

*South African Journal of Education*

Copyright © 2011 EASA

Vol 31:461-474

## The development and application of the Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions

**Manfred Max Bergman, Zinette Bergman and Sarah Gravett**

max.bergman@unibas.ch

*This article develops the Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions based on 80 essays of school principals and their representatives in Gauteng. It reveals the degree and kinds of school dysfunctions, as well as their interconnectedness with actors, networks, and domains. The model provides a basis for theory-based analyses of specific dysfunctions, and for context and culture-sensitive interventions. The main dysfunctions relate to rules (dysfunctional rules, rule bending, and rule breaking), competences (management, finances, and conflict resolution), and roles (role confusion and conflict, abuse of power). The model was developed to invite researchers to explore these and other dysfunctions in relation to their antecedents, motivations, and consequences, as well as to formulate evidence-based interventions and policies.*

**Keywords:** dysfunctions; organizational behaviour; school principals; underperforming schools

“As the managers of our schools and key delivery agents in our education system, school principals are the most important partners in education. The biggest driver of better education outcomes is the school manager, the principal. School academic performance is highly correlated with the abilities and commitment of the principal.”

(Department of Basic Education, 2011a)

### Introduction

Unwittingly or deliberately, principals may cause harm to others and their school, as others may cause harm to schools and their principals. This article focuses on reported problems by principals of underperforming primary and secondary schools in Gauteng. The profusion, complexity, and interrelatedness of problems in these schools are enormous in both degree and kind, even difficult to fathom for most South Africans. A systematization and explanation of problem sets faced by principals helps to understand and train principals, and to formulate school and education policy closely related to contextual and institutional realities.

South Africa's schools fare poorly in international comparison, even among African countries. Among 12 African countries participating in the MLA study in 1999, South African Grade 4 learners scored lowest in numeracy and fourth lowest in literacy. In 2004, Grade 8 learners in the TIMSS scored lowest of 46 countries in mathematics and science (Reddy, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). In 2007, 21% of learners in the foundation phase and 52% in the FET have repeated at least one year (Social Surveys Africa, 2009). These national indicators hide the fact that predominantly white and Indian schools usually fare better than predominantly black and coloured schools (Van der Berg, 2008; Christie, 2008; Fleisch 2008). Apart from a small minority of schoolchildren in privileged schools,

the vast majority of children attending disadvantaged schools do not acquire a basic level

of mastery in reading, writing and mathematics. It is these South African children ... whose learning remains context-bound and non-generalizable" (Fleisch, 2008:30). Van der Berg (2008:2; *cf.* Bloch, 2009) found that "educational quality in historically black schools — which constitute 80% of enrolment and are thus central to educational progress — has not improved significantly since political transition."

While learner performance is an important indicator of school quality, others should also be considered, such as management or infrastructure. Gallie assessed the "quality of organizational capacity available to perform effective change management functions" (2007:18) and classified schools into high-functioning, low-functioning, and non-functioning institutions. His study implies that most schools in South Africa are either low or non-functioning. In terms of schools' infrastructure, the National Educational Infrastructure Management Systems (NEIMS, 2009) reported that 3,600 public schools have no electricity, 2,444 have no water supply, 11,231 use pit-latrines, only 21% have a library, and 23% have a computing facility. The Department of Basic Education reported that 6,619 schools had multi-grade classes in 2009 (2011b) and 1,209 schools had an average class size of over 60 in 2008 (2010). Unsurprisingly, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation finds that "close to 80% of South Africa's schools are essentially dysfunctional" (Taylor, 2006:65).

School dysfunctions do not start when learners enter their school. Kamper (2008:2; *cf.* Fleisch, 2008; Maree, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2005) states that learners are often hungry and ill; do not have proper clothing; lack study facilities, parental support, study motivation, self-esteem and language proficiency; and move frequently from school to school.

Over two million learners were single or double orphans in 2008 and nearly 50,000 learners were reported pregnant by their school principals, of which approximately 70% were in Grade 9 or below (Department of Basic Education, 2010). As the highest HIV population worldwide, 5.6 million people are estimated to be HIV positive, and 410,000 new infections were estimated for 2010, of which 40,000 were children (Statistics South Africa, 2010).

The focus on principals was selected not because they are more or less innocent or guilty than others in the drama taking place in South Africa's underperforming schools on any given school day, and not because they are often considered at the centre of their schools' problems (they rarely are), but because most stakeholders expect principals to solve the problems of their schools, be it political leaders, administrators, school governing boards, school management teams, community leaders, parents and other care providers, and, not least, learners. According to Mestry and Singh (2007:478),

[t]he expectations have moved from demands of management and control to the demands for an educational leader who can foster staff development, parent involvement, community support, and student growth, and succeed with major changes and expectations.

