

**The Structural and Cultural Constraints on Policy Implementation:**

*A Case Study on Further Education and Training Colleges in South Africa*

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## Synopsis

In its first decade of democracy the South African government embarked on radical reforms to the apartheid education system. One such set of reforms concerned the restructuring of the further education and training (FET) college sector. The implementation plan for the restructuring of the FET college sector, entitled *Reform of South Africa's Technical Colleges* (Department of Education, 2001), was released in September 2001. The reorganisation of the FET college sector brought with it the prospect of meeting the objectives of the country's Human Resource Development Strategy (Department of Education, 2001). Colleges would be transformed so that they offered learners the "high-quality, lifelong learning opportunities that are essential to social development and economic competitiveness in a rapidly changing world" (Department of Education, 2001:5).

The study has its origins in a deceptively simple research question: What are the organisational and cultural influences and constraints on policy implementation?

Much has been written about why policies fail to be implemented as planned (McLaughlin 1987; Guiacquinta, 1994). Based on the extensive data generated in this research I found explanatory power in a conceptual framework that uses the dual lenses of *restructuring*, focusing on "changing the use of time, space, roles and relationships to improve learning" (Fink & Stoll, 1998:308); and *reculturing*, which focuses on "the process of developing new values, beliefs and norms" (Fullan, 1996:420). The new government policy for FET colleges proposed a dramatic re-organisation of the sector through mergers in order to position these institutions so as to meet the socio-economic and human resource needs of a transforming society in line with global trends. Yet, an analysis of the sector revealed system-level problems relating to the structure and culture of the FET colleges that would undermine the implementation of the new policy.

The comparative case study method was used to conduct this research on three technical colleges – two state-aided and one state college – as the "cases" under investigation. Data was collected over a one-year period using a wide variety of data collection methods including in-depth interviews (both individual and focus group sessions),

document analysis, the review of minutes of meetings and other communiqués, selected photographs and structured questionnaires.

The first major finding of this study is 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.

The second major finding of this study is 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.

This research further demonstrates the consequences of attempted *restructuring* without *reculturing* and the implications of not taking into account implementation matters involving institutional culture, values, behaviour and working styles. Successful change has more to do with the professional values, beliefs and assumptions held by implementers than with the voluntary adoption of the reform, irrespective of whether it is mandated at the national or provincial levels. Implementers choose practices and changes that fit best with their pre-existing beliefs and which are consistent with the organisation's culture. Furthermore, the insights gained from this study that structure and culture are inextricably linked have both practical and theoretical significance. The study not only offers insight into the reorganisation of the FET colleges in South Africa, but also serves to extend our understanding of the importance of culture and structure as two neglected dimensions of systemic reform.

In this study I highlighted several issues that could serve as a springboard for future research into this neglected sector (FET colleges) of the education and training system:

- longitudinal rather than snapshot studies of institutional cultures and their unfolding effects on college restructuring;
- empirical and conceptual accounts of college cultures that examine the impact of micro-political activity on the change trajectory; and
- studies on how college *systems* change or restructure as opposed to individual colleges.

In sum this research found that there were several structural (capacity, resource, leadership, support, communication, planning and advocacy) and cultural (beliefs, values, assumptions, understanding and practices) factors that constrained policy implementation. The study further argues that restructuring without *reculturing* encourages symbolic rather than substantive change. The thesis concludes that the restructuring (mergers) resulted in a fragmented, rather than a coordinated, FET system.

**Key words:** organisation, structure, cultural, *restructuring*, *reculturing*, policy implementation, reform, further education and training, educational change, reorganisation

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To the National Department of Education, Gauteng Department of Education, Rector and Staff of the Atteridgeville Technical College, Rector and Staff of the Centurion

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**Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my daughters

Anushka and Sidhika

The light of my eyes when I needed a vision of the future.

**Declaration of Originality**

I, Sandra Sanyagitha Sooklal, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted previously for any degrees at any university.

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**S.S. Sooklal**



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**Key Acronyms**

AFETISA	Association for Further Education and Training Institutions in South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
CCF	Colleges Collaboration Fund
CNE	Christian National Education
COTT	Central Organization for Trade Testing
CTCP	Committee of Technical College Principals (Later renamed AFETISA)
DoE	Department of Education
FET Act	Further Education and Training Act (Act 98 of 1998)
FET	Further Education and Training
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HWI	Historically White Institution
HBI	Historically Black Institution
IMT	Institutional Merger Team
MEC	Member of the Executive Committee
MOTT	Merger Operational Task Team
NCFE	National Committee on Further Education
NLTT	National Landscape Task Team
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PMT	Provincial Merger Team
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

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