

Successful principals: why some principals succeed and others struggle when faced with innovation and transformation

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I explore the role and skills a principal needs to succeed in a transforming South African township school environment. I looked in detail at four principals and schools exposed to innovation. Two were successful in transforming their schools and two were not. The successful principals were able to seize innovations and make them work for the school. They were selective in the innovative practices they accepted but, compared with principals of less successful schools who opposed many of the innovations, they were able to explain why they opposed the ones they rejected or modified. The successful principals were particularly effective at working with the surrounding community on its own terms and with the local education district office, and in making these interfaces productive, allowing the school to play a key role in improving the community and supporting changes in the district office.

Introduction

I present a micro study of four principals and how they reacted to a particular innovation, which says little more than how four men reacted to change in their schools. However, the intention is to trigger further ethnographic and case studies on the behaviour of school principals.

While a considerable amount has been written in western countries about the skills and habits of successful school principals (e.g. Blankstein, 2004; Bush, 1998; SREB, n.d.), much less has been written in the developing world about such principals. In this paper I focus on four successful and not so successful principals in a transforming school environment in a South African township. I explore the hypothesis that principals who reflect the changing management norms in South African political and business life — typified by the leadership styles advanced by Presidents Mandela and Mbeki, which are typified by inclusive, participatory and distributed, but strong, leadership approaches with a complementary focus on developing systems of accountability and responsibility — are more adept at managing change and leading high performing schools than the majority of principals in South Africa who exhibit what I typify as a 'Botha-esque' (after apartheid-era president PW Botha) management style, which is centralized, hierarchical, 'militaristic', authoritarian, rule-driven, and secretive.

The research was based on a case study of the education district and the service-provider managed 'Soshanguve School Development Project', which operated in all 96 schools in Soshanguve township between 1997 and 2001, before being absorbed into the normal operations of the district office.

I examine briefly the structure and delivery of the project, the research methods used, the nature of the problems in Soshanguve schools in the late

1990s, and the way in which successful managers in two profiled schools worked with the district office in partnership with a service provider to improve their schools and communities. I further explore the management of two other profiled schools, which were less successful in managing change and so failed to develop. I conclude with reflections on the management skills and behaviour in the four schools which led to successful engagement with, or avoidance of, change.

Research approach

The larger study (Prew, 2003) from which this paper is drawn used a case study approach, allowing use of a wide range of somewhat eclectic, but complementary research methods — both quantitative and qualitative — in a growing case study tradition (see Golby, 1994; Lewin in Vulliamy, Lewin & Stephens, 1990). However, the study also had an ethnographic component with a lengthy engagement with the change process allowing for a longitudinal aspect supported with participant reflections. Further, the study drew on the growing literature related to research undertaken by a participant observer (Davenport, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Stronach, 1986; Vulliamy *et al.*, 1990). Lastly, I drew heavily on official and unofficial documents and a systematic analysis of these documents and the school development plans.

The findings in this paper emanate from extensive interviews with the principals, school governing body members, staff, and pupils in the four archetypal schools in 1997 (as part of an extensive baseline survey) and again in 2001 (as part of the project evaluation) (LCD, 1997; Mnisi & Prew, 2001). The interviews were triangulated with analysis of their school development plans (SDPs) and their questionnaire responses; interviews with the district office staff; personal diary observations by myself and the evaluation team; the school profiles and reports written by school fundraising trainers; written documentation from the process; and a television programme about one of the schools.

The exemplars were selected through a purposive sampling process. They each represent a different archetype based on reaction to change. A nautical nomenclature was used with the successful schools being typified as 'steaming' (Schools A and B), 'setting sail' (School C) and 'becalmed/marooned' (School D). All the schools at the start of the project in 1997 had been highly dysfunctional including School A, a secondary school, which was a known as a centre for drugs and gangs. Situated on the edge of Soshanguve it served a very poor, constantly shifting and growing community of shanty dwellers. School B, a primary school, was described by a district manager as a 'basket case'. In both there was a lack of co-operation between staff and principal, with considerable tension, and the principals seemed to lack a vision for their school. The principals — both male — did not believe that their role included curriculum leadership (LCD, 1997).