The South African literature on education management and leadership reflects these expectations, but it fails to provide a model to explain the set of intricately linked dysfunctions school principals face. The myriad of requirements, demands, expectations, and advice to principals in the South African education literature is astounding in its scope. Most of the management and leadership literature implies that principals are the catalyst for positive change or at the root of their schools' problems. Apart from occasional and brief description of a situational context, few studies explore in detail the problem sets principals are confronted with, especially in underperforming township, inner city, rural, or informal settlement schools. Instead, the literature is largely imbued with normative, summative, anecdotal, or case-specific proposi-

tions. One of the exceptions is a study by van der Westhuizen *et al.* (2005), who identified 22 organisational culture factors in relation to academic achievement in schools, thus linking organisational culture to academic performance. However, this commendable article does not isolate the principals' contribution in particular.

Rather than assuming that low or non-functioning schools are suffering from poor management and leadership, this article explores the structure and types of dysfunctions in underperforming schools in Gauteng. The overall objective of this article is to propose an Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions (EMSD). To achieve this objective, the following steps were undertaken:

1. review key texts from the plethora of literature on dysfunctional organizational behaviour (DOB) in industrial and organizational psychology, sociology of work and organizations, and the management and organizational sciences;
2. identify main components in this literature that allow for a systematization and explanation of DOB relevant to primary and secondary schools;
3. apply and refine these components for an EMSD, using 80 essays written by principals or their representatives;
4. explain the complexity of problems experienced by school principals in Gauteng with EMSD; and
5. make context-relevant intervention recommendations to combat dysfunctions in schools, based on the empirical findings of this study.

### **Conceptual framework**

Three conceptual tasks need to be accomplished before presenting the Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions: conceptualize schools as organizations; outline the scope of the study on dysfunctions in organizations; and identify the components of a model of school dysfunctions based on the literature on dysfunctions in organizations.

#### **Schools as organizations:**

Robbins and Judge define an organization as a "consciously coordinated social unit composed of two or more people that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals" (2009:6). This definition is one of the least controversial, although, as all other definitions, it leaves out important considerations which, if introduced, become subject to debate and opposition (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2010). Considering schools as organizations is well-established in the research literature on education (e.g. Bidwell, 2001; Herriott & Firestone, 1984; Nakamata, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2005; Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2005). As most studies on dysfunctions in schools are lacking a conceptual framework, a recasting of school dysfunctions as organizational dysfunctions makes available multiple explanatory theories and empirical research approaches.

#### **Dysfunctions in organizations:**

A large body of literature exists on dysfunctions in organizations in various subfields of the social sciences, of which the most prolific are industrial and organizational psychology, sociology of work and organizations, and the management and organizational sciences. Robinson (2008) observes that, despite copious publishing activities in different fields in the past decade, little cross-fertilization has taken place. Disciplinary traditions rarely draw from each other in theory building, conceptualizations of key constructs, and empirical studies. Thus, dysfunc-

tional behaviour in organizations may be understood as workplace deviance, counter-productivity, organizational misbehaviour, incivility, aggression and violence at the workplace, etc. Conceptualizing dysfunctions in organizations is further complicated by the use of different terms for the same phenomenon, or the same term for different phenomena. Also, authors introduce unnecessary new terms or propose unnecessary divisions within and between disciplines (*ibid.*). As a consequence, the literature is unsystematic, and authors of literature reviews on DOB struggle to categorize into meaningful clusters the profusion of concepts, theories, and empirical studies.

One way of analysing the research foci across different subfields is to classify the phenomena under investigation into antecedents, indicators, and consequences of dysfunctions. A fourth component — motivations for dysfunctional behaviour — was added during the literature review because various authors lamented its absence from most empirical studies on DOB (e.g. Robinson, 2008; Vardi & Wiener, 1996). The following is the result of a qualitative content analysis of the most commonly cited dysfunctions in organizations, their antecedents, and their consequences. Details of studies of DOB on which this analysis is based can be found in the overview and review chapters by Greenberg (2009; 2010), Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, and Collins (1998), Handel (2003), Pritchard, Griffin, and O'Leary-Kelly (2005), Robinson (2008), Robinson and Bennett (1995), Robinson and Greenberg (1999), O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996), and Vardi and Wiener (1996). According to these chapters, dysfunctions in organizations or at the workplace include: social loafing; withdrawal; absenteeism; theft; fraud; sabotage; verbal threats; intimidation; bullying; mobbing; unconstructive criticism; abusive supervision; withholding information and other forms of obstructionism; ridicule; covert and overt conflict; verbal, emotional, and physical abuse; sexual and other types of harassment; back-stabbing; aggression; assault; and retaliation behaviour. In the literature on DOB, various dysfunctions from this list are anteceded by: personality types or traits; negative affectivity; sense of powerlessness; low sense of control or self-control; low self-esteem; anger; hostility; revenge attitudes; workplace injustice; feeling victimized or mistreated; job stressors; pre-existing and especially prolonged conflicts and hostility in the organization; vicarious exposure to conflict or aggression; perception of unfair, arbitrary, or self-serving behaviour of others; perceived or real experience of sexist, racist, classist, ageist, and other conflicts; exposure to aggressive cultures; job dissatisfaction; personal dissatisfaction; overt or covert conflicts; company contempt; intent to quit; perceived injustice; substance abuse; low workplace surveillance; large or overly bureaucratic organizations; competitive environments; weak, ineffective, or frequently changing leadership; and idealism. Consequences of dysfunctional behaviour includes: sense of helplessness; lack of control; reduced productivity; absenteeism; tarnished reputations; low productivity and commitment to the organization; employee turnover; lawsuits; insomnia and chronic fatigue; injury; stomach and back problems; dissatisfaction; anxiety; stress; role conflict; depression; anger; sabotage; and incivility.

