resources did not exist to bring about the changes as anticipated in the FET policy.

A senior Department of Education official explained that government had committed the resources it had available to restructure education as a whole, and that provinces and individual departments had the prerogative of deciding how they intended to utilise the funds available to them. He indicated that, because of the lower priority assigned to technical colleges, only 2 percent of provincial education budgets are spent on technical colleges. He emphatically stated that additional funding was needed for FET given that:

*The state of the colleges is such that they need to be revamped. In addition to this there are several members of staff who are not actually qualified to teach, and therefore staff needs to be retrained. At the same time there is a need for interventions to bring colleges closer to the local communities and local industries . (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

He was concerned about the cost of the reform, as a great deal of money was needed to restructure the sector to achieve the long-term objectives. The Department of Education official understood the pressures on the education system as a whole, and he knew that

it was not possible to make the additional financial resources available through the provincial budgets. In addition, provincial education departments decided what proportion of their education budgets would be allocated to FET, and this was generally a very small proportion of the budget, as schools and compulsory basic education were the immediate priorities. FET colleges fell outside of these parameters. The official maintained that a possible solution could lie in partnership arrangements with the private sector which would potentially have a vested interest in FET colleges. He recognised the partnership arrangements with the CCF as one such arrangement.

The consultant was sympathetic towards the fact that funds were a major constraint. Government had not made any additional funds available to implement the FET policy. The policymaker pointed out that private sector funds were utilised to remunerate the merger facilitators. Without private sector funds it would have been virtually impossible to appoint merger facilitators. He questioned that, had the Department of Education been committed to the reform of the FET colleges, why had no resources been made available to support the change agenda? The Department of Education had indicated that the mergers would increase efficiency in the FET college sector, but, there had been no indication of how much the savings would amount to.

The union representative was distressed that funds for the merger activities often became a contentious issue between the members of the different colleges since it was not clear who would be responsible for particular expenses associated with the merger activities. These issues were never discussed and colleges had to provide funds from their already committed budgets.

### *Time*

The role of time is often underestimated when it comes to implementing new policies. Simultaneously, different role-players have different perspectives on the role of time in implementing educational change. A senior Department of Education official felt that sufficient time had been allocated for the development of the merger plans, and the announcement of the merged colleges. He believed that stakeholders were aware of what was required in terms of the policy promulgated in 1998. He stressed that



*... people knew that we would be restructuring. This was a decision taken in 1998.*  
(Brad, 23/10/2002).

What the Department of Education official failed to acknowledge was that even though people were aware that there would be restructuring they had not understood that restructuring implied mergers. The emphasis at the college level was on being declared a FET institution as indicated in the FET Act. Deliberations that were taking place at the college level were around the criteria that colleges would need to satisfy in order to be declared a FET institution.

A second Department of Education official alleged that there had been no need for further deliberations or time to ensure understanding of what was intended, as the policy development process had been through a vigorous consultation process. He pointed out that

*Provinces knew all along that the intention was to consolidate; they were very clear about that as these were all negotiated long ago as we went through the legitimate exercise of serious engagement with several public forums and comments in the development of this policy* (Rob, 16/07/2003).

Like the college staff the provincial department officials were aware that the policy involved the reorganisation of the sector. However, they did not consider the merger as the first stage in the restructuring of the FET college sector. The provincial department had engaged with the colleges on the criteria to be declared as a FET institution.

The consultant felt differently from the Department of Education officials and recalled the hasty pace at which the mergers proceeded. He expressed concerns about the process, and indicated that the pace at which things were supposed to happen placed a lot of pressure on all those involved. He was of the opinion that the Department of Education perceived it as

*... a bureaucratic notion of where the Department of Education will take the decisions and people will simply comply and there will be buy-in and understanding* (Tom, 12/11/2003).

A union representative explained that he felt pressured as things were so rushed and not sufficient time allowed for college staff to grasp the steps and stages of the mergers. He felt disillusioned as the haste had created a lot of insecurity among college staff and questioned the process. Chris indicated that he could not understand

*... why this process was steamrolled, why couldn't we have stopped when things were heavy, and we could all see that it is going to come apart at the seams, why didn't we just take one step back and say, okay let's see if everybody is on board, number one, are all the provinces exactly in line at this stage, number two, do you all have the funds that you need to carry on with this process, number three, what are the problems you experience at ground level at your colleges. (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

The pace at which the events unfolded left no time to review and monitor implementation. This resulted in anxiety, frustration and demotivation among those involved, as there was no opportunities to question, understand or interpret the merger.

