

Employees' perceptions on barriers to the adoption of a new organogram in the Eastern Cape Department of Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores employees' perceptions regarding the barriers to adopting a newly introduced organogram within the Eastern Cape Department of Education, South Africa. Employing a qualitative research approach with a case study design, the research engaged ten participants representing various levels within the department. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights. The findings reveal several perceived challenges that hinder the implementation of the new organogram, including resistance to change, communication breakdowns, mismatches between required and existing skills, limited stakeholder involvement, and inadequate training support. These barriers collectively point to the need for more effective organisational change strategies. The study emphasises the importance of implementing proactive change management practices, fostering continuous capacity-building initiatives, and ensuring meaningful stakeholder participation. Transparent communication and inclusive decision-making processes are critical for achieving successful and sustainable organisational transformation. By addressing these issues, the research contributes to the relatively limited body of knowledge concerning organisational change within the South African public sector, especially in the context of provincial education departments.

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INTRODUCTION

Organisational restructuring has increasingly emerged as a strategic imperative for public sector institutions seeking to improve service delivery, enhance operational efficiency, and adapt to shifting socio-economic landscapes. Within the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) context, restructuring efforts have addressed persistent systemic inefficiencies, underperformance, and disparities in education service delivery (Cahyani & Kriswibowo, 2022). Despite its potential to induce transformative institutional change, organisational restructuring often presents considerable challenges for employees, particularly in adjusting to new roles, altered processes, and evolving institutional expectations.

A growing body of research has underscored that the objective of restructuring is typically to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of public services. Vilakazi (2023) affirms that while restructuring is intended to catalyse change, it frequently disrupts an organisation's day-to-day operations and established routines, exerting significant pressure on its workforce. Similarly, Heyns, McCallaghan, and Senne (2021) define restructuring as reorganising the existing organogram involving reallocating responsibilities and adjusting workloads to enhance productivity and achieve collective goals. Isnaeni (2022) further provides empirical support that managerial, operational, and asset restructuring can substantially improve institutional performance.

Recent organisational transformation within the ECDoE has been marked by efforts to realign administrative functions with national policy priorities, streamline resource allocation, and integrate digital systems to serve educational communities better (Isaacs, 2018). These initiatives, however, have not been uniformly successful. Employees have reported confusion regarding their redefined roles, challenges adapting to new technological tools, and difficulties navigating revised hierarchical structures (Harahap, Hasibuan, & Watrianthos, 2020). These disruptions have had tangible implications for staff morale, performance levels, and the department's overall capacity to deliver high-quality education.

Given these concerns, the current study investigates the barriers employees face in adapting to the new organogram introduced during the ECDoE's recent restructuring. The central aim is to understand employees' perceptions of these challenges and to develop recommendations for strengthening organisational change processes through effective capacity-building and participatory strategies.

The following objectives guide the study:

- To examine employees' perceptions of the barriers to adopting the new organogram in the Eastern Cape Department of Education.
- To propose practical strategies to enhance employee adaptability and facilitate the successful implementation of organisational changes.

Theoretical Framework and Empirical Perspectives

Lewin's Change Management Model

This study is grounded in Lewin's Change Management Model, a foundational framework in organisational change theory comprising three interrelated stages: unfreezing, changing (transition), and refreezing (Sung & Kim, 2021). The model underscores the importance of preparing individuals for change, facilitating the transition, and ensuring the institutionalisation of the new structure into the organisation's culture. The unfreezing phase involves creating awareness of the need for change and destabilising existing behavioural norms. In the context of the ECDoE, this phase was marked by employee resistance rooted in fear of role ambiguity and job insecurity, particularly following the introduction of cluster-based leadership to enhance decision-making processes (Kang, 2015). Belyaeva (2024) contends that unfreezing requires clearly articulating internal inefficiencies or environmental shifts to justify the change.

In the changing or transition phase, the organisation moves from its current state to its desired future state. Erida and Lofti (2021) assert that this stage involves technical and emotional adjustments, requiring support mechanisms such as clear communication, employee engagement, and training. In the case of ECDoE, the research findings reveal a failure to manage this phase adequately—employees remained uncertain about placements and experienced disruptions in performance evaluations. They lacked the necessary capacity-building to assume their new functions. The final stage, refreezing, is intended to stabilise the new structure and behaviours as part of the organisation's operational norms. However, the ECDoE struggled to institutionalise the change, as the study uncovered that key restructuring principles outlined by the Department of Public Service were neglected. Paragraph 14 of the Staff Migration Strategy (2019) promised a dedicated change management plan, which was never implemented, leading to employee confusion and mistrust. Triansyah, Hejin, and Stefania (2023) point out that successful refreezing requires consistent reinforcement of new behaviours through communication, accountability, and integration.

