Building a foundation for implementing a professionalisation framework in Human Resources

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Keywords

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Abstract

The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) has created a framework for professionalising human resources. This framework needs to now be implemented. This article has the question of how to build a foundation for successfully implementing this professionalisation framework on human resources as its research objective. To explore recommendations on building a solid basis for implementation, the literature has been scrutinised for pillars that will assist in building a foundation for the successful implementation of this framework. The findings confirmed that conscious leadership and a healthy organisational culture are the pillars needed to build a foundation for successfully implementing a framework or strategy. It is thus recommended that the DPSA ensures that these pillars are strong and in place before it embarks on the process of implementing the professionalisation framework for human resources.

Introduction and Background

We live in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. The new world of work, constant change, digitisation, and the skill set required for the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) are realities organisations currently face. Because everything is constantly changing, organisations are formulating new strategies and frameworks to address emerging disruptors, but these can be challenging to implement. When organisations fail to adapt, it may signal their demise (Voss, 2017). Implementation of any organisational changes are complex processes that require careful planning and execution to achieve successful outcomes.

The Government Gazette of 24 December 2020 published the "National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service". The framework draws an essential distinction between being professional – which refers to practices, conduct and values that one needs to be professional – and professionalisation, which is about changing individual attitudes, behaviour and performance towards serving the public with empathy in accordance with the Constitution, Batho Pele and the Public Service Charter. Professionalisation, according to the framework, also means having qualified people who know what they are doing and are fully equipped to perform their jobs with diligence. This entails continuous development, which makes public servants more competitive by sharpening their "know-how" (National School of Government, 2020). The framework also requires the professionalisation of certain categories of occupations in the public service, of which human resources is one. Human resources has come a long way since 1994, when it was still called personnel administration.

The professionalisation of human resources now needs to be implemented by using the designed framework. Implementation always has its challenges. This article aims to recommend a foundation on which the performance of the professionalisation framework for human resources can be built. To be able to do this, it is essential to look at barriers experienced and recommendations made by other organisations that have implemented new frameworks.

Researchers and health specialists from the University of Otago and health specialists investigated the implementation of a framework for system-level measures (Doolan-Noble et al., 2016). According to their study, leadership on all the different levels, as well as organisational culture aspects such as communication, stakeholder engagement and the involvement of the strategy team, played a crucial role in the successful implementation

process. Qin (2020), who created a framework for implementing a biological diversity treatise, investigated the "willingness + ability" framework and found that implementation happens more easily when stakeholders believe the new framework is in their interest and meets their expectations. It also has to link in a sense to their personal purpose, and purpose is driven by conscious leadership (Campbell, 2022). From these two studies it is clear that the presence of leadership and a supportive organisational culture are thus critical in the implementation process. This is supported by Ehlers and Lazenby (2020), who state that leadership and organisational culture are crucial factors when implementing new frameworks and strategies.

Conscious leadership involves a heightened level of self-awareness, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to the development of others (Dinh et al., 2014). It is increasingly recognised as an essential trait for leaders who want to build sustainable, socially responsible, and adaptable organisations. Conscious leadership is also explained as leaders who possess emotional (EQ), spiritual (SQ), physical (PQ) and adaptability (AQ) intelligence (Dethmer et al., 2015); their people, communication, and self-control skills are thus on a very high level.

Organisational culture, as the second pillar for framework and strategy implementation, refers to the values, beliefs, and norms that shape how work is done within an organisation (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). A positive and supportive culture is thus essential for the successful implementation of a new framework, as it can foster a sense of shared purpose, improve collaboration, and help to overcome resistance to change. Research has shown that the combination of conscious leadership and a positive organisational culture can significantly impact the success of organisational change initiatives and the implementation of new strategies or frameworks (Schein, 2016. Leaders also need a simple yet convincing model of change they can utilise for a quick and effective outcome. They need to feel that they can affect the changes being implemented and, therefore, have control over the change process (Potter & Starke, 2022, p.160).

To answer the research question of how to build a foundation for the successful implementation of a professionalisation framework on human resources, the concepts of conscious leadership, organisational culture and strategy implementation will be investigated in the literature review in order to make recommendations for assisting with framework implementation.

