

# Creating People-centred Schools

School Organization and Change  
in South Africa

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and Change in South Africa

## Learning Guide

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## SECTION TWO

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# What is an 'organization'?

## 2.1

### Introduction

Think of how often we use the word 'organize' or 'organized'. Often it is used as an instruction. Someone might say, 'Please organize the catering for the meeting on Thursday'. At other times it might be used as a compliment. For instance, 'Thandi is such an organized person'. Just the other day, a soccer commentator said the same of Bafana Bafana's performance against Argentina: 'That is the most organized performance I have seen from our team in recent months.'

Generally you will notice that the different versions of this word are used to describe *favourable* characteristics. In contrast, to be labelled 'disorganized' is not complimentary!

But even more importantly, the word is used to describe an *achievement*, whether it be excellent catering at Thursday's meeting, or Thandi's successful life, or good play by Bafana Bafana. However, it goes further than this: it describes an ability to *plan* and *carry out* these plans successfully so that a *goal or vision* – be it a tasty lunch, a well-run life or a good soccer performance – is achieved. In other words, it doesn't describe an achievement which occurs as a consequence of luck! And a big part of an organized performance is the ability to get things or people to *work together*. For instance, it is unlikely that Thandi would be described as 'organized' if she was good at one thing, but the rest of her life was chaotic! Likewise, Bafana Bafana could only be described as 'organized' if the team *worked together*. In fact, we might describe a collection of individuals working together in an organized way as an *organization*.

*Any group which works together in a planned, co-ordinated way to achieve some common purpose could be described as an organization.*

The description obviously covers a wide variety of organizations: soccer teams, burial societies, teachers' unions, churches, businesses, charities and stokvels, for example. In fact, throughout our lives we are dependent on, and interact with, organizations. But what about schools? How do we decide whether a school can be called an organization?

#### ACTIVITY 1: IS MY SCHOOL AN ORGANIZATION?

To answer this question, use our new criteria for an organization to assess a school that you are familiar with. Examine the school by asking:

- Does it consist of a *group* of people?
- Are the individuals *working together* ...
- ... in a *planned, co-ordinated way* to achieve this purpose?
- Does this group have a *common purpose*?

Later, as we learn more about organizations, we will ask you to re-assess your answer. You will then be able to do more informed analyses of your school.



Spend no more than 45 minutes doing this activity. You may want to discuss your thinking with a fellow student.

## Is a school an 'organization'?

The writers of this module didn't study a school (because we don't currently teach at one). Instead, we examined the college of education where one of our team works. We decided it could be called an organization if we defined an organization in terms of the four criteria listed above.

First, it does consist of a *group* of people – lecturers, learners, administrative staff – gathered together for the *common purpose* of training teachers. We initially had some difficulty in deciding whether we should include administrative staff since they are not directly involved in the training. However, we decided that their purpose at the college was to assist in making the training of teachers possible.

We also wondered whether we should include parents. In the end, we decided to exclude them as most of our learners are adults themselves (and so make their own decisions about education). However, we realized that if we'd been assessing a school, we would probably have included parents as they are represented in governing bodies (and so on), and do have a direct interest and say in their children's education. In other words, they share a common purpose with other staff, even though they are not active in the actual teaching.

We found that the members did *work together, and in a planned way*, to achieve their purpose. Sometimes, though, it doesn't feel like this! At times, there is tension between lecturers and the Rector, between staff and learners, and even between academic and administrative staff. And often the plan seems rather vague and haphazard! But, in the end, we decided that while we should *improve* the way we worked together, and also spend more time planning together, we did work together in a sufficiently planned way to be called an organization (although, possibly, a fairly disorganized organization!).

The criteria are quite useful in distinguishing an organization from ordinary groups of people, such as soccer spectators. While Bafana Bafana and the spectators at their match are both groups of individuals, they differ in significant ways. A soccer team *works together* towards a *common purpose*, but a soccer crowd does not. A soccer crowd also has no plan (although they do have a common reason for being in one place together).

“  
... individual  
members contribute  
their skills and  
intellectual resources  
to achieve the goals of  
organizations  
”

## Deepening our understanding of organizations

We saw earlier that, even when organizations do meet the four criteria, they can differ a great deal. We noticed that even while organizations might have a common purpose and might work together in a planned way to achieve this purpose, it is not always achieved in a very organized way. For instance, in our organization there is a great deal of suspicion among members – particularly those in charge – which prevents our working together effectively. Also, we are often *told* what we must achieve rather than jointly discussing and agreeing upon our goals.

When we think of a business or school as opposed to a church, for instance, we notice other differences in the ways in which they are organized. Priests, for example, may be leaders of a Christian community, but do so largely through inspiration. They are dependent on the *support* of their congregation and usually have no power to order the congregation around. However, in schools, most principals are appointed to their positions and have the power to give instructions to teachers and learners. In most schools, teachers and learners have very little power to oppose principals.

Another key characteristic of an organization now becomes apparent: in all organizations, individual members *contribute their skills and intellectual resources* to achieve the goals of that institution. This also distinguishes an organization from a group of people, like a soccer crowd or a crowd of shoppers. Thus, we need to add 'members contribute skills and resources' to the criteria for an organization.

In addition, we need to explore the *way in which members work together* in order to be able to describe *different kinds* of organizations more accurately. Do members



simply accept instructions, or do they participate in decision making? Towards the end of the module, you will notice that there are people who believe schools are not organizations. Instead, they suggest that schools are far more like *communities* than organizations.

## What will we do in the rest of Section Two?

In Section Two we will develop our understanding of how South African schools are organized and why they are organized in this way. We want to find answers to the following questions:

- **What are the organizational characteristics of most South African schools?** We find that most South African schools could be described as *hierarchical*. This often means that members don't work together as teams and that decisions are made by a central authority and transmitted down to other members.
- **Is this form of organization still appropriate for schools in South Africa?** The answer is probably 'no'. In a world increasingly characterized by rapid change, and in a South Africa committed to democracy, organizations need to be structured so that decisions can be made quickly and in a participative manner. We will find out about some of the key changes that need to be made in order to transform schools.
- **Why are South African schools organized in this way?** The hierarchy and bureaucracy that characterizes South African education is not unique. In many ways it reflects a dominant theory of organization and management called 'scientific management'.
- **What do we need to do to change our organizations into more appropriate organizations?** We maintain that it is important to change the *structure* – in other words, to set up committees and processes which allow all members to participate in decision-making. We also need to change people's attitudes (the school's *culture*) and teach them how to operate successfully in these new organizations.
- **Finally, why are South African schools so authoritarian and hierarchical?** We find that while international ideas about how to create efficient organizations (scientific management theory) were an important influence, another major influence was the conservative political philosophy of South Africa's apartheid rulers.

So, let's begin our study by visiting our 'case study' school on a typical day ...



Read your answer to Activity 1. Reassess it in the light of the new criteria. For instance, ask what skills and resources different people contribute to achieving your school's goals. You could also decide whether your organization is similar to ours (i.e. operating mainly through top-down instructions), or whether it makes decisions collaboratively.

## 2.2

## How are South African schools organized?



We have designed this Learning Guide with a wide margin so that you can make notes as you read. Please use the margin!

## Introduction

You will have spent many years in school as a learner, and you may also have some experience of schools as a teacher. A good way to start building an understanding of schools as **organizations** is to think about your own experiences of how schools work. Let's begin by visiting our case study school, Thuthuka, on a typical day. Observe carefully. Write down your observations of the following aspects of the school's functioning:

- Do school members work together towards a clearly defined goal?
- Do all school members have equal amounts of say in the way the school is run?

## A day in the life of Thuthuka school

*It is Monday morning in the third term. The school day is supposed to begin at 7.45 a.m. When the first bell rings, most teachers are still chatting in the staffroom. The principal comes in looking flustered. He tells teachers that he's just heard from the Chief Superintendent of Education and Management (CSEM, the old 'district officer') that the trials for the inter-school athletics will be held tomorrow. Most teachers are happy at this 'day off'; but two teachers are irritated by the news.*

*'I'd planned to have an important Maths test tomorrow,' says Sindi Nxumalo. 'Yes, and my matrics were going to start their orals tomorrow. Now we will be behind schedule,' replies the English teacher, Thulani Shabalala.*

*The teachers who have lessons in the first period pick up some chalk and move off to their classes, slowly. They know that the learners will also be slow to arrive. The school is surrounded by a wire fence to keep the learners in and the vandals out. The fence is not very effective, as the school has often been burgled. There are still many learners loitering around outside the fence. The teachers do not chase them inside. They think that is the job of the deputy principal. Their job is only to teach.*

*The class next door to Sindi's class is very noisy and doesn't seem to have a teacher. The learners don't greet Sindi when she walks in, and she has to insist that they stand and say, 'Good morning, ma'am.' Their Science teacher is away at an in-service workshop, and hasn't left the class any work to do. Thuthuka has no policy about staff development workshops. So sometimes teachers go off for days at a time and there is no one to replace them. The learners just have to miss out on work, and they become noisy and disruptive. There is also no requirement that teachers must share what they have learned at the workshop with other staff. In fact, it has been reported that teachers sometimes just spend the day in town, doing shopping, instead of attending the workshop!*

*Meanwhile, back in the staffroom, the Grade 9 Geography and Biology teachers are discussing a field trip to the river that they want to organize for their learners. They are planning to do some integrated teaching. At the river the learners would study soil erosion and the effects of pollution on the local ecosystem.*

*'I went to the Head of Department (HoD) and she said it was a good idea. But she still refused permission for it, saying that it would be "impossible" for the classes to be away from the school for the whole day as they'd miss Maths, English and Science. "What if the Superintendent of Education and Management (SEM, the old 'circuit manager') comes and wants to know why the learners missed a whole day of school? Then I'll be in trouble," she said to me. She said I must talk to the principal – but he is so busy, it is almost impossible to see him!' complains Nomusa Ngubane, the Biology (and Science) teacher.*



The video produced as part of this module will only be used in detail in Section Four. But, if you have a video, you may want to watch it now (and then do so again later).

The video tells the story of a number of schools near Pretoria which are trying to change the way they function. Take note of:

- the sorts of difficulties they are attempting to address;
- how they are reorganizing their schools to meet new demands.

*'Isn't it crazy that we are still so scared of the authorities? Surely we should be treated like professionals and be allowed to make decisions?'* replies Siphon Gumede, the Geography teacher.

Another teacher overhears the conversation. *'I know what you mean. Yesterday I was reprimanded by the principal because my learners were outside looking for plants and leaves so that they could draw them. He said they should have been in the classroom, learning properly. It seems impossible in this school to try out anything different.'*

In another office, two HoDs are discussing the field trip too. *'I don't know what to do. Mrs Ngubane and Mr Gumede want to take their classes to the river. But what about the other lessons they will miss? And what about the other classes that the teachers should be teaching on the day? Our timetable won't allow this new-fangled "integrated" teaching. It is nothing more than integrated chaos! And the principal is so busy with meetings that he has no time to listen to these issues!'* says the Sciences HoD fiercely.

*'Well, you should be glad that you have some innovative teachers in your department! It is difficult to get teachers in my department to even submit their work schedules to me. They really resent it when I ask them. They think I'm just trying to police them. They don't realize that I'm just trying to fulfil my responsibilities,'* answers the Humanities HoD.

