Appplying and Adapting Resistance to Change Theory to the Changed Adult Education Landscape in South Africa

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how the 'Resistance to change' theory of Kurt Lewin can be interpreted as be helpful in facilitating consultative and participative change management. I demonstrate this through the investigation on transition of former Adult Basic Education and Training sector to Community Education and Training sector. This transition was elicited by the need to upgrade adult education sector to a level in which it can contribute towards the attainment of National Development Plan, which is, to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality. I created data through document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion with 11 and 5 participants respectively, whom I selected through purposive maximum variation sampling strategy. Some of the themes that concern the application (and adaptation) of resistance to change theory are consultation and communication, and collaboration of all stakeholders. It is suggested that as change is outcomes-oriented, it is important that all stakeholders involved in change processes are informed, for them to be willing to actively participate.

Keywords: Adult Basic Education and Training, Community Education and Training College, Resistance to Change Theory, National Development Plan

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Introduction

This article demonstrate the interpretation of Resistance to Change (RTC) theory as a consultative and participative change management (Burnes 2015). It gives an alternative interpretation to different interpretations of RTC theory – such as those who understand RTC as a confirmation that people spontaneously oppose any change initiative (Singh, Goel, Ghosh, and Sinha 2021). I demonstrate this interpretation through the investigation on transformation of Adult Education from Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) sector to Community Education and Training (CET) sector.

Most African countries remained in poverty even after freedom from colonialism (Alemazung 2010). South Africa remained a poverty stricken and unequal society even after freedom from apartheid (Brankovic, Mphahlele, Nunu, Ngxukuma, Njana, and Sishuba 2020). National Development Plan was launched with an intention of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality (Fofana, Chitiga-Mabugu, and Mabugu 2018). All sectors of society, including former ABET centres, were expected to play a role in the elimination of poverty and reduction of inequality (Baijnath 2018). Unfortunately, ABET did not have capacity to contribute due to qualifications of low quality that are offered in ABET centres, low enrolment rates, low throughput rates, limited contact hours and unsuitable venues of operation (DHET 2015; Mokgatle 2014 and Maphumulo 2014). Hence, transformation of adult education was inevitable.

The progress of the transformation, thus far, is that nine Community Education and Training Colleges (CETCs) have been gazetted; former ABET centres have been declared as Community Learning Centres (CLCs) – as operational venues or satellites of their respective provincial CETCs; members of college' council, principals, deputy principals and support staff members have been appointed; operational budget is annually allocated to CETCs and there is gradual improvement of lecturers salaries. But the shortcomings of former ABET centres are still prevailing in most CLCs (DHET 2015) , which elicit doubt of whether the CETC will have contributed to NDP by 2030.

Lessons Learnt From the Implementation of Development Plans in Other Countries

Existing literature captures the findings of international studies on the causes of success and failure of implementation of development plans – like the South African NDP. In Kenya, for example, poverty rates remained high, despite the formulation of various poverty eradication policies such as development plans and publications on poverty reduction strategies, due to the formulation of these policies often being dominated by donors' prioritisations. In this case the voices of the poor were excluded, treating them as passive participants during policy formulation and implementation (Nyamboga, Nyamweya, Sisia, and George 2014).

In Ghana, despite a long term NDP being collectively adopted by different stakeholders such as the Council of Indigenous Business Association, Federation of Association of Ghanaian Exporters, Private Enterprise Foundation, National Union of Ghana Students, National House of Chiefs, Ghana Employers Association and many more, the NDP also failed in that country. In this case, the primary reason for failure could be ascribed to the governing party allegedly prioritising its manifesto over the NDP (Abubakari, Asamoah, and Agyemang 2018).

In Nigeria, different national development plans and strategies have been undertaken since independence, with these not achieving the expected results. As a result, the country is still

characterised by widespread poverty, dilapidated infrastructure facilities, high levels of unemployment, low-capacity utilisation, technological backwardness, short-life expectancy, urban congestion, excessive debt burdens, environmental degradation, and high incidences of diseases, despite the efforts to support development (Iheanacho 2014). These plans are said to have failed as a result of corruption, poor planning, limited discipline, lack of commitment, unavailability of relevant data, over-ambitious development plans, lack of continuity for governmental programmes, public service insufficiency and poor collaboration between the public and private sectors (Iheanacho 2014, 57-58).