Understanding Organisational Design and Restructuring in Provincial Governments

Organisational restructuring in public institutions serves as a framework to guide institutional transformation by outlining essential phases, actors, and mechanisms for change implementation (Elvis & Poi, 2022). An adequately designed organisational structure is essential, as it directly affects operational performance by determining hierarchies, workflow distribution, and coordination mechanisms. Vlachopoulos (2021) highlights that strategic considerations typically drive restructuring to enhance institutional responsiveness and adaptability in changing external or internal conditions. According to Lundmark, Richter,

and Tafvelin (2022), an organisational structure defines how work is divided and coordinated through standardised procedures or role specialisation. The Department of Public Service and Administration's (DPSA) Toolkit on Organisational Design (2006) details the six phases of the restructuring process as follows:

- Identification Stage: Diagnosing performance issues and identifying whether structural changes are warranted.
- Strategic Goal Setting: Aligning organisational processes with long-term objectives.
- Planning Preparation: Developing a comprehensive business case for review by executive authorities.
- Implementation Preparation: Planning employee migration, risk assessments, infrastructure needs, and impact analyses.
- Implementation: Executing the plan through communication, change management, and progress monitoring.
- Operationalisation: Embedding the new structure through risk and issue management, and ensuring continuity of transversal functions.

Sung and Kim (2021) further argue that successful restructuring depends on appointing change management agents to oversee training, stakeholder engagement, labour relations, and project managers responsible for ensuring timely delivery and quality assurance. As Lofti and Erida (2021) outlined, these mechanisms must align with established success factors in change initiatives.

Barriers to Implementing the New Organogram

Numerous barriers have been documented in implementing structural changes, particularly in large public-sector organisations.

a) Lack of Communication and Information Dissemination

Effective change management hinges on timely and transparent communication. Theale (2022) identifies the absence of clear information transmission policies as a key inhibitor of successful transitions. When employees are not adequately informed about the rationale, timelines, or outcomes of the change process, confusion and resistance tend to increase. Issac (2018) similarly highlights that strategic updates help reduce misinformation, mitigate anxiety, and foster employee buy-in. Erida and Lofti (2021) emphasise that clear, consistent messaging is essential in breaking complex changes into comprehensible components.

b) Inadequate Training and Follow-up Mechanisms

Training equips employees with the skills and confidence to navigate organisational transitions. According to Theale (2022), insufficient training and follow-up support hinder employees from fully internalising new systems or workflows. Erida and Lofti (2021) reinforce this view, suggesting that training improves technical competencies and enhances adaptability, motivation, and psychological readiness for change. Interactive methods such as simulations and workshops have proven effective in reinforcing learning outcomes and reducing transition-related stress. Rivaldo and Nabella (2023) assert that professional development—through education and structured training—has a direct, positive impact on employee performance. Moreover, experiential learning contributes to a more resilient and engaged workforce, particularly during organisational flux.

Rationale for Restructuring in the ECDoE Context

As Cahyani and Kriswibowo (2022) noted, organisational restructuring is often a strategic response to evolving environmental demands or institutional underperformance. In the case of the ECDoE, the Service Delivery Model (SDM) 2021–2025 outlines numerous challenges that necessitated structural reform. Over the past two decades, the department has struggled with suboptimal educational outcomes, governance lapses, and weaknesses in curriculum implementation. Resource constraints, limited ICT infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified support staff compounded these issues. To address these challenges, the department proposed a consolidation of district offices—from 23 to 12—and a fundamental redesign of the organogram.

As detailed in the SDM, the 2006 Post Establishment model failed to provide a coherent administrative architecture, partly due to its lack of alignment with a publicly articulated service delivery framework. Vilakazi (2023) found that the misalignment of functions and poorly clustered positions led to inefficiencies in departmental operations. Furthermore, the responsibilities overlap across the department's three internal branches, calling for urgent structural realignment.

Another restructuring impetus was the transfer of Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and Adult Education and Training (AET) Centres to the Department of Higher Education and Training, as formalised by Function Shift Circular No. 1/2014. This transition required recalibration of departmental roles and necessitated the review of the ECDoE's organisational configuration to reflect new mandates. Despite the shortcomings of the strategic rationale, planning, communication, and stakeholder engagement, the implementation process has been marred. Vlachopoulos (2021) notes that such deficiencies are typical in the South African public sector and have consistently undermined organisational change efforts. A closer examination of the barriers encountered during ECDoE's restructuring can yield actionable insights for future initiatives, particularly within provincial education departments.

An Overview of the ECDoE Organisational Structures

This section briefly compares the EDoE's New organisational structure with its old organisational structure from 2016.