### 6.3.6 Culture

#### *Assumptions*

In terms of the cultural aspects of the change agenda it was evident that there were substantial variations as regards the **assumptions** made by the policymakers, union officials and provincial department officials interviewed. Firstly, both Department of Education officials and policymakers assumed that stakeholders had a degree of **understanding** of the FET policy and implementation strategy.

The Department of Education official was of the view that since the policy had been promulgated in 1998 each individual involved in the sector had at least read the FET Act and Education White Paper 4 (1998) as it impacted directly on their lives. He assumed that the stakeholders had some understanding of what was implied by the reorganisation of the sector. However, the college staff differed in their assumptions about on the role and responsibilities of the new bureaucrats in the Department of Education and Gauteng Department of Education.

Secondly, college staff assumed that the Gauteng Department of Education would enter into discussions and negotiations with the colleges when implementing the policy

changes. The Department of Education on the other hand assumed that further discussions and negotiations were unnecessary as the policy has been through a rigorous consultation process. The policymaker maintained that the policy intentions were made clear at the various workshops and meetings held over the two to three year period prior to the mergers. The Rectors of the technical colleges and representatives from the College Councils attended these workshops and meetings. The assumption was that Rectors and Council members would initiate discussions at the college level on the imminent changes in order to convey the message down to all levels in the colleges. A senior Department of Education indicated that

*... the understanding of the sophistication of the strategy in arriving at that change was understood varyingly by different people given their location within the system at a particular point in time (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

He assumed that this was the case depending on the level of information shared at the colleges and the practice within the specific college to encourage debate and discussions on the FET policy. However, Rectors assumed that it was not their role to inform college staff of the change. The Rectors assumed that the Gauteng Department of Education would do this through meetings and workshops since it was the Department of Education and the Gauteng Department of Education that intended to put the plan into action.

Thirdly, since neither the Department of Education nor Gauteng Department of Education had informed college staff directly of the merger the college staff assumed that there was a hidden agenda in the merging of the FET colleges. They assumed that the restructuring of the FET colleges implied that white college staff would lose their jobs. The assumption was that restructuring implied making the staff profile more representative of the demographics of the student profile, which was changing rapidly. The Department of Education on the other hand assumed that since there was no such indication in the policy or anywhere else college staff would not feel threatened that they would lose their jobs. The Department of Education official indicated that

*... part of the problem in transforming institutions to be reflective of the demographics of this country is a problem of a skills base so the transformation is not by anyway a two year thing (Brad, 23/10/2002).*

He assumed that college staff was aware of the challenges that the sector faced in terms of teaching skills shortages and that it would not be possible to change staff profiles within a short period of time. He explained that it would take several years to build capacity among the different race groups in order to make the staff profile representative of the student demographics of these institutions.

Fourthly, the union representative assumed that mergers would result in a decline in the status and the quality of service provided by colleges. He assumed that through the amalgamation of the colleges resources would have to be shared, thereby leading to a decrease in the quality of services provided by the colleges. Of great concern to the union representative was the fact that the merger would result in

*... sharing the resources and being attached to somebody who isn't on your level*  
(Chris, 06/11/2002).

He believed that state-aided colleges were superior to state colleges.

#### *Norms*

Norms relate to behaviour patterns that take place in the context of an organisational structure. The general norm is that the technical college sector is known to be white male dominated and responsible for a particular role in a designated sector of the South African population. The policymaker described technical college staff as

*... of the most capable and committed advocates of change; or you get these very solid soldiers who do not want to change and who have their roots and won't be able to make a change. Then you get the older Rectors and senior managers who are entirely uncomfortable with the changes* (Tom, 12/11/2003).

