

Chapter 8

What have we learnt about change?

Connecting Data and Theory

Any major organisational change generates four kinds of issues. Firstly, it will have an effect on individuals' need to feel effective, valued, and in control. Second, it will require new kinds of structural alignment with the organisation. Third, the change will cause conflict among those who will benefit and those who will not benefit from it. And, finally the change will result in loss of meaning for some members... particularly those who are the targets rather than the initiators of the change.

(Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, 1997)

8.1 Introduction

At the time of commencing this study my intentions were to investigate the factors affecting policy implementation in the six technical colleges in the Tshwane¹⁶⁰ (Pretoria) district in the Gauteng Province. The six technical colleges in Tshwane were to be merged into two FET institutions – one in the northern region and the other in the southern region. I deliberately focused my attention on the structural and cultural differences in the six colleges. My objective was not to produce a framework, but to use what was at hand and also what I had identified from my literature review as the structural and cultural factors affecting policy implementation. However, as I proceeded I realised that the initial framework presented in Chapter 3 needed to be altered and redefined in the light of the emerging data.

Once I commenced with my research study and collected my data it became obvious that the volume of data collected was too voluminous to handle given the time I had to complete my study. I was faced with the moral decision of what should be excluded from my study. Upon scanning the data I was able to identify the recurring themes across all six colleges. I discussed this with a colleague who served as a peer reviewer throughout my study and recorded my overall observations. There was a great deal of overlap across all colleges and it no longer seemed necessary to include all six colleges in my study. My decision on the number of colleges was informed by my initial intention of sampling by geographic area. The technical colleges in the Tshwane region are situated in the north and south.

¹⁶⁰ During the course of the study the city of Pretoria was renamed Tshwane.

The criteria I ultimately used in selecting these three colleges could be summed up as the geographic location; a mixture of state and state-aided colleges; different social and historical context; and that a sample of 3 colleges provided sufficient replication from which I could draw my conclusions and recommendations.

While conducting this case research I discovered that there were several change theorists (Fullan, 1991; 1993; 1999; 2000; Hargreaves, 1995a; 1995a; Elmore, 1995; Stoll and Fink, 1996; McLaughlin, 1987; 1990; 1998) who had looked at policy implementation in developed countries, but very few had really concentrated on developing countries. The models presented in the literature that I perused were based mainly on the findings in schools in developed countries, and seldom recognised the contextual factors prevalent in less developed and less mature environments. Furthermore, the research on FET was restricted to funding or financing, resource dependence, curriculum development, managerial skills and capacity. Through this research study I sought to provide deeper insights into the structural and cultural factors that influence and constrain policy implementation in developing countries, particularly in South Africa, where there is an array of new policies currently being implemented in a transcendently complex environment.

The major observation in this case study deals with what Fullan (2001:77) refers to as “false clarity” – describing what happens when reforms are more complicated than people realise. The FET merger was formalised through the publication of the mergers in the government gazette while college staff stated that they had never seen the completed merger plan. However, they maintained that they were aware that the colleges had merged as they had read the relevant government gazette. They expressed concern that they were not sure of what the mergers meant in practice as everything else has remained the same as far as they were concerned. The reform decision taken by the Department of Education based on the assumption that the merger would lead to changes in the sector was most unlikely to expand the college staff’s understanding of the change initiative.

There was a great deal of uncertainty around the development and finalisation of the merger, primarily mainly because of the “resistance” by Centurion College to the merger. The Gauteng Department of Education failed to contact the college regarding its request not to merge. This was the missing link in the process that created confusion

for all the colleges involved in this merger. Another contentious issue was the fact that the merger facilitator had halted activities on several occasions, and the time allocated by the Gauteng Department of Education for the finalisation of the merger plan had lapsed. The confusion and disarray that prevailed could be explained by the fact that the colleges' staff believed that once they had acquired the merged status they would function as a single entity with a new corporate image and ways of doing things. However, in practice the status quo remained the same in that the colleges continued to function as separate entities, each with their own bank accounts, staff complements, programme offerings and institutional heads. No directives were received from the Gauteng Department of Education to clarify the situation and all that the staff of the individual colleges were told was that a Rector (CEO¹⁶¹) would be appointed soon.