Despite the wealth of theoretical and empirical research on DOB, Robinson (2008) identifies several lacunae, of which six are explicitly addressed in this study: most studies fail to consider the complexity and dimensionality of dysfunctions, focusing merely on one or two dysfunctions in isolation; researchers tend to work within their specific domain and thus fail to take into consideration cross-disciplinary potentials; motivations and consequences are insufficiently considered; new methodological approaches are necessary to study DOB, particularly qualitative studies; and studies ought to focus not only on self-reports but include reports from coworkers or supervisors.

### Model components for the Explanatory Models of School Dysfunctions:

Four interrelated components can be gleaned from the literature on DOB: antecedents, motivations, types of dysfunctions, and their consequences.

*Antecedents* of dysfunctions refer to phenomena that, within a conceptual or theoretical framework, correlate with, explain, or cause dysfunctions in schools. Type A personality, unconstructive criticism, or large and bureaucratic organizations are examples of antecedents (e.g. Robinson, 2008; Vardi & Wiener, 1996). Even though the literature refers to causes of dysfunctions, a direct causal link between a psychological trait or state, for example, and a unique dysfunctional behaviour located within a specific place and time is difficult to sustain. Often, the suspected cause is either caused by another dysfunction, or it is merely a correlate of the dysfunction. Therefore, the term antecedent is preferred because it may include other antecedent explanans, such as behavioural pre-dispositions, demographic correlates, or organizational idiosyncrasies.

*Motivations* refer to ambitions, drives, urges, inclinations, and intentions toward achieving a goal. They are intrinsic, i.e. engaging in activities for their inherent worth, or extrinsic, i.e. engaging in activities for an outcome that is separable from that activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The DOB literature occasionally distinguishes between benefit and harm, i.e. if the dysfunctional behaviour is intended to benefit or harm someone or something, and between intentional and unintentional behaviour (e.g. Robinson, 2008; Vardi & Wiener, 1996). Accordingly, EMSD includes motivation in terms of intended benefit, intended harm, unintended benefit, and unintended harm.

*Dysfunctions* as an object of study have a long history in the social and medical sciences. The term is predominately used in counseling psychology and physiology to describe a mental, social, or physiological deficiency. Its adoption in other research areas is often fruitful, but the term is usually insufficiently or not defined. For this article, a dysfunction is defined as an intentional or unintentional action or position by an individual, group, or institution that impedes either partially or wholly the functioning of an organization or some of its parts by violating organizational goals, norms, or societal standards within a context relevant to the organization. Notable here is that the construct is considered normative, i.e. it implies a desirable versus an undesirable state or process; related to this, relativistic in terms of points of view of different actors; dichotomous, i.e. functional vs. dysfunctional, whereas it is more appropriate to consider dysfunctionality in terms of degree; and absolute, i.e. it implies a wholly dysfunctional environment, whereas organizations and their components may only be partially dysfunctional.

*Consequences* of dysfunctions are outcomes that have direct or indirect effects on an organization, some of its parts, or members associated directly or indirectly with the organization. Primary consequences are directly associated with a dysfunction. For example, witnessing a violent act at the workplace may cause mental and physical distress. Secondary consequences are knock-on effects caused by the primary effects. The secondary consequences of mental and physical distress, initially caused by witnessing a violent act, may include a greater likelihood to engage in violent acts or absenteeism. Accordingly, dysfunctions are likely to lead to further dysfunctions.

In sum, sorting and classifying the various dysfunctions in organizations as covered in the scientific literature provides an analytic framework of dysfunctions in schools for the Explanatory Model of School Dysfunction. The framework consists of four components: antecedents as explanans of dysfunctions, motivations, dysfunctions as explananda, and consequences of

dysfunctions. These four components are assessed for their suitability in explaining the scope, range, complexity, and interrelatedness of dysfunctions in schools.