The two less successful schools (School C is a secondary school and School D a primary school) had appeared relatively 'normal' during the base-

line survey in 1997. While both had some internal staff and management tensions both male principals seemed in control and ran 'tight ships', and the schools were considered relatively successful, particularly School D. School C had a reputation for discipline problems and poor teacher morale, but no more so than the neighbouring School A.

Principals and innovation: the literature

It had been recognized in the mid 1990s in South Africa that school management was key to improvements in the education system (SADE, 1996b) and the international literature indicated that the role of the principal would be critical in how the innovation would be received by their school (Sammons *et al.*, 1997). International research indicates that 'transformational' leaders are most effective in adopting and sustaining innovation in schools, as compared to 'transactional' managers (Fullan, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; SADE, 1996; Van den Berg, Vandenberghe & Slegers, 1999).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) define a transformational leader as one who builds a school vision and mission, provides intellectual stimulation to colleagues while providing individualised support, symbolises professional practices and values, demonstrates high performance expectations, and develops structures to foster participation in school decisions.

The skills and attitudes required of transformational leaders can be broadly equated to those of Presidents Mandela and Mbeki, while those of transactional leaders to those of former president PW Botha (Prew, 2006). However,

The changes under Mandela and then Mbeki to more inclusive, distributed and developmental leadership styles, reflecting national and international trends, have not been reflected rapidly or strongly in most schools (Prew, 2006:2).

Christensen (in Fullan, 1996) undertook a review of school effectiveness literature and found that principals of 'effective' schools communicate goals, share decision-making, create and articulate the school vision and support staff. Her own research indicated that the most critical were 'fostering the process', 'supporting staff', 'promoting learning' and 'promoting parental involvement'. These management elements further reflect those of the transformational leader.

While there was some attempt in South Africa at broadening the basis for decision-making in many schools and changing the culture of management and of the school itself, with the introduction of the concept of a school management team (SMT) (SADE, 2000) many of these principals, under the façade of inclusion and participation carry on much as before, while delegating tasks to the school management team (Middlewood, 2003). Such schools present a façade of transformational leadership with vision and mission statements in place, a pretence at shared leadership and an assertion that parents are involved in decision-making, but the reality, indicated by a number of intensive school studies, is very different (Mnisi & Prew, 2001; Prinsloo, Ro-

berts & Pereira, 2006). Behind the façade these Botha-esque principals dominate all aspects of the school, but with limited management skills (SADE, 1996b; Thurlow, 2003). This leads to high levels of tension in many schools, and in some schools the total collapse of all management (Prew, 2003) and indicates the gap between national expectations around the management of public institutions and the reality in schools.

In addition, in many schools the principals realize that they are the only common factor in both the School Governing Body (SGB) and the SMT. So if they use this position carefully they can control the school either through the SMT or the SGB (Brijraj, 2004). There are many recorded cases of principals using their position in the SGB to run the school without conferring with the school's staff (SADE, 2004).

The redefining of the role of school management included another important element: the promotion of the concept of the self-managing school as part of an overall decentralisation thrust (Motala & Pampallis, 2001). This is implicit in the South African Schools Act (SADE 1996a). The very expression 'self-managing schools' gave urgency to the argument that school management needed to be rehabilitated and given a more central role in the schooling system. This was finally articulated clearly by the Minister of Education when she stated a new vision for the role of principals in South African schools (Simeka, 2005), which acknowledged changes that were already rooting in some schools. It talked of the relationship between transformational principals and effective schools, and gave it a systemic dimension emphasising the need to strengthen and professionalise the role of the principal so preparing them to play a critical role as leader of the school. This has acted as a key pressure in driving changes in the way principalship is constructed, positioned, and understood in South Africa.

So, along with a changed political leadership norm there were a number of pressure points that had begun to influence school managers and the education system leading to an environment that made change in school management appear inevitable.