There is another puzzling observation about the Tshwane North merger that requires some explanation. One of the necessary steps in the merger process should have been the pre-merger activities. These would have entailed sensitising all parties involved to the imminent merger, as well as addressing the major issues of concern or other existing factors that might have impeded implementation at the inception of the process. Why did the Gauteng Department of Education not engage in these pre-merger activities? The implementation process unfolded with several problems associated with the plan that had been presented to the colleges. The planning process required a great deal of communication, given the fact that this was a top-down mandate to institutions steeped in a culture of distrust towards outsiders. These observations offered potentially new insights into policy implementation in public institutions grappling with change.

¹⁶¹ Chief Executive Officer was the new title to be accorded to the head of the merged FET institution. The post of CEO was a new post that was being created in the GDE FET college staff establishments.

¹⁶² In Chapter 3 I provided a definition for restructuring as being mainly about altering the “rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships” (Hargreaves,1994) and reculturing as the “the process of developing new values, beliefs and norms” Fullan (1996).

¹⁶³ See pages 42 –44.

8.2 FET policy implementation: perspectives from three technical colleges

In this section I return to the conceptual framework provided in Chapter 3 according to which *restructuring* and *reculturing*¹⁶² are seen as two separate approaches taken to complement each another in bringing about sustainable change. I want to argue that change efforts, particularly in developing countries, need more depth and breadth if real change is to take place. Structural changes without tapping into the cultural aspects do not accomplish the kind of changes intended, particularly in a highly complex process such as the *restructuring* undertaken in the South African FET context. Currently, many of the change efforts in South Africa, including the *restructuring* of the FET colleges, are “from the neck up” as Hargreaves (1997) put it. Besides capacity, skills, resources and leadership, it is imperative that implementers really understand what the change means in order to achieve success.

Several factors, as identified in Chapter 7, have emerged from the cases in the study. It was apparent that the mergers were implemented without paying attention to the deeper aspects of change. At the initiation stage it was crucial that an examination of the culture of the colleges be undertaken to establish what was sacred to the college staff in terms of the deeply seated conservative institutional culture outlined in Chapter 2¹⁶³. Technical colleges typify the deep conservative institutional culture which is characterised by the avoidance of conflict, orderly behaviour, staff blamelessness, distrust of others from different cultures and races, superiority, the embracing of Christian values and conforming to authority. Any deviation from these cultural norms demonstrated disrespect, bad values and inferior beings. The data from the case study suggested that the merger did not result in cultural changes.

Although on the surface it appeared as though college staff, through their involvement in the merger activities, were embracing the change, an in-depth analysis revealed a considerable gap between the philosophy and the new roles, beliefs and practices emanating from the development of the merger plans. For many of the college staff their

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personal beliefs about change were inconsistent with the way they perceived the merger. The college staff believed that the merger was not necessary to bring about the curricular changes essential for increasing responsiveness to the socio-economic needs of the country. It was explicitly stated several times during the interviews with the college staff that what was required was money for equipment and other facilities, and that the merger activities incurred wasteful spending. The disjuncture between their personal beliefs and the bigger picture needed consensus around the meaning of change and what it implied in practice.

The Rectors of the three case study colleges were faced with several dilemmas. As appointed leaders of the technical colleges, firstly, they alleged that they did not understand the change trajectory. They admitted being aware of discussions that colleges would merge long before the release of the implementation plan. Like their staff members they too grappled with the intentions and meaning of the merger. This resulted in their feeling alienated, demoralised and incapable. Secondly, the merger activities disrupted the orderly manner in which the colleges functioned, causing frustration and confusion among staff members. Staff members had to relinquish valuable teaching or private time to merger planning activities. Thirdly, their “havens” were threatened, and the main concern was the sharing of resources with other colleges with which they believed they had nothing in common except for their geographic location. The culture that prevailed in the colleges did not allow for sharing, because they considered this to be empowerment and enrichment of the beneficiary and detrimental to their own well-being. Fourthly, the head of the new institution was still to be appointed, and each one of the Rectors desired the position. They assumed that any disagreement or confrontation with the Gauteng Department of Education could compromise their chances of being considered for the post when advertised. In addition, the culture of the technical colleges commanded subservience to authority, irrespective of whether one agreed with the Gauteng Department of Education or not. The Rectors were instructed by the Gauteng Department of Education to merge, and under no circumstances would this instruction be ignored, irrespective of whether they disagreed with the principles, objectives or strategy of the change agenda.