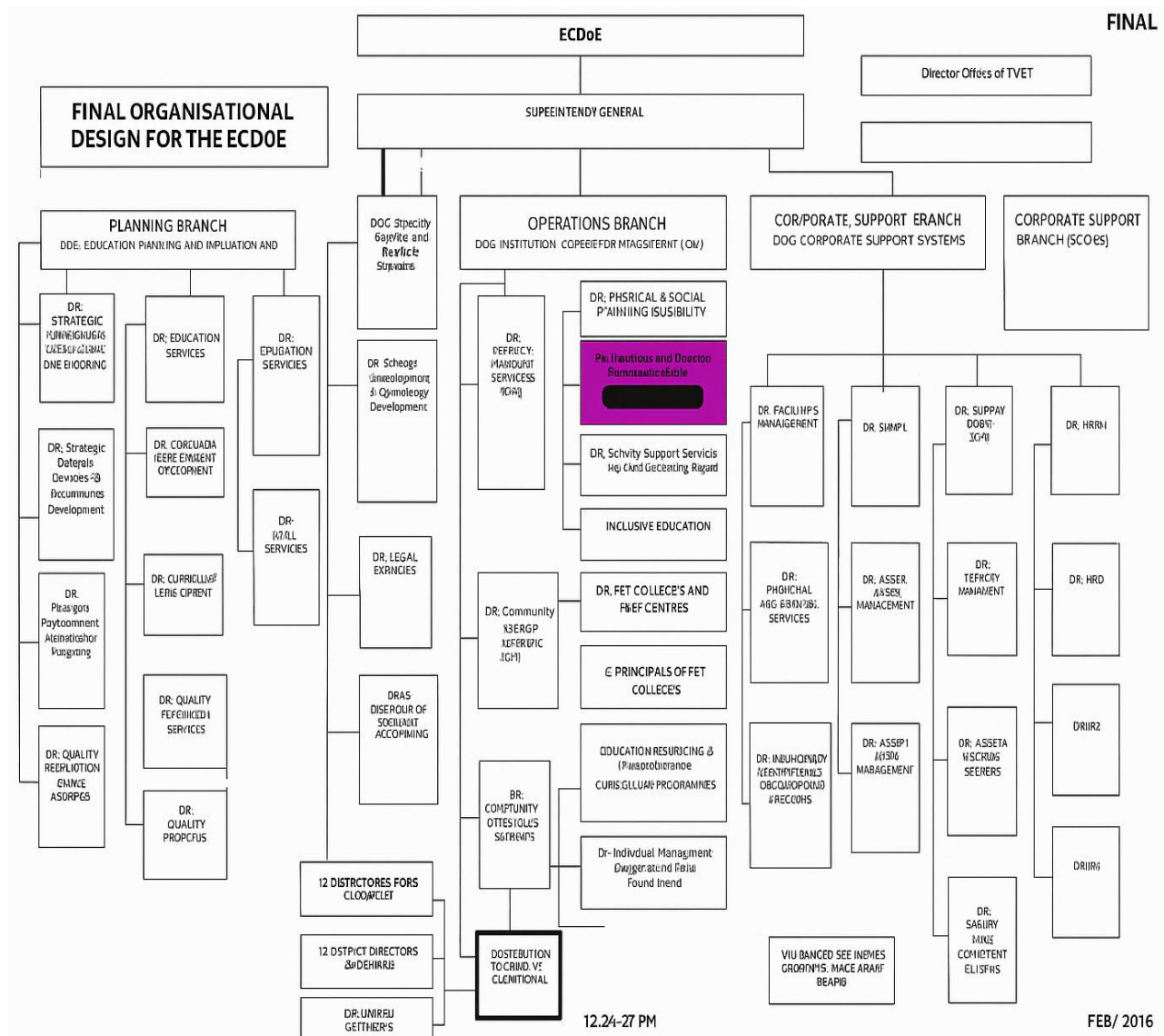


Figure 1. The ECDoE 2016 Organisational Structure

According to the 2016 organisational chart, Members of the Executive Council, as the political head of the department, are in charge of the department, with the support of the Superintendent General and Deputy directors of the three branches. As the chart illustrates, the structure lacks uniformity and synergy, and the reporting lines are ambiguous. Three chief directors and eight directors support the Deputy Director General, who leads the first branch, the Planning Branch. The Operations branch comes next, under the direction of the DDG, who is assisted by six chiefs, eight directors, and eight FET College principals. The CFO, four chief directors, and twelve directors comprise the Corporate Support Branch, the final branch. Additionally, there is the Chief Director's Statutory Advisory, which reports directly to the Superintendent General. One Chief Director, three Directors, and one Deputy Director lead this advisory. Two Directors then report to the HoD, and one Director reports to the MEC's office. There were 63 Senior Management Staff in the 2016 organisational structure.