Increasing evidence shows that being a transformational leader in the confines of the school in a developing-world context is not adequate to manage change. Successful schools had realized that they also needed to build a real working relationship with the community and the local education district office. While hard work, these linkages of trust can be very rewarding and pay high dividends to school management (Shaeffer, 1992; 1994; Chambers, 1997; Prew, 2003).

The intervention

The project was originally a straight-forward school development planning project, based on borrowed knowledge of school development planning in the UK and Australia. The aim was to find out if school development planning was portable and relevant to South African schools. Secondly, again naively, it was assumed that once the School Development Plans (SDPs) came in the district

office would start using them to improve the planning and delivery to schools. Not surprisingly, in retrospect, neither happened — less than half of the schools produced an SDP in 1997 and the district had no idea what to do with the SDPs that did come in.

The project team and district office modified the project in 1999. The school development plans were still used as the basis for the intervention. However there were a number of incentives attached to them, including providing small conditional accountable grants to schools which used the parent-driven fundraising committees to undertake community-based fundraising; linking each school with a partner school in UK; providing interns from the UK to train the schools in fundraising techniques; and providing developmental classroom support from the district office (see Figure 1). The project modifications led to a programme of organizational development in the district office with the service provider placing a skilled manager in the district office to integrate the project into the normal functions of the district. Further, the project team designed a training process for all district staff to prepare for school-based delivery. It led to the district office becoming a service centre for the schools. These changes led to growing trust between the district office and the schools.

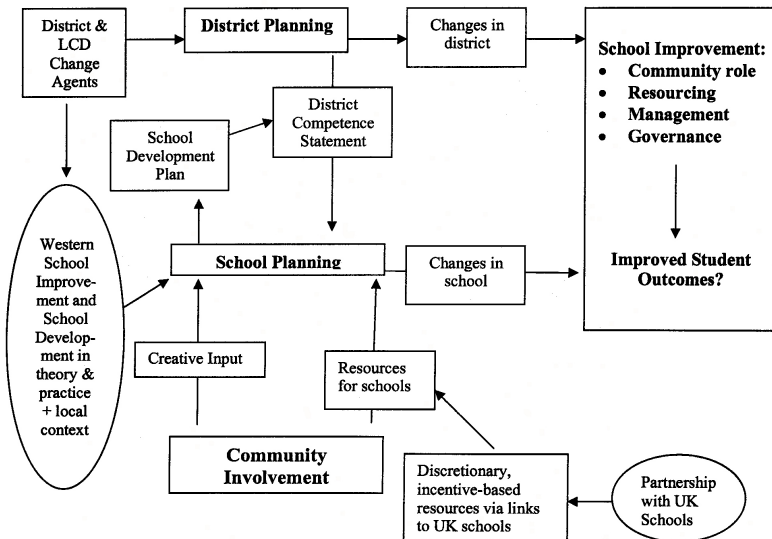


Figure 1 Framework for the case study

The mischief – what problem did the project address?

Soshanguve is a fast-growing dormitory town with a population of some half a million. It is made up of many squatter settlements housing rural immigrants ringing a traditional township. The cement that kept this township of diverse ethnic groups together was a militant rejection of the *apartheid* regime: it was known as a radical trade union and political centre. With the new political dispensation in 1994, much of this militancy was redirected into crime, fuelled by the high rates of unemployment and general poverty. This atmosphere of crime and violence impacted negatively on the township schools.

Schooling in Soshanguve faced huge problems in 1997. It shared many problems seen in townships at that time — problems which have been well documented (Chisholm & Vally, 1996; Hartshorne, 1992; Nkomo, 1990). These are summarised as,

Many of the schools have suffered years of neglect and violence. This area has seen political-inspired violence in schools which has, it is probably fair to say, mutated into violence around drugs and power. Some of the schools as a result of recent history have badly divided student bodies and even staff bodies ... What does strike the visitor is the lack of a culture of work — typified by absenteeism by staff and pupils, endless reasons for not teaching and school disruptions, leading to low Matric results in many schools and an air of depression in schools (LCD, 1996).

The successful and unsuccessful exemplar schools in the study were all suffering similar problems in 1997. As a result the district — which was made up of all Soshanguve's 88 schools (increasing to 96 by 2001) and a few former white schools — was scoring the lowest aggregate Matric pass rates in 1997 of all the districts in the province (Gauteng Department of Education, 1999).