Furthermore the merger activities offered very few opportunities for collaboration among the staff of the three colleges, or even among staff of the same college, to gain

deeper insights into what the change meant or required. In all three cases, within the colleges themselves the culture of presenting a united front to outsiders sustained the belief that there were no major conflicts. The impression of friendly working relationships was paramount, especially between the provincial department and the colleges, and this was one of the reasons the Gauteng Department of Education avoided confrontation and active participation in the process. There was no avenue for acknowledging conflict or talking about differing interpretations or opinions of the merger. Even though Centurion College had requested permission from the Gauteng Department of Education via the South African Defence Force to remain a stand-alone institution, it was not going to publicly acknowledge that tension existed between the Gauteng Department of Education and itself. Instead, Centurion College pretended to continue to be part of the process even without full commitment, and could not be accused of being uncooperative about the change agenda. It was the culture of the sector that prohibited Centurion College from openly demonstrating resistance by challenging the Gauteng Department of Education on its decision that the college merger with the two other colleges in its vicinity. Both Atteridgeville and Pretoria West Colleges were aware of this, but were unwilling to confront the Gauteng Department of Education as dissent was not permitted within the broader technical college culture. Open disagreement among the technical colleges would have signalled defiance towards authority and disrespect, and this would have been in contravention of the culture of the sector. The culture maintained the appearance of unity thereby preventing staff from openly communicating about the way they felt. In the interviews they aired their complaints about the Gauteng Department of Education and their concerns about implementing the mergers, and referred to staff members and members of the working groups without referring to names, as it was not in their culture to confront each other.

The staff at all three colleges displayed sympathy towards the Rectors whom they believed were the victims of the change agenda. They saw the Rector as a person without authority and believed that this inhibited the Rector's abilities as a leader. In addition they were accustomed to a work culture in which written instructions from the Gauteng Department of Education to the college Rector would precede any major policy change. This would be followed by discussions between the Gauteng Department of Education and those involved on the implications, processes and strategies of the change agenda. The Rector as the head official of the college would be responsible for

implementing the change in the college. However, the instruction in relation to *restructuring* through mergers was issued in an unusual way in that the plan was adopted by the Department of Education and the Gauteng Department of Education and the directive given to colleges at the national launch in September 2001. This was followed by the introduction of the merger facilitator to the three colleges at a meeting convened by the Gauteng Department of Education. None of the Rectors attended this meeting. College staff were informed of the workgroups to which they had to volunteer their services and time. Inevitably college staff were thrown into the deep end as they were not accustomed to initiating change on their own. College staff were accustomed to following the rules as given by the authorities above – the Gauteng Department of Education in this case. The college staff also assumed that detailed plans outlining each step, and the resources to implement the change agenda would be made available. They did not see it as their responsibility to engage in new policies and to try to understand what the policy meant in practice. They believed that this was the responsibility of the Gauteng Department of Education, and assumed that the Gauteng Department of Education would provide the capacity and resources to implement the policy.

The culture of maintaining the appearance of harmony discouraged college staff from openly criticising the system, however; they indicated the structures and process that they would have liked to see in place. Several college staff articulated their sense of betrayal that neither the Department of Education nor Gauteng Department of Education honoured verbal promises about additional resources. This increased distrust between college staff and the Gauteng Department of Education and Department of Education. It also led to college staff questioning the sincerity of the Department of Education in implementing the FET policy.