The principal is also in his office, with a long stream of people waiting at the door. Parents are there to explain why they can't pay their school fees, learners are waiting to be disciplined, and a teacher is applying for study leave. The principal is under pressure because he must go to a special meeting to discuss the implications of the new government policy for governing bodies. There is also trouble brewing with the SRC; they're angry about the large number of learners who failed the mid-year exams. They say that the teachers are biased, and they will boycott classes until the papers are re-marked.

## ACTIVITY 2: COMPARING THUTHUKA WITH MY SCHOOL

Re-read the story of a day in the life of Thuthuka School. Then answer the following questions:

- a** How do the different people at the school *relate* to one another? Who has authority, and over whom? How do people respond to this authority? How do the different people understand their responsibilities?

Here is an example of what you should do:

- *The CSEM seems to have more power than everyone else. He sends down instructions, and the principal acts on them even when he doesn't seem to support the idea fully. This, in turn, seems to suggest that the principal does not feel he has a responsibility to challenge this instruction. He seems to see his responsibility as one of communicating the instruction to teachers and ensuring that it is carried out.*

Do this kind of analysis for the *principal, deputy principal, HoDs, teachers* and other people at the school (*learners, SRC, governing body, parents*).

- b** Do the events at this school sound familiar? Write down any incidents which you have experienced at your school too (either as a teacher or as a learner). Do you think these incidents are a consequence of individual attitudes, or of the way in which the school is managed?

Here is an example of what you should do:

- *The teachers and learners move off slowly to classes. I think this is a consequence of teacher and learner attitudes. They all seem rather uninterested in education and demotivated. The teachers don't seem to believe that they have to work in order to deserve a salary. However, the management of the school must also be a factor here.*



Spend about 1 hour doing this activity. Share your different experiences and different answers to these questions with fellow students.

## Making sense of relationships at Thuthuka

Clearly Thuthuka is an organization, in terms of our criteria. But it is an organization with a number of problems.

While there are teachers at Thuthuka who are committed to their work – and to innovation and change, they feel quite frustrated. The *attitudes* of management, other teachers and learners make it difficult to teach in new ways, and to plan their teaching. In addition, the *structures* at the school – such as a rigid timetable and an all-powerful but distant management level – make change difficult. For instance:

- An instruction from the CSEM can disrupt an entire day's schooling, without the staff having the chance to discuss and decide on the timing of the athletics trials.
- The school's timetable (and the HoD's attitude) is not flexible enough to allow a good educational idea – like a well-planned field trip – to take place.

It is clear that Thuthuka does not have a collaborative style of operation. In most cases, teachers *work alone* – in teaching their particular learning area, for instance – and management figures make decisions alone. Moreover, it seems that non-management members of this school – such as teachers and learners – have *very little power* over what happens at the school. They are not included in making decisions. However, it seems that even principals and HoDs are relatively powerless, at least in relation to the CSEM!

A consequence of this individualism, and of the top-down decision-making, seems to be increasing levels of demotivation and demoralization among good *and* bad teachers.

Like many other South African schools, Thuthuka is organized *hierarchically*. Hierarchical organizations assume that the *people at the top have the right to give instructions* and that those below them will *obey these instructions*. Each level of the hierarchy (the CSEM, for instance) is given more power and authority than the level below it (the principal). In addition, in hierarchical organizations, each person is given a particular *function* to carry out (the deputy principal, for instance, has the function of discipline in the school), and is not expected to discuss this with other members of the organization.

In other words, in a hierarchical organization:

- authority is achieved through *appointment to a senior position in the organization*;
- relationships – such as 'line functions' – are *clearly defined and arranged vertically* (top-down);
- responsibilities are clearly defined and increase with seniority.

While this form of organization might sound undemocratic – and it is true that many hierarchical organizations are authoritarian, it emerged as a viable organizational style because it was able to increase organizational efficiency at one time. It was argued that:

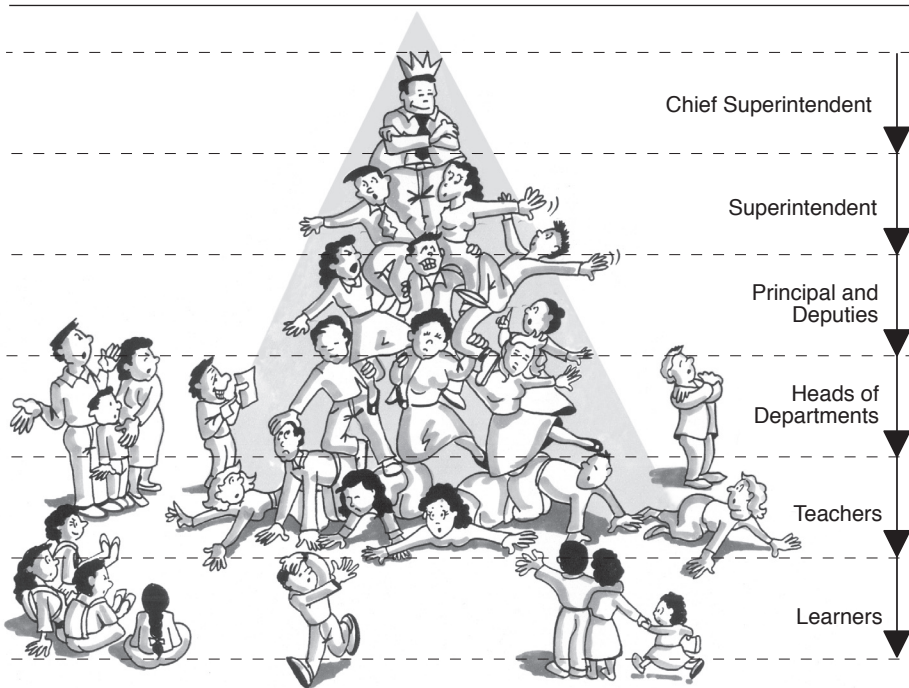
- a hierarchy – with a clear indication of who was boss – allowed for quick and unambiguous decision-making;
- the clear division of responsibilities clarified who to approach for a particular action (or problem), and who to hold accountable if that action was not carried out.

Something else that is noteworthy about Thuthuka is that its hierarchy doesn't actually achieve its aim of increased efficiency. For instance, the principal is so caught up in small, daily problems that he doesn't have the time to carry out the important leadership functions associated with his position in the hierarchy (such as dealing with poor teaching or bad timetabling). Another factor which undermines efficiency is the strict division of responsibilities. Because the deputy principal was responsible for discipline, other teachers take *no* responsibility for this function.

A further interesting point that becomes evident when reading the case study is

“  
a consequence of  
this individualism ...  
seems to be  
increasing levels of  
demoralization  
”

**unambiguous:** clear, unlikely to confuse people



**Figure 2.1** A typical hierarchical pyramid – this is our diagrammatic representation of Thuthuka's organizational style

that 'juniors' in the hierarchy – teachers and learners – often take no notice of management's instructions. Although the principal and CSEM *expect* teachers to attend workshops, teachers often go shopping instead. Despite being *expected* to teach for a full day, teachers often spend much of it chatting in the staffroom. In other words, while principals are *given power* in hierarchies, this does *not mean that people within the organization will recognize or obey this authority*.

Schools – like all organizations – are complex. They bring together different sets of people, with different and conflicting *interests*. All organizations are *human constructions* – collections of human beings – and, although the *structures* for efficient work may be in place, the organization's *culture* may still prevent any efficient functioning.

*In order to understand organizations, we must realize that the **structure** – in Thuthuka's case, a hierarchy – is only part of what assists an organization to function. We must also explore the **organizational culture** – developed by individuals within the organization – and see how this impacts on the functioning of the organization.*

With these points in mind, let's go back to Thuthuka and develop our understanding of the dominant organizational styles in South African schools a little further.

Nomusa, who is studying a course at the local university, knows that the new 'buzzword' in school organization and management is 'learning organization'. She thinks this means – in simple terms – that the school as a whole dedicates itself to the *ongoing improvement* of teaching and learning. But Nomusa also knows that *learning organizations* are characterized by open, friendly and non-hierarchical relationships between teachers and management. This isn't the case at Thuthuka at the moment. Nomusa decides that a first step in changing Thuthuka is to get her group of four committed teachers to meet regularly and discuss ways to change Thuthuka. As their first task, she asks them to discuss how they understand relationships at their school. This is what they say.



Compare the views of these teachers with your answers to Activity 2. How do they compare?

### **The views of Thuthuka teachers on relationships at their school**

*'There seems to be some **distance** between the teachers and management,' says Thulani. 'We see this when one HoD says the teachers don't want to co-operate with her. The teachers also don't want to help the deputy principal in his task of disciplining. Although the principal may be approachable, the fact that he is very busy means there is little time for the teachers to talk to him.'*

*'Ja, and sometimes the learners show respect for the teachers; other times they don't,' Sipho adds. 'Teachers insist that the learners address them as "sir" or "ma'am". There seems to be great emphasis on formal **authority** in the school. However, teachers address one another using first names, which suggests that there is less distance between them ... they are equal in status and position.'*

*'The CSEM seems to have authority over the school in terms of deciding when events like athletics trials will be held. The SEM also seems to have authority over what happens in the school. And teachers don't feel free to make decisions in their classrooms in case he or the principal disagrees. The teachers also have to bow to the authority of the HoDs,' Sipho continues.*

*The conversation progresses. The group notes that HoDs are responsible for checking that the teachers cover the work in the syllabus. They are also responsible for ensuring that teaching and learning are happening smoothly in the school. But they don't have the authority to make changes to the structure of the timetable. Teachers are responsible for teaching in their classrooms, but their authority to make decisions is extremely limited. The deputy principal has the responsibility of getting learners into their classrooms and ensuring that there is silence during class time.*

## **Key characteristics of hierarchies**

As the Thuthuka teachers have noted, *roles and responsibilities are clearly defined* in hierarchies, and they are *divided in terms of position and status*. There are *strict procedures and rules* that specify which people carry out which tasks as laid down by the school. The *lines of authority flow downwards*, and never upwards.

This seems to suggest that it is not easy for teachers or learners to have their voices heard or for teachers to participate in decision-making. However, this may not be true in every school with a hierarchical structure. In some schools, the *style* of management and leadership may encourage a greater degree of involvement in decision-making through frequent consultations with teachers and learners, even though the structure is hierarchical. However, hierarchies in some schools may be implemented so badly – or with so little consultation – that the whole system of organization may break down as people who feel excluded resist the authority of the head.

Thuthuka teachers are also puzzled about why their hierarchy has not developed an *efficient* system in which people follow instructions as expected. Obviously there are problems which go beyond the *structures* of the school. They argue that the demotivated attitude of teachers and learners may reduce their limited power in this hierarchy even further. Nomusa believes this is due to the 'don't care' attitude that has developed in the school over time. She feels that this attitude (or 'culture') of apathy, in particular, has to be tackled if they want to change their school.



Spend about 30 minutes doing this activity. You may want to discuss your observations with fellow students.

### **ACTIVITY 3: EXPLORING HOW HIERARCHIES AFFECT RELATIONSHIPS AT YOUR SCHOOL**

Think of a school you have experienced. Then:

- a** Write down ways in which clearly-defined hierarchies, and the division of responsibilities, rules and procedures, make it *easier* for your school to function efficiently.
- b** Write down ways in which these characteristics of hierarchical organization may have *inhibited* the school's ability to operate and innovate.