Literature review

Effective leadership, a strong organisational culture, and successful strategy and framework implementation are essential components for the long-term success of any organisation. However, achieving these goals can be challenging in today's fast-paced and ever-changing world. Implementation gained traction in recent years is conscious leadership, which emphasises self-awareness, empathy, and authenticity. Conscious leaders are not only focused on driving financial results, but also on creating a positive impact on society, the people in the organisation, and the environment. In this section, the researchers will explore the interplay between conscious leadership, organisational culture, and strategy implementation, and how they can work together to help an organisation achieve its goal, namely, to implement a new framework.

Conscious Leadership

A conscious leader is defined as a transformational leader who inspires, fosters, and brings out the best in the people around them. Their role is to serve the organisation's higher purpose, while supporting those within the organisation, with the goal of creating value for all stakeholders. Conscious leaders recognise the importance of culture, and they purposefully cultivate a conscious culture of trust and care (Mackey & Sisodia, 2014).

Conscious leadership refers to guiding others with full awareness of the self and cultivating growth in organisations by supporting the people in the organisation not only to focus on surface-level issues, but also to focus deeper and develop character (Voss, 2017). Achieving peak performance within an organisation requires leaders to shift mindsets, address limiting beliefs, and learn to manage the egos through higher levels of consciousness. Instead of an ego-centric 'me' attitude, a conscious leader embodies all aspects of an inclusive 'we' approach (Campbell, 2022). According to Arora et al. (2019) conscious leaders have a transformed relationship to power and a sacred sense of purpose; they are authentic, and have not only emotional (EQ) and spiritual (SQ) intelligence, but also physical (PQ) intelligence. Their sense of purpose is central to their leadership role because in the workplace, they can link personal purpose to organisational growth. By doing this, they bring greater energy, synergy and focus to their work. Leaders who thus articulate a sense of purpose are more successful and effective in garnering the support of others to achieve exceptional results (Craig, 2018; Nevada, 2018). For conscious leaders it is not about power, the ego, roles, wealth, and titles; it is their sense for purpose that cultivates greater buy-in and collaboration for the greater good of a project or

an organisation (Arora et al., 2019). Conscious leadership is thus a deliberate process whereby leaders take the elements of both long-term and short-term organisational goals into account in the execution of leadership (Van Niekerk et al, 2013), and link organisational goals with personal purpose.

Conscious leadership has more to do with how deeply a leader knows themself than with what they do. According to Voss (2017), leaders who promote a higher purpose in an organisation can drive individuals' deep desires to make life better for others and unify stakeholders toward one larger goal. It also drives accountability to reach purposeful objectives. When employees understand that there is an organisational objective that can make life better for all, they are likely to care less about their self-interest and work toward the higher purpose. The conscious leader has the internal capacity to manage change implementation and sustain what has changed. Even the best of strategies and frameworks will not yield the intended results if those leaders involved in the implementation process fail to successfully align their actions with the goals and vision of the organisation.

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture directly reflects the organisation's personality, which is influenced by top management (Voss, 2017). An organisation's culture can influence and drive the activities within the firm and its strategic direction. By fostering a conscious culture in an organisation, it can simultaneously facilitate growth in individuals as well as for the organisation.

Although much research has been done on the concept of organisational culture, Chatman and O'Reilly (2016, p.202) explain that "it is difficult to see with clarity what we understand about culture". The reason for the continuous studies conducted on this concept is because it is such an important aspect for organisations to consider when planning to stay in business. This is supported by Costanza et al. (2016), who state that organisational culture can be seen as an important resource for adapting to dynamic environments and surviving long-term.

A respected scholar in the field of organisational culture studies, Edgar Schein (2016) defines culture as the accumulated shared learning of a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs,

values, and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness (Schein, 2016, p.21). Schein adds that the concept of culture implies structural stability, depth, breadth, and patterning or integration that results from the fact that culture is, for the group, a learned phenomenon, just as personality and character are learned phenomena for individuals (Schein, 2016, p.22).

According to El Emary et al. (2020, p.31), a broader interest in the field of organisational culture, especially among the researchers and specialists of organisational management, started in the 1980s. Since then, it has been linked to the fact that organisational culture is a keyway to improve an organisation's efficiency and identity while improving human relations and winning new markets, which can be called the key to success.

Widarko and Anwarodin (2022, p.125), define organisational culture as a shared value system in an organisation that becomes a reference for how employees carry out activities to achieve organisational goals or ideals. It is usually stated as the organisation's vision, mission, and goals. Organisational culture is developed from a collection of norms, values, beliefs, expectations, assumptions, and philosophies of the people in it. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is later seen clearly in the behaviour of individuals and groups. This understanding links to what El Emary et al. (2020, p.38) describe as the process of knowledge management that requires the realisation that every organisation is different and has different objectives and tasks. This, in turn, requires not only diagnosing the current state and defining the consequences of certain artefacts, attitudes, cultural behaviours, and beliefs, but also a skilful identification and application of instruments that shape a culture that is conducive to the process of individual and collective learning as well as sharing and using knowledge at work.