Throughout the process college staff blamed the Gauteng Department of Education and the Department of Education for the lack of support, capacity, resources, training and leadership. It was apparent that they found the poor communication, and insufficient time and money to be barriers to change. The staff at all three colleges were of the opinion that the resources to implement the change should have been provided by either the Department of Education or Gauteng Department of Education. In all three cases the college staff held themselves blameless in regard to the problems associated with the lack of capacity, skills, understanding, collaboration and communication of the change

agenda. College staff acknowledged that it was their own responsibility to acquaint themselves with the new FET policy and legislation, but were of the opinion that the onus was on the Rectors to provide the structural aspects for change within the colleges. Even though they implied this in their discussions they did not openly blame the Rector or college management for the lack of these structures. Instead they credited themselves with highlighting the positive aspects of their colleges, and externalised the problems associated with the policy implementation onto the Gauteng Department of Education or the Department of Education.

College staff saw themselves at the mercy of an unresponsive and incapable bureaucracy that was exerting undue pressure on them to change. They felt that the Gauteng Department of Education had not consulted or negotiated with them, and that the timeframe set to implement the merger was too short. There was no support or training from the Gauteng Department of Education either. In all three cases the staff were aware that the policy had been adopted in 1998 after intense consultation with stakeholders, but held themselves blameless for not having engaged with the policy. In all three colleges staff indicated that they believed that as long as they did not get involved with the policy it would not affect them. The top-down mandate resulted in an implementation that was largely disconnected from the cultural practices and beliefs of the staff of the colleges

8.2.1 The images of organisational inefficiency and change

The study showed that reform is a complex issue and that appropriate organisational structures are needed to support the endeavour. The policy idea (merger) was not necessarily misguided or ineffective, but difficulties were experienced in getting the excessive and poorly supported reform of the ground. From the top the reform agenda was constrained by vague conceptions of what the merger implied in terms of change.

The primary reason for this was the non-allocation of designated resources at the national, provincial and institutional levels to fund the reform initiatives. Money was needed to acquire skills, capacity, support, training, and all other physical and non-physical resources required to initiate and sustain change. Effective communication channels are one of the most fundamental structures needed to ensure that all stakeholders develop a common understanding of, believe in, share information on,

develop trust in, increase meaning and support the change agenda. The lack of financial resources constrained the ability of the provincial department officials to be physically visible through the merger process. Not only was there not enough people employed in the Directorate but the problem was further exacerbated by the lack of physical resources for *inter alia* the availability of a motor vehicle for officials to travel to the colleges. College staff on the other hand construed the visual absence of provincial officials as a lack of support.

Furthermore, the implementation of the policy was the responsibility of the provincial department. The directive for the merger had come from the Department of Education in the form of a national plan. The lack of leadership further compounded the confusion in the minds of the college staff with regard to the intentions and ownership of the change agenda.

The merger demanded new skills, knowledge and understanding yet provision was not made to train staff for their new roles and responsibilities. Change requires time to change understanding, assumptions, values and beliefs (Fullan & Miles, 1991; Gilley, 2000). The merger was implemented over a relatively short period of time. There were just three months between the adoption of the plan and the completion of the merger plan. The set timeframes ignored the individual contexts within which the colleges functioned. The time did not provide adequately for stakeholders to internalise the rationale and process involved. In addition to this time is required to improve understanding, share vision, build capacity and skills.

College staff viewed the merger plan as a symbolic signal of change and they failed to move sufficiently beyond the symbolic formalization of change - the merger, which took the form of a notice in the government gazette. The announcement of the merger, which had achieved one of the policy objectives, was disabled by the colleges' inability to move beyond the structural capacities for, and cultural constraints, on the change process.

8.2.2 Implications for educational change

What can be learned from this case study of policy implementation in the FET sector?