The project aimed to turn these largely dysfunctional schools into functional schools by transforming them into centres of community life and in the process improve the schools. This was largely achieved. By 2002 Soshanguve was the highest scoring Gauteng township in the national exit-level exam, Matric, and had a reputation for well-led schools and a strong, hard-working district office. The project also intended to mentor and train the management teams of the education district and the schools such that change would be welcomed and they would develop a culture of high performance and effectiveness.

Findings

Reaction to the project

The principals of both Schools A and B were characterised by their ability to see the project as a vehicle they could use to gain control and drive a number of changes in their schools, which could be owned and refined for their own purposes. Both saw the potential of the discretionary incentive grants linked to the school-planning process and realised that these could be used to bring about transformation in their school. They welcomed the attention that their

schools were getting from the district, the service provider and the UK link schools, and used the energy created to generate and sustain a positive environment where change was welcomed. This included building a strong unified staff team out of the fractured staffroom, with high expectations and an excitement about being part of their school.

However, they were remarkably selective in their acceptance and take-up of the innovations that were part of the project. School B, for instance, under the guidance of the principal rejected the SDP template and only chose two priorities (instead of the standard five priorities) because the principal argued that it would be easier to drive development and change with fewer priorities. It worked for the school.

Similarly, Schools C and D rejected some of the innovations. However they did so with no logical explanation related to development. Their responses related to frustration with the learners, the School Governing Body (SGB), and the district office. When School C did raise funds the principal spent them on a TV instead of the toilets they had been raised for. Such a unilateral decision would have been inconceivable in Schools A and B and led to, “less incentive to raise funds, since there is no assurance on how the funds will be spent” (LCD, 1998).

Similarly, a teacher in School D reported that “*We did raise some funds without a purpose or a specific target, so the principal used the money for his personal things*”.

Such leadership led to deep tensions and communication breakdowns - amongst the staff and between the school management and the SGB. Such tensions increasingly sap morale and impact badly on the management of the school and on teaching and learning.

Schools C and D, rather than relishing the attention and linkages related to the project, tried to avoid publicity, failed to apply for or use the incentive grants and failed to develop their school development plan. They equally failed to see the potential of the links to UK schools. Any sign of innovation in both these schools — and this was very limited — was driven at the level of the individual teacher and was often blocked or ignored by the school’s managers and other teachers. This meant that no sustained change occurred and increasingly the better teachers became frustrated. This led to growing teacher absenteeism. Interviews with the pupils showed they were aware of the deterioration of their school and felt angry and frustrated. As one observer in School C reported,

The pupils attribute poor student attendance to lack of commitment on the part of the teachers ... the lax attitude of the teachers is a direct result of the principal’s continued absence (LCD, 1998).

Relationship with the local community

The SSDP could not have taken place without the involvement of the broad Soshanguve community. This highly politicised community needed to endorse the SSDP for the project to have wider political and social credibility. The successful managers responded to this reality, and the relative failure of a more

traditional approach to school development planning in 1997, by creating space for the community in the schools through the project. Gaining real community involvement in the school is a two-way relationship as illustrated by the more successful schools in Soshanguve: it needed to be planned and worked on, as one would anticipate from the literature (Schaeffer, 1992; 1994). The effort paid serious dividends.

The principals of Schools A and B indicated that community ownership of schools has positive knock-on effects and was essential to the development of functional and effective Soshanguve schools. The most solid and productive relationship between the school and its community developed where the school allowed the community to frame the relationship within the broad context of the school development process. This seemed to be important as it steered the relationship in every case away from a focus on school work and classroom activities towards more social interactions, income-generating activities and informal education, such as AIDS education — activities that appeared to work to the strengths and needs of community members. In other words, the relationship was being framed to meet the community's understanding of itself, and within its own terms of reference. The trigger for this process in both schools was the community-based fundraising through events, which got teachers, parents, and community members involved in a project that captured their imagination. This was reportedly successful because it involved money and personal creativity in generating income, was enjoyable, and helped to build the school team. As it did not involve any focus on their children's school work and did not reveal their lack of literacy skills the parents did not feel threatened and began to willingly engage with the school. The teachers also responded positively to this form of engagement as it did not threaten their professionalism.