He explained that college staff could not be classed as a homogenous group where in which all staff shared the same values and beliefs about change. However, technical colleges were considered to be institutions that were managed by white males – a typical characteristic of the institutions considering the history of technical colleges (refer to Chapter 2). Some of the older members of staff were deep entrenched in these institutions and resisted change. They believed that they understood the sector best and had established a work culture that had proved to be successful. Change implied

challenging the beliefs and values that they had upheld for decades. On the other hand younger staff members were more adventurous and were willing to embrace the change.

The union representative agreed that the technical colleges were by nature very conservative. He emphasised that the values and beliefs of the state-aided colleges were deeply embedded in the conservative institutional culture. He felt that the culture of the colleges was something of which the white staff was proud, and that merging colleges with different cultures would be a problem. By different cultures he was referring to the state and state-aided colleges that were established to meet the education and training needs of different race groups. He referred specifically to race and saw this as an inhibitor to change. He was of the opinion that:

*Blacks have a totally different way to of doing things. They have a different attitude and different style in life from whites and anything that you do or start together, requires really working hard at it. It will slow things down (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

The union representative believed that the values and beliefs of college staff were based on race. He described blacks as being laid back and unwilling to work hard, and believed that only whites would make a concerted effort to bring about the necessary changes. To him the mergers would slow down the pace at which the colleges functioned. He went on to explain that:

*... we are extremely proud of what we achieve, number one, with our students, and what we have as facilities, and the staff all feel that we are part and parcel of this. Now anything that could affect that will put us on our guard and then I will say yes, it would be easier for a college if they had a more casual approach to life, and where the pass rate was, for instance, low, or where they didn't have the facilities to merge, because they have a lot to gain, whereas the college who had everything and a lot to lose or not to lose, they had to sacrifice a lot, and it could be at the end that they will not be in the same elite position as they were before (Chris, 06/11/2002).*

It was evident that the union representative believed that the whites owned the college and there was a sense of pride in what they had achieved. He displayed a strong sense of ownership. He believed that mergers implied a loss of these long held values and beliefs. He was saddened that state-aided colleges would have to share their resources

with state colleges and believed that this would lead to a decrease in the performance of state-aided colleges.

The Department of Education official referred to the mergers as the “hard stuff” in the reorganisation of the FET college sector, while the creation of a new ethos and culture constituted the “soft stuff” of the process. By referring to the “soft stuff” he was referring to the cultural aspects of change as the assumptions that college staff held, the values and beliefs, norms and meaning of the purpose of change. The “soft stuff” would have to be changed as the next stage in the mergers.

### **6.3.7 Strands of congruence**

The conclusions drawn from the preceding analysis indicate that:

- The Department of Education envisaged implementation of the mergers as a rational, linear, intellectual paradigm and saw the mergers as a technical exercise that could be implemented by a mandate. However, the focus on the importance of cultural conditions in educational settings can be seen in theories on organisational change. Fullan (1999) referred to the impact of chaos or complexity theory on conceptions of change. Implementers, on the other hand, face a non-linear, non-rational, complex and sometimes even chaotic reality.
- The reallocation of resources to support the conceptualisation of the mergers was also an important element of *restructuring*. Limited access to the resources of money, time and data is often a major barrier (Louis & Miles, 1990). In the South African context education policymaking has, to a large extent, been a product of redressing apartheid. Political symbolism in educational policymaking was the order of the day in the post-apartheid state. The policy agenda is set by powerful politicians while the implementation is left to those at grass-root levels. The success of implementation depends upon motivating educators to implement the new policy, and upon providing them with the necessary resources to do so (Fowler, 2000).