On the contrary, Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey have better succeeded in implementing their economic policies and development plans. Naiya (2013) attributes these accomplishments and successful implementation of national development plans to political stability, human development, and levels of functioning as well as sound economic management. While playing a supervisory role in the economy and minimal intervention on investments in infrastructure, energy and transport, the government in Turkey laid 'more emphasis on private sector development, labour-intensive production, and export-oriented projects' (Naiya 2013, 33). Naiya (2013) highlights an outstanding achievement that the Malaysian government displayed as the facilitation of national unity by providing economic and viable employment opportunities to all Malaysians in their diversity. He also highlights an outstanding achievement that was displayed by Indonesia as peaceful, democratic, and affluent society that reduced poverty through economic development, employment opportunities and environmental sustainability.

Conceptual Framework

Change is a continuous and developmental process which can be understood through a multi-philosophy approach (Graetz and Smith 2010; Wee and Taylor 2018). Hence, I integrated concepts of different related theories (Ngulube, Mathipa, and Gumbo 2015): resource dependency theory (Cone, Krone, Phillips, and Yacoub 1993), strategic theory (Huber and Glick 1993), post-modern philosophy (Dijksterhuis, Van den Bosch, and Volberda 2003), and psychological philosophy (Weick 1979). RTC theory was introduced in 1947 by Kurt Lewin (Burnes and Bargal 2017) as a 'systems concept' that arises from the context in which change takes place, with an intention of motivating change managers to encourage participative decision making instead of imposing change on people (Burnes 2015). Singh, Goel, Ghosh, and Sinha (2021) critiqued the interpretation of RTC theory as a 'systems concept' and regarded RTC as a framework that considers people as spontaneous opponents of any change initiatives, resisting it no matter how it is proposed. It follows that although there is no one interpretation of RTC theory, RTC can be used in research when investigating people's reaction to change, for example in terms of resistance due to failure of a change initiative (Amarantou, Kazakopoulou, Chatzoudes, and Chatzoglou 2018). In my view, such a use of RTC theory from a negative perspective can result in an investigation that focuses on the identification of those who resisted change, with a punitive intention.

According to Dent and Goldberg (1999), RTC theory does not imply that all people will be spontaneously prompted to resist change, but rather posit that people would want to actively participate in the planning and implementation of a change process (Lortie 2020). This view is supported by Sarayreh, Khudair, and Barakat (2013) who state that employees would want to be consulted when a change process is planned and initiated. Taylor (2020) regards anxiety as a spontaneous reaction to change; yet in this regard, Frahm and Brown (2007) and

Velmurugan (2017) indicate that the thorough explanation of a change process may reduce the levels of anxiety experienced by those involved in the foreseen change process.

These arguments emphasise the importance of not ignoring the already existing systems and individuals in an institution where change will be implemented (Argyris 2017). It is further important that change involves all sectors of an institution and, for example, not only concentrate on relocating workers from one site/position to the next without considering their personal circumstances (Belschak, Jacobs, Giessner, Horton, and Bayerl 2020). As such, keeping people informed and considering their needs and personal circumstances are seemingly two guidelines to consider when wanting to implement change.

Research Methodology

I followed a qualitative approach in undertaking my study. This enabled me to explore the lived experiences of the participants and gain in-depth insight into their personal views (Frechette, Vasiliki, Monique, Kelley, and Mélanie 2020). I adopted an active approach whereby I, as the researcher, actively participated and encouraged the participant to think deeply and even discover new interpretation of their experiences of events (Romm 2018). This approach enabled me to stimulate critical discussions between the participants and me, which I captured during and after the interviews in the form of audio-recordings and field notes (Merriam and Grenier 2019). I relied on Phenomenology (Frechette et al. 2020) as research design, allowing me to elicit the participants' personal interpretations of their experiences in relation to CET college's role in e.g., eliminating poverty and reducing inequality.

I used the purposive maximum variation (PMV) sampling strategy to select three colleges and their respective regional offices. Based on the (PMV) strategy I selected participants across the spectrum that related to the topic of my study (Doyle, McCabe, Keogh, Brady, and McCann 2020). More specifically, I selected one principal, one CLC manager and one lecturer from each college together with one regional manager and one curriculum implementer from the regional office that support the college. In addition, I selected one official from the DHET head office. In the end, nine people from colleges, six from regional offices and one from DHET head office participated.