It also offered some income and employment opportunities, particularly to local women, while working parents could also participate as activities were held during weekends. It allowed the community to voluntarily engage with the school, which is in contradistinction to a focus on their children's schoolwork or behaviour, which a number of the schools indicated in the baseline, was not getting parents into school. Such a traditional focus works to the teachers' strengths and, in a semi-literate community, puts the parents in a position of weakness. Possibly this is the basis for studies that indicate that many teachers in South Africa do not welcome a closer relationship with the community or even parents (Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance, 2004) and explains the contempt that teachers showed for parents in the SSDP project baseline (LCD, 1997).

The teachers in Schools A and B were vocal in identifying the advantages accruing to the school as a result of stronger relations with the community. These included improved safety in the school, the end of vandalism outside school hours, well-attended parent meetings and payment rates of user fees way above the norm for this township (being over 80% in School B compared to a norm of under 50%). The principal of School A reported that his school is so vibrant and safe because it is now 'open all day and night' with extended

school activities and community use of the school.

In Schools C and D, which were closed institutions, community members were not welcomed. The reason for this was not clear until the profiles were developed. In School C — a secondary school — the principal was in conflict with the staff and the district office: he increasingly turned to alcohol and was often absent from school. In School D the authoritarian principal was accused by the community of converting school funds to his own use. The SGB, representing a scandalized community, froze the school's bank account and pushed the district to suspend the principal. Eventually the principal resigned and the deputy left due to illness leaving the school bereft of leadership. The already deteriorating school, without leadership and community involvement, went into a tail-spin avoiding all contacts with the project team.

The fact that Schools A and C served the same micro-community and Schools B and D served another micro-community within the township created particularly strong pressures on Schools C and D to reform and build new management teams with a more inclusive and participatory profile. These schools saw the advantages accruing to schools that had become active in the project. This created pressure, as expressed by a teacher in School D, *“look at our school, it's horrible. There are no innovations. We cannot even make a garden”*. (Mnisi & Prew, 2001)

By 2002 both Schools C and D were slowly coming into the project and were simultaneously becoming more functional. In both cases new managers began to emerge from amongst the staff, so negating the impact of the former authoritarian managers. As the two schools become more functional and consequently confident, their receptivity to their local community opened and community involvement grew. At the same time the community began to supply support and imposed levels of accountability that assisted the school in moving forward. This is a key dialectical relationship. In Schools A and B it had been a strong feature of the schools from 1998. However in the less successful schools it only started to develop after a new management cadre started to emerge, which understood and reacted positively to the management skills and attitudes needed to succeed in the 21st century.

Nexus between school, community, and local economy

The successful principals understood that the key relationship for sustained school community development was the nexus between the school, the community, and the local economy. Through this dynamic relationship schools become service centres for the whole community, involved community members in real decisions, often driven by the community as well as creating employment opportunities for them. Where the relationship was at its most productive — as in the successful schools — it involved elements of income generation, including the opportunity to hold the licence for the tuckshop, sell food and other produce, grow vegetables, or work directly for the school, together with entertainment, including fun days, bazaars and film shows. By 2000 about a thousand community members, mainly female, were directly gaining some income from the 96 Soshanguve schools, as a result of project

related activities (Mnisi & Prew, 2001). Parents and communities served by such schools indicated a very positive attitude to the school and reported in interviews that they protected the school and felt real ownership. This was endorsed by the interviews with the teachers and principals in those schools.

Principals' relationships with the Education District Office

The successful school principals in Schools A and B realised and acknowledged regularly that the district office is an essential component in broad-based school community improvement. SDPs developed in western schools tend to indicate that the plan will be fulfilled within the school with no external help (Prew, 2003). It was important that the district office was prepared to assist the schools in Soshanguve, as schools were not resilient or resourced well enough to sustain a developmental cycle in isolation. As the education systems in developing countries are often quite weak and fractured there is a need to build up the district offices to service schools effectively. If the district office is marginalized the schools are likely to feel isolated and frustrated, as well as finding themselves with access to few or no resources. This situation pertained in the Soshanguve schools that rejected the district office.