The ECDoE's new organisational structure

The new organogram for 2019 was created with synergy and distinct reporting lines as compared to the structure from 2016. The corporate services branch appears to have been divided into two branches, financial management plans and the corporate branch, by the 2019 structure. According to the 2016 organisational chart, Members of the Executive Council, as the political head of the department, are in charge of the department, with the support of the Head of the Department and Deputy Directors of the three branches and Chief Financial Officer (ECDoE Annual Report, 2022/23).

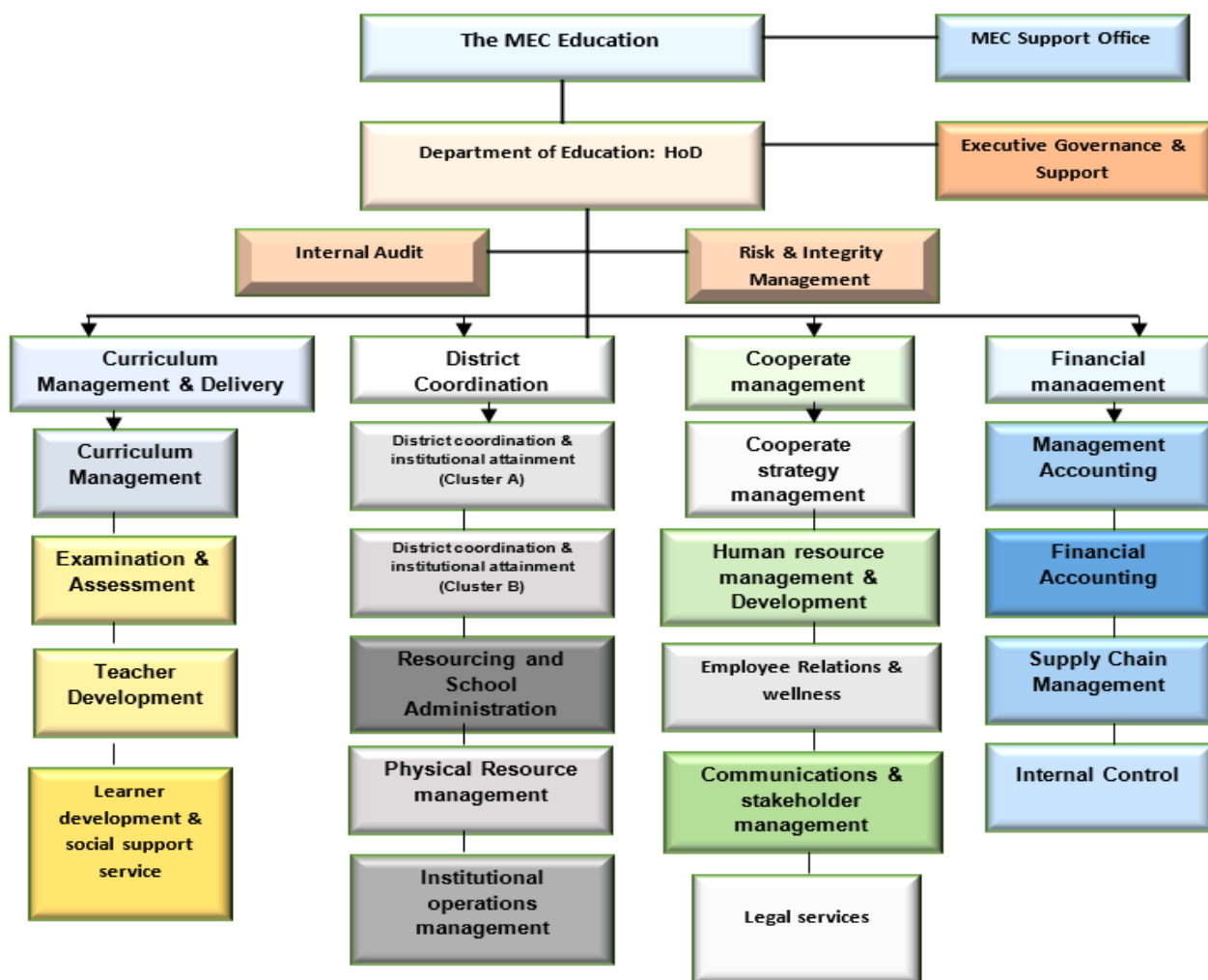


Figure 2. The ECDoE's New Organisational Structure

METHODS

To address the research objectives, this study adopted a qualitative research approach within the framework of a case study design, focusing on the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) as the unit of analysis. This methodological choice enabled an in-depth exploration of the complex organisational dynamics and employee perceptions surrounding the restructuring process. Both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility in probing emergent themes while maintaining consistency across participants. Secondary data included official departmental reports and policy documents relevant to the organisational restructuring.