First and foremost, the nature of the reform initiative should match the context within which implementation is to take place. In this case study each of the three colleges was identified as having a unique context, history, staff, leadership, socio-economic status, and “culture”. All these factors were found to play a vital role in how the reform initiative was accepted and implemented. The top-down mandated implementation plan ignored these factors by adopting the “one size fits all approach”. I strongly believe that the lack of consideration of the unique contexts, history, staff, leadership, socio-economic status, and “culture” of the case study colleges affected stakeholders’ understanding of the change, capacity and commitment needed to implement the change innovation.

Second, it is important to share in a vision where the change initiative is adopted and planned without the actors being part of the planning. Evidence from this case study suggests that the possibilities for increasing the success of implementation lie in establishing a shared vision that is linked with planning and support. I argue that the absence of a clear vision in this case study caused confusion, demoralisation and incomplete implementation. Effective change requires a shared understanding and commitment at the local level.

Third, leadership lies at the core of successful implementation. The role of leadership is paramount in establishing structures, providing support, building vision, ensuring the availability of resources, and establishing the culture and ethos of the organisation to embrace the change efforts. Traditional organisational theory entrenched the power of leadership in those informal roles legitimised by hierarchical structures, that is, those people appointed to those posts of authority within an organisation. Current changes in leadership have spawned new concepts of leadership to the effect that leadership no longer needs to be limited to one individual or to those in administrative or supervisory roles (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). For successful *restructuring* and *reculturing* there needs to be empowerment through collaboration, collegiality and commitment (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988). I consider that effective and supportive strong leadership on the part of the Rector is important for collaboration, building capacity and sharing decision-

making. The emphasis at the college level should be on active participatory leadership rather than top-down delegation, as the latter does not encourage debate, stifles initiative, and ignores fears and resistance.

Fourth, the role of the provincial or district level leadership is essential to provide pressure and support for change. Without the shared vision and understanding of the bigger picture implementation at the site or college level is virtually impossible. I strongly believe that active provincial or district level leadership is needed to increase understanding, and motivate and support complex change initiatives. The absence of active provincial or district level leadership leads to the implementers¹⁶⁴ feeling alienated, demotivated and demoralised.

Fifth, I think that to be able to implement the reform initiative successfully capacity and skill are necessary ingredients. I argue that without the necessary capacity and skill implementers will not be able to carry out the directives given, particularly in a top-down mandate where capacity entails the understanding of the process as well as the new skills and competencies required to be actively involved in the change innovation.

Sixth, support and training are critical in any effective process of initiating and implementing reform initiatives. I am of the view that support could take the form of contact with regular collaboration groups, physical, financial and human resources, professional development opportunities, time for planning and monitoring the change process, and two-way communication structures.

Seventh, the lack of time was found to be a major constraint. I firmly believe that time must be made available to engage with the change process. Time is also vital for the establishment of a vision and capacity building. It is important that there is time for planning and professional development. Often the rapid pace at which *restructuring* innovations are implemented does not accommodate time for discussions, engagement in the change process, decision-making, increased understanding and the building of trust among implementers.

¹⁶⁴ In the FET context this will comprise the college Rectors, management, teaching and administrative staff, College Councils and students.

Eighth, the lack of both formal and informal communication structures was found to constrain the stakeholders' understanding of the process. I believe that communication structures and processes should not inhibit or restrict any change intervention. Open communication channels build trust, increase commitment, motivate, and help alleviate fears and insecurities. The communication structures should be such that implementers also receive feedback about implementation. The planning for change should commence with the establishment of clear communication structures. Communication in complex change situations should be accompanied by advocacy campaigns that help arouse attention and increase awareness of the change initiative.

Ninth, for complex changes there needs to be long-term clear plans that indicate process and resources to enable implementing. I wish to argue that the absence of detailed plans leads to confusion and uncertainty about whether there really is a serious intention to implement the change initiative. To plan effectively it is paramount that leaders consult implementers during the planning process, as the implementers understand the contexts better than the leaders, and are bound to look at minor details that are likely to be omitted during planning. The minor details are usually the ones that significantly constrain policy implementation.