## **Methods**

This study is based on essays written by principals and their representatives, who participated in the University of Johannesburg's ACE leadership programme in 2010. Participants were asked to write essays on a specific problem they had encountered at their school.

Three analyses were conducted in this study: First, a systematic analysis of the DOB literature yielded four components for an analytic framework for school dysfunctions. Second, dysfunctions in schools as reported by principals and their representatives were classified into this framework in order to assess its adequacy for the Gauteng school context and the adequacy of the EMSD for explaining the complexity and interrelatedness of school dysfunctions. Third, the four components of the model — antecedents, motivations, dysfunctions, and consequences — were recontextualized, thus capturing the complexity and interrelatedness of dysfunctions in the school context. All analyses were based on Content Configuration Analysis (CCA), a systematic, qualitative analysis method for non-numeric data related to qualitative content and thematic analysis (Bergman, submitted). CCA goes beyond these in the following ways: First, CCA explicitly and continuously relates context to the analytic process in relation to either the historical, political, cultural, and social conditions of data production, or the interconnectedness of data elements within the body of the data material. Second, CCA is embedded in modern ontological and epistemological considerations, while concurrently emphasizing its practicability within empirical research. Within limits, it can accommodate different ontological and epistemological positions. Third, if one could consider a continuum, on which the goal of qualitative analysis is to identify the actual content embedded in a text, on the one hand, and, on the other, an analysis, which aims at constructing meaning of text based on the subjectivities of individual researchers, then CCA occupies the space where these two positions overlap. Fourth, CCA can be applied flexibly in that it can be used on all non-numeric data, including textual, audio, and visual data. Fifth, CCA has several starting points, which are conditioned by the goals, foci, theoretical frameworks of the research design, as well as the preferences of the researcher. Sixth, CCA is always associated with substantive theory, whether theory guides analytic process from the beginning, whether it is integrated during analysis, or whether CCA is used for theory building. Seventh, CCA is a distinct method within the qualitative research domain. Its results do not necessitate additional quantitative or qualitative research. Eighth, while not programmatic, different forms of analytic procedures within CCA are nevertheless explicitly described. Ninth, the degree of complexity of CCA is research and researcher-defined. It can be conducted in a fairly simple manner on a small sample, but it can also deal with multi-media data sets, large samples, and complex, multi-dimensional phenomena.

## **Results**

760 mentions of dysfunctions were identified in 80 essays. Revealing as they may be, the essays cannot be interpreted as factual accounts of lived situations. As with questionnaire or interview data, the essays contain what principals are willing and able to present from their perspective at the time of data collection. Nevertheless, even without explicit instructions, the principals and their representatives presented vignettes that allowed for a qualitative analysis of context, antecedents, and consequences.

In these analyses, as in qualitative research in general, sorting, classifying, and interpreting components and subcomponents are rarely unambiguous because of their complexity and interrelatedness. The classifications presented here are based on ideal types. For Weber (1903–1917/1949: 90),

[a]n ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those onesidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.

In this article, categorization served to identify meaningful substructures within the realm of dysfunctions. Within each proposed component are not necessarily present all characteristics of a phenomenon *in situ*. Instead, categorization is a synthesis of structural commonalities and differences of forms and elements.

### Results 1: Four components for an analytic framework for school dysfunctions

Based on an analysis of the DOB literature, four components of dysfunctions in organizations were identified. After sorting and classifying the narratives within the four components, CCA was used to explore the internal structure of each component.

*Dysfunctions:* Dysfunctions vary in degree, kind, complexity, and interrelatedness. They range from simple incidences of theft of a mobile phone or a teacher failing to submit leave forms, to complicated problems such as a school riot due in part to overcrowding of two schools on one single school premise. CCA revealed four large groups of dysfunctions: rules, competences, resources, and extrinsics.

*Rules*, i.e. rule bending and breaking, as well as dysfunctional rules, form the most dominant cluster of dysfunctions. Examples of rule bending or breaking relate to school norms (e.g. teachers fabricating their learners' marks; chronic unpunctuality and absenteeism of teachers or learners; favoritism in hiring and promotion practices due to romantic interests), etiquette and cultural norms (e.g. learners' lack of discipline or respect; parents verbally abusing and threatening principals), and laws (e.g. rape of learners by teachers; drug dealing, gambling, and prostitution on school premises; fraud and counterfeiting of checks by a deputy head). Rules themselves can be perceived as dysfunctional. For example, the appointment of a replacement teacher is stalled indefinitely because a school district demands the post to be filled by a government bursary holder, none of which has applied for the vacancy. Abuse of power is another subcomponent of dysfunction. This includes district officials protecting teachers or learners from censure because of their personal relationships with the individual or parents; or school government bodies withholding funds because of personal feuds with members of the school management team.