For data generation and documentation, I conducted a document analysis of relevant documents such as the Report of Task Team for Community Education and Training Centres (TTCETC), Government gazettes, policy documents, as well as circulars and minutes of DHET portfolio committee. Next, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the participants of the first two colleges, being guided by open-ended questions that I prepared in advance but following a flexible approach in terms of the sequence of questioning and follow-up questions that were regarded as relevant (Harding 2018). I also conducted a focus group discussion with the five participants of the third college (Hennink and Kaiser 2021). All regional officials, principals and CLC managers were requested and agreed to participate in follow-up interviews if these were to be required. Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews to facilitate evaluative discussions with one official from the DHET. During the evaluative discussion with DHET head office official, inputs and concerns of some regional and college participants were discussed to gain more perspective in terms of these views. Throughout, I made field notes and recorded the interviews, which were transcribed verbatim, for data analysis purposes.

In conducting data analysis, I relied on the principles of Atlas TI which encourage simultaneous coding of data from literature and from fieldwork (Ronzani, da Costa, da Silva, Pigola, and de Paiva 2020). I used splitting method of coding, categorisation and thematisation as explicated by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2018). Participants' and literature's inputs that had the same connotation were categorised. As I clustered categories that had the same connotation, themes that related to aspects of this research's conceptual framework emerged.

Research Ethics

I secured permission to conduct the study from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of education at the University of South Africa before commencing with my study as well as from the DHET head office and the managers, principals and CLC managers of the selected regions, CET colleges and CLCs. Participants provided written informed consent to declare their voluntary participation. For the purpose of anonymity, especially of the principals and regional managers, I did not use the names of the selected colleges in any written report. Throughout, I also attended to the principles of confidentiality, trust, and protection from harm (Surmiak, 2020).

Findings

My discussion of the findings is guided by RTC theory and my integrated conceptual framework, as this allows me to elicit the basic principles of change (Frahm and Brown, 2007; Velmurugan, 2017; Roth and DiBella, 2015). Themes that emerged relate to consultation and communication and the collaboration of all stakeholders; the slow and fragmented change process; and unavailability or non-provisioning of resources.

Theme 1: Consultation, Communication and Collaboration of All Stakeholders
It is one of the aspects of post-modern philosophy.

Differences in the time and mode through which the CLC managers and lecturers were informed about the change that their institutions would undergo suggest that consultation by DHET officials involved a roadshow during which the institutions were notified about the impending change. According to the participants, the roadshow entailed one-way communication and a mere notification format. For example, the principal of College 1 said that '*The DHET official from labour office was just notifying us and wanted to find out if there were those who would like to remain in the DBE. He did not want our inputs'* (Patrick); the lecturer at College 1 concurred '*It was a top-down announcement of a management plan for the implementation of a finalised product. It was not a consultative road show*' (Sarah), and the principal of College 3 reiterated '*the roadshow did not demand our in*puts' (Harry).

When I enquired about the time and dates on which the participants learned about the transition, they indicated that they were informed about it during the planning and reporting back session of the TTCETC in 2010 or in some cases, only later. The Regional manager at College 3 for example said that '*I heard about the function shift in 2012 at the national AET meeting that was arranged by the DHET*' (Daniel). The lecturer at College 2 indicated that he heard rumours about the pending change in 2013, with other participants learning about the change in 2012 and 2013 during road shows (Simon).

To explore whether or not the participants understood what exactly the transition would entail, I prompted them to indicate their feelings towards or against the change. The principal of College 1 responded, respectively:

> I was anxious since there was no one who seemed to understand what exactly is going to happen. People who were supposed to explain to us were also not having enough convincing information. Most people that I talked to were having the same problem of not understanding what this transition was all about. Maybe those who were given proper information felt differently. Only if you are properly informed then you could feel differently. (Patrick)

Speculations and rumours that seemingly influenced the beneficiaries' perceptions about the expected change suggest that the lecturers and CLC managers did not receive sufficient information, with some not getting any information. For example, the CLC manager at College 3 explained that he and his colleagues were initially excited when hearing rumours of a salary increment yet were later devastated when they received almost half of their usual salary (David). The term 'rumours' implies that the CLC managers and lecturers seemingly assumed that they would receive a salary increment, without confirmation or guarantee from the change agents.