### **Possible strengths of hierarchical organizations**

Hierarchies – with their emphasis on clear lines of accountability and with a clear division of responsibilities – offer the chance for organizations to run efficiently and with a fair amount of transparency. This avoids the anarchy and chaos which could result when everyone does exactly what he or she pleases, and where no one takes responsibility for final decisions. Hierarchies also offer a set of clear procedures on how things should be done.

For example, think of trying to run the matric exams with no clear procedures. A teacher at one school might offer one exam on Monday, while the school next door decides to offer the same exam paper on Tuesday. School 1 gives the learners five hours to write the exam, while school 2 says it will use 'continuous assessment' and a short interview as their form of assessment. Finally, while school 1 might agree to have its learners assessed by a central body of markers, school 2 insists that its own teachers mark the scripts.

This lack of standard procedure would allow unequal standards and cause enormous frustration to the teachers involved: they would not know what to do next. But learners would also suffer: some would have plenty of time to write their exam while others would have to face an interview. How would you compare their performances?

So rules and procedures – for instance, various irritating forms from the department! – do serve a purpose. But more than simply providing a set of procedures, hierarchies also give people in organizations an idea of who is ultimately responsible for carrying out procedures (i.e. accountability). Again, consider a school that runs an exam which is an absolute disaster, but no one takes responsibility for this. How do you improve processes in such a situation? **Clear procedures** mean that people can be held accountable when things go wrong. For example, in one school where there is no electricity, a learner in Grade 11 has the responsibility of ringing the hand bell at the beginning of each lesson. If the bell does not ring, then the principal knows exactly who is responsible for this task and he can find out why the bell wasn't rung.

The **simple lines of accountability** in hierarchies should also provide **clear communication**. This, in turn, ensures that everyone knows their job responsibilities and what is expected of them. If, for example, five different teachers tried to co-ordinate the athletics club in a school, it would be a chaotic disaster. Both learners and teachers would be confused and people would not know who to listen to.

Finally, where **responsibilities are clearly divided according to posts** (division of responsibility), people can become experts in their jobs. This leads to greater effectiveness. For example, at Thuthuka School, the Head of the Humanities Department is also in charge of drawing up the timetable each year. She has learnt how to do this effectively and quickly over the last six years. If a new person were to do this each year, it would take a longer time to complete the task, and it would probably be done less well and less efficiently.

### **Some weaknesses of hierarchical organizations**

However, our own experience as well as the experience of Thuthuka teachers, raises two important problems with hierarchical organizations. First, hierarchies often don't function as well as they should. Some people might argue that the problem doesn't lie with hierarchies per se; but instead with **poor implementation** of the system. For instance, people might argue that Thuthuka's problem with discipline isn't the fact that this task has been given to the deputy principal alone. Instead, it means the deputy is not carrying out his function properly.

Second, while hierarchies are particularly good at keeping **stable** systems functioning, they are often too rigid in contexts which are changing rapidly – like South Africa at present. For instance, teachers are expected to **follow procedures** (rather than making their own decisions and possibly changing procedures), and to **follow instructions** from above (rather than taking their own initiative). This makes it difficult for institutions to take advantage of rapidly changing circumstances or to

**accountability:** division of responsibility, transparency

**innovation:** introduction of new ideas or practices



These are some of the strengths and weaknesses of hierarchies that we came up with. Can you do better?

Turn back to your answer to Activity 3 and reassess it in light of the new ideas you have learnt.

encourage innovation.

Here are two examples from a school where I taught a few years ago. The tender procedures that schools must follow when buying equipment – which *are important* to prevent fraud and corruption – also prevented my school from taking advantage of a special price offer on sports equipment. Ultimately, this meant that we could not afford to buy any equipment at all for our soccer team. Obviously this had a negative effect on the extra-curricular life of the school.

The hierarchical form of organization at this school also inhibited innovation in my teaching. It prevented me – an ordinary teacher – from developing a new course at the school because the tedious procedures prescribed that all new ideas first be approved by the principal and the CSEM. I wanted to introduce a course in Technology, but found the process of going through the different levels of approval so time-consuming and frustrating that I gave up. Thus, the school did not get the new course, and I felt increasingly depressed about my role at the school. It seemed that teachers were not expected to innovate or to show initiative.



# Why are hierarchical styles under attack?

## 2.3

### Introduction

We have seen that there are some advantages to schools being organized hierarchically. But we have already suggested that such forms of organization, while appropriate in certain circumstances, may not be appropriate in other circumstances. In particular, we suggested that two major weaknesses of hierarchical organizations are their inability to respond rapidly to change, and their limiting of innovation.

What if our society moved to a point where *change* (rather than stability) was its most dominant characteristic? Or where society valued people's ability to *think and innovate* more than people's abilities to follow orders simply and efficiently? Would hierarchical forms of organization still be the most appropriate way to organize work?

Let's see what experts in the field of *organizational development* think.



#### ACTIVITY 4: WHY DOES BUSINESS BELIEVE 'HIERARCHIES' ARE INAPPROPRIATE?

Turn to Part 1 (the beginning) of your audiotape. Listen to a number of South African organizational and educational experts as they explain the changes that are occurring in South African society and globally, as well as the implications of these changes for schools. Stop the tape when you hear an instruction to complete Activity 4. Make notes as you listen.

Then turn to and read the article by McLagan and Nel (*Reading Section Two, 'Organizations: The impact of global change'*). The article deals in more depth with the kinds of changes occurring in South African society, and makes suggestions about the new kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners require in order to live and work successfully in such a society.

Now answer these questions in your workbook:

- What kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes do old hierarchical styles of schooling develop in learners? Do they fit in with the values that the writers and speakers argue are important in present-day society?
- What kinds of knowledge, skills and values (competencies) should 'new' schools develop in their learners in order to prepare them for life and work in the kind of society that is emerging?
- What characteristics should 'new' organizations have if they want to operate successfully today?
- Think about your own school. Do the writers' comments hold true for your school? Give an example.



This is the first activity in which you have to read and listen to the ideas of other people. Read and listen carefully. Do so more than once. And always try to link these new ideas with the ideas you have already learnt and to contexts with which you are familiar. Spend about 2 hours on this activity.

### What problems do hierarchical organizations pose in present-day society?

You will notice that all the 'experts' argue that society *has changed* and that old hierarchical organizations are not appropriate to this new 'age'. They assert that this new age – in the language of McLagan and Nel, the *Age of Participation* – requires structures that promote *participation* and *flow*. They also make an important point: that

**apathetic:** showing no interest

structures will 'teach' employees certain values. In other words, they argue that **structures** which provide opportunities for participation will create an **attitude** in favour of participation. However, organizations which **don't** provide opportunities for participation might well create apathetic attitudes among teachers.

One problem with hierarchical organizations is that their emphasis on specialisms and authority creates **divisions (boxes)** between those at the top and others below them, as well as between people at the same level. There isn't a sense that everyone is working together for a common purpose. Think of schools. Often teachers don't co-operate with management; also, there is no sense that they are working together towards the same goals – or with one another. Teachers, for instance, don't often involve themselves in team-teaching or consult with each other on learners' progress.

Do you remember how the teachers didn't help the deputy principal at Thuthuka in his task of getting learners inside the classrooms?

**First**, teachers **boxed** this function as his responsibility and were not prepared to assist. This is working against schools in contemporary society, according to the writers, because contemporary society requires an approach to work that **integrates** functions. The discipline function is not only about the deputy principal patrolling the gates; it is also about teachers teaching well, and being in their classes on time. The writers talk about a **team** approach to work, where teams are put together in order to achieve a particular task and then disband once this function has been achieved.

**Second**, in addition to hindering **participation**, this **boxing** of functions also makes the organization **inflexible** and **unable to respond to immediate needs or changes**. (Notice how the children call it a 'sticky' structure.) All the experts suggest that our new schools must be **flexible** enough to respond to the rapid changes that will occur in South African society in the future. The current **boxing** of functions and steep, hierarchical decision-making structures hinder teachers, especially junior teachers, when they try to innovate. The focus in hierarchical organizations is on **following procedures**, rather than on thinking of imaginative new ways of doing things. Again, the writers suggest that participation by all workers in decision-making, and putting together temporary teams to deal with situations as they arise (rather than hierarchical, boxed structures), would assist organizations to deal with rapid change and to innovate. (In schools, such task-based teams would probably include an HoD, some teachers and learners.)

**Third**, rapid change requires organizations that can **communicate quickly and effectively**. Hierarchical organizations make this difficult because messages have to pass through so many levels. They also hinder 'bottom-up' communication. This means that problems among ordinary teachers are rarely heard by management, and therefore generally remain unresolved. Hierarchical organizations could also lead to the principal feeling isolated because he or she is separated from the rest of the school.

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... rapid change  
requires organizations  
that can communicate  
quickly ...  
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## What values underlie the hierarchical model?

We have heard that organizational structures **teach** participants certain kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Often these are similar to the kinds of values (or assumptions) that underpin the form of organization chosen.

McLagan and Nel state that there are a number of assumptions underlying the hierarchical model of organization. They say the model began as a consequence of Frederick Taylor's attempt to find an **efficient form of work organization** in factories. Taylor had suggested this would be best achieved if organizations:

- were arranged hierarchically – with **clear lines of accountability and clear procedures**;
- **divided work into small parts and gave each part to specialists**: the functions of **thinking** (designing products, planning processes, etc.) and **doing** (physical work)

were separated (i.e. people should specialize).

Our schools provide many examples of this approach. Principals have enormous and often unquestioned power in schools. Till recently, learners have had virtually no access to decision-making. Procedures dominate decision-making, often manifested in the endless torrent of forms that teachers have to fill in. Seldom can quick, spontaneous decisions be made. Different subject departments work separately and, even within departments, different teachers don't really co-operate in their work.

The fact that we are part of a hierarchical organization means we 'learn' these kinds of values over time, simply by participating in the organization. We learn to operate as individuals, to respect authority, and to follow instructions (even if they don't seem to make sense), rather than to innovate.

However, as we suggested earlier (and the 'experts' agreed), these assumptions no longer hold in South Africa. Unlike the old system where teachers simply had to implement a syllabus which was given to them, our new educational policy suggests that teachers now have to:

- **participate in constructing curricula;**
- **participate in making decisions** about how schools are run;
- **think** (plan) as well as **do** (teach);
- **work with** other teachers in planning learning programmes, devising suitable materials, teaching, and conducting continuous assessment (work in teams, not as individuals).

This clearly suggests that schools need to be **structured differently** so that we begin 'learning' new kinds of values. This, in turn, will enable us to **teach our learners the new kinds of competencies** they require to live in this changed world.

## How do hierarchical structures impact on relationships, attitudes and behaviour in schools?

We saw that the four Thuthuka teachers are frustrated because their efforts to improve their teaching are being blocked. This 'blockage' is caused by inappropriate structures and teacher attitudes. Using the day at Thuthuka as an example (page 18), let's look more closely at how a particular kind of school organization may affect teachers' **attitudes** to learning and teaching.