Dysfunctions relating to *competences* can be classified by the agent attributed with competence problems. Perceived incompetency relating to principals include the mismanagement of finances and staff; inability to make decisions because of vested interests; inability to cope with job stress or tough decisions such as reporting dysfunctions to the district; or inability to communicate effectively with parents, staff, and community leaders. With regard to teachers, competence dysfunctions include the inability to teach a subject; maintain discipline in class; or coping with the teaching load, marking, or general paperwork.

*Resource* dysfunctions include lack of qualified staff (including educators, management and administrative staff; cleaning and maintenance staff); deficient facilities and infrastructure (e.g. electricity, water, toilets, offices, classrooms, books, security fencing of school premises,

basic maintenance and cleaning of buildings; sports facilities); and support and welfare schemes (e.g. security on school premises, safe and efficient transportation of learners to school, student services, psychological services, or feeding schemes).

*Extrinsics* are dysfunctions that manifest themselves outside of the school premises and domain but enter directly and indirectly by influencing the teaching, learning, and administration of the school. These include individual problems (psychological instability or similar dysfunctions of parents or other care-providers; sexual affairs of parents or school staff; parents' or other relatives' unwarranted and high expectations of learners' success), or learners' home environment (e.g. abject poverty and unstable home environment, including repeated changes in household structure and foster care arrangements; continuous exposure to violence in the home or neighborhood; physically or sexually abusive parents or other care providers; death or debilitating illness of care-providers; HIV and AIDS status of care-providers or learners; child-headed households; continued exposure to alcoholism or chronic drug use at home). Health and welfare is another subcomponent of extrinsics and includes malnutrition or lack of access to health care for learners; continued exposure to trauma; child labour; unstable and unsafe living arrangements and nutritional provisions; and long or unsafe travel to school. Some learners engage in law breaking that impinges directly or indirectly on the school, such as drug dealing, money lending (in one case, a Grade 7 learner was selling drugs and loaning money with interest to teachers), theft, robbery, prostitution, etc.

*Antecedents of dysfunctions*: The analysis of antecedents yielded four subcomponents: individual, situational, organizational, and structural.

*Individual* antecedents are factors or characteristics attributed to specific persons. These included aggressive personalities, alcoholism, greed, laziness, indifference, or incompetence. *Situational* antecedents are factors attributed to a particular and apparently singular situation. They include an abusive or violent event, temporary loss of control due to hunger or job stress, etc. *Organizational* factors include issues relating to infrastructure and competence, but also to relations, especially with regard to problems between the SMT and the SGB, between the SMT or the SGB and the principal, and between district administrators and principals. Conflicts within these bodies, especially in the form of rivalries between factions, are also considered organizational antecedents to dysfunctions. Many organizational antecedents to dysfunctions are similar to situational antecedents. The main difference is that organizational antecedents are presented as systemic and long-term, while situational antecedents are limited to a particular situation or constellation of actors. *Structural* antecedents transcend the organization and relate to racism and sexism. Another family of structural antecedents includes poverty, continued exposure to crime or violence in the community, etc. Structural antecedents also include district or provincial policy considered dysfunctional, especially relating to unions and district administrators.

The most important antecedent to dysfunctions is other dysfunctions. In other words, school dysfunctions rarely remain without consequence such that they are often the cause of further dysfunctions.

*Motivations for dysfunctional behaviour*: Motivations are a particular subgroup of antecedents of dysfunctional behaviour. Because of its relative neglect in the DOB literature and the encouragement of authors of that literature to include this element more explicitly in the analyses of dysfunctions, motivation was isolated from other antecedents. More specifically, motivations were identified in terms of intended benefit, intended harm, unintended benefit, and unintended harm. An example for intended benefit is the theft of a mobile phone (the



beneficiary is the thief), for unintended benefit is the lengthy delay of the dismissal a sexually abusive teacher (the beneficiary is the teacher), for intended harm is the threats or violent behaviours against teachers or principals by parents or other relatives of failing learners (the victims are teachers and principals), and for unintended harm is the failure to file leave forms (the victims are staff members who have to cover for absentee colleagues on short notice, or learners who do not receive a lesson as no replacement teacher can be hired).