If an organisation has a strong culture, it generally internalises ideas associated with the founder (or the early leaders of the organisation). It articulates the organisation's vision, strategy, or philosophy (Asatiani et al., 2021). When a culture is strong within an organisation, it has tremendous consequences. For instance, it can enable the organisation to take swift and coordinated action to react to a competitor or to satisfy a customer (Gopalakrishnan & Zhang, 2017).

An organisational culture is said to be strong when most members of the organisation firmly hold it and when it is guided in every action (Abdelzaher et al., 2017). Employees' commitment

depends on several factors such as organisational capacity, the length of time the organisation has existed, turnover of executive members, and the origin of the culture. Organisational culture predicts the organisational climate. Organisational climate can be described as the way it feels to be a member of the firm (Khalili, 2016, p.2277). This refers to the norms, practices, and procedures that support and develop proactive members who will be risk-takers in novel initiatives (Sethibe & Steyn, 2016, p.172).

In an organisation with a strong culture, all the individuals throughout an organisation are seen as leaders. The organisation encourages an entrepreneurship spirit and mindset, empowering risk-taking and innovation. The culture supports individual growth, open communication, collaboration, and following personal goals and passions within projects (Hynes & Mickahail, 2019).

Organisational Change

Change in an organisation is a multifaceted phenomenon. It encompasses social, organisational, and technical issues. Traditionally, there are a few approaches to looking at change, namely: the result-oriented approach, which focuses on the effects of introducing changes; the process-oriented approach, which refers to the occurrence of changes over time; and the behavioural approach, which is concerned with changing employee attitudes and behaviours. Implementing change projects in an organisation requires combining all these approaches (El Emary et al., 2020, p.49).

The structuring of a change process should be governed by the expected outcomes of the change (including how an organisation operates) which can be achieved by changing employee behaviours and attitudes. The way in which changes are implemented can be a source of valuable experiences that enhance the competencies of employees and the organisation, but it can also a factor that blocks subsequent change processes. An organisation's capacity for change involves the effective management of both single-change projects, and changes implemented concurrently or sequentially. It applies to various types and forms of changes occurring in an organisation.

Organisation leaders are seeking new ways to create a more diverse team as well as organisational culture because organisations have to be more creative and innovative (Hynes & Mickahail, 2019, p.12). This is supported by Kontoghiorghes (2016) who states that a culture

can also grow strong when common values and behaviour patterns and practices are reinforced. Kinicki and Kreitner (2006) outline four functions that an organisation's culture fulfils. Firstly, it can provide members of an organisation with an identity. Secondly, it ensures and facilitates collective commitment within the organisation. Thirdly, it supports social system stability, and lastly, it shapes the behaviour of the members because it enables them to make sense of their current surroundings. Because of these four functions that build on each other, members of an organisation can work together towards a common goal, which will ensure organisational profit. However, it is required that many interactions on many levels within the organisation should take place, as it is a dynamic process.

Implementation

Implementation is the process of putting a strategic plan or new framework into action. It is an essential step that determines the success or failure of a strategic plan. There are several factors that affect strategy implementation, including the leadership, organisational culture, communication, resources, and alignment.

The process of strategy implementation lies heavily on the shoulders of managers, who need to ensure that they relay the strategy or framework and goals of the organisation to employees, and that they stick to the plan that has been outlined. Managers and management teams are tasked with introducing, monitoring, and evaluating models of service delivery, and reconstructing them if there are any elements of the model that might hinder the successful implementation of strategy (Atkinson, 2006; Gottschalk & Gudmundsen, 2009).

Several reasons have been identified as to why strategy and frameworks fail at the implementation stage. These include unclear strategic goals and objectives, conflicting priorities, a lack of buy-in from the team, a loss of momentum, the failure to account for business as usual, an unwillingness to iterate, a lack of alignment, and the failure to celebrate quick wins and success (Trompenaars, 1996). However, shortcomings from a managerial or leadership perspective seem to stand out as the main cause behind implementation failure, indicating either a failure in managerial style or in ways of communicating (Kalyal et al., 2020).