In selecting participants, the study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct experience and insights into the restructuring process. According to Sakyi and Mweshi (2020), purposive sampling is particularly effective for identifying "information-rich cases" that are most likely to yield meaningful findings in qualitative inquiry. The sample consisted of ten (10) participants drawn from various levels and functions within the ECDoE. These included:

- One Director from the Organisational Development Directorate, responsible for overseeing employee placement;
- One middle manager from the Human Resource Development unit, accountable for performance appraisal and staff evaluation;
- One representative from the Employee Wellness programme, tasked with monitoring the psychological and operational impacts of restructuring;
- One official from the Strategic Planning unit, offering insight into the strategic implications of the new organogram; and
- Six additional officials from different directorates were selected for their technical expertise and lived experiences of the restructuring challenges.

The study employed deductive thematic analysis based on the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke to analyse the data. These steps include: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) identification of themes; (4) review of themes; (5) definition and naming of themes; and (6) producing the final report. This approach facilitated a systematic extraction of recurring patterns, allowing the researcher to interpret participants' perspectives about the theoretical framework and research objectives.

Several strategies were employed that were in line with qualitative research standards to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility, which refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations, was established through data triangulation. Data were collected from multiple participants across different directorates, roles, and hierarchical levels to obtain a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the organisational restructuring experience. In addition, member checking allowed selected participants to review and validate the transcriptions and interpretations of their responses. This process ensured that the accounts accurately reflected their perspectives and minimised researcher bias in interpretation.

Dependability, which addresses the consistency and reliability of the research process, was enhanced through clear documentation of all methodological procedures, including sampling rationale, data collection protocols, and thematic coding decisions. An audit trail of decisions and reflective notes was maintained throughout the study to enable future researchers to understand the analytical steps and reasoning behind them. Transferability was considered by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participant roles, and institutional setting. These detailed accounts enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar organisational settings or restructuring initiatives within other provincial departments or

public sector entities. Lastly, confirmability, the degree to which the participants shape findings and not researcher bias, was supported by the use of verbatim quotations and independent review of themes by a peer researcher, contributing to a more objective and balanced interpretation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study examined employees' perceptions of the barriers to adopting a new organogram in the Eastern Cape Department of Education. This study used a qualitative approach to examine data collected from 10 participants. Amongst them, 80% were female, and only 20% were male; the average age of participants was 39 years. The interviewees were drawn from the Eastern Cape Department of Education. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected qualitative data and examine the key themes of the study, focusing on employees' perceptions of the barriers to adopting a new organogram. Upon the completion of data analyses, several themes emerged, including employee dissatisfaction with migration procedures, resistance to change, uncertainty and role ambiguity, disengaged employees, shortage of skills among employees, increased workload, emotional stress and lack of communication with stakeholders involved.

Dissatisfaction with Staff Migration Procedures

The results from interviews showed that participants were not satisfied with the migration procedures done within the Department. Participants are dissatisfied with the time it took for them to get their placement letters, as highlighted below:

"The process was very slow; it took time to issue placement letters." I spent almost a month doing follow-ups on my placement letter, which took a long time." [Participant C]

"The placement process was very stressful; I found out that my directorate does not have a salary level 6. I had to wait for the whole process to conclude so the Organisational Development directorate could identify which offices had vacancies" [Participant B].

Another factor leading to employee dissatisfaction in the staff migration process is the organisational development unit's mishandling of the application form, as highlighted below.

"I had to fill in the Choice Form more than three times and not get positive results from the relevant official in the Organisational Development Unit" [Participant I].

"The placement process was grossly inequitable and inefficient; it was kind of intentionally discriminating indirectly." [Participant H]

The above statement indicated that the employees were not satisfied with how the department managed the process upon submission of the placement choice form. The implication is that, regardless of the existence of the Staff Migration Agreement Strategy, the Department failed to address the intended objectives as promised in the Staff Migration Agreement Plan. Employees continued to express their experiences and concerns with the placement process.

Resistance to Change

The available data showed that resistance to change was one of the challenges faced while implementing a new organisational structure. In the Eastern Cape Department of Education, the restructuring into cluster-based leadership teams to streamline decision-making was met with resistance. Employees often fear the negative impact of the new organisational structure on their roles and job security. Many employees, particularly district officials, expressed concerns about losing autonomy and influence in their decision-making processes. Participant C echoed that:

"Mmmm! I am afraid that the new structure would lead to job redundancy or marginalisation of our roles".

Participant G stated that:

"Employees may fear job loss, reduced autonomy, or shifts in authority due to the new structure."

Participant D pointed out that:

"Mistrust in leadership and scepticism about the benefits of the organisational restructuring can hinder buy-in. Officials need to be educated on the importance of this new structure".

For the above sentiments, mistrust in leadership further fuelled resistance, as some employees questioned whether the restructuring genuinely aimed to improve efficiency or served other motives, such as political agendas or cost-cutting. For instance, when leadership communicated the changes, the lack of initial consultation with affected employees led to scepticism about the process. To mitigate this, the department organised stakeholder workshops to explain the rationale behind the restructuring, emphasising its potential to improve resource allocation and support at the district level.