*Consequences of dysfunctions:* A CCA of the consequences yielded two sets of sub-components: the first set are antecedents of further dysfunctions, such as anger (individual), a stalemate in appointment procedures (situational), or a motivation to intentionally cause harm (motivation) due to perceived injustice; the second set of consequences are the same sub-components identified for dysfunctions themselves: rules, competences, resources, and extrinsics. Upon closer inspection, this is not surprising because the dysfunctions described in the essays are rarely isolated events but connected to a set of circumstances and actors that are implicated in an interrelated set of dysfunctions. Also, the vignettes reveal that the line of demarcation between antecedents, dysfunctions, and consequences are a matter of analytical perspective. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, where absenteeism is an antecedent leading to absenteeism as a dysfunction:

*[S]he will report almost every week that she can't find her keys for the car thus she will be late ... if not she will phone and say that her car has a flat or cannot start.... When she reports to be ill every week and the HOD, educators and the deputy complain about it [the principal] says that there is nothing he can do because she brings a sick note. This has now created a situation where those educators who had never stayed at home because they had a touch of cold, had now lately, publicly said to other colleagues that if she can stay sick every week, they will also stay at home. (Essay 7643:1)*

In the next excerpt, absenteeism is a consequence of a set of dysfunctions:

*Miss P was busy changing when she happened to turn around when she saw a figure climbing over the stall. Miss P got a fright and cried out. Miss P hastily got dressed and rushed out of the stall. A male staff member had caught the culprit and to Miss P' horror, the person who had been caught was [a learner in her class].... [In a meeting] the father stated that the principal and his staff had bullied [the learner] into admitting his offence and that he the father would be contacting his 'friends' at the department to ensure that the school did not get away with the persecution of an 'innocent child'... In the meeting the principal was accused by the director of being a racist, only believing the teacher and making a huge fuss over something that could easily be sorted out. The parents were then assured that the child did not have severe sanctions and after a hug for the parents, the district official left. Miss P missed the last few weeks of term and went home to her parents. It is uncertain if she will return. (Essay 0894:2-3)*

The convergence of sub-components in both dysfunctions and consequences of dysfunctions illustrates not only that dysfunctions are connected but also that they form complex inter-relationships with each other within a web of actors and power relations in specific situations. It is also clear from these vignettes that the beginning of the essay is not necessarily the beginning of the chain of events leading to a set of dysfunctions, and the end of the essay does not necessarily signal the end of a dysfunctional episode.

## Result 2: The Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions (EMSD)

A systematic analysis of the DOB literature yielded four main components of the emergent

EMSD. CCA was used to identify the relations between these components, as well as the content of the respective subcomponents. Figure 1 summarizes these analyses.

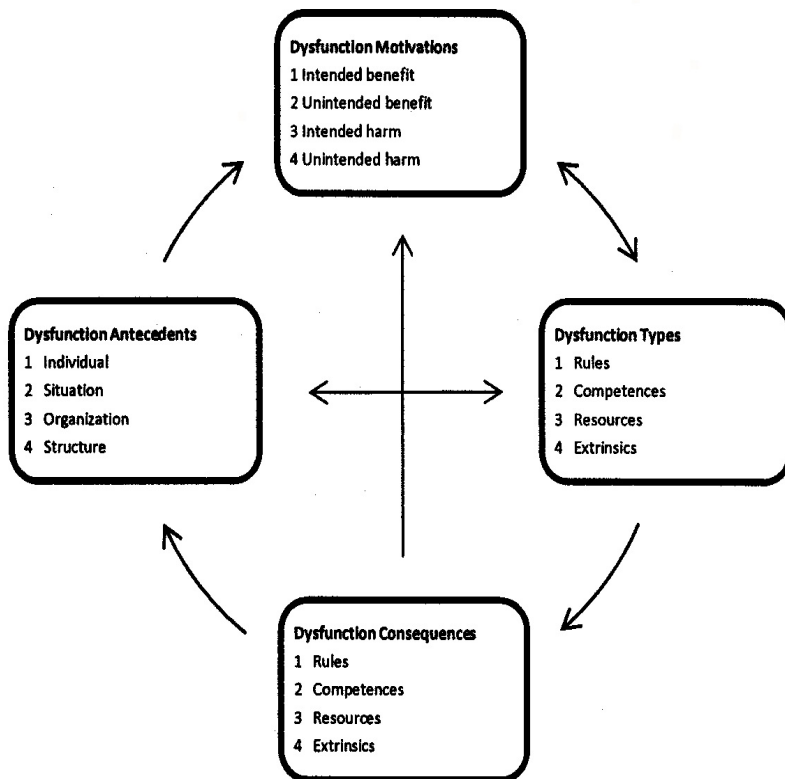


Figure 1 The Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions

Notable in this figure are the relations from consequences to antecedents and from consequences to motivations. They indicate that dysfunctions may have a long and complex development history formed by interwoven dysfunctional episodes, have numerous antecedents, give rise to consequences, which, in turn, create a change in antecedents or motivations that again lead to similar or different dysfunctions.

