



Organisational Challenges for School Development and Improvement: The Obstructing Role of Sub-Groups and an Overly Positive School Culture

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The purpose of this study has been to identify and analyse obstacles embedded in the school organisation that impede organisational development and improvement. The general findings show that the school structure comprised sub-groups and had characteristics of a diversified organisation. This led to dysfunctional discussions that challenged school development and improvement. Second, the findings revealed that the nature of the school culture may challenge school development processes. Positive features of the school culture, such as engagement, good relationships and high self-esteem might deter the effectiveness of the schools, e.g. the schools' ability to prioritise and improve the pupils' academic achievements.

Keywords: school development, management, school improvement, organisation, challenges, sub-groups, school culture, learning

Introduction

There is an explicit expectation that schools should continuously improve the functionality of their internal structures and dynamics. Hence, a considerable amount of international research focuses on school development with a view to identifying obstacles and suggesting improvements (Dolph, 2017; Donaldson & Weiner, 2017; Feldhoff et al., 2016; Tuytens & Devos, 2017). However, school improvement is actually a complex research area comprising multiple processes and factors that might impede the prospects of developing a satisfactory educational learning environment for all involved actors. For example, school dynamics might be affected by the existence of multiple types of pressure promoting different interests that affect the outcomes, including the tensions between problem orientation and learning orientation, leadership and development issues, individualism and collectivism, and unprofessionalism and professionalism (Liljenberg,

2015). Other obstacles relating to school development and improvement might be embedded in school structures. Research suggests that schools do not seem to realise the potential that already exists within them with respect to resources and various types of data that can be used to achieve informed decision-making. It appears that energy and efforts are frequently used to develop the school from an accountability perspective, while there is a lack of knowledge and skills relating to how to use data to improve instruction and set learning targets (Schildkamp et al., 2017). For example, Murray (2014) concludes that the existing resources and pupil achievement data should be user-friendly to allow educators to make use of this information in their daily work. However, to promote this type of school advancement, Murray (2014) also suggests that all school representatives should be educated in how to utilise the existing data and other available information.

In the process of developing and improving school, as well as any other organisation, it is also useful to consider where the locus of causality for desired change is situated. It is fair to say that initiatives to develop and improve schools often originate with the education authority in the municipal administration. Some empirical findings suggest that school development might fail if it is not embedded in the school organisation. For example, Pollock and Winton (2012) found conflicting demands between the local school focus and the district and regional focus when it came to priorities and development. Similarly, Adolfsson and Alvunger (2017) found that great resource investment on the part of the central authorities in the school organisation did not necessarily lead to changes in teaching practice. All this suggests that top-down initiatives are not likely to succeed if the main obstacles that impede the school organisation are not identified.

Dalin and Kitson (2004) describe that the school organisation consists of five main dimensions: surroundings, relations, values, structures and strategies. The dimension 'surroundings' includes the local community and the society at large, consisting of both people and organisations that might help schools to do their work. Examples of topics that schools must take a position on regarding their surroundings are transparency, openness and the way of creating a constructive relationship to the surroundings. The dimension 'relations' refers to human relations in the informal school organisation, e.g. individual and group norms, power, influence and interactions contributing to the school climate and the quality of human relations (Dalin & Kitson, 2004). Such norms govern people's perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviour and are context-dependent, fluid and capture the group in the context of other groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). 'Values' is a term referring to the basic values in the school ideologies, ceremonies and symbols, including both formally expressed objectives and informal values

(Dalin & Kitson, 2004). Values contribute to the organisational culture as a 'pattern of development reflected in a society's system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day to day ritual' (Morgan, 1998, p. 112). 'Structure' refers to questions of who is making decisions and what they make decisions about (Dalin & Kitson, 2004). The final dimension that describes the school as an organisation is 'strategies,' which refers to the question of how the school is run, e.g. mechanisms and methods for developing schools, solving problems and making decisions (Dalin & Kitson, 2004). It is important to note that these five dimensions are overlapping and mutually interdependent, implying that school organisations can only be understood by analysing all the processes that comprise all the above-mentioned dimensions.

Using the above-mentioned dimensions as our point of departure, the purpose of the present research was to analyse obstacles embedded in the school organisation that represent an impediment to organisational development and improvement. In the following we use qualitative data from four schools in the Norwegian education system. Each school was approached and analysed as a case study where potential aspects of school organisations were examined. The data from all four schools were initially analysed and subsequently compared. The analysis across five dimensions of school organisation revealed the presence of two prominent processes that represent a typical challenge for school development: sub-cultures in the organisation and challenges with the school culture.