Uncertainty and Role Ambiguity

The results from the study showed that uncertainty and role ambiguity pose significant challenges during organisational restructuring, as employees struggle to understand their responsibilities and where they fit within the new hierarchy. In the Eastern Cape Department of Education, implementing a cluster-based leadership structure confused many employees regarding their roles and reporting lines. For instance, district officials were unsure about the extent of their decision-making authority regarding the newly introduced cluster leaders. Participant F argued that:

Employees may experience confusion about their responsibilities and reporting lines within the new structure. They may also receive insufficient information about the new structure, its goals, and how it aligns with the department's vision. This can confuse their roles and the organisation's expectations. "

Participant J added that:

"Overlapping roles or poorly defined job descriptions can lead to inefficiency and frustration. Uncertainty about the stability of employees' positions leads to anxiety, especially if the restructuring includes downsizing or merging roles".

Participant D opined that:

"With a restructured organisation, employees find their roles redefined without clear job descriptions or performance metrics, leading to confusion about their responsibilities."

The above verbatim indicated that a lack of clarity resulted in overlapping responsibilities between district managers and cluster-based teams, leading to inefficiency and frustration. Sometimes, tasks were duplicated or neglected, as employees were unsure who was accountable for specific duties (Erida & Lofti, 2021). For example, school support programs were delayed because district officials and cluster leaders assumed the other party was responsible for their rollout.

Disengaged employees

The study established that the restructuring of employee well-being is affected by the organisational restructuring process. The participants shared their experiences, which are consistent with the experiences shared by officials in employee wellness below.

Participant F mentioned that:

"Some employees were referred to our offices, and employees never followed up for their appointment. Most employees who were unplaced felt left out by the Department."

In addition, participant H indicated that:

"Some employees are underutilised in their offices, which causes them to feel demotivated to come to work".

Participant B mentioned that:

"The placement process affected me emotionally, and the anxiety of adjusting to work that is different from what I was doing is a big challenge. What is more stressful is adjusting to the duties,

but my qualification is not aligned, even if a post may be advertised in that office, I will not qualify."

Participant I also mentioned that:

"I had no challenges getting the placement; the stress was on whether I could adjust to the new task."

The above sentiments show disengaged employees lack motivation, emotional connection, and organisational commitment. In the context of structural change, this can manifest as resistance to new policies, reluctance to adopt new practices, and reduced productivity. Disengaged employees may perform at suboptimal levels, negatively impacting service delivery (Tawse & Tabashe, 2020).

Shortage of skills among employees

The results showed that employee training is a significant challenge during organisational restructuring, especially when employees must take on new responsibilities or adapt to specialised roles without prior training. In the Eastern Cape Department of Education, this issue was evident when the Department transitioned to a decentralised decision-making model with cluster-based leadership teams (Boufim & Barka, 2021). Many district managers and educators promoted leadership roles, but lacked training in strategic decision-making, financial management, and data-driven approaches to monitor school performance. The participant expressed their answers as follows:

Participant H mentioned that:

"One of the key challenges is that no change management training was afforded to all employees".

Participant G also pointed out that:

"Employees could not perform as no orientation or induction was conducted by the Department after placement".

Participant D opined that:

"Yes, I had to move to a new office, and I have not been trained or enrolled in any courses relevant to the new function".

Participant D adds that:

"I was placed in a different office, which is challenging because the new post function, skills and qualifications required are different from the ones I have. "

In addition, Participant I also indicates that:

"I do not have a chance to grow or get a promotion to the current post as I do not possess the correct qualifications, and also, I cannot perform the function because I have not been trained or offered a bursary to pursue a different career path".

Given the above statement, it is clear that the Department failed to get the necessary training to assist the employees in adapting to their new work functions. According to Zindi and Sibanda (2022), individuals are more likely to be productive and support the strategy's success when they are trained and knowledgeable of what is expected.

Increased Workload

The results showed that the new restructuring process employees experienced increased workload, as employees were supposed to balance their adaptation to new processes with maintaining their existing responsibilities. Increased workload is a significant challenge employees face when adapting to a new organisational structure in the Eastern Cape Department of Education. This challenge arises as roles and responsibilities shift, often without the immediate availability of additional resources or clear boundaries (Tawse & Tabashe, 2020). Participant G lamented that:

"The shift to a cluster-based leadership model significantly increased the workload for district officials. While they were expected to oversee their traditional responsibilities, they were also

required to adapt to the new reporting structures and support implementing the cluster-based system”.

Participant F added that:

“District managers had to attend weekly strategic meetings with cluster leaders to align goals and ensure the new structure was functioning effectively. At the same time, they continued managing ongoing programs such as textbook distribution and school infrastructure projects. This dual burden led to extended working hours and heightened stress levels among employees, reducing morale and productivity in the short term.”

