



INVESTIGATING BARRIERS PRINCIPALS ENCOUNTER EXECUTING RIGHTSIZING AS A WHIP FOR TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to investigate the barriers school principals encounter when executing rightsizing as a punishment for teachers. The main question guiding the study is: What are the challenges and implications of utilizing rightsizing as a punishment in schools? Employing a qualitative approach, the study reviews recent scholarly literature to explore the complexities of this issue. An interpretive paradigm is adopted to gain deeper insights into the perceptions surrounding rightsizing as a disciplinary strategy. Findings suggest that using rightsizing in this manner negatively affects teacher morale, job satisfaction and the general school environment fostering notions of inequity and lack of administrative support. This study contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting the adverse effects of punitive rightsizing and informing policy and leadership practices. Limitations include potential biases in the reviewed literature and the case study's context which may not be applicable to all settings.

Keywords: *rightsizing, school leadership, disciplinary measures, teachers, educational policy*

Introduction

Majumdar (2024) argues that the use of rightsizing as a punitive tool by school principals can significantly and adversely affect education quality, efficient instruction and school climate. Rightsizing involves transferring teachers to different schools or positions as a form of discipline rather than for legitimate staffing needs. While rightsizing may be necessary for operational reasons, using it punitively raises serious concerns. One major issue is that punitive rightsizing can lead to decreased teacher morale and job satisfaction. Wang et al. (2024) warn that teachers who are involuntarily transferred may feel devalued, contributing to reduced motivation and engagement in their work. This process negatively impacts classroom performance and teacher-student interactions. Furthermore, frequent teacher transfers disrupt continuity in student learning and damage relationships within the school community (Rhodes et al., 2024).

Similarly, punitive rightsizing may exacerbate teacher shortages in specific subjects or regions. Schools perceived as less desirable may struggle to retain quality teachers if rightsizing is used as a threat leading to an inequitable distribution of experienced educators and perpetuating disparities (Mason-Williams et al., 2023). This practice can also be viewed as an abuse of administrative power which may foster an atmosphere of fear and mistrust between teachers and school leadership with impediments to collaboration and shared decision-making processes in schools (Shiller, 2024). On the other hand, there are legal and ethical concerns regarding punitive rightsizing. Many jurisdictions have policies and procedures governing teacher transfers and disciplinary actions using rightsizing informally may violate these regulations and teachers' rights, including social justice considerations for students (Koon et al., 2024).

While principals may face pressure to maintain discipline and resolve performance issues punitive rightsizing is likely counterproductive in the long run. Alternative approaches focusing on mentoring, professional development and progressive discipline policies aligned with due process may be more effective in enhancing teacher performance and school quality (Ladica & Osias, 