- The school simply **accepts** the CSEM's decision about when to have the athletics trials, despite the fact that it negatively affects teaching and learning. The hierarchical structure has **developed an attitude** within the CSEM that he has the **right** to instruct without consultation. It has also created an attitude among his juniors – the principal and teachers – that they simply have to accept this decision. The structure has created an attitude – or 'culture' – of **instruction and compliance** rather than **consultation and debate**.
- Some teachers want to teach Geography and Biology in an integrated way, but are unable to do so because of the way the timetable has been structured. The timetable has also created an attitude or 'culture' at the school which suggests that its procedures should be **followed blindly**, rather than creating an attitude where teachers regard the timetable as a **flexible suggestion** about how time should be organized. This is evident in the attitude of the other teachers and the HoDs. Rather than think of ways in which this innovation could be implemented without impacting negatively on other teachers' programmes, they simply accept that it can't be changed. The school's inflexible timetable structure has created inflexible attitudes among teachers.
- Teachers have little say in designing the goals of the school, or in decision-making. This lack of participative decision-making structures leads to an attitude among many teachers that reflects a lack of concern. For instance, some teachers are thrilled about the athletics meeting because they can get out of a day of teaching



Turn back to the McLagan and Nel reading and re-read Figure 3.2 on page 23. This gives a summary of the key assumptions made by authoritarian (extremely hierarchical) and participative approaches to organizations respectively. It also lists some of the tensions that are emerging as we change our organizations.

(even though this might impact negatively on their learners' progress). Also, the lack of any proper policy about teachers attending staff development workshops means that those teachers who often go away to workshops are not accountable to their colleagues for what they have learned, or responsible to learners for setting work to do during their absence.

- Learners are threatening to boycott classes – which would lead to a loss of their own learning time – because they feel that staff and management do not take their views seriously. The lack of any good, participative decision-making structure through which learner grievances can be voiced, creates a feeling among learners that there is no partnership and no sense of co-operation in the school. This leads them to believe that it doesn't matter if their boycott destroys the school because they feel no sense of 'ownership'.



**Figure 2.2** A consequence of excluding teachers from participation in decision-making structures is the growth of an apathetic, 'don't-care' attitude among many teachers

It is becoming evident that changing school organization is about changed *attitudes (or cultures)* as well as changed structures. We can see too *that structure impacts on culture* but that *culture also impacts on structure* (for instance, a good participative structure can be destroyed by an apathetic or undemocratic culture among teachers, learners or parents).

Later we will learn more about the relationship between structure and culture, and how both are important in creating a school where teachers want to teach and learners want to learn.

## Conclusion

McLagan, Nel, Mbigi, and Mahanjana have raised a number of interesting challenges for teachers.

First, they all seem to suggest that one possible reason for the problems we face in our schools is that they simply don't 'fit' into the society developing around them. In other words, they are outdated.

Second, they also give some ideas as to why both government and business are currently spending so much time talking about the need for 'new' kinds of education, such as OBE, and new and more democratic organizational structures at schools. Clearly these new ideas are not simply some individual's 'bright new concept'. Instead, many of these changes are a consequence of the changes in society which, in turn, mean that learners who enter that society will need to have different kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

So, South African schools – and many schools worldwide – tend to be hierarchical because they emerged at a time when societies were relatively stable and when work processes valued efficiency above creativity. These societal needs led to a 'family' of organizational and management theories known as *classical management theory*. We will learn more about this in the next part.

At the end of this section, we will briefly explore how South Africa's particular context of apartheid *deepened* the hierarchical nature of South African schools, causing most of them to be more *authoritarian* than the hierarchically structured schools in many other countries.

### What have we learnt so far?

- Most South African schools are currently organized as hierarchies. This means that:
  - decisions are made by people with more authority (the school's management) and handed down to those with less authority – the information flow tends to be top-down;
  - functions are clearly divided and allocated to different positions – people work in specialist positions and seldom co-operate with each other;
  - there are clear procedures according to which tasks are carried out – following these procedures efficiently is far more important than spontaneous innovation.
- Hierarchical forms of organization have some important benefits, and were developed in an era where stability and efficiency were regarded as the most important characteristics of organizations.
- However, the era in which we live has different requirements. Rapid change requires organizations which are more participative, more flexible and encourage innovation. Rapid change also requires individuals who take responsibility and who innovate rather than simply follow orders.
- This holds true for South African schools as well as for schools in other countries. New educational policies stress that teachers should be able to do *and* think, to participate in decision-making, and to co-operate with others in teaching.
- Finally, to effect change in organizations, we must create new *cultures* (i.e. teachers with new, improved attitudes to their work), as well as new *structures*.

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# 2.4

## 'Classical' management theory and school organization

### Introduction

So far we have relied mainly on our own *experiences* and those at Thuthuka School in our attempts to understand hierarchic forms of organization. We have also heard and read the opinions of business consultants and educationists who have argued that hierarchical forms of organization are inappropriate for future societies. But we also know that hierarchies:

- have worked, and continue to work well (and often not so well!) in many schools and businesses around the world;
- are still the most dominant form of organization in South African schools, and have 'formed' the attitudes of thousands of learners and teachers in these schools.

In this sub-section we'll learn a little more about some 'classical' management theories and their influence on the organization of schools. But, in order to make this *theory* useful to us as teachers wanting to understand and change the organization in which we work, we will first need to learn about how this theory – and all other theory – can be used *in practice*.

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... a clearer  
understanding  
of the themes which  
underpin practices  
helps us to understand  
and change the  
institutions in which  
we work ...  
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### Using theory practically

We have already read a little about how the effects of political, economic and social forces shape business and education. But the explanations we give about *why* things are the way they are depend upon the *theories* we hold. For instance, McLagan and Nel make assumptions about how the world is changing and, because of these assumptions, they draw particular kinds of conclusions. In other words, they have a *theory* about change and society and this leads them to make particular kinds of statements. In general, a clearer understanding of the different theories which underpin different practices – such as hierarchical forms of school organization – helps us understand and change the institutions in which we work.

The *policy* which underpins the South African education system has shifted away from authoritarian thinking and hierarchical school organization to more participative, democratic thinking and organizational styles. This shift is clearly part of the political change away from apartheid towards a more democratic and equal society.

How do we understand this change? It is clear that a different set of assumptions – a different theory – underpins the new policies (and desired practices) from the set which underpinned our old way of practising education (and the way in which we organized schools). One new assumption, for instance, is that schools function better if all stakeholders are involved in decision-making. This is quite different from the old assumption that schools functioned best when only those with expertise and experience made decisions.

While we may *prefer* one of these positions above the other, this preference is not particularly important in academic study. It is far more important to *understand why* a particular practice emerges. In other words, we need to understand what assumptions are made by those who believe in participative decision-making, for instance, assumptions about people and authority that 'allow' them to justify their kind of organization above other forms of organization.

We have all experienced 'theory' that hasn't helped us. People often use the word 'theory' in a common-sense way to mean something that is opposite to 'practice'. A

driver could say, 'In **theory**, I can change the wheel of my car'. By this she means that, although she has read the vehicle manual and knows what steps to take in theory, in practice she has never actually changed a wheel.

But we will use the word 'theory' in a different way:

*Theory is a set of ideas and arguments that explains something in our everyday lives in a way which enables us to begin making changes to that 'something'.*

Read the following excerpt – 'Using theory to improve practice' – from Tony Bush's 1995 book called *Theories of Educational Management*. In this excerpt the author asks why teachers and managers so often reject theory as 'useless' and argue that their professions are 'purely practical affairs'. He suggests this is so because, often, theory is taught as an end in itself. Bush argues that theory is only useful when it 'explains practice' and 'guides action'.

In other words, he asserts, theory should always be learnt with the question 'So how does this help me improve my work?' in mind. It should never simply be memorized. Bush warns that if we don't have theory to guide our work, all we can rely on is our experience. And, of course, our experience is usually limited to one or two types of situation, which does not provide a reliable basis for making important decisions.

As you read, note in particular Bush's four reasons stating why theory is important. Is he right? Perhaps you are unwilling to make a decision about this yet, so keep his ideas in mind as you work through this module. Later, reassess your answer, and try to judge whether any of the 'theory' learnt here has been useful or not.

## Using theory to improve practice

### Arguments against 'theory'

Management is often regarded as essentially a practical activity. The determination of aims, the allocation of resources and the evaluation of effectiveness all involve action. Practitioners tend to be dismissive of theories and concepts for their alleged remoteness from the 'real' school situation. School and college staff have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards theory. The teachers themselves commonly regard theory with a varying mixture of respect and suspicion: respect because it is thought of as difficult, and suspicion because its bearings are unclear on the detailed decision as to what to do next Monday morning ...

Hughes (1985: 3–31) concedes that links between theory and practice have been weak:

*Theory and practice are uneasy, uncomfortable bedfellows, particularly when one is attempting to understand the complexities of human behaviour in organizational settings ... It has been customary for practitioners to state the dichotomy in robust terms: airy-fairy theory versus down-to-earth practice.*

It is evident from these comments that theory and practice are often regarded as separate aspects of educational management. Academics develop and refine theory while managers engage in practice. In short, there is a theory/practice divide. Theory may be perceived as esoteric and remote from practice. Yet, in an applied discipline such as educational management, the acid test of theory is its relevance to practice.

### How to make theory useful

Theory is valuable and significant if it serves to explain practice and provide



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**alleged:** claim, declare; many people claim that theory is 'remote', but there is no reason why it has to be  
**ambivalent:** mixed opinions about something

**concedes:** admits, acknowledges, agrees

**dichotomy:** a way of seeing things as strictly divided into two quite different, separate, or even opposed groups or parts

**esoteric:** knowledge that is limited to a small number of people

**acid test:** a test that proves whether or not something is able to do what it is supposed to do

managers with a guide to action (...):

*Theories are most useful for influencing practice when they suggest new ways in which events and situations can be perceived. Fresh insight may be provided by focusing attention on possible interrelationships that the practitioner has failed to notice, and which can be further explored and tested through empirical research. If the result is a better understanding of practice, the theory-practice gap is significantly reduced for those concerned. Theory cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. (Hughes and Bush, 1991: 234)*

If practitioners shun theory, then they must rely on experience as a guide to action. In deciding on their response to a problem, they draw on a range of options suggested by previous experience with that type of issue. Teachers sometimes explain their decisions as just 'common sense'. However, such apparently pragmatic decisions are often based on implicit theories:

*Common sense knowledge ... inevitably carries with it unspoken assumptions and unrecognized limitations. Theorizing is taking place without it being acknowledged as such. (Hughes, 1985: 31)*

When a teacher or a manager takes a decision, it reflects in part that person's view of the organization. Such views or preconceptions are coloured by experience and by the attitudes engendered by that experience. These attitudes take on the character of frames of reference or theories which inevitably influence the decision-making process.

The use of the term 'theory' need not imply something remote from the day-to-day experience of the teacher. Rather, theories and concepts can provide a framework for managerial decisions:

*There is nothing more practical than a good theory... It can... help the practitioner to unify and focus his views on an organization, on his role and relationships within the organization, and on the elusive phenomena of leadership and achievement (Landers and Myers, 1977:365).*

Theory serves to provide a rationale for decision-making. Managerial activity is enhanced by an explicit awareness of the theoretical framework underpinning practice in educational institutions. As a result, some academics and practitioners 'now vigorously challenge the traditional view that practical, on-the-job experience on its own provides adequate management training in education' (Hughes, 1984:5).