### Result 3: Interdependencies and conditionalities within the EMSD

In the process of categorizing different phenomena into the model's framework, they had to be isolated from their socio-cultural and textual context. More generally, sorting and classi-

fying textual elements decontextualize the phenomena under investigation. To obtain a better sense of the complexity, interdependence, and conditionality of dysfunctions, a final analysis recontextualizes isolated phenomena of dysfunctions. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

*There were different posts advertised at my school. The SGB together with the entire management and staff agreed about certain criteria, requirements and needs of these posts, all procedures were followed, but the outcome of the process was the opposite. People who were appointed to the posts were people who were not earmarked, who had no prior experience and some did not meet the requirements and the needs of the school. People started to talk about the "Hit List". This resulted in one of the SGB members being shot dead and the situation escalating out of control. The SGB member who was a teacher was shot in class in full view of the learners. Everybody was in extreme shock. The school was never the same again. (Essay 3691:1)*

As in the excerpt from Essay 0894, this excerpt illustrates different dysfunctions functionally connected to each other by actors and their interests within a specific context.

In these excerpts, dysfunctions are cross-cut by actors, domains of interest, and situational contexts, which make it exceedingly difficult to propose a programmatic approach to management and leadership. While EMSD allows systematization and explanation of school dysfunctions, a situated view of these dysfunctions shows the intricate interdependencies between dysfunctions, antecedents, and consequences.

## Conclusions

This article aimed at systematizing the intricately interwoven dysfunctions school principals of underperforming schools face. The Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions allows for a conceptualization and explanation of dysfunctions in the following ways: dysfunctions vary in kind and degree; they are rarely singular but are intricately interwoven and often give rise to further dysfunctions; while principals and their representatives are directly or indirectly connected to the dysfunctions, the dysfunctional episodes usually involve many other actors, power structures, and domains; EMSD is not a theory in itself but it invites researchers to embed in it theories or interventions to address sets of dysfunctions in a context- and culture-sensitive manner.

This study has incorporated elements that, according to Robinson (2008), are frequently neglected: it integrated explicitly the complexity and dimensionality of dysfunctions; it took into consideration the cross-disciplinary potential of studies on dysfunctionality; it included motivations and consequences as two of the model's four main components; it is based on a qualitative analysis of essays; and it focused on principals' reports of dysfunctions relating to peers, coworkers, supervisors, administrators, and others.

Professionalism and professionalization are insufficient to deal with the complexity and depth of these problems. Five factors are prominent in relation to the frequency and severity of school dysfunctions: breaking or bending rules; lack of competence; role confusion; abuse of power; and lack of conflict resolution skills. These should be studied in detail within and beyond EMSD, and they also should be the focus of interventions, policy, and reform.

Dysfunctions as systematized in the EMSD invite further studies: Theory-based analyses of specific subcomponents of dysfunctions, such as rule dysfunctions, can be studied in relation to situational or structural antecedents. Another example is the study of role and role confusions between administrators, principals, and teachers, and how this leads to specific sets of

dysfunctions. Interesting to explore are structural typologies of dysfunctional episodes, such as dyads, chains, cycles, networks, and spirals. Extensions of EMDS would include the perspectives of administrators and teachers, and a comparison of different dysfunctional sets in terms of contingencies and dependencies. Finally, this study could be expanded by employing quantitative, longitudinal, and panel data.

While this study presents a framework for further studies, it also suggests directions for interventions. Principals ought to receive help in role clarification in relation to district administrators, unions, and teachers. In addition to their current training, they should receive training in conflict resolution techniques. Finally, they should be able to rely on support and control structures that include a network of principals, administrators, and teachers. They should participate in formulating, clarifying, and enforcing support and control systems, which would direct and monitor administrators, principals, school boards, and teachers. Most importantly, their support system should include a systematic, long-term structure beyond one-day workshops with a keynote speaker and a buffet lunch.

This article has described and explained the intricate network of problem sets of principals, in which dysfunctions are embedded within contexts, domains, and actor interests. These interact in situational and cultural contexts such that they often develop into a maelstrom. A principal is not unlike a captain of a ship, and a principal at an underperforming school in South Africa is in great need of a sound ship, a competent and cooperative crew, training and experience, and a plan of action that is adapted and adaptable to a particular situation.

### Acknowledgements

We thank the school principals for generously donating their time in writing essays, as well as our colleagues at the University of Johannesburg for their support.

### References

- Bergman MM submitted. Content Configuration Analysis. *Qualitative Social Research Forum*.  
<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs>
- Bidwell CE 2001. Analyzing schools as organizations: Long-term permanence and short-term change. *Sociology of Education*, Extra Issue:100-114.
- Bloch G 2009. *The toxic mix: What's wrong with SA's schools and how to fix it*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Christie P 2008. *Opening the doors of learning: Changing schools in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Department of Basic Education 2009. *National Educational Infrastructure Management Systems Report*. Available at <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=p8%2F3b6jxko0%3D&tabid=358&mid=1263>.
- Department of Basic Education 2011a. *Importance of Principals*. Available at <http://www.education.gov.za/dobeinternet/principals/tabid/335/Default.aspx>. Accessed 9 April 2011.
- Department of Basic Education 2011b. *Report on the 2008 and 2009 annual surveys for ordinary school*. Available at <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EM0CsHBX%2F8g%3D&tabid=422&mid=1261>. Accessed 16 May 2011.
- Department of Basic Education 2010. Report on the annual school survey 2007/2008. Available at <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=n87v%2BFQAYT0%3D&tabid=93&mid=1131>. Accessed 16 May 2011.
- Fleisch B 2008. *Primary education in crisis: Why South African schoolchildren underachieve in reading and mathematics*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Gallie M 2007. *The implementation of developmental appraisal systems in a low-functioning South*