Participant I expressed that:

“The restructuring process often combines multiple positions or redistributes tasks, leading to an expanded scope of responsibilities for remaining employees”.

From the above views, it can be seen that increased workload can result in physical and emotional exhaustion, decreasing job satisfaction and engagement. Employees face additional reporting, training, or documentation requirements for the new system’s implementation. With more tasks to manage, employees may be unable to devote adequate time and effort to critical duties, compromising service delivery and outcomes.

Emotional Stress

The results established that emotional stress occurs often during organisational restructuring, as employees face uncertainties that disrupt long-standing routines and comfort zones. In the Eastern Cape Department of Education, the transition to a cluster-based leadership model generated significant anxiety and low employee morale. Many felt unsure about their job security, reporting lines, and how their roles would fit into the new structure. Participant J argued that:

“Officials accustomed to clear and predictable workflows found it challenging to adapt to the increased collaboration required under the new model. Some feared the restructuring would reduce their influence or lead to redundancy, creating a sense of insecurity”.

Participant B expressed that:

“This restructuring process causes emotional strain, leading to resistance among some employees, who questioned the rationale behind the changes and avoided fully engaging in the transition.”

From the above views, the restructuring process left many employees under stress. They were expected to implement new processes while still managing existing responsibilities. Overwhelmed employees struggled to manage tasks effectively, leading to errors and reduced efficiency.

Lack of Communication with stakeholders involved

The study identified a lack of communication between the officials and employees coordinating the placement process. This is supported by the majority of the participants who indicated the following:

Participant H mentioned:

“There was no clear guidance on how the employees should choose their placement; employees had to peruse the organogram to pick their placement; this confused the employees as some of the office's names had changed.”

Participant J stated that:

“There was a lack of communication within this restructuring process. I was told that the office I have been placed in is at the district offices, and it does not exist in Head Office, which appears to be based at the Head Office in the organogram.”

Participant A alluded that:

“There was limited interaction with the junior staff, and the progress on migration was only communicated to senior management. The process affected my performance as I handled my placement problem during office hours.”

Additionally, Participant A alluded that:

"The process was very challenging; It was a long journey, and I struggled to find placement. I constantly went to the OD office to check my placement until I was placed in February this year."

Given the statement above, the Department lacked a communication strategy during the implementation of the organisational structure. There is inconsistent communication between the employees and the officials managing the placement process.

Discussions

The results showed that employees were dissatisfied with how the department handled the placement process. This shows that implementing the Staff Migration Agreement Plan was not as envisioned. According to the plan, an Appeal Committee will be established to consider employee concerns; however, no feedback has been provided to the employees who lodged disputes, and some employees were unaware that such a committee existed. These findings align with Tawse and Tabashe (2020), who argue that organisations tend to prioritise strategy formulation above effective implementation inside organisations. Furthermore, the literature by Johnson and Watt (2021) supports that conflict may arise if communication and consultation become increasingly individualised rather than reaching all employees. Issac (2018) also affirms that giving workers the appropriate information at the appropriate moment is essential to preventing misunderstandings and misinformation.

The study's findings showed that limited stakeholder involvement in the restructuring process remains a challenge. Key stakeholders were not engaged during the planning and decision-making phases, resulting in a disconnect between the new structure's objectives and their needs or expectations. Employees may not know where to seek information or whom to contact for clarity, particularly when the restructuring disrupts traditional lines of communication. Insufficient or inconsistent dissemination of information about the new structure's rationale, goals, and implementation timeline can create uncertainty and speculation. Top-down communication that fails to incorporate employee and stakeholder feedback can leave them feeling undervalued and disconnected.

The study findings showed that a lack of communication was a challenge faced by employees during the restructuring process. These findings are in line with the work of Issac (2018), who argues that in times of transition of this nature, a lack of continuous communication can lead to employee frustration and resistance; subsequently, organisational communication is crucial for the timely dissemination of workplace information and informing employees about change benefits. Effective communication increases employee involvement and commitment. In support of the above statement, Phillips and Klein (2022) affirm that Effective change management requires communication, which encompasses networking, messaging, and negotiating. All organisation members should receive clear communication from the change managers. Erida and Lofti (2021) also assert that a lack of communication and employee participation may lead to resistance to change. Communication reduces resistance, increases buy-in, and creates a change-ready environment.

The results indicated that the lack of training follow-up after placement of employees remains a challenge. Employees did not receive any training after being placed in their respective directorates. However, the Staff Migration Agreement Plan stipulates that employees assigned to the new office shall receive skill development training to assist them in adjusting to their new roles. The participants stated that they had not received any education, training, or course offers since their placement in 2020. Training is pivotal in enhancing employees' skills and enabling them to perform their jobs (Zindi & Sibanda, 2023). These findings align with the literature of Boufim and Barka (2021), who concur that staff skills should be enhanced to performance-centric strategies and sector developments to address the "talent gap" that organisational change management brings. Additionally, Errida and Lotfi (2021) and Theale (2022) point out that one of the key success factors for sustaining and managing change is employee coaching and training.