There are four main arguments to support the view that managers have much to learn from an appreciation of theory:

- Reliance on facts as the sole guide to action is unsatisfactory because all evidence requires interpretation. Life in schools and colleges is too complex to enable practitioners to make decisions simply on an event-by-event basis. A frame of reference is needed to provide the insight for this important management task. (...)
- Dependence on personal experience in interpreting facts and making decisions is narrow because it discards the knowledge of others. Familiarity with the arguments and insights of theorists enables the practitioner to deploy a wide range of experience and understanding in resolving the problems of today. (...)
- Errors of judgement can occur while experience is being acquired. Mistakes are costly in both human and material terms. Resources are limited, but the needs of children and learners are even more important. In education we just cannot throw away the flawed product as waste and start again (Hughes, 1984:5).
- Experience may be particularly unhelpful as the sole guide to action when the

**pragmatic:** down-to-earth, practical

**frames of reference:** particular sets of ideas which provide a way of making sense of the world



practitioner begins to operate in a different context. Organizational variables may mean that practice in one school or college has little relevance in the new environment. A broader awareness of theory and practice may be valuable as the manager attempts to interpret behaviour in the fresh situation.

Of course, theory is useful only so long as it has relevance to practice in education. (...) The relevance of theory for the manager in education should be judged by the extent to which it informs managerial action and contributes to the resolution of practical problems inside schools and colleges.

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**organizational variables:** factors or characteristics which differ, or vary, from one organization to another

## But how do we make theory 'practical'? ask Thuthuka teachers

*In the fourth meeting of the Thuthuka group, when everybody is prepared to move on to the next topic, Thulani suggests that the staff should look at some management **theory**. This raises a big argument about theory and its usefulness for teachers in the classroom. Many in the group feel that theory is for academics at universities, and cannot offer anything to teachers who are dealing with real issues in their schools. They feel that experience is far more useful than theory, despite having read Bush's article.*

*Thulani agrees that Bush hasn't really given any examples of **how** to use theory. Instead he simply focuses on **why** theory is important for good management. 'But,' Thulani says, 'In my management course we learnt how to use theory to make "educated guesses". For instance, we now know that old-style hierarchic organizations believe that the following of procedures – and the efficient running of organizations – is extremely important. We could, therefore, take an "educated guess" that such thinkers would not be particularly interested in a junior person constantly presenting management with innovative plans for change.'*

*'In other words,' Thulani continues, 'we could use our theoretical understanding of old-style management to work out what is likely to be tolerated when we try to change, what is likely to be resisted, and why this is so. So, one practical benefit is that it gives us ideas as to how we should strategize change. And understanding "new" organizational theory will give us a set of indicators by which we can check our progress.'*

*The staff are not entirely convinced, but agree that Thulani should prepare a talk for the group on different 'scientific' management theories which, says Thulani, 'explain' the way in which Thuthuka is organized. With a fuller understanding, the group hope they may gain clearer ideas on what to change, and why.*

*Thulani's presentation is divided into two parts. First he looks at some historical facts about management theory, and then he looks at present trends. Here is a summary of his presentation.*





Thulani made extensive use of another chapter in Bush (1995), *Theories of Educational Management*, written by T. Barr Greenfield. If you are interested, you may want to read the chapter entitled 'Organizations as social inventions: rethinking assumptions about change'.

## 'Classical' management theories: how they can help us understand school organization

by Thulani Shabalala

### Some early management theory

Two thinkers - Taylor and Weber - probably had more impact on 'classical' management theory than anyone else. Most 'old-style' hierarchical organizations have been structured according to the principles developed by these two thinkers.

### Taylor (1911) and scientific management

Put very simply, the development of management theory stretches back to the last century. Industrialists wanted to increase their profits, so they had to produce goods effectively and efficiently. One way of doing this was to increase mass production through the assembly line. This meant setting up factories where every person did a different job. Instead of a single craftsperson making a complete shoe, for example, one person would cut out the leather uppers, another would cut out the sole, and another would stitch the shoe together.

One of the people who influenced early management theory was the American, Frederick Taylor. At the beginning of the 20th century, he developed his principles of 'scientific management' to improve production in American factories. He claimed that efficiency could be achieved by working out the best way to do a job scientifically. Each job was broken down into a series of small, related tasks. He thought there should be a clear division of responsibility between the management and the workers. Management should do all the thinking; they should set the goals, plan and supervise. The workers should not think at all; they should just do the tasks required of them. Scientific management became very well known, not only in industry but in the management of all kinds of organizations.

At the time of Taylor, the Western world was becoming an 'organizational society'. There was often conflict between people and organizations. Even though Taylorism increased wages - when workers maintained the strict standards which he set, many workers felt overwhelmed by the needs and demands of industrialists. One result of this approach was that skilled craftspeople (who were able to do tasks such as making a complete shoe) were replaced by unskilled workers (who did repetitive small parts of the task, like making shoe soles). To combat the range of human problems which arose, the first trade unions were formed to look after the interests of the workers.

### Weber (1947) and bureaucracy

Also at the start of the 20th century, Max Weber did important analyses of organizations, and developed a theory of bureaucracy. In his theory, Weber described the structure of large organizations - like government departments, schools, and hospitals - which were divided into offices, staffed by officials of various ranks. Bureaucratic organizations like these have clear-cut divisions of labour, a hierarchical structure of authority, and clear-cut rules and regulations. Decisions were made by seniors, without reference to others in the organization. In theory, people are selected and promoted according to what they can do, rather than according to class privilege or social connection. In this sense, Weber believed that bureaucracies promoted democracy: people were promoted on merit and not according to some other, less desirable criterion.

Weber stated that the growth of bureaucracies was inevitable for large-scale organizations. He believed that well-run bureaucracies were fairer, more impartial and more predictable than organizations which were run according to the whims of certain individuals. Before

this, Weber noted, people who owned businesses and factories employed their own relatives and friends, and ill-treated workers as they pleased. However, Weber acknowledged that bureaucracy had some major failings, especially its denial of democracy.

### **Some features of bureaucracy**

- A hierarchical chain of command. The bureaucratic organization is structured as a pyramid with the boss on top, who gives instructions to the next ‘layer’ of people, and so on. This chain of command brings order to large organizations.
- Specialization of jobs. The way to achieve efficiency is to divide the overall task into a number of smaller jobs. The manager makes decisions and assigns tasks in such a way that all the parts add up to a coherent whole.
- Written rules and policies. A bureaucracy is governed by rules which define the rights and duties of employees. The most basic rules concern who can give orders to whom.
- Standardized procedures defining each job. There are fixed ways which govern how people do their jobs. There are routine ways to deal with issues that occur frequently. This frees people in higher positions from constantly making routine decisions.
- Impersonal relations. Relationships are between one role and another, rather than between one person and another. The holder of a particular role is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities in a rational and unemotional manner, according to standardized procedures. This avoids favouritism.
- Limited responsibility. A consequence of these previous features, this tendency of bureaucracy often creates problems in education. It is reflected in such statements as ‘I cannot stamp this for you/ give you what you want, etc. Mr Masinga can do it, but he is not here this week. Come back next week.’, followed by the speaker putting the matter out of his or her mind, rather than taking some trouble to help the person making the request.

The bureaucratic model gained so much influence and support in the western world that other perspectives of management must always be understood in relation to it. You will notice that the ‘hierarchical’ model we have discussed so far is a combination of Taylor’s ‘scientific management’ and Weber’s ‘bureaucracy’. A key common factor in these management styles is their focus on organizational structures and their neglect of the human dimension (culture).

### **A ‘modern’ response to early management theories**

Probably the most significant change in thinking about management fairly recently has been the increased focus on the people who make up organizations. Many theorists argued that the aim of Taylor and Weber – namely, increased efficiency – would not be met if managers did not take into account how their workers felt. Although there are many writers who made this point, I will mention only two.

Scientific management and bureaucracy were not the only theories of organization. Other writers in the 1930s, like Elton Mayo (1933), emphasized the human side of organizations. The ‘Human Relations Movement’ made an important contribution to organization theory. It stressed the importance of individuals and teams in making organizations work. It emphasized people’s needs for self-fulfilment, job satisfaction, and a sense of belonging.

Another important management theorist who challenged ‘scientific management’ was Thomas Greenfield who wrote in the 1970s and 1980s. Greenfield (1985) stressed that organizations are made by human beings, and we cannot understand them unless we take individual beliefs and perceptions into account. Individuals may have different interpretations of the same situation. For example, teachers and learners have different perceptions of what happens in the classroom. Different

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teachers also have different understandings. Greenfield's view is that we cannot understand an organization like a school unless we understand the individual perspectives within it.

According to Greenfield, structure is a product of human interaction. Thus, schools cannot be changed simply by making structural changes. He wrote: 'We cannot solve organizational problems by either abolishing or improving structure alone; we must also look at their human foundations' (1973: 565).

### How I have used 'theory' practically

When I learnt about these theories, I became very excited for a number of reasons. First, I was able to understand that both Weber and Taylor were seeing organizations in a way that was appropriate to their times and which had particular purposes. This made me realize that any assessment of our school structure had to begin with questions about (a) whether it is appropriate to our age and society, and (b) whether it serves the purposes we want to achieve. For instance, I can now ask:

- Is our purpose primarily efficient production (one of 'scientific management's' key purposes)? If my answer was 'yes', then I could set about building an organization inspired by scientific management and Weber's notion of a bureaucracy. But my answer was 'no': educating children, while it must be done efficiently, is not primarily about efficient production. So I had to think again carefully about my key purpose, and then decide what would be the most appropriate structure to meet this purpose.
- Greenfield really excited me. For the first time I understood structures as human constructions. This really was a 'practical' discovery. It made me realize why so many good structures fail. Greenfield helped me understand that they failed because they were implemented outside the human beings in that school. To succeed with structural change, then, we must get people to understand that they are the various parts that make up school structures. This was very practical advice ... and it came from a 'theory'.



Note how Thulani writes this presentation. First, he clearly outlines the key points of the theories he has read about. Second, he explores key similarities and differences. Then, third, he explores some of their practical implications.

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## Thuthuka teachers react to the impact of 'classical' management theory

*Now the Thuthuka teachers can definitely see the influences of classical management ideas on the way their school is organized. 'We do have a hierarchical chain of command, because the SEM tells the principal what to do, he tells the HoDs, and they tell us. And the school also has very clear procedures for making decisions,' says Nomusa. 'Even if they are very inefficiently carried out at times,' she laughs.*

*'Yes, I can see some things are the same, but a school is definitely not the same as a factory or a business! We teachers do have some freedom about what we do in our classrooms. In other words, we are different from workers making shoes on a production line,' replies Sindi. 'Because of this, it is difficult to separate "doing" from "thinking" in schools, as scientific management suggested should happen in factories in order to make production efficient. And, although it does have some similarities with bureaucracies, I really think individual schools are too small to require bureaucratic procedures ...*

*'I think Greenfield has a point about the importance of taking an individual perspective,' adds Sindi. 'He talks of structures as human constructions. At school, that structure includes our learners who, unlike shoes on a production line, have feelings, misbehave and often respond unpredictably. So, schools are much more complex and human than factory organization. And I agree with Thulani: Greenfield's challenge to us is that we won't achieve change if we look only at structures ...'*

### What have we learnt so far?

- Theory is useful when it explains why organizations are arranged in certain ways, or when it helps us to make sense of the world in a more systematic way. It provides us with a different, more analytical lens through which we can see reality. It also provides us with a basis for change.
- The way in which schools are organized is not just a result of social, political and economic developments. Management and organizational **theories** have also influenced the shape of organizations. Of course, organization theories, particularly theories of bureaucracy, also help us to understand **why** schools are currently organized as they are.
- 'Scientific management' theories tend to emphasize the rationality, efficiency and effectiveness of organizational structures, whereas other theories stress the **human** side of organizations and the importance of individual beliefs and perspectives in developing healthy organizations.
- Bureaucracy, we found, works well for certain repetitive tasks and in stable conditions, rather than for tasks that require creative thinking and in situations of frequent change. New work organizations, however, function in societies that change rapidly and require workers who can **innovate**. It is thus becoming more and more important for people to think creatively and make good decisions, rather than simply to follow instructions.

