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From Resistance to Resilience: Leadership Strategies for Managing Organisational Culture Change in KwaZulu-Natal Schools

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Abstract

The South African education sector continues to undergo significant reforms driven by curriculum changes, digital transformation, and growing demands for inclusive, high-quality education. In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), many schools face challenges in implementing these reforms because of resistance to change, limited teacher engagement, and varying leadership practices. This study investigates how school leadership can transform resistance into resilience by fostering positive organisational cultures that support sustainable educational improvement.

A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative semistructured interviews. The study involved a sample of 200 participants, comprising principals, deputy principals, heads of department, and teachers from 10 public secondary schools across selected districts in KwaZulu-Natal. The quantitative data were analysed via descriptive statistics, whereas the qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify leadership practices that influence successful culture change.

The findings indicate that resistance to organisational change is associated primarily with ineffective communication, inadequate professional development, limited teacher participation in decision-making, and insufficient leadership support during policy implementation. Schools that demonstrated transformational leadership, collaborative decision-making, and continuous professional learning were more likely to develop resilient organisational cultures characterised by trust, innovation, and shared accountability.

The study recommends strengthening leadership development programmes for school management teams, promoting participatory decision-making, improving communication during change initiatives, and expanding continuous professional development opportunities for teachers. Additionally, the study



advocates for policies that encourage collaborative school cultures capable of adapting to ongoing educational reforms. These strategies can enhance teacher commitment, improve school effectiveness, and contribute to sustainable educational transformation in KwaZulu-Natal schools.

Keywords: Organisational Cultures; KwaZulu-Natal Public Schools; Educational Leadership; Teacher Engagement; Transformational Leadership.