The various strategy drivers (leadership, organisational culture, reward systems, organisational structure, and resource allocation) are interrelated, and a change in any one of these has an impact on the others (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2020). If the organisational culture changes due to a

change in strategy, the leadership may also change. In the event of a change in culture and leadership, it may also be necessary to review the organisational structure. Organisational structure often serves as a framework for resource allocation, thus a change in structure necessitates a review of the resource allocation plan. Organisational structure also serves as a framework for setting short-term goals and functional tactics. Changing these two instruments for strategy implementation would then lead to a change in functional tactics.

Findings and Discussion

The initial question asked was how to build a foundation for successful implementation of a professionalisation framework on human resources. The literature indicates that leadership and culture are the most important pillars in the framework and strategy implementation stage. Most implementations fail due to a lack of management and leadership, as well as the cultural aspects of communication, taking ownership and action. The literature on leadership indicates that the most successful leadership style for framework and strategy implementation is conscious leadership (Campbell, 2022) – leaders with spiritual intelligence (SQ) who can link the purpose, objectives and aims of the organisation with the personal purpose of the employees, and who can drive accountability and the implementation of change for the benefit of all.

The investigation into organisational culture indicates that where there is a solid collective culture in an organisation, there can be tremendous consequences (Potter & Starke, 2022). A culture that embraces an entrepreneurial, innovative spirit; that is willing to take risks, but that also provides employees with a strong identity, stability, and commitment; and where employees can make sense of their current surroundings, is a culture where people work together for a common goal.

Apart from all the obvious theoretical and textbook advice (namely, to be clear on what is expected, to monitor and evaluate, and to meet implementation deadlines), the most important pillars for a strong foundation for the successful implementation of a professionalisation framework of human resources, are conscious leadership and a healthy organisational culture.
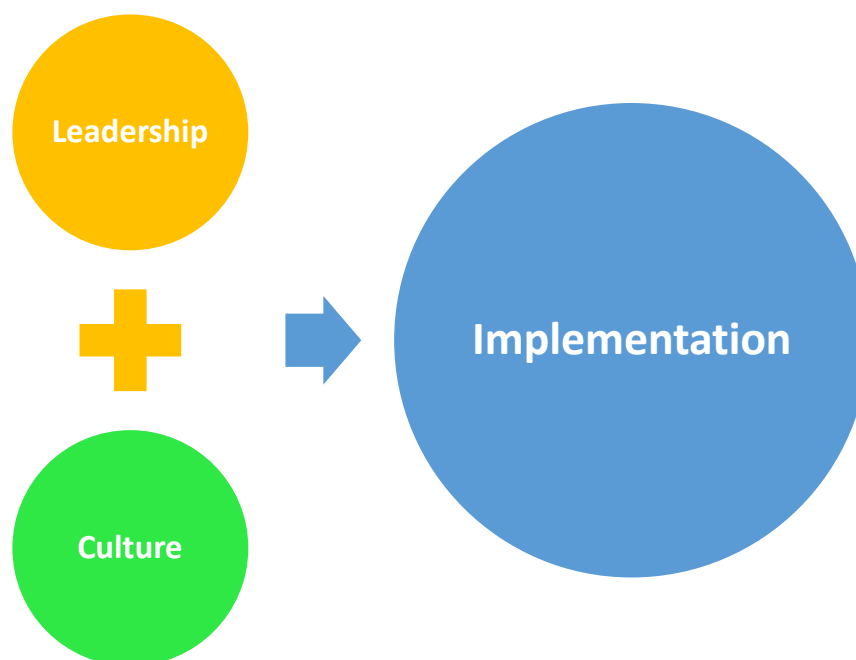
Figure 1: Implementation drivers

Conclusion

In conclusion, conscious leadership and a strong organisational culture play a critical role in the successful implementation of an organisation's strategies and frameworks. Self-aware, ethical, and empathetic leaders can create a positive work environment that inspires employees to collaborate, innovate, and work towards achieving the organisation's goals. In addition, a supportive culture that promotes open communication, inclusivity, and continuous learning can help establish a sense of purpose and belonging among employees, leading to higher engagement and productivity. When frameworks and strategy implementation is driven by conscious leadership and supported by a positive organisational culture, it is more likely to be successful in the long term, resulting in improved employee satisfaction and a more sustainable future for the organisation. Thus, the DPSA should ensure that these pillars are strong and in place before implementing the professionalisation framework for human resources.

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