Methodological Approach

The basic methodological approach in the present research project was a case study where each institution represented one case (Yin, 2009). The data material was collected by two researchers who were assigned two institutions each. Two of the institutions were primary schools and the other two were lower secondary schools, all located in the same relatively large Norwegian city. The schools were purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) and selected from a large quantitative study where the aim was to map the general school learning environment. The schools were selected according to the principle of maximum variation, representing both the upper and lower results from this study.

While collecting data we adopted several techniques within the realm of qualitative methodology: individual interviews with four participant groups (head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers and parents), observation of the classroom climate in four school subjects (mathematics, native language, foreign language and physical education), observations of children and adults and their interaction during the breaks, spontaneous situational conversations with various actors and our impression of the institutions

as a whole. Triangulation of the sources provided us with better insight into the inner workings of each school organisation. In the present study we report findings based solely on the data collected from the individual interviews with the head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers and parents. However, it is important to note that our general understanding of the school organisation in the selected schools is most likely influenced by these additional means of collecting data. For example, our approach included situational conversations that spontaneously emerged during our visits. These conversations were approached in an informal manner and were not planned, but of course had the purpose of the study in mind. The researchers' behaviour during these informal observations (e.g. during breaks in the staff room or random conversations in the hallway) was more active in nature as opposed to mere observation. Nevertheless, in all these settings we were aware of our outsider perspective and we actively attempted to preserve this role (Patton, 2002).

To obtain variation in the present data and gain better insight into the school organisation from different perspectives, we conducted interviews with four participant groups in each of the four schools: the head teacher, the deputy head teacher, two teachers and two parents; a total of 24 interviews. The informants were purposefully sampled where the institutions were asked to choose information-rich informants (i.e. informants who presumably have an opinion about the school and credible grounds for that specific view, see Patton, 2002). The informants represented both genders and varied in age.

The data collection was based on a pre-developed interview guide. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions covering a wide range of topics about the school, such as experience of the school leaders, how the teachers related to the pupils, the nature of relationships in the school, the nature of cooperation, identification of challenging processes, how the pupils thrived at school and so on. Both researchers conducted interviews and worked closely to coordinate and adjust the content of the interview guide during the data collection. The interview guide was naturally somewhat different from one informant group to the next.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Both researchers analysed the data-material, focusing on the two institutions where they conducted the interviews. We used NVivo 10 to conduct an in-depth study of these texts. The first step in the analysis was to read thoroughly through the interview transcriptions. During this step the authors summarised the findings at each institution into the categories 'what functions well' and 'what is challenging.' In the present article we report findings from the latter category. The analytical approach resembled an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By continuously asking the basic question 'What challenges

does the school have?’ several codes emerged during the subsequent review of the material. The researchers then agreed on the most prominent codes. Considering that many codes revolved around the same process, we started to cluster them into more overarching categories in accordance with Miles & Huberman’s (1994) descriptions. During this additional analysis it became apparent that two distinct themes emerged and dominated the collected data material: challenges with sub-groups in the organisation and challenges with the school culture. The last step in the analysis was to return to the data material and point out relevant findings within each of these topics. Below, these findings are both summarised and presented as extracted quotations.

Findings and Discussion

Challenges with Sub-Groups

The first category that emerged from the data analysis representing an obstacle to school organisation and its development was related to the existence of sub-groups in the teacher faculty. Two distinct types of sub-groups were identified. First, people tend to form groups according to rather informal criteria, meaning here such categorisations as age, gender and professional/dispositional characteristics of the teachers in the schools. In School 1, when the head teacher was asked to describe the relations between teachers and the teacher faculty in general, the grouping and the criteria for the description of variations between teachers are described in this manner:

We have some older teachers and some [...] younger teachers. And we have teachers who are quite decisive, and some teachers who are more like [...] easy-going, who take things as [...] open [...] and come up with new proposals and ideas. Some teachers are [...] not directly old-fashioned, but they have their own ways when it comes to teaching, while some others are more active in terms of differentiating the instruction for each pupil [...] In addition, some teachers are like ‘I need a little help’ when it comes to teaching and differentiated instruction. It’s my responsibility, as a head teacher, to help all teachers in the school. [...] I think that this is quite normal for a school.