- Department of Education officials, policymakers and union representatives identified the complexity of the change as one of the most challenging aspects. This affected the understanding among stakeholders, but even where there is understanding, people seldom embrace change that is threatening to their comfort zones (Fullan, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994). Without the investment of time to bring about understanding the change process, building collegiality and relationships, sharing beliefs and values, and developing norms, there is bound to be resistance and failure (Sarason, 1982; Simpson, 1990).
- One of the biggest challenges that the sector faced was the lack of leadership to drive the change agenda. Leadership was paramount to initiate the agenda, conceptualise the plan, and provide opportunities for capacity building, support and training (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Giacquinta, 1994). The lack of capacity was identified as one of the major constraints, and even external support sometimes hampered implementation.
- The implementation agenda was based on several underlying assumptions. Embedded values and beliefs were ignored in this top-down mandated change. While financial resources were acknowledged as necessary no specific provision was made to provide these resources.
- The role and channels of communication were undermined and it was assumed that stakeholders would have taken it upon themselves to develop an understanding of the policy and implementation strategy. According to McLaughlin the "actual consequences of the policy will depend finally on what happens as individuals throughout the policy system interpret and act on them" (1987:172).
- The lack of sufficient time for collaboration was a major challenge, and both the provincial department officials and college staff referred to time constraints in the context of formal collaboration, stating that they felt overwhelmed trying to meet the associated responsibilities (Miles, 1978; Rogers, 1995). Implementers need time and other resources to learn and understand the purpose of the innovation, and to become comfortable with new strategies and structures. The

time made available for this is usually inadequate or nonexistent. I wish to argue that in top-down mandates the change process leapfrogs from the planning or policy development stage to the implementation stage, neglecting the preparation stage.

#### **6.4 The provincial experience**

In this section I present the perspectives of the Gauteng Department of Education officials responsible for the implementation of the FET policy, particularly the merging of the three case study technical colleges. The Gauteng Department of Education, like the other eight provincial education departments in the country, embarked on streamlining their functions in accordance with the new education policies and its requirements. During the course of 2002 the Gauteng Department of Education had established and proceeded to staff all the relevant units to cater for the new policy demands. A Directorate: FET Colleges and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), was established to implement both FET and ABET policies. In both the FET and ABET sectors new policies had been enacted and needed to be implemented almost simultaneously. The officials assigned to this directorate had to allocate their time, skills and capacity to both FET and ABET. This placed a huge burden on their ability to service both sectors adequately.

The plan for the New Institutional Landscape indicated that the 32 technical colleges in Gauteng were to merge to form eight FET institutions.<sup>150</sup> The Gauteng Department of Education was in a favourable position compared to the other provinces in that one of the two provincial education department representatives on the NLTT was a senior official from the Gauteng Department of Education. However, despite this arrangement, little information on how and why the plan was conceptualised was transmitted to other members of the Gauteng Department of Education FET Directorate. Like everyone else, the officials in the Directorate: FET Colleges and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) learnt of the contents of the plan at the launch on 17 September 2001. An official of the provincial department recalled that he experienced a sense of humiliation. He indicated that he felt as though the Department of Education was dictating

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<sup>150</sup> The plan indicated the merger of 152 technical colleges nationally into 50 FET institutions.



*... that certain things should be done, and done in a particular manner so that it fits into the mode of achieving the 50 FET colleges within the set timeframe (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

A second official from the Gauteng Department of Education indicated that he could not understand why, when an official from within the Gauteng Department of Education was part of the NLTT process, the contents and proposals were not shared with him and the other members of the FET Directorate, as the “foot soldiers” implementing the plan. He indicated that at that time he felt insulted and perceived it to be an indication of a lack of confidence in his abilities as a senior department official. However, he later concluded that

*... this is as result of real bad communication, it wasn't intentional, but it's really bad communication on the side of senior officials who worked with this (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

Vish explained that implementation of the merger was delegated to him and his colleagues. He said that it was an instruction that implementation was to begin immediately, based on the assumption that he and his colleagues would be able to provide technical college staff with the relevant information regarding the rationale for the mergers. Morris recalled that

*The first time I saw the plan was when it was launched nationally and, at that stage, I didn't know why college A was merging with college B. I didn't know that, and if people asked me later why are you merging college A and college B, instead of college A and college C, I wouldn't be able to provide that answer. The only thing was that once it was there in the document, I needed to go to colleges and give them that information (10/11/2003).*

As implementers they had to deal with the finer details of the implementation process. The department official elaborated on the frustrations they experienced, as there was no time to engage with the plan and internalise why something was being done in a certain way. He described the prevailing state of affairs as

*... people who had nothing to do with the day-to-day running of institutions were taken on board to develop a detailed plan for the colleges, and obviously the plan had many gaps. Some of those gaps that I'm talking about, like resources, could have been identified (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

He was of the opinion that people who had hands-on experience with the colleges should have developed the plan. By this he implied that provincial department officials should have been included in the detailed planning for their respective provinces. In this way many of the problems that colleges encountered would have been foreseen and addressed during the planning stage, instead of having to deal with them while implementation took place.