The two successful schools seemed to understand the logic of working closely with the district office and sought to develop a strong working relationship with it. Both schools were very clear that this did not mean they were in any way seeking dependency on the district office. In fact their access to alternative sources of income (community-based fundraising and the accountable grants) left these principals less dependent on the district office than other principals, but they both indicated that they wanted to work with the district office and valued its support and interventions. This was unusual at the time: most schools indicated a rejection of their district office (SADE, 1999). However the district office in this case had undergone transformation and shown itself willing to support schools on their own terms rather than inspecting and bullying them as was the norm at the time (SADE, 1999).

The need for trust between the schools and the district office is probably universal. However it gained particular potency in the charged political environment of Soshanguve. Growing trust — which the successful principals played a key role in generating — created the conditions under which principals and teachers welcomed district staff support in their school and classroom. Such an alliance holds the promise of full-school involvement in district-led activities, and schools looking to the district for leadership, endorsement and information, while increasingly developing their own management capacity.

A unique feature of the relationship between the successful schools in Soshanguve and the district office was the evident pride that the principals of Schools A and C expressed in being part of the N4 District. It seems that as success builds on success there is growing identification with the district and pride in belonging to that particular district.

Schools C and D did not acknowledge in any way the changes made to the district office and its unusually school-focused mode of working and delivery.

They refused to see the changes, even when they were discussed in the interviews. In fact, in much the same way that most principals had done during the interviews for the baseline survey, the managers of Schools C and D blamed the district office for most of their ills. School C blamed the district office for not solving the impasse over their principal who had stolen school funds, which had left the school leaderless, while School D blamed the district for not removing their alcoholic principal. While both schools had a point, and the district should have acted more decisively, it also indicated a different attitude to that prevailing in the successful schools. They illustrated a dependency, which argued that unless the district office intervened there was nothing that the school community could do. This was somewhat paradoxical in School D where the school governing body had acted decisively to freeze the school's bank account and ease the principal out in 1999. However, having acted decisively once, the SGB and teachers lapsed into inertia, until in 2002 when they started taking the initiative again and immediately the school started to improve.

This same pattern of behaviour amongst principals and management teams was observed in a number of the 32 schools in Soshanguve which failed to engage with the innovation. When questioned they all indicated some issue or complaint related to the district office.

Principal as key to school improvement

The principals appear to have been the key to the successful take-up of the SSDP in their school. Conversely, and even more starkly, principals blocked the innovation in the less successful schools. The research indicates that they did not block change because they were worried by change itself. All the principals who played such a role were either in conflict with the district office, were faced with a deeply divided staffroom, were abusing alcohol, or were accused by the local community of corruption. Behind this core problem all these principals exhibited authoritarian management styles. The relationship between failing and deteriorating schools and their failure to engage with the project was strong. In Schools C and D, once the offending principals withdrew or were eased aside the school started engaging and immediately showed improvements in their functionality and, in School D, in their Matric results. This change was in each case accompanied by a fundamental change in management style, to one that was more inclusive and democratic.

The staff of the less successful schools often described their principals as authoritarian. These principals appeared to lack the ability to change with the times and reflect the changing norms of institutional management prevailing in the country. They remained as Botha-esque managers, ignoring the expectation that they needed to act in an inclusive, transparent, hands-on way that would draw on understanding of '*ubuntu*'¹ (Prew, 2006). This disjuncture between societal expectations and their actual practice created tensions with the Soshanguve community. One of the secondary schools which rejected the innovation and had very poor relations with its community and the district office, even though it achieved good Matric results, was fire-bombed during

the course of the project (Mnisi & Prew, 2001). These principals were resistant to change, a trend which is common in South Africa as elsewhere in the world (Fertig, 2000).