In the extract above, it is clear that the head teacher is describing a diverse faculty. It is interesting that the head teacher simultaneously conveys two somewhat opposing views: (1) acknowledging that this diversity might create tensions, and (2) perceiving tensions as ‘normal.’ The head teacher’s descriptions of the sub-groups in the school are strikingly echoed and reaffirmed by his deputy head teacher:

It's not easy to talk about teachers (in our school) as a unified group, considering that they are very different [...] Not all of them are pre-occupied with the rules [...] I don't have problems with any teacher in the school but there is a difference in enthusiasm amongst them [...] it's rather common I suppose in schools. But there are some who are more passionate about matters than others [...] while others merely want to do their own thing in their own way without contributing when it's necessary. But this is to be expected, people are in different phases in their lives.

In their interviews, both the head teacher and the deputy head teacher describe an organisation consisting of informal groups with older and younger teachers, strict and lenient teachers, traditional and modern teachers, passive and ambitious teachers, dependent and independent teachers, rule-oriented and relationship-oriented teachers, and community-oriented and self-oriented teachers. The head teacher in School 1 explains that there might be tensions between these groups and that is why they put teams together meticulously. The head teacher describes the difference in the 'pupil perspective' as being the biggest challenge for the teacher faculty. This is then confirmed by what the deputy head teacher says: the informal groups represent a challenge and there are teachers who do not want to work together due to differences in the 'pupil perspective.' According to these informants, this difference is seen in a group of teachers who believe that rules govern pupils' activities and a group of teachers who believe that the way they interact with the pupils matters. Thus, it seems as if the groups are only loosely coupled together and that the difference in the way they perceive the pupils might be a symptom of a diversified organisation where the existence of informal groups is dominant. It is unclear, however, when it comes to the degree to which the tensions between these informal groupings impede school development and improvement and create potential obstacles to innovation. On the one hand, the divisions in a faculty into informal groups is unavoidable, not necessarily negative and accepted as 'normal,' as suggested by the school leaders in the interviews. However, it is also clear that the existence of latent diversification in the organisation might be costly and has the potential to discourage innovation (Mintzberg, 1989). In a school, the way pupils are perceived is a key feature of its culture. Differences in how pupils are perceived might create tensions in several settings and confirm the differences between the informal groups. Bear in mind that standardisation of norms might be a coordinating mechanism that contributes to everyone functioning according to the same set of beliefs and helps to hold an organisation together (Mintzberg, 1989).

Second, in addition to these informal divisions of their organisations,

the schools were also characterised by divisions based on predefined structures. These formal groups, formed by the school leaders, were embedded in structural groupings according to the different study groups in the given schools. One of the teachers in School 4 describes the institution as follows:

Like many other schools, our school is almost three schools in one. You have year eight, year nine and year 10. There are big differences between these three-year levels. And this is not visible when you examine one particular school. You need to see the school as a whole, then separate the year levels, and only then will you begin to see it.

This informant feels that there are virtually three schools under the same roof. These separations are based on the structures embedded in each year level and corresponding teaching teams. During our visits it was also relatively visible that the physical surroundings were arranged according to the year groups. The head teacher explained that when the school was renovated their plan was to facilitate for cooperation between the teachers, between teachers and pupils, and between pupils in the same year. According to the headmaster, they prioritise continuity in these teams and only replace a teacher for special reasons. She points out that a new teacher in the team may be positive, but that 'one must not change so much that it destroys the good relations and routines we have.' Thus, the school administration, the physical surroundings and the organisational structure are pulling in the same direction because the school has been organised to facilitate for these functional teams. One teacher describes how this structure impacts everyday life:

I have my shifts there. I have my lessons there. I have subjects there. I know their names. We have common rules that we have agreed upon. We have offices there. So, we're all teachers together at this year level. And I have more influence here. So, I know less what is going on in the school, I must admit.