- African school*. PhD dissertation. Available at <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-06192007-115447/unrestricted/00front.pdf>. Accessed 9 April 2011.
- Greenberg J 2009. *Managing behavior in organizations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Greenberg J 2010. *Behavior in organizations*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Griffin RW, O'Leary-Kelly A & Collins J (eds) 1998. *Dysfunctional behavior in organizations: Vol. 1. Violent behavior in organizations*. Greenwich, CT: Elsevier.
- Gruenfeld DH & Tiedens LZ 2010. Organizational preferences and their consequences. In ST Fiske, DT Gilbert & G Lindsey (eds). *Handbook of social psychology*, Vol. 2. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Handel MJ (ed.) 2003. *Sociology of organizations: Classic, contemporary, and critical readings*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Herriott RE & Firestone WA 1984. Two images of schools as organizations: A refinement and elaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 20:41-57.
- Jaworski BJ & Young SM 1992. Dysfunctional behavior and management control: An empirical study of marketing managers. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 17:17-35.
- Kamper G 2008. A profile of effective leadership in some South African high-poverty schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 28:1-18.
- Katz D & Kahn RL 1978. *The social psychology of organizations*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Maree JG 2010. Editorial: Reconsidering psychosocial reality in the 21st century: The need for psychosocial services. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 40:119-124.
- Mestry R & Singh P 2007. Continuing professional development for principals: A South African perspective. *South African Journal of Education*, 27:447-490.
- Nakamata L 2011. *Schools as organizations: Implications for research on school violence*. Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology. Royal York, Toronto, 14. March.
- O'Leary-Kelly AM, Griffin RW & Glew DJ 1996. Organization-motivated aggression: A research framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 21:225-253.
- O'Sullivan S 2005. *Fixing broken schools: Applying organizational analysis to dysfunction in schools*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Pritchard RD, Griffin RW & O'Leary-Kelly A (eds) 2004. *The dark side of organizational behavior*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Reddy V 2006. The state of mathematics and science education: Schools are not equal. In S Buhlungu, J Daniel, R Southall & J Lutchman (eds). *State of the Nation: South Africa 2005-2006*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Robbins SP & Judge TA 2009. *Organizational behavior*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Robinson SL 2008. Dysfunctional workplace behavior. In J Barling & CL Cooper (eds). *The Sage handbook of organizational behavior*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robinson SL & Bennett RJ 1995. A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: A multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38:555-572.
- Robinson SL & Greenberg J 1999. Employees behaving badly: Dimensions determinants, and dilemmas in the study of workplace deviance. In DM Rousseau & C Cooper (eds). *Trends in organizational behavior (Vol. 5)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ryan RL & Deci EL 2000. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25:54-67.
- Social Surveys Africa 2009. *Access to education: Technical report of the national household survey*. Johannesburg: SSA.
- Statistics South Africa 2010. *Mid-year population estimates, 2010*. Statistical release P0302.
- Taylor N 2006. School reform and skills development. In *Money and morality: 2006 transformation audit*. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.
- UNESCO/EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006. *Literacy for life. Regional overview: Sub-Saharan*

*Africa*. Available at [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001497/149776e.pdf](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001497/149776e.pdf). Accessed 9 April 2011.

Van der Berg S 2008. *How effective are poor schools? Poverty and educational outcomes in South Africa*. Göttingen: Centre for European Governance and Economic Development Research.

Van der Westhuizen PC, Mosoge MJ, Swanepoel LH & Coetsee LD 2005. Organizational culture and academic achievement in secondary schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 38:89-109.

Vardi Y & Wiener Y 1996. Misbehavior in organizations: A motivational framework. *Organizational Science*, 7:151-165.

Weber M 1903–1917/1949. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.

## **Authors**

Manfred Max Bergman is Chair of Social Research and Methodology at the University of Basel, and Visiting Professor at the Universities of Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand. His research interests include the transition from education to work, inequality and exclusion, and group conflict. He is Editor of the *SAGE Journal of Mixed Methods Research*.

Zinette Bergman is Research Associate of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Her research interests include educational leadership, organisational behaviour and change, barriers to education, and dysfunctional educational settings.

Sarah Gravett is Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Her research interests include the design of learning environments and events, education leadership, and teacher education.