A second provincial department official emphasised that there were a lot of complications and challenges with which they had to deal. He recalled that he and his colleagues felt bitter, and distanced themselves from the plan. There were too many substantive issues that were not clear. He was of the opinion that

*... the plan should have included the activities, the time-frames and where the resources were going to come from for every activity, so that people could see the whole plan, activities, time lines, and also the budget for every line item....so the whole thing revolved around good planning (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

The implications of being excluded from the planning resulted in the Gauteng Department of Education officials feeling alienated and this resulted in an attitude of indifference. This was compounded by the fact that they lacked the necessary understanding of how and why the plan had been conceptualised in such a manner. The provincial department officials referred to this as the “Department of Education’s plan”. He indicated that they were not prepared to take ownership thereof and

*...began siding with the Rectors, when the Rectors indicated that they were not going to inform their staff about the benefits of the merger because they were not consulted the department officials would reply that they were also excluded and that they were both victims and that the people who did the planning should sort out the implementation process (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

He explained that they often felt inadequate when they were unable to provide the appropriate responses to questions raised by technical college staff regarding the reason, purpose and process of the merger. They felt that their weaknesses were being exposed and they were not willing to lose credibility as department officials among technical college staff.

The low morale prevalent among the provincial department officials was compounded by the lack of capacity that existed within the system. A provincial department official alluded to the fact that the Department of Education did not have a sufficient number of staff members to manage the task on hand. He also referred to the limited understand that provincial officials had of the change trajectory. He believed that

*... the Department of Education simply identified what they regarded as a key aspect of planning such as the, establishment of a coordinating structure. Since the national department didn't have capacity they brought onboard provinces and they hoped that the provinces were going to cascade the message, and that's where there was a breakdown in communication (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

He was aware that the FET Directorate in the Department of Education comprised two persons, a Director: FET Colleges and one other member who were responsible to oversee and drive the mergers from the national department. The role these two Department of Education officials played was to coordinate the support to provinces through the MOTT.<sup>151</sup> They had very limited decision-making powers, and senior management in the Department of Education had to be consulted when there were issues that needed clarity or consent. Provincial department officials regarded the Department of Education officials as having a “clinical idea” of implementation issues once “policy hit the ground”. The reality of the situation was that implementation was never going to be a straightforward process.

The Gauteng Department of Education official was of the opinion that provincial department officials should have been brought in to develop the implementation plan. Vish strongly believed that a plan conceptualised by people not involved in the day-to-day running of technical colleges was bound to have several gaps. He, however, confessed to the limitations of the provincial department in that

*Capacity in terms of they think in twos people who are able to think the process through, they had that kind of capacity, but capacity in terms of numbers they didn't have, and that was one of the biggest problems (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

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<sup>151</sup> Defined earlier in the chapter.

He implied that planning at the provincial level was done collectively and he believed that they had the capacity, know-know and understanding of what planning for change entailed. He did, however, acknowledge that there were too few people in the FET Directorate at the provincial level to implement the required change. He felt saddened that their increasing responsibilities in having to implement two major new policies<sup>152</sup> simultaneously did not ease the highly volatile situation that existed. Vish described the process as an exercise of “fire-fighting” and keeping the process going so that the mergers would be completed within the designated timeframes. The provincial department official acknowledged that end product was to be a merger plan formalising the mergers.

As the process unfolded several additional issues began to surface. The issue of additional financial resources was raised continuously by colleges. The Gauteng Department of Education official explained that the college staff was despondent because

*Colleges had to carry the burden of having to cover some of the costs and the issue of resources, was only considered much later when the colleges started complaining (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

The support provided by the Department of Education to provincial departments was purely to ensure that all provinces complied with the legislative requirements in terms of the FET Act. The provincial representative described the MOTT as a useful structure at which implementation issues were addressed, and working groups established to attend to issues that warranted lengthy deliberations. He, however, remonstrated that a lot of time was spent at MOTT meetings, or finalising tasks assigned during MOTT meetings, over and above their other day-to-day activities as departmental representatives. The increased workload limited the time available for discussions with the rest of the team on implementation issues and strategies. He lamented that they were unable to ensure a common understanding as departmental officials, and, consequently, very little information was made available to colleges.