The teacher explains that membership in the team impacts what she feels responsible for, her daily routines and who she is acquainted with, both when it comes to the pupils and teachers in the school. We are certainly not sceptical about this way of doing things. It is logical to prefer to establish a team of teachers to promote the school's tasks in general and to relate to and educate the pupils. However, the findings in this study reveal that such teams also might represent challenges for school development and improvement. For example, several informants in School 4 explain that the pedagogical beliefs are different within the teams, with different pedagogical ideas about how one sees the pupils and enforcement of the rules

(e.g. using written reprimands). This is the reason why the head teacher plans to develop a common educational platform for the whole school. She explains that she wants the team working with relationship-oriented classroom management to function as a driving force when she initiates a process where the entire faculty is to develop a common ideological approach with the same set of beliefs. However, the diversification of an organisation might be costly and discourage innovation (Mintzberg, 1989). This is demonstrated in the findings in this study when Teacher 2 describes how the sub-groups in the school organisation impact discussions within the faculty in a negative manner and complicate the process the organisation is trying to agree on to establish a common educational platform:

[S]o, they feel that their efforts are not appreciated and that the school leaders and others do not perceive them as competent. What you get is the group of teachers in your section who are very demotivated, even frustrated [...]. Dealing with new ideas is not a problem, but we're forced to put aside everything we're working on just to start doing something new. It's not surprising that people are feeling underappreciated, if you have done something over many years and had the impression that you have been doing a pretty good job. Then someone comes along and informs you that what you're doing doesn't work, research shows that you're doing it all wrong. Now you're going to do it [...] like this. It's quite offensive for someone who has given so much of him- or herself to the job.

The teacher explains that dealing with new ideas is not a problem *per se*. Nevertheless, she also points to the differences between the teams as challenging, even employing a war metaphor when talking about future educational discussions, calling them 'minefields.' Correspondingly, when faculty groups holding opposing attitudes about their work are placed in a relation of dependence, the organisations may have trouble dealing with a type of subcultural warfare; different norms and attitudes may create hard to handle dysfunctional situations (Morgan, 1998). As this informant says, the presence of opposing educational views that are developed in 'isolation' might result in frustrated co-workers and colleagues who do not feel appreciated, both within and between the teams.

These challenges might be especially accentuated if the head teacher chooses to use the group with relationship-oriented educational ideology as a driving force to develop a common ideology. Group norms are best captured in relation to other groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006) and using one of these teams as a driving force might increase the risk of 'warfare' in faculty discussions. When asked directly about what is problematic with these discussions, Teacher 2 answers that some teachers might feel that

what is being communicated is that ‘either you’re a good teacher who does this [i.e. acting on relationship-oriented classroom management] or you’re a bad teacher who doesn’t.’ This informant seems to suggest that when the school leaders initiate discussions to develop a common ideology in the school, some of the teachers feel that the underlying message is that what you have been doing has not been good enough. As noted in conversation analysis, one should not only analyse the content of the participants’ utterances, but also what the participants are implicitly saying (Schegloff, 2007).

In this school the presence of different ideologies between the sub-groups seems to leave some teachers feeling degraded when the faculty is discussing the possibilities of developing a common ideology. The findings point out that school development is sensitive to the value-loaded positions in any given sub-group in the organisation. The identification and analysis of the communicative dynamic in these latent divisions seem to be highly important for any organisation aiming to develop a common educational platform. Developing a common ideology in the school might enhance the sense of uniform belonging in the organisation. As noted by Mintzberg (1989), the standardisation of norms may infuse the work so that the organisation functions according to the same set of beliefs, acting as the glue that holds the organisation together.

All in all, ‘challenges with sub-groups’ relates to both the informal and formal divisions in an organisation. Our data indicate that in spite of some advantages, these groupings might lead to tensions when it comes to organisational development.

Challenges with the School Culture

The second category that appeared in the data material relating to school organisation is focused on the nature of the dominant school culture in the selected schools.

In School 2 the informants described the effect of the school culture as: ‘it’s like coming into a warm place’ and that ‘it’s nice to come to school where you’re noticed.’ This was also reflected in the personal commitment of the faculty, where engagement was identified as a vital feature in the school culture. The head teacher stated: ‘engagement was the first thing I noticed when I started to work here’ and she continues:

[A]ll this can be seen in the work effort, the willingness to initiate efforts, handling situations and the way of addressing the pupils. Passionate engagement for our kids is what characterises daily life in the school.

The teachers’ engagement is also noticed by the parents: ‘it’s communi-

cated very clearly, they're (teachers) concerned about the pupils, [...] perhaps more than is expected.' But note that while the head teacher describes engagement as unilaterally positive, this parent remarks that the teachers are perhaps committed to their work beyond what should be expected. This is elaborated on in the following extract:

[A]nd some are so enthusiastic that it becomes too much concern about particular pupils, seems almost like they have difficulties letting it go because they are so concerned that pupils should not fail. It seems like some teachers are exhausted in getting some pupils to progress through school levels. They get so personally involved. But when all is said and done, it's just a job.