## 2.5

# The importance of structure and culture in school change

## Introduction

In the '*Structures: flow, not boxes*' reading, the writers said structures *set the framework* for the culture of an organization. We know from our own experience, and from the happenings at Thuthuka, that the dominant *structures* found in South African schools have shaped the *attitudes* of teachers. Now Greenfield states that structure is a *product of human interaction*. We are beginning to see that, if we want successful change, we must work on this human dimension – the *attitudes* or dominant *culture*, as well as on changing structures.

So far we have been using the term 'culture' in a very vague sort of way. In this subsection we will explore:

- in more depth, what the 'culture' of a school actually is;
- how structure and culture impact on each other.



Spend about 50 minutes on this activity. We suggest you share your experiences of schools with other students. Debate why your respective schools *feel* different.

When you have done this, turn to Part 2 of your audiotape. This begins *after* the narrator asks you to complete Activity 4. Listen to Andrew Schofield, Mark Potterton and Penny Vinjevoold talk about their experiences of different school cultures and the difficulties in changing them.

### ACTIVITY 5: HOW DO DIFFERENT SCHOOLS 'FEEL'?

Think of two schools that you know or have visited recently. It is likely that these schools 'felt' different, even though they may have been built in a similar style and probably had similar management structures. In your workbook:

- Write down words to describe the way each school *feels* – does it feel 'friendly', or 'chaotic', or 'impersonal', etc.?
- Explain *why* you think each school 'feels different'. Has it to do with the way it is organized? Or with the kinds of teachers and learners it attracts? Or with the personality of the principal? Or something else?

## What is 'culture'?

'Culture' is a word that can be interpreted in different ways. Two of the most common interpretations are:

- Culture has *to do with art, music, dance* (for example, people who go to the theatre or listen to good music are often called 'cultured' people).
- Culture encompasses the *way of life of a particular group of people* (for example, in Chinese culture, people take off their shoes before entering a temple, based on certain beliefs about the temple being a holy place. In Zulu culture, children should not look adults in the eyes, based on a belief that children should show respect for the wisdom of the elders).

In this module, we draw strongly on the second definition of culture, but relate it to schools. In other words:

*Culture is the way of life of the people within a particular school. It refers to the underlying beliefs and assumptions, norms and values, relationships and interactions, shared by people in a school.*

Think back to Activity 5. You were asked to describe the different 'feelings' you experienced when you entered different schools. You may have noted that a particular school's 'feeling' was created by the way in which teachers *related* to each other, for instance. In one school, you may have found a very *relaxed, easy 'feeling'* created:

**norms:** shared beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, or the right or wrong way to do things

- by all teachers (Principal and HoDs included) addressing each other by their first names;
- by the interaction between teachers who talked to each other about work, shared resources, and worked together;
- by the relaxed dress code of the teachers (no ties or suits, for instance);
- by the bright and inviting classrooms and school premises, and so on.

When you walked into another school, you may have noticed that:

- teachers were formally dressed;
- all teachers addressed each other as *Mr* or *Ms* or *Dr*;
- the school (and staffroom) was silent.

These characteristics might have created a feeling of 'stiffness' or 'formality' within you. The point is that the culture of the two schools is likely to be quite different.

### How do cultures emerge?

Different kinds of 'school cultures' emerge through the different **beliefs and assumptions, norms and values, relationships and interactions** that are dominant in the particular school. David Hopkins, a British researcher studying school change, explains these various dimensions of 'culture' in a school as:

- **Observed behavioural regularities.** These describe teacher interaction in a staffroom – the language they use and the rituals they establish. For example, do teachers use first names or surnames when addressing each other? This would contribute to a more, or less, formal 'culture' being established in a school.
- **Norms.** These evolve in working groups of teachers in terms of lesson planning or monitoring learner progress. Do different subject teachers regularly discuss what and how they are teaching classes they have in common? Has a 'norm' of peer observation been established, or do teachers work absolutely independently? Does team-teaching occur naturally in the school? Depending on the norms which emerge in practice, either a **collaborative** culture or a very **individualistic** culture will emerge.
- **Dominant values.** These are espoused by a school in its aims or 'mission statement'. Does the school commit itself to sporting excellence, or high matric pass rates? Is its emphasis on art and culture, and on developing the 'whole' person? Depending on the choice, the school will develop either an 'academic' culture, or a 'sporting' culture, or some other kind of culture over time, which will attract some kinds of learners and put off others.
- **A philosophy.** For example, this guides the dominant approach to teaching and learning of particular subjects in a school. Does the school encourage group work, or experiential learning? Or does it assume classroom-based, teacher-centred teaching, like Thuthuka does? Depending on the dominant philosophy, the 'culture' of one school will differ from another.
- **The rules of the game.** These must be learnt by new teachers in order to get along in the school or their department. They are very important. Often these rules are at odds with the written-down, **formal** rules of a school. So, for instance, many teachers at South African schools feel that the way to succeed is **not** to be critical or innovative. Instead, they should obey and, more importantly, not 'rock the boat'. Depending on the 'rules of the game' that emerge in one school or another, so the 'culture' of those schools will vary.
- **The feeling or climate.** This is conveyed by the entrance hall to a school, or the way in which learners' work is displayed (or not displayed). Many schools are characterized by empty walls, unkempt passages and gardens, and so forth. This creates a 'feeling' of neglect in teachers, learners and visitors, and probably influences the way in which people behave. In other words, the feeling or climate influences the culture of the school.



This classification is found in Hopkins, D. 1994. *School Improvement in an Era of Change*. London: Cassell. The classification, however, was first used by Edgar Schein in Schein, E. 1985. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.

In reality, school cultures are formed by a **combination** of many of these components. In most cases, cultures are **unspoken**: they are '**felt**' rather than spoken, but



Re-read your answer to Activity 5. Were any of the dimensions of culture identified by Hopkins evident in your school? What sort of culture was created in the school? (Later you will read an article by Hopkins which will deepen your understanding further.)

they act powerfully on participants' behaviour. In other words, you are likely to find the 'culture' of your school in those actions and beliefs that are '**taken for granted**' – that most staff believe are simply the '**natural**' way of doing things.

So, to succeed in changing a school, you must demonstrate that these taken-for-granted actions and beliefs are **not** the only way of doing things. You need to provide examples of how things can be done differently, and what benefits such change will bring to the school.

Cultures are not always positive. You are no doubt aware of the calls for restoring a 'culture of learning and teaching' in South African schools. And you may have heard of people suggesting that, in order to do this, the current 'culture' of apathy, or 'irresponsibility', or 'laziness', needs to be destroyed. Two school-change researchers – Davidoff and Lazarus (*in The Learning School, 1997:18*) – describe how 'culture' can work negatively as well as positively:

*Where there is a culture of malaise at a school – of teachers arriving late, not preparing lessons adequately, resenting being at school after the last bell has rung – the way teachers think about and value their teaching will be affected. It will affect the way in which people relate to each other, the way meetings are run, the way information is shared, the way school is managed.*

Davidoff and Lazarus refer to components of school culture that we have already mentioned – the way teachers **think about and value** their teaching, the **way people relate** to each other, **the way meetings are run**.

### **Living in different cultures**

**Culture is the way people make sense of their daily lives.** But we all live in more than one culture. For example, we may be part of a **student culture** while we are at college and, at the same time, be part of a particular **ethnic culture** and, at the same time, participate in **cultural activities** or belong to a particular **religious group**, and all along also be a product of our **school culture**.

The descriptions and examples we have read about Thuthuka tell us about that **school's** culture. By examining the **observable practices, behaviours** and **habits** of a school, we can come to understand the culture of a school. But we also need to explore how a deeper level of **underlying beliefs and assumptions** – which often emerge **outside** school – impacts on the culture of a school. For instance, traditional rural people may believe that it is 'natural' for younger people to show respect for older people. This belief is likely to shape the way teachers operate in schools too, regardless of what official policy might say.

The deep underlying belief that this is the 'natural' way of the world is the reason why people who hold this belief are shocked when they meet people who do not share this belief. We do not always think about these beliefs – they are simply taken for granted – and the belief only becomes visible when challenged by another set of firmly held beliefs.



## The relationship between structure and culture in school organization

Now that we have a clearer understanding of what we mean by ‘culture’, let’s look at the relationship between structure and culture. McLagan and Nel suggest that **structure influences culture**, that the structure of a school **creates the framework** for values and relationships (in other words, the culture of the school).

This implies that the teachers, managers and learners in a school structured in an authoritarian and hierarchical way, will learn to relate to each other in an authoritarian way. For example, they would argue that a rigid timetable doesn’t allow teachers to plan together or to team-teach and, in **structuring time in this way**, creates a ‘mindset’ (a **culture**) among teachers which encourages **individualistic** teaching (rather than collaborative teaching) of **separate** subjects (rather than integrated learning areas). We can explain McLagan and Nel’s understanding of the relationship between structure and culture in the following diagram:



Figure 2.3

However, other writers see this understanding as too simplistic. The next reading – by David Hopkins and others – argues that the relationship between structure and culture is a **two-way** relationship. In other words, while structure **does** influence culture, it is also true that culture **constantly influences** structure. The writers argue that the relationship is ‘dialectical’ – **structure and culture constantly interact with each other and each constantly changes the other**.

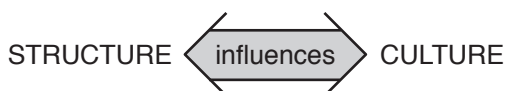


Figure 2.4

But let’s read the explanation of this relationship by Hopkins et al. Their reading starts with a problem:

*‘How do we, as school change agents, begin changing schools? In particular, do we begin by changing structures or by changing cultures?’*

Ultimately they seem to suggest that it’s not an **either/or** question; instead, one has to work on **both**. However, we think Hopkins et al. lean towards a preference for work on changing **structures** simply because they see this as a more concrete (and thus easier) way to change cultures. They seem to argue that, because work on structures is practical, it is visible to people, whereas work on culture is often invisible and thus it is more difficult for people to see the benefits.

The writers draw strongly on their experience, but then ‘theorize’ this experience so that it is applicable more widely (i.e. so that you can make use of their findings). Notice how they develop ‘models’ to:

- explain the different kinds of relationships between structure and culture that



Now that you have learnt a little more about the relationship between structure and culture in school change, we suggest you rewind your audiotape and re-listen to Part 2.