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<sup>152</sup> The Directorate was responsible for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) as well as FET. Both sectors were implementing new policies.

The senior Gauteng Department of Education official recalled that a few selected Rectors were occasionally invited to the MOTT meetings when aspects necessitating their specific specialist input were discussed. These Rectors were considered to be in a favourable position as they had access to the issues raised and some notion of the processes to be followed. A provincial department official voiced his discontent as these Rectors often returned to their colleges and prematurely disseminated the information they had acquired to their colleagues. Provincial department officials who were not part of the MOTT often found themselves in a compromising situation

*... as it sometimes caused tension because we were still trying to conceptualise or deal with an issue while someone had already spread the word and we were seen as superficial at the provincial office for not wanting to share information with them. We did not share information freely as it was not making sense to us, and therefore we could not take this to the colleges because we were at the coalface and when it comes directly from the top to the bottom then that is the tension and the challenge (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

The Gauteng Department of Education official expressed distress that this situation created dissension among technical college Rectors. Those Rectors who were invited to the MOTT meetings were regarded as the preferred few. This state of affairs was further compounded as most of the Rectors were serving in an acting capacity. A provincial department official indicated that the Gauteng Department of Education had placed a moratorium on vacant senior positions in the technical colleges until the *restructuring* of the technical colleges was complete. He pointed out that in the majority of instances the person appointed as Acting-Rector of a college was a senior member of the college staff who assumed leadership in a void. He further indicated that the perception that college staff had was that the government was busy with a secret agenda and people did not know what to expect next. The Rectors interpreted the FET Act and Education White Paper 4 (1998) in terms of their own contexts and understanding. The provincial department official recalled the empathy he felt for the college Rectors.

*I actually had sympathy for some of the Rectors and staff in the colleges. I was an official of the department, it wasn't affecting me directly, but I was just saying to myself if this was me and people were sitting somewhere and they were discussing my future, how would I feel about it? I felt very bad that as human beings working in the sector, information was not coming to them as it should and obviously they would act in a different way (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

College staff were unsure of their future in the colleges. He recalled that he tried on several occasions to share the little information he had with the colleges

*... firstly there were provincial merger teams and I chaired the provincial merger team in the province. I would go out and convene meetings with Rectors, convene meetings with various people within the colleges, and they were informed on a regular basis. They came up with very crucial questions, some of which we were not able to address, because I was not aware of the processes, but as far as I knew, the information that I had given them (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

He defined the role of the provincial department as merely passing information from the Department of Education on to the colleges. He described the role of the provincial department as

*... being that of a conveyer belt; we were taking information from the national department and delivering it to the colleges, because if they asked certain questions you wouldn't be able to answer, because you were not part of the major planning process (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

The official stressed that this created a lot of discontent, and that as a senior provincial departmental official he felt disempowered. Morris lamented that

*... sometimes you get bitter, you really get angry, you get demotivated, you feel like you are not valued, you feel excluded and really feel you are not adding value to the organisation (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

It was obvious that the frustrations experienced by departmental officials were due simply to a lack of understanding of the strategy and process that had been conceptualised by a higher authority. A senior Gauteng Department of Education official expressed that

*... we are still grappling with some of those issues even today. It is not only the responsibility of this Directorate, but also the understanding from the entire organisation within the Gauteng Department of Education as a whole to understand the direction that FET should take (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

The complexity of implementing the FET reform was that it required the integration of numerous activities across the entire provincial department. The fact that the plan had been conceptualised in isolation from the relevant units that were to be involved in its implementation was bound to cause several problems. A departmental official elaborated that

*... for example your human resources section within the department is going to play a role in making contributions towards the new situation within colleges, how does your curriculum component come in and guide this process towards the requirements of a curriculum within an institution, and how does the institutional development and support from the organisational development point of view come in with leadership up to the top level bringing in that support and combining all these elements to give appropriate leadership to the process as a whole. It's a bit of both in terms of a lack of a clear understanding of the process and also a lack of very strong leadership that understands the direction which the sector should be taking (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