Thus, 'the extra engagement' mentioned as unilaterally positive by the headmaster is questioned by parents who have an outside perspective. Systems have their own agenda, often with unspoken implicit goals (Senge, 2006) and values in the school organisation are not always clear and explicit. The difference in the descriptions of the teachers' engagement, between an outside and inside perspective gives reason to speculate whether there is an unspoken norm in the school culture that personal commitment beyond what is expected from a teacher is highly appreciated in this school. The parents who see the school organisation from the outside suspect that this personal commitment and engagement might cause some teachers to be exhausted. This points out how important Morgan's (1998, p. 90) statement is about evolution in an organisation needing to be guided 'as much by the avoidance of noxiants as the pursuit of desired ends.' Thus, development of the ideology in School 2 must be guided by the goal to maintain engagement as a dominant norm in this organisation, but also by the goal to develop attitudes and introduce measures that prevent a potentially negative aspect of engagement, namely teacher burnout. However, if norms are implicit and not identified, this may impede the advancement of such goals.

In School 3 the school culture is also positively described, both by the parents and the school representatives. The school leaders describe the relationship between the teachers and between teachers and pupils as good and close. The head teacher uses the hyperbole 'insanely good' and Parent 1 says 'I think this is the best junior high school my children could attend.' However, the school leaders explain that the schools' academic achievements are not good enough compared to other schools in the community and that in the time ahead they want to prioritise the development of the pupils' academic achievements. Of course, there can be any number of reasons why the school does not score high on the academic achievement scale compared to other schools, but rather unexpectedly the data material suggests that some of the explanation might be found in the school cul-

ture. The findings reveal that when the head teacher talks about the need to develop the pupils' academic achievement, he routinely seems to add a 'but':

[S]o that we'll remember to focus on reading or arithmetic while we're working with the other material and relations. Because we have to bring all the things we are good at with us further. [...] but we have to work with 'how much can we expect, how much can we demand so we get a better outcome?' But then we have to be smarter when it comes to relations [...].

Thus, his choice of words seems to suggest that academic performance has second priority:

[W]e're not managing to transform ourselves, as much as we wanted, the emotional support for the instrumental aspect, by that I mean formal competencies [...] And I think the reason is that we put too much emphasis on the relational and emotional aspect at the expense of the instrumental aspect.

This extract shows that the informant perceives academic achievement as 'instrumental,' describing academic achievement with a slightly negative connotation. A concept has political capacities and 'is not simply indicative of the relations which it covers; it is also a factor within them' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 86). Accordingly, the choice of words in itself might imply that the teachers at this school prioritise good relationships at the expense of academic performance, consequently impeding the school from prioritising academic development. Thus, the utterances in the data material give reason to question whether the head teacher is giving ambiguous and possibly conflicting signals about the school culture and that because of this academic development has second priority. This is a mechanism that has been described by Mintzberg (1991): when an organisation has to make a fundamental change, an ideology that has been necessary for the effectiveness of the organisation might become a problem and be a force for maintaining the status quo. Similarly, when the school leaders want to prioritise the improvement of the pupils' academic performance in this school, positive features of the school culture appear to rather contribute to maintaining the current situation.

Additionally, another feature of the school culture seems to contribute to maintaining the status quo and obstructing the possibilities of developing and improving the pupils' academic performance in this school. The head teacher describes the school's position in the municipality in the following way:

I think about [the school name] like a school that follows the dictates of the local education authority, but at the same time we follow our own path, a bit ahead of other schools, by emphasising relations, it's well known that we're good at that.

As we can see, the head teacher explains that the way they work with relations in the school is ahead of other schools. Similarly, the deputy head teacher refers to results in a national survey where the school scores better than other lower secondary schools within the municipality on pupil satisfaction. He continues to explain that they have 'worked at and worked at' building the school's learning environments and have become very good at this. He claims 'we don't have one single pupil who it is not included in school' and that they have less conflicts between the pupils than other schools, even though they have a high rate of parents with low socio-economic status in the school's catchment area. Likewise, in the following extract he gives an example of how well they work at this school:

About the parent meeting that we had. It was new for me to do that. They put a team together and worked with the issue. It was fantastic.

As we can see, from the head teacher's point of view, the planning and implementation of a parent-teacher meeting deserves top marks. Thus, he describes the school in a very positive manner by explaining that the school works hard on issues. This might be the case and the background for the high self-esteem that characterises the school culture.