'If you were fully involved, what would be your input?' I asked.

The curriculum implementer of College 1 suggested that 'The College has to knock at the doors of the business houses for sponsorship. There must be funds made available by the department for youth development' (Maria). The curriculum implementer of college 3 repeated Maria's assertion:

> The current funding model for colleges does not make provision for skills training. College councils are expected to establish partnerships with business and other sectors to fund skills training…most of our former students found employment in our neighbouring hotels because our area is a tourist attractive area. There are many Hotels, restaurants, and resorts. I suppose that the management of these Hotels are potential employers and sponsors that must participate in the collaboration of all stakeholders. (Rachel)

The principal at College 2 suggested that 'all unused school buildings should be handed over to the DHET' (Suzan).

Theme 2: Slow and Fragmented Restructuring (Change Process)
(Strategic theory – change is outcomes oriented; and psychological philosophy – change is elicited by experience, especially long-suffering experience)

To CLC managers and lecturers, progress that has been made thus far is not satisfactory because their conditions of employment, times and venues of operation remained unchanged. When I told the DHET head office official about their concern, he said:

> We told them [CLC managers and lecturers] that at the end, the post of a college lecturer would be equivalent to an assistant director; of a principal would be equivalent to the director and the deputy principal to the deputy director…. I think that we should have emphasised that we were just beginning, it might take some time,

but we need to start somewhere. We should have also indicated that it would be a trial and error learning curve, but their future was not at risk. (Derrick)

The regional manager of College 3 avowed that the planning at national government level, which only proposed the structure or organogram of the envisaged CET colleges, was satisfactory. He however expressed unhappiness about the (limited) way in which details about the change process were discussed with the people who would be experiencing the change. He said:

> I was thrilled by the objectives of the White Paper that could be achieved through the CETC. [Now] I am disappointed. Structures are being put in place for implementation, but planning, time, resources and consultation was not sufficient. Many people are left out. (Daniel)

Promises of introducing the second and third categories of the CET college programmes and qualifications was seemingly a source of excitement to the participants. However, they were of the view that quietness and inactivity about the skills programmes represented a failure. In this regard, the curriculum implementer of College 3 referred to:

> The continuation of CETC to fund NQF levels 1 to 3 qualifications only, while it committed to expand to NQF levels 4 and 5 is a drawback to the achievement of the change' (Clifford). In support, the CLC manager at College 2 said that 'our clientele is not interested in ABET learning areas but want to learn skills that will enable them to get employment. (Frank)

Participants expressed different views about their expectations of the link between the expansion of CET college curriculums, capacity building and the permanent employment of lecturers and CLC managers. For example, while the CLC manager at College 1 shared an optimistic view by saying:

> Skills development programme was very scares in the former AET system. I hope the DHET will give it a priority, especially upgrading former AET educators into CET College lecturers. (Ben)

The regional manager of College 2 shares the same sentiments:

> People are no longer interested in ABET levels 1-4 but instead they need skills programmes that will assist them to be employed… Most of the current lecturers we have cannot handle such and therefore the results are affected…the college must be assisted in appointing the relevant qualified lecturers who will be able to handle the learning areas and programmes. (Hazel)

Theme 3: Unavailability or Non-provisioning of Resources
(Resource dependency philosophy – instead of resisting, people may be disabled to change by unavailability or non-provision of facilities)

The participants were seemingly of the view that the achievement of CET colleges' founding principles could enhance the attainment of the developmental strategies of the NDP, yet they noted that the lack of sufficient facilities such as school buildings, workshops and laboratories posed a high risk and could result in failure. They concurred that the introduction

of second and third categories of programmes and qualifications could enable them to achieve their aspirations of producing a strong workforce but noted that the unavailability of facilities could impede their aspirations. For example, Ben said, respectively:

> I aspire to produce independent thinkers, self-sufficient entrepreneurs and lifelong learner. However, our college is not providing an enabling environment like classrooms. The promised skills programs and full-time employment of educators is also threatened by lack of own school/college buildings. I think that all unused school buildings should be handed over to the DHE. (Ben)