Tenth, a collaborative culture allows participants to experience anxiety rather than protect them from it. Through collaboration stakeholders share meaning and understanding, confront resistance, and build capacity, trust and ownership. Evidence from the case study indicates that the lack of collaboration led to confusion, mistrust, and a lack of understanding. I firmly believe that through collaboration and participation stakeholders become actively involved, thereby improving planning and developing a sense of ownership. Leaders need to foster dialogue about the meaning of the change innovation and redefine resistance by respecting and listening to the resistor's perspectives. The staff needs to be encouraged to question the value of the innovation and reform without being viewed as simply being resistant to the new ideas.

Eleventh, the beliefs and values of implementers (college staff) are important in ensuring success. I would argue that where implementers see the reform as working against their own interests they are likely to resist the change innovation and experience a sense of alienation. In a top-down mandate it is therefore important that implementers are given an opportunity to develop their understanding of the initiative, and critically

assess and discuss the initiative in a collaborative environment in order to ensure successful implementation.

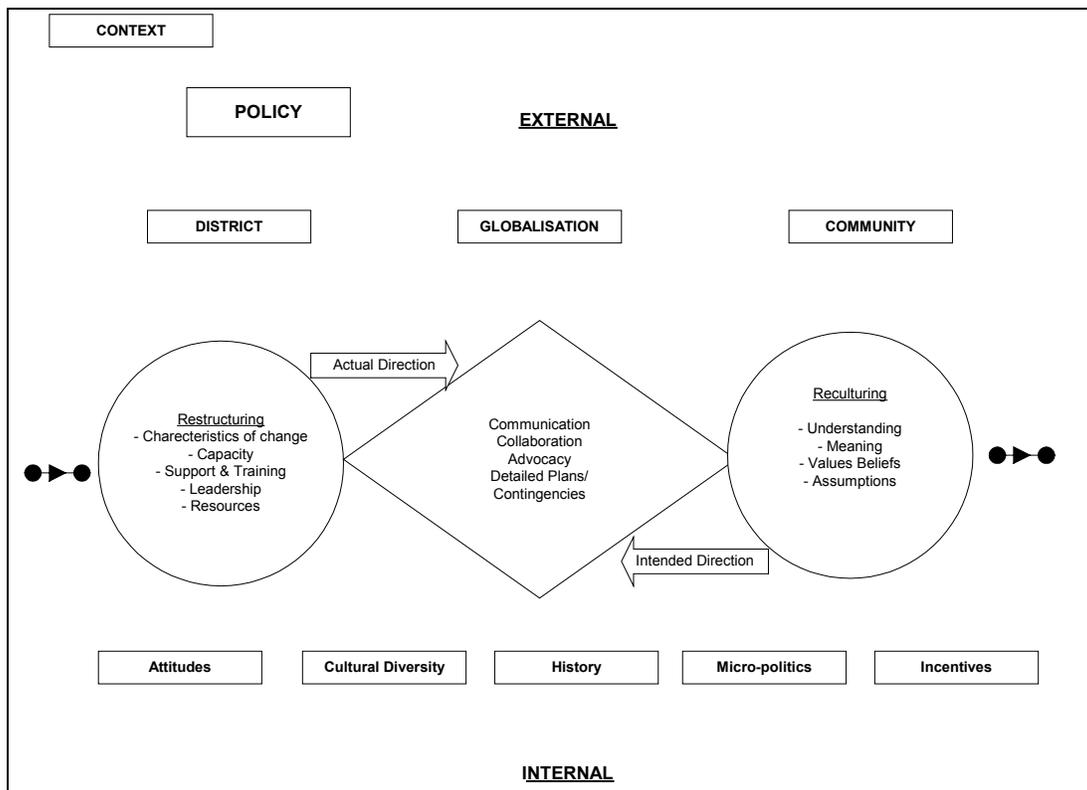
Finally, this case study highlights the consequences of *restructuring* without *reculturing*, and illuminates the importance of the staffs' beliefs and culture in reform implementation. I strongly believe that successful change has more to do with the professional values and beliefs of the college staff than with the voluntary adoption of the reform, irrespective of whether the national or provincial levels mandate it. Teachers choose practices and changes that fit best with their pre-existing beliefs, and which are consistent with the school's culture.