The study was able, through the detailed school profiles, to show that the more effective principals adopted a range of different management styles — some led from the front, others from behind, but all made explicit their total support for the project, process, and its main features. They also, even when faced with success, constantly challenged and stretched their staff and ‘refocused’ the project in the school to maintain momentum. The principals that sustained the innovation were those who at the start could inspire involvement in the project and take school-level ownership of key elements of the project, which made sense in the context of the school, but then distributed leadership across the school’s stakeholder groups — including parents, staff, and pupils — so ensuring that s/he is not too critical of the process. This meant that should the initial leader leave or die (as occurred in School B) the transformation and development process was not strangled.

It is important to note that successful managers of the effective schools contextualised the innovation so that it appeared flexible and able to adapt to other changes coming through the system. This was possible even within a township environment with limited resources and training. This should hold out hope for other innovations in resource-sparse environments.

Conclusions

Although I only focused on four schools in the process of engaging with an innovation, the paper does present some interesting observations and allows for tentative assertions to be made about the way that different principals engage with change.

I indicate the centrality of the principal as the key figure in determining the take-up of an innovation in a school. Broadly, Soshanguve principals fell into two groups — those who had adapted to the new political and management environment and those who had not. The Mandela/Mbeki like leaders, who could manage change while driving and owning transformation in their schools, were much more effective in moving their schools forward and making them more effective. The principals in the less successful schools exhibited Botha-esque authoritarian tendencies, limiting access to decision-making, keep the community out of the school, and blaming the district for their problems. The paper poses the question whether the principals of these schools — Schools C and D — engaged in anti-social behaviour because they were authoritarian. Possibly, the pressure to change built up and as Botha-esque managers they lacked the skills to manage the school under the new conditions. What is certain is that engaging in such anti-social behaviour, while being naturally authoritarian, created immense tensions in their schools and led ultimately to their removal.

In contrast, the successful schools developed complex relationships with their micro-communities based on growing trust. Where the school ignored its community, or eroded the nascent trust that was growing, the community

naturally opted out. This posed scant problems in the *apartheid* era when schools were divorced from, and often set against, the community around them. However, in the modern era the importance of community trust in the school's principal appears to be paramount. What this study shows is that there are ways of fostering the involvement of parents and the broader community in township schools in ways that are non-threatening while being attractive to the teachers and community, and also often enhancing the economic well-being of the community. The paper shows that once these relationships of trust and mutual benefit have been established they have a positive effect on parental engagement with the core function of the school in ways that no longer upset the teachers. This was linked — though the causal relationship was not established — with improved Matric results across the township.

It is important to note that the successful Soshanguve principals selected to introduce innovations within the project that fitted their transformational agendas and their inclusive development plans, and which they believed they could use to advantage. These successful principals, who were open, confident, and inclusive, were effective at working with the surrounding community, based on the community's understanding of its own needs and nature, and with the education district office. Their success in these two key arenas allowed the school to play a key role in improving the local education and community environment, while simultaneously making their schools more functional. Hargreaves recognises that this ability — to see opportunities in new initiatives and reframe them to fit the needs of the school and their own management needs — is typical of effective school leaders worldwide (Hargreaves, 2004). However, the management of many schools is not in the hands of such leaders. In many schools a management style more in tune with a Botha style still predominates. This authoritarianism is reflected in the culture and climate of these schools, which are all too often unattractive environments, not conducive to learning.

Furthermore, the research indicates that in the successful schools self-management can be implemented as long as the structures are in place with a district education office structured to give support and create constructive accountability, the community involved in the school on its own terms, and the management team of the school welcoming and managing change.

It appears from this small study that principals who have absorbed the lessons and mores of the prevailing political management styles — Mandela/Mbeki leadership norms — were more successful in managing innovation and their schools during change, than those that clung to traditional Botha-like norms of management.

Note

1. *Ubuntu* is a 'unifying vision enshrined in the Zulu maxim *'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye'* ('one is a person through others'). The individual commonly says: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. The ideal of *ubuntu* is the common spiritual ideal by which all black people south of the Sahara give meaning

to life and reality. This concept is usually described as the spiritual foundation of all African societies (Teffo in Makgoba, 1999).

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