The stringent timeframes left no opportunity for interaction among and across departmental units. The various subsections within the provincial department saw it as a responsibility of lesser importance as noted earlier. A provincial department official explained that the lack of capacity within the provincial department, and the proliferation of policies directed at the school sector had removed the focus from the FET policy implementation. The sudden bout of activity within the FET sector created the impression that there was a sudden urgency to put a plan into action. He indicated that

*... it was rushed, they were rushing things, it looked like some senior official was challenged to make sure that within a short period of time the Act is implemented, because remember the Act was promulgated in 1998 and in 1999 nothing happened. It's only in late 2000 that a lot of things started happening and within the period, 2000, 2001, 2002 there was a lot of rushing (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

The rigid timeframes of six months (June to December 2001) led to a great deal of anxiety. People were often uncertain of what was expected of them mainly because they were not informed. Ray felt saddened by

*... the lack of proper communication and understanding of the task that lay ahead in terms of what we wanted to achieve (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

The provincial department official maintained that more time was needed to execute the plan and to create an understanding at all levels in the sector. In order to alleviate and address some of the anxieties and fears there was a need for a clear understanding of the procedures and processes involved, and how these would impact on people. The official recalled that

*... we expected to put much more hours in engaging about the changes and how that was going to affect various people. Most of the colleagues within the college sector were dealing with their own fears and anxieties rather than looking at the sector in terms of restructuring benefits (Ray, 26/05/2003).*

The strong conservative institutional culture that had prevailed for years was threatened. It was insensitive to disregard this as many college staff had served the sector for a considerable length of time and were proud of their accomplishments as

*... they saw the colleges as belonging to them and they saw government as interfering with their little space, and it was clear that there was going to be a lot of resistance. People feared losing jobs, you definitely needed to be sensitive to those fears, because it is natural and you might think people are resistant only to find that you are not addressing their particular fears (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

The plan did not address the human resource matters relating to the service options involved in *restructuring* the sector. Implicit in the plan was the acceptance at all levels of the change agenda as mandated. The provincial department official who dealt directly with colleges was unsure of why no provision had been made to deal with the fears and trepidations of college staff threatened by the change. He felt strongly that



*... you definitely need to put incentives and provide options and say to people that they may exit if necessary. You need to say to people these are the options that you can take, so that you are able to move along with people who are committed, and for all the people who are to be off-loaded you get a system in place that can help them get off, if they are not comfortable with moving forward (Vish, 14/11/2003).*

The policy made reference to mergers as an option in reshaping the FET landscape, and the FET Act provided the legal basis from which to implement mergers. Mergers were not the only option, however the Department of Education had decided that the *restructuring* of the FET landscape would be through mergers. An official of the provincial department considered this to be an indication of the indifference displayed by those people who had the vision of where they wanted to take FET colleges. He maintained that this was largely a power play displayed through an

*... arrogance that you feel you are in charge, you are the head of a particular sector and you mandate through the Act. You really feel the Act has gone through consultative processes and if people were not part of those consultative processes it's not your problem, that's how people feel, but you've got a different view to say that it is not everybody who's interested in reading a White Paper or Green Paper, the whole policy process, people are not interested in those to a large extent. At the end people want to be given information that says, because we are expecting you to do this, this is where it comes from (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

The hastily mandated implementation plan ignored the many dissenting voices. The provincial department official felt uneasy that

*...at lot of members of the colleges were bitter, we couldn't see the bitterness very clearly, because we didn't work much with the educators, we did not hear them, we locked them somewhere. The people with whom we had been in contact were the Rectors and the Rectors were waiting for posts, they couldn't spoil their chances deliberately by speaking out viciously against anything that was happening, so they kept to their little corners, patient and quiet, but in their corridors you could hear the rumbles (Vish, 14/11/2003)*

The anticipated reform required strong leadership that focused on the pertinent aspects of the change agenda. The facilitator was appointed to facilitate the process, but leadership was divided between the three campus heads. The provincial department official maintained that this hampered the process as

*... you need a champion; you need an advocate to drive the process. In my view, the advocate or the champion was none other than the Rector; if you got the Rector earlier on then you had the necessary advocate, the necessary champion, to drive your process. Without such a person, placed in a particular institution, how else would you expect other members of the colleges to be part of the process? (Morris, 10/11/2003).*

Despite the challenges of developing quality merger plans, the provincial department was able to meet its mandate and announce the mergers in January 2002. A department official referred to this as the fulfilment of a “legislative requirement,” and stated that they were not in a position to influence this process substantially as it was a political mandate. However, as already noted, the official recognises that the biggest challenge of the *restructuring* of the college sector resides in the second stage as people begin to see how the *restructuring* or merger affects them as individuals.