The findings from this study could be summarised as follows:

- that the restructuring of the FET colleges through mergers was constrained by structural or the organisational inefficiencies in the system, that is, the lack or absence of the structures required for effective implementation of policy.
- that the restructuring process underestimated the depth and resilience of the FET college culture, and that this institutional culture militated against effective implementation. In other words, there was no strategy for reculturing these institutions.

Figure 8.1 provides the framework for future studies. The initial framework presented in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.1) identified the following as important elements of *restructuring*: Characteristics of Change, Capacity, Support and Training, Leadership and Resources. The elements recognised in terms of *reculturing* were Understanding, Meaning, Assumptions, Values and Beliefs. However, my findings indicate that the convergence of the two approaches, namely, *restructuring* and *reculturing*, needs to take place through vigorous formal and informal communication, collaboration, advocacy and detailed plans with contingency arrangements for sustained systemic change, as indicated graphically in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: Conceptual model to reculture for restructuring



8.2.3 Implications for future research

In this study I highlighted several questions that could serve as a springboard for future research, namely, the need for

- longitudinal rather than snapshot studies of institutional cultures and their unfolding effects on college restructuring.
- empirical and conceptual accounts of college cultures which allow for micro-political activity and internally initiated structural changes; and
- an investigation into how college systems change or restructure as opposed to an individual college.

8.3 Summary

In this thesis I have identified the structural and cultural factors that constrained policy implementation, as well as documenting the merger as it unfolded in three technical colleges in the Tshwane South region.

I have reconfirmed existing theory and provided new empirical evidence and insight into implementing top-down mandates. The research has shown the symbolic consequences of implementation - *restructuring* without *reculturing*. Much about the implementation of the mergers was assumed, rather than spoken about and debated. College staff were expected to change, despite diverse and divergent philosophies and beliefs about change. Before being expected to change, especially when change is complex and multifaceted, lecturers need to articulate their own beliefs about teaching and teaching practices. They need to question their own beliefs, and challenge their core values about education, teaching and learning.

The research has shown that leadership was absent at both the district and college levels. The Rectors at all three colleges did not provide direction, nor did they encourage dialogue among staff. They themselves were disempowered as there was no dialogue between them and the district officials to achieve consensus around the meaning of the change initiative. The role of the Rector in leading change has been defined as persuading others to change, and building consensus around the meaning of the change innovation. This top-down mandate does not accommodate dissenting views, and the college staff's understanding of the merger was highly varied and largely unspoken.

The role of leadership was further emphasised in that, irrespective of whether the principal or provincial officials are leaders or facilitators, they must communicate their commitment to the goals of the change and demonstrate the sincerity of their intentions to all members within the system. Without the visible and continued support of the leaders the change agenda has little chance of succeeding (Fullan,1985).

Furthermore this research has also shown that sustainable change requires the embracing and developing of the human dimensions of change. Top-down mandates are generally oblivious to the human dimensions of change that manifest in fear, anxiety, loss and resistance. For change initiatives to be successful it is important that the change is well thought out, educators and district officials need to be active change agents in the process with sufficient resources and time to support the reform, and there needs to be capable leadership, and changes in the organisational culture along with the structural changes.

The study also shows that there is a need to ensure that the change agenda is supported by enabling structures, processes and mechanisms. Enabling structures provide the framework around which rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships are built and maintained while shaping the culture of the organisation. However, in order to change an organisation's structure *restructuring* is a very complex task. This is mainly due to the fact that cultures 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 it is accompanied by cultural change.

Finally, without cultural change it is likely that the change innovation will remain at the level of structural and symbolic implementation. The altering of teachers' beliefs is a daunting task, and many of the cultural beliefs are often hidden, tacit, and upheld by cultural assumptions. To facilitate deep and meaningful change we need to begin with surfacing the deeply held tacit assumptions and bringing to the fore the "undiscussables" (Argyris, 1999).