These components support and enable staff members' capacity to adapt to organisational changes and effectively fulfil their duties to achieve the company's goals. Additionally, Harahape et al. (2020) *support the idea* that education, job placement, and job training all impact workers' productivity at work.

The results indicate that since the inception of the placement process in 2020, the Department has not successfully placed all the employees in the new organogram. They are still employees who have not been placed in staff migration. This implies who is deemed redundant, as the Staff Migration Agreement Plan stipulates that the employees who are not placed shall be deemed additional or redundant. Furthermore, this suggests that when the department was designing, the organisational structure did not assess the readiness of the department to undergo such a change; additionally, there was no comparison in terms of the number of posts versus warm bodies within the Department.

The results also showed that the organisational restructuring in the ECDoE affected the employee well-being, subsequently affecting their performance. These findings align with Li, Sun, Tao and Lee (2021), who argue that organisational change modifies how work is done in organisations and leads employees to fear whether they can cope with the changes. Aboramadan, Elhamalawi, and Shahid (2020) attest that perceived job instability negatively impacts employee affective commitment. Additionally, employee psychological well-being improves emotional commitment, leading to better job performance. In support of the above, Yandi and Havidz (2022) concur that the extent to which people actively participate in their work, feel a sense of personal significance from their performance, and identify with it. Furthermore, employee absenteeism and resignation rates will be lower in an organisation with high levels of job involvement. On the other hand, low levels of work involvement will result in higher rates of resignation and absenteeism within an organisation. The above findings are in line with the research findings conducted by Rukande (2021), who confirms that change and uncertainty can negatively impact employee well-being, leading to increased occupational stress, lower job satisfaction, higher absenteeism, decreased commitment to the organisation, a lack of trust, and mental and physical symptoms of illness.

CONCLUSION

Implementing a new organisational structure within the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has presented various challenges that significantly hinder employees' ability to adapt effectively. Chief among these are uncertainty, role ambiguity, increased workload, and inadequate communication with key stakeholders. These issues are frequently rooted in insufficient preparatory planning, poorly executed communication strategies, and a lack of structured support systems to facilitate the transition. Uncertainty and role ambiguity have left many employees unclear about their specific responsibilities, reporting hierarchies, and the extent of their decision-making authority. This ambiguity contributes to heightened stress levels and operational inefficiencies. In parallel, increased workloads—often a consequence of consolidated roles and transitional demands—have placed considerable strain on employees, frequently resulting in burnout, diminished productivity, and resistance to change. Moreover, the absence of consistent, transparent communication exacerbates these challenges by fostering confusion, mistrust, and disengagement among both staff and external stakeholders. If unaddressed, these barriers can severely compromise the success of the restructuring initiative and undermine the department's capacity to deliver high-quality educational services. Several strategic interventions are recommended to mitigate these challenges and support a more effective adaptation process. First, the ECDoE must strengthen its communication strategies by ensuring that information dissemination is timely, transparent, and consistent. It is essential to develop a comprehensive communication plan that clearly articulates the objectives of the restructuring, its intended benefits, and the anticipated changes in employee roles. Multiple communication channels—such as formal meetings, emails, newsletters, and interactive feedback sessions—should be employed to engage stakeholders meaningfully throughout the process. Second, the department must

provide clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. This involves disseminating updated job descriptions, performance indicators, and reporting lines to all personnel. Doing so will reduce ambiguity and promote a shared understanding of expectations under the new organisational framework. In addition, implementing workload management strategies is crucial. A systematic task allocation and process flow review should be conducted to prevent employee overburden. Streamlining administrative processes, integrating automation for routine tasks, and recruiting additional personnel where necessary will contribute to a more balanced workload. Complementary measures such as flexible work arrangements and employee wellness programmes can support workforce resilience. Fourth, providing training and continuous support is vital in equipping employees with the necessary competencies to function effectively in their redefined roles. Tailored training initiatives should complement mentorship and coaching programmes, offering sustained guidance throughout the restructuring period. Furthermore, meaningful stakeholder engagement must be prioritised from the outset. Involving employees, union representatives, and other relevant actors during the planning and implementation stages promotes ownership, transparency, and trust. Mechanisms for regular feedback—such as focus groups and staff surveys—should be institutionalised to capture emerging concerns and facilitate real-time problem-solving. Lastly, the department should establish a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to assess the restructuring process's short- and long-term impacts. Continuous evaluation will enable the department to make evidence-informed adjustments, address unforeseen challenges, and ensure alignment with strategic goals.

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