How do you think the three South African school organization experts in Part 2 of the audiotape would answer this?

- they found in the different kinds of schools they worked in;
- suggest that our strategy for school change will differ, depending on the kind of relationship we find in the school in which we are working.



This is a time-consuming but important activity. Spend no less than 3 hours working through it.

**continuum:** the *kinds* of cultures in different schools are not completely different; rather, they vary *by degrees* from one another, from 'stuck' schools to 'moving' schools



## ACTIVITY 6: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 'STRUCTURE' AND 'CULTURE' IN SCHOOLS

Turn to page 51 in your Reader and read the article titled 'Culture and structure in school improvement' written by David Hopkins and his colleagues. This reading is more complex than those you have read thus far, so read carefully and read it more than once. Before you begin reading, have a look at the questions we want you to answer below. This will focus your reading.

- The writers distinguish between the *appearance* of change and the *reality* of change. What is the difference? Can you provide an example from your own experience – in schools or other organizations – which illustrates this difference?
- The writers use a 'model', developed by Rosenholtz, to explain differences in school cultures. But, they argue, school cultures aren't as simple as this. Instead they provide another model – developed from their own experiences of school change – which includes a *continuum* of cultures. What are their four 'cultures'? What is the relationship between work on cultures versus work on structure in each? Provide examples of your own to illustrate the four kinds of schools.

## Using the 'continuum' to analyse two South African schools

To explain the ideas of Hopkins et al. further, let's try to use them to explain the events in two case studies of fictitious schools.

### Case study 1: Mfundwenhle Primary School

At Mfundwenhle Primary School, the timetable allows for 30 minute lessons. During this time teachers usually teach from the textbook and learners copy notes from the board. Teachers often complain about the short amount of time given to each lesson and argue that they teach in this way mainly because they have a lot of work to get through in a short time. They have never tried possible alternatives to this structural arrangement. The way in which they teach has become the taken-for-granted and accepted way of doing things (it has become part of the school's culture).

Then the teachers attended a few workshops where they were introduced to the notions of 'integrated' teaching, learner-centredness and group work. After the workshops, the teachers decided to try out some of these things. They started to get their learners practically involved in doing things in the classroom. But they soon realized that they needed longer periods than 30 minutes if they were to succeed.

We can see here that the teachers were thinking differently; they wanted to teach differently, and so the timetable needed to change. At first they found it difficult to convince management that the lesson times should be an hour long instead of the usual 30 minutes. The more committed teachers decided to combine classes and to use double periods whenever possible. Gradually they persuaded the management committee to give them a chance to try this out with the junior classes in the following year. The timetable was changed accordingly, and the teachers did good work which impressed the principal and the management team. The follow-

ing year, the whole school used a new timetable where six 1-hour lessons replaced the old twelve 30-minute periods.

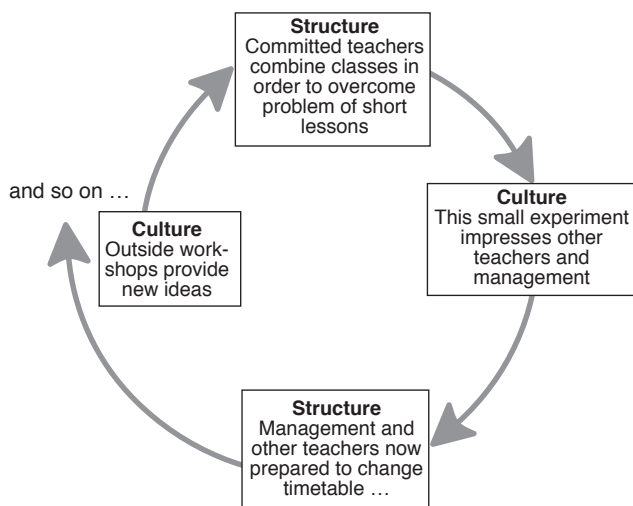
**Analysing Case study 1**

It seems that this school has achieved a sensible balance between work on structure and culture. It is certainly not a school characterized by too much innovation (a ‘wandering’ school) or no change (a ‘stuck’ school), or by living on its past glories (a ‘promenading’ school). We would argue that it is *most like* a moving school (even though some may argue that it falls short because it doesn’t have a *systematic and ongoing* process of reflection and change in place).

The way change occurs seems to fall within what the article calls *spontaneous change* – the teachers themselves take the initiative – but may well take on other characteristics as the school change deepens. You could argue that a change in the culture of teaching (committed teachers combining classes and using double periods, then attempting this with junior classes), finally prompts a change in the structure (‘the following year, the whole school used a new timetable ...’). A change in thinking about teaching and learning – through the workshops *and* the practice of these new ideas in the school where possible) – began changing the taken-for-granted ideas about teaching. Later – much later – the structure of the school changed.

What you should notice is that this school still hasn’t drawn up a new set of *priorities (framework)*, or a *strategy* for ongoing change. It has also not yet done much about changing *roles and responsibilities*, but there has been a change in the *ways in which teachers work*.

We could demonstrate this kind of structure-culture relationship in another diagram:



**Figure 2.5** A diagrammatic representation of the relationship between structural factors and cultural factors in the change process at Mfundwenhle

This depicts a very different, and more complex, relationship between structure and culture than that suggested by McLagan and Nel. It is a good example of a dialectic relationship in the sense that structure changes culture which, in turn, causes more change in structures, and so on ...

It also provides some interesting – and early – pointers as to how we begin changing schools. Usually, schools focus on changing structures because it *seems* easier to do so. But this example suggests we must also change culture *as we work on chang-*

*ing structures*. Otherwise, we could get an *appearance* of change but not the *reality* of change (to use the language of Hopkins et al.).

Hopkins et al. refer to schools that are 'renewing at the *organizational* (structural) but not at the *classroom* level' (which is most dependent on the changed attitudes of teachers, or a new culture). In other words, schools create the *spaces* to make change *possible* – for instance, they may well introduce 1-hour long lessons. However, because teachers are still caught in old cultures of 'teacher-talk' understandings of teaching, they do not *make use* of the spaces created for possible change. Instead, you may find them complaining that lessons are now too long!

Let's look at another example of change.

## Case study 2: St Mark's Secondary School

Following the stipulation of the South African Schools Act, St Mark's Secondary School introduced a new governing body with a representation of parents, principal, learners, teachers (called 'educators' in the Act), administration and other support staff (called 'non-educators'). In line with the principle of decentralizing decision-making powers and co-operative governance, parents are in the majority. Learners' views can be aired through their representation on the governing body.

In reality, however, the governing body has only had three meetings since its inception, and only three of the seven parent representatives attended the meetings (which are generally held directly after school at 2.30 p.m.). So the principal and the management team of the school feel they have been forced to continue making and implementing crucial decisions about the future of the school.

Although learner representatives attended all three meetings, there is growing dissatisfaction among the learners that nothing has changed. They say they seldom get agendas or minutes before meetings and so have to attend 'unprepared'. There is a simmering strike around the issues of the use of school funds, the irrelevance of the curriculum, and the lack of teacher commitment. At the last meeting, two parents argued vehemently against the learners' suggestions that two underqualified teachers be fired. They also didn't agree that the lunch break be extended by 15 minutes. The parents' view was that these matters should be decided by the principal and staff, and not by the learners.



This activity is an important application of some of Hopkins' ideas. It is a tough activity which requires you to use the theory you have learnt. Don't rush. Look back at how we analysed Case study 1, re-read Hopkins, and listen to Part 2 of your audiotape again. Then do this activity. Discuss your ideas with fellow students. Spend about 2 hours on this activity.

### ACTIVITY 7: ANALYSING THE CHANGE PROCESS AT ST MARK'S

- a Draw a diagram (see the example on page 43) that represents the relationship between structural and cultural factors in the changes at this school.
- b Explain why you think problems seem to be emerging in this school. (Go back to Hopkins. How would he characterize this school?)
- c What would you suggest teachers in this school do in order to ensure that the desired change occurs? Are you able to represent this diagrammatically? (Again, see whether Hopkins is helpful.)

### Our interpretation of Case study 2

What we observe at this school is a change in *structure*: a governing body has been established. This is a consequence of change in the school's *framework* (a new vision). But the old way of making decisions – the old 'culture' or, in Hopkins' language, *ways of working* – still continues. Although *structurally* the governing body is in place, the *way in which it functions* has not brought about any major observable change.

The ways in which the teachers, parents and learners *think about* the purpose of

education – in particular their roles in its management – have not changed. Another problem is that parents and learners may not have the *skills* required for democratic participation. So there is an *appearance* of participative governance, but this has not been carried through to a *reality* of change. Hopkins talks of *roles and responsibilities* as being partly cultural and partly structural. This is clearly evident here. In a sense, the principal has not really allowed parents to fill their new role by scheduling meetings at a time when parents are at work, and by not providing documentation so that people can prepare for meetings (structural issues). It is also evident that neither parents nor learners clearly understand their new responsibilities (a cultural issue) or have the skills to participate in democratic structures. This is a good example of how we need to work on culture – changing attitudes towards democracy and the skills of democratic participation – among management and parents.

### **Our advice to St Mark's**

This is the advice that we would give to the school: run an educational programme with all stakeholders on the role that governing bodies play in schools. This could form the basis of a process that will lead to a school mission statement and plan (a setting of agreed-upon priorities to which the governing body will generally work). The programme should also focus on how to participate effectively in democratic structures.

This programme would be a mix of cultural and structural intervention, acting to change ways of thinking about the organizational roles of all participants (a cultural intervention), as well as setting a *framework* and giving skills for participation (making it possible for stakeholders to take on their new *roles and responsibilities*). But the suitability of the *time* when meetings are held and the *venue* of meetings for parents should also be investigated (a structural intervention). Immediately set about allocating clear practical roles and responsibilities to parents and learners so that they can see how this new structure benefits them in practical terms (and to reassure the principal that it is not a threat to his or her position). Providing good documentation is also important in a form that can be read by newly-literate parents. These actions would also be structural interventions.

Our diagram would be similar to that of the first case study. In other words, it would reflect the fact that structure and culture continually act upon each other in a spiral that constantly re-evaluates and adapts actions embarked on by the school.

### **What have we learnt so far?**

- When we talk about school organization, we refer to the way in which the school is structured, *as well as* the norms and procedures which regulate behaviour and action within the school (the culture).
- Culture refers to the ways in which schools come to do things: the taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that are shared by people in the school. The practices in the school are usually reflections of these assumptions.
- Culture and structure are interdependent: they have a dialectical relationship. In order to bring about positive change in schools, it is vital that we examine exactly how structure and culture are related in a particular school, and then work on both as we attempt to change the way in which the school is organized. Otherwise, we may get the *appearance of change* without any *real change* taking place.



We will spend more time looking at the importance of focusing on both structure and culture in Section Four when we examine the processes of change in more detail. But it is very important that you feel confident that you understand sub-section 2.5 before you move on.

## 2.6

# Why are many South African schools hierarchical and authoritarian?



**legitimacy:** acceptability to the general population in terms of an appropriate social arrangement

## Introduction

Up till now we have used our experience to suggest that South African schools are hierarchical and authoritarian, and have implied that these characteristics need to be changed. But we require more support for this argument than just our experience.