The point here is not to dispute that School 3 is a good and well-functioning school. The findings indicate, however, that the high self-esteem that characterises the culture in this school might contribute to 'the school' not being aware of the need to improve. The following extract from the interview with the deputy head teacher reveals that one consequence of the school's high self-esteem may be the inability to act on feedback from external sources:

[W]hen we say that we're not satisfied with the pupils' performances and knowledge, in any way that these competencies that are assessed by PISA and other national tests, we feel that we have a potential for improvement. We can actually get better on everything. It's that simple. But if you ask if we're very good at everything [...] or at least in many things, the answer is 'yes.' Guaranteed very good and very loyal to each other.

The deputy head teacher thus reflects over the school's PISA results. He acknowledges the school's need to improve the academic performance, but it must also be noted that he states 'we're very good at everything [...]

or [...] many things' and concludes with the assurance that the school is 'guaranteed very good.' This train of thought might indicate a belief that the school organisation does not need to develop and change, as also noted by Parent 2:

The school is very good [...] at boasting that everything is going well. It's a good thing, but can be sometimes [...] I'm afraid that sometimes we're not able to see things that don't work well [...] think it's a bit scary if we proclaim: 'here all pupils are enjoying themselves' and 'here there is no bullying,' and so on.

Thus, the school's high self-esteem is noticed by the surroundings and is not seen as unilaterally positive. Parent 2 also says 'I would like to hear a bit more humility occasionally. Acknowledgment that things occasionally are not so easy.' Similarly, Parent 1 characterises the school as self-righteous and somewhat arrogant, and when asked about the parents' possibilities to have influence he answers:

I don't think so, in fact. Because, I have a feeling that they are so satisfied with themselves that they don't want to change anything.

Thus, Parent 1 has noticed that the school is pleased with itself and argues that this may mean that it has no desire to change. The findings reveal that School 3 seems to have characteristics of what Mintzberg (1991) calls a missionary organisation where the ideology plays a key part. The ideology reflects the school culture, and in this school, it seems to override the need to prioritise other significant tasks in the school. The ideology implies that the school leaders send ambiguous messages about the need for the school to improve the pupils' academic achievement by emphasising the importance of good relationships. Moreover, high self-esteem is a prominent feature of the school culture that seems to prevent the school from developing new organisational goals. The ideology is unique for each organisation and binds the members to it (Mintzberg, 1989, 1991) and it might be challenging for members of an organisation to discover that positive features of their prevalent ideology might undermine the possibilities to develop and improve.

All in all, this section demonstrates that the school cultures in both School 2 and School 4 are characterised by positive features, such as engagement, good relations and high self-esteem. The findings reveal, however, that these positive features of the school culture might also detrimentally impact developmental processes in the school organisation. By allowing these features to dominate, the school leaders might overlook the need to introduce measures that could block a potentially negative aspect of engagement that sends conflicting messages about the need for the

school to improve the pupils' academic achievement and could lead to a state of inertia, i.e. they are less inclined to change and develop. Development in educational institutions depends on several underlying processes that support schools in motion (Kovač et al., 2018)). The findings in this study reveal that school development also depends on having insight into such underlying organisational processes.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present research has been to identify and analyse obstacles embedded in school organisations that are potential impediments to organisational development and improvement. The findings demonstrate that especially at two of the schools the faculty was split into sub-groups, thus having characteristics of a diversified organisation. The identified problem for the school organisation was that these groups, predominantly informal in one school and predominantly formal in the other, contributed to dysfunctional discussions that clearly challenged innovative processes and development.

Thus, the findings from this study support the notion suggesting that levels of fragmentation or integration have a decisive influence on the organisation's ability to deal with challenges (Morgan, 1998) and might in turn discourage innovation (Mintzberg, 1989). In addition, and rather unexpectedly, the findings also reveal that some positive features of the school culture, such as engagement, good faculty relations and high institutional self-esteem might in fact impede school development and improvement. It is clear that while the ideological school culture can get in the way of organisational change, it also represents a driving force behind organisational effectiveness (Mintzberg, 1991). This idea of the 'double-edged sword' is supported in our data where we find that a school culture imbued with a positive and strong ideology might in fact prevent school organisations from developing and improving. This agrees with what Mintzberg (1989, p. 229) has presciently noted: 'The missionary organization is more inclined to change the world than to change itself.'

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