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that DHET officials' consultation and communication with CLC managers and lecturers during the initial planning and implementation stages of the change process involved a monologue that did not encourage input from those at ground level. Hence, most CLC managers and lecturers were unacquainted, confused and anxious about the change they were subjected to. Even though minutes of later meetings (2018 to 2020) of the DHET portfolio committee indicate that the DHET officials, college councils, CET college management and student representative councils (SRC) engaged with their constituencies and different stakeholders, the prominent role-players should have participated in the initial discussions, during the planning and implementation stages of the foreseen change. While the government was developing policies that would enable adult education sector to reduce inequality and eliminate poverty on CLC managers, lecturers and most importantly, students, the very same CLC managers and lecturers felt alienated because they did not know what is happening in offices (Lian, Ngok, Wong, Tsang and Li 2022). Govender (2022) advises that people must be involved in policy developments so that they can enable policy developers to draw policies that are relevant and practicable.

In terms of the pace at which the restructuring process occurred, the study I undertook indicates that the pace at which the establishment of CET colleges' management teams took place, i.e., of appointing principals and deputy principals, gave hope to CLC managers and lecturers that their long-suffering experience of unsatisfactory conditions of employment might be nearing the end. However, the required qualifications and curriculum for CLC managers and lecturers to qualify as CET college lecturers was not yet formulated when the process of change commenced. As a result, many lecturers with ABET diploma qualifications continued to redirect or improve their qualifications and then migrated to mainstream schools.

By the time I concluded this research, no evidence of the eminent introduction of second and third categories of CET college qualifications and programmes could be found. Furthermore, CLCs which were still using DBE's schools as venues of operations could not extend their time of operation. Hence, the necessary changes in terms of many important aspects that could enhance the attainment of the NDP by 2030 seem to be very slow.

With regard to resource availability and provision, the planning of any change project should include thorough budgeting (Maravilla and Grayman 2020), however no evidence could be found that the DHET had estimated the money that would be needed for recurriculating CET college qualifications, the training of CET college lecturing staff, the provision of suitable venues for operations, or allowance for staff appointments (from head office to a CLC level). It seems as if the only budget that was planned for was for head office officials and CET

colleges' management teams. Even though a trial and error approach implies that not everything will necessarily be readily available when a project starts (Sosna, Trevinyo-Rodríguez, and Velamuri 2010), planning implies budgeting for all potential activities (Atakan, Cocco, Orlecka-Sikora, Pijnenburg, Michalek, Ronnevik, ... Drury (2022), which was seemingly not done as part of the change process.

Finally, when considering the importance of collaboration with stakeholders, the South African Department of Basic Education's involvement in the transition process primarily involved the supply of information about PALCs' staff structures, some of which was insufficient. The DHET also signed memoranda of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Basic Education that would permit the newly established CLCs to continue using public schools as venues for operation and for the Department of Basic Education to be able to administer ABET level 4 examinations. As a result, some CLCs ended up utilising unused public schools for full-time contact sessions, which demonstrated a positive contribution by the local government towards the livelihood of CLCs. The involvement of other sister departments and the private sector is however not evident.

Conclusion

It can reasonably be said that everybody is yearning for an adult education system that contributes towards elimination of poverty and reduction of inequality. Therefore, the delay or supposed reluctance of realising the ideal CET sector cannot be attributed to resistance, but to inaccurate implementation of resistance to change theory, that is, a change process that does not take on board the requirement to involve stakeholders. For the envisaged CET colleges to be realised in South Africa, equal involvement of the various stakeholders in the planning and execution of the restructuring project was required yet has not been sufficiently executed. Project leaders are therefore urged to continue with participatory and conversational consultation on a broader level, involving e.g., as governmental departments, private businesses, and labour formations. While not everything can be done at once, an incentive to sustain formerly qualified ABET educators is encouraged for a smooth transition and as more affordable option than retraining or upgrading staff members' qualifications. Finally, cooperation between CET colleges, SETAs and the industry may positively affect the attainment of the NDP through e.g., short-term courses that can render CET college students with employment opportunities, while the various components of the envisaged fully fledged CET colleges may be generated.

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