Luckily, Sindi – a Thuthuka teacher – has read a report on school management written by a government task team in 1997. The report, entitled ‘Changing management to manage change’, asks the question: *Why do we have the schools we have and why should we change them?* These are some of its answers:

- Apartheid education lacked legitimacy which led to a crisis in South African education. This crisis manifested itself in poor educational management and the collapse of the culture of learning and teaching.
- Teachers and principals were *controlled by the rules, systems and procedures* of a hierarchical and centralized education system. For example, governance structures, the curriculum, finance, teacher appointments, and language policies, were all dictated from the top. Thus, teachers and principals were mere administrators who could not respond to the needs of their schools and communities.
- Public administration was characterized by an approach which led to a *rule-driven, secretive* and hierarchical management structure. The structure and culture of management were authoritarian and non-consultative.
- Managerial training and development were inappropriate and characterized by the collection of qualifications and certificates. The courses attended by teachers and managers had little relevance to issues in schools. Little attention was paid to the transfer of knowledge gained in such courses to the institutions and classrooms in which the teachers worked.

## Thuthuka teachers begin discussing South Africa’s educational history

*Somehow word had gone round Thuthuka that the four teachers we have already met (Thulani, Sindi, Nomusa and Sipho) were discussing some serious school-related matters. This had raised curiosity and three other teachers joined the discussions. We meet them in the staffroom during their lunch hour.*

*Sindi begins the discussion with a provocative comment: ‘OK, so the report tells us the obvious: we all know our schools were authoritarian in the past. But can anyone tell me **why** on earth our schools were organized in this hierarchical way in the first place? I’m a little confused because we now know that bureaucracies and hierarchies were not apartheid inventions. So why aren’t South African schools simply typical of schools worldwide? Aren’t all schools hierarchical and bureaucratic?’*

Sindi has already partly answered herself: yes, schools worldwide were influenced by ‘classical’ management theories which stressed the benefits of hierarchical and bureaucratic organization. As the staff had noted earlier, Thuthuka also manifests some of the characteristics of this management style in the way it is run. So, **one**



In Section Three we will look in more detail at this report, and at the *contexts* which might influence the way schools are organized in the future. We will also examine the current economic, political and social contexts shaping South African education.

*reason* for South Africa's hierarchical and bureaucratic schools could be ascribed to the influence of management theories and styles that were dominant worldwide in the last few decades.

But that doesn't give a full answer. It doesn't address the second part of Sindi's question: namely, are there other *uniquely South African* factors which make our schools *different* from those in many other countries? In order to answer this question, let's look briefly at the *context* which gave rise to the educational policies of the past. We will look at a simplified version of the history of education in South Africa.

## The historical context of education in South Africa

Formal schools have existed for less than 200 years. Before the Industrial Revolution in Britain, there was no such thing as education for everyone. Upper-class children in Europe were usually educated at home by tutors. Then, in the nineteenth century, there was an increase in schools for the 'masses'. One reason for this was the rapidly changing society. Industry needed people who were socialized into the new ways – particularly the attitudes required for repetitive factory-based work, and who had learnt the skills required to use the factory machines. As the Industrial Revolution spread to other countries, mass schooling developed alongside industrial development in Western society.

In pre-colonial Africa, schools (as we know them now) also did not exist. Children learnt what was important from their parents and elders in the community. When the Dutch colonized the Cape in 1652, very few schools were established. Children of the Trekboers learnt to read so that they could study the Bible, but there were no formal schools. An increase in schools only really occurred when the British administration took over after the Anglo-Boer War in 1902. Compulsory education was introduced for whites, but not for blacks. Many of the white people who were migrating to the towns were poor, unskilled, unemployed and Afrikaans-speaking. Schooling was seen as one way of bringing them into the rapidly industrializing society.

Until the 1950s, the education of black children was the responsibility of the church, through mission schools. These schools often had inadequate facilities for all the children who wanted to attend. So, even before the National Party came to power in 1948, education in South Africa was unequal and segregated. In terms of organization, though, there was little indication of large bureaucracies controlling education. Education was administered by a number of different bodies with little central control. School management, however, was authoritarian and hierarchical.

### ***Bantu Education is introduced***

In 1953, Bantu Education was introduced when H F Verwoerd was the Minister of Native Affairs. Most mission schools were closed down in favour of government schools which were to provide a limited curriculum to 'teach the Africans to accept their proper place'. Verwoerd created centralized control over 'black' education by moving it from the provinces to a national Department of Native Affairs. By 1956, the majority of black children who wanted education had no alternative but to attend Bantu Education schools.

While Bantu Education is often criticized for its underlying 'philosophy', it should be noted that schools *for all South Africans* underwent both philosophical and organizational changes when the National Party took power. The National Party took its inspiration from a conservative Calvinist reading of the Bible and believed that schools – for both whites and blacks – should instil *respect* for *Christian values* and for *the nation* in learners. They believed that adults – particularly Afrikaner adults – had the right and duty to *mould* younger children into adults with *these particular moral beliefs*. They had this right, they believed, because children were born inherently sinful – they quoted the biblical story of Adam in justifying this – and had to be socialized into goodness.

“  
... because the  
purpose of schools  
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”

With these as key educational beliefs, it is not surprising that the entire system was revamped as a larger, centralized, hierarchical and authoritarian system. In a sense, apartheid perceived God to be at the top, a white nationalist government below, and then principals, teachers and other adults below this. The role of teachers was to accept the instructions of the government (which, it was believed, represented God), and to do their duty by instilling these values in those below them.

Black people (and many white groups, such as Jewish people) were regarded as less than 'adult' in the sense that they had not been moulded into a Christian National view of life. This gave the National Party government the right to act as 'custodians' (carers) of black people, and so to impose a particular view of life – a culture – on them. Black people were educated only minimally so that they could be used as semi-skilled labour on the mines and in the factories. Another key motive for expansion was Verwoerd's belief that he could control black people by 'socializing' them into accepting apartheid values. One of the biggest ironies of apartheid education, however, is that it was the first mass provision of education for black children. Schooling for black children expanded rapidly, although it was vastly inferior to that provided for white children.

So, because the purpose of schools during the apartheid era – for both white and black children – was to mould them into apartheid citizens with the values appropriate to this kind of society, all schools were tightly controlled by the government. The education departments, of course, were hierarchically structured. This, and their increased size, led to massive bureaucracies with clear procedures being defined for virtually every action (most vividly represented by the forms teachers constantly fill out!). Inspectors from the various education departments (of which there were 19, divided according to race, province, and homeland) would visit schools to see whether they abided by the rules. And principals and teachers followed orders. Learners were given no power to decide on schooling because, it was assumed, they were too immature to do so.

### ***Protests and unrest: challenges to an authoritarian system***

Despite this tightly controlled system, the level of anger and frustration at the inequalities and oppressive nature of South African education increased until June 1976, when learners in Soweto protested against the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in black schools, and against Bantu Education in general.

These uprisings soon spread across the country. The government realized that its schooling system had lost its legitimacy – in other words, learners no longer trusted it and, thus, it had lost its ability to 'socialize' learners into apartheid values. They realized that some form of change was inevitable and responded by replacing the Bantu Education Act of 1953 with the Education and Training Act of 1979. African education was put into the hands of the new Department of Education and Training (DET).

But very little actually changed. In particular, schools were still authoritarian, and principals still looked to the DET for instructions. In Hopkins' language, there was the appearance of change but not the reality of change.

Dissatisfaction with Bantu Education continued, and the education ministry was forced to introduce further changes. A semblance of democracy was introduced when schools were allowed to have School Committees and, later, Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) and Student Representative Councils (SRCs). Although these structures had limited powers, they were nevertheless an indication of a shift in thinking and of the growing influence of democratic forces.

School boycotts and disruptions to black education continued through the 1980s. The government responded by setting up the De Lange Commission. It recommended a single department of education for all, equal educational opportunities, and a greater emphasis on technical education. This last recommendation stemmed from the need for South Africa to develop better expertise in the field of technology, to assist the economy. But resistance to apartheid and apartheid education continued. In the late 1980s, a strategy to make schools 'ungovernable' was launched



by learners.

In a sense, this resistance was developing a *culture* among learners (and, increasingly, teachers) which would make it impossible for apartheid *structures* to work. At the start of the 1990s, the apartheid government – in its dying days – set out new policy proposals in the Education Renewal Strategy and the Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa. However, these policy proposals were overtaken by South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

## What can we learn from our educational history?

The first rather obvious point is that our schools are structured in the way they are because of globally dominant *ideas about school management*. But this gives only part of the answer. The other part – which explains why our schools differ from those in many other countries – is that our particular history (and the beliefs of dominant groups in our history) also had an important role to play in shaping the kinds of schools we have. This also suggests that we need to examine carefully how changes in global and national belief systems – and economic and social systems – may impact on the way in which we organize schools in the future.

Second, the history of educational change in South Africa is an interesting example of how a system that was *structured* as a tightly controlled, hierarchical and authoritarian structure *wasn't able to do its job* efficiently, that is, to *control* people. While, initially, the desired *culture* of subservience among teachers and learners might have been achieved, ultimately an alternative *resistance culture* had been built by learners, *despite the existence of authoritarian structures in schools and society*. This culture – and the actions which flowed from it – managed to destroy the old structures and old cultures.

However, we now sit in a post-apartheid South Africa with a historical challenge: we destroyed the authoritarian structures and cultures of apartheid. But, in so doing, we also badly damaged the *culture of teaching and learning*. How do we rebuild *both* a new educational culture and new organizational structures to sustain our hard-won political democracy? As we have learnt so far in this module – and no doubt have noticed from our own experiences – *simply* resourcing schools better, or creating new policies and structures (like SRCs, or PTSA's, for instance), is not enough.

We need to build new cultures too, and this is a long and difficult job. In Sections Three and Four we will attempt to answer this question in terms of how *school organization* theory can assist us. Other modules – in particular *Being a Teacher* – address the question of building a new culture of teacher professionalism more fully.



This South African history section draws strongly on Christie, P. 1985. *The Right to Learn*. Johannesburg: Sached/Ravan.

## What have we learnt so far?

- Classical management theories and bureaucratic patterns of organization were not the only influences that shaped the hierarchical structures of South African schools. Particular cultural forces in our history, especially the beliefs and attitudes of dominant groups, shaped our hierarchical organizations in uniquely authoritarian ways.
- In the first half of this century, the provision of schooling already discriminated between white and black; state resources were spent on compulsory education for whites, while the education of black children was left to the church. Both state and church schools, however, exhibited the hierarchical and relatively authoritarian structures typical of schools in many countries.
- Later, under the apartheid government, the ruling group's self-constructed role of 'guardianship' underpinned all state schooling:
  - All children were seen as essentially immature (even evil), and in need of moulding to a particular vision of 'adulthood'.
  - Black people, old and young, were seen as subject to the 'guardianship' of the white Afrikaner.
  - There was a heavy emphasis on control, obeying orders, 'policing' by superordinate officials, and dependence on the part of school staff – a culture of control and compliance.
  - The system was both highly centralized (especially for blacks) and fragmented (19 education departments).
- Significantly, this highly authoritarian and even repressive system gave rise to an alternative culture of **resistance**. Attempts to reform the system failed to withstand the new culture of refusal, aimed at making the system 'ungovernable'. However, in the process of destroying apartheid structures and culture in the education system, the 'cultures of teaching and learning' were also badly damaged.