Morris described the mergers as a “paper exercise” and indicated that heads of institutions needed to be appointed before any further steps could be taken. Taking the size, responsibilities and complexities of managing an institution of such a nature, the Department of Education proposed that the heads be appointed at salary levels substantially higher than the current levels. In addition, the head of the FET institution would be referred to as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the institution. The number of appointments would be considerably fewer than was previously the case, as the number of institutions was to be rationalised through the merging process. Consequently, many of the former Rectors could no longer be appointed as heads of institutions. The steamrolling of the merger exercise did not allow time for the provincial department officials to engage with the Rectors to build trust, ensure buy-in, and eradicate misconceptions and fears.

### **Inferences from the implementer’s dilemma**

The role of the provincial department officials cannot be undermined in a large complex change agenda. Provincial department officials were excluded from the design of the reform programme. Past experience has revealed that provincial level support, or lack thereof, has been shown to be critical to the consequences of reform (Deal & Peterson, 1994). "The active commitment of district leadership is essential to project success and long-run stability" (McLaughlin, 1990:12).

There were no proper communication channels internally or externally. This hampered the stakeholders' understanding of a very complex change agenda. Communication and decision-making *structures* for information and support, as well as a well developed administrative *structure* supported by adequate funding, are other critical structural elements (Parer & Benson, 1990:22). These factors are interrelated, dynamic and central to the process of change. They can facilitate the discovery of the essential features of an innovation.

For successful change there is a need to establish and support enabling structures that provide the framework around which rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships are built and maintained, and at the same time, shape the culture of the organisation. However, to change an organisation's structures – *restructuring* – is a very complex task (Elmore, 1995). This is largely due to the fact that cultures, almost by definition, tend to be conservative and self-preserving. Cultural forces persuade us to cling to familiar, established structures, so that structural reform can only take place and achieve its objectives when accompanied by cultural change.

In the FET sector it is evident that there exists a relationship between *cultural* and *structural* factors, and that change is neither static nor linear. The data reveals that the structure of the FET college system is hierarchical, isolated, balkanised, and lacking the necessary skills, support resources and leadership to take forward the changes as envisaged in the policy. Furthermore, the culture prevalent in the sector is deeply entrenched in the apartheid ideology of CNE. The conservative institutional culture of colleges are associated with superiority, submissiveness, respect for authority, waiting for instructions, and are non-confrontational, with the assumption that new resources will accompany the change agenda, and a distrust of people from other cultures. Fullan (1999) maintains that change and reform are primarily seen from the perspective of the classroom, schools and districts, rather than society as the unit of analysis. Educational change can be successful only when the reform effort is well thought out, when implementers are the active change agents in the process, when there are sufficient resources and time to support the reform, when capable leadership is present, and when the organisational culture changes along with the structural changes.

## **6.5 Summary**

Having explored the intentions of the FET policy and various documents, and having obtained the perspectives of the national department of education officials, policymakers and union representatives, and also the impressions of provincial department officials, it was apparent that the structural and cultural factors identified in Chapter 3 played a role in the implementation of the FET policy. The analysis of the data lent itself to indicating that the policymaking process was not straightforward, and that the FET policy was placed in an environment of other policies competing for limited human and fiscal resources. These situations led to the Department of Education taking on a bureaucratic stance by mandating the merger of the technical colleges, thereby causing a great deal of unhappiness to the policy implementers who were left out of the planning process. Among other factors a lack of ownership hampered policy implementation.

I now proceed in Chapter 7 to identify the structural and cultural factors that played a role in influencing policy implementation in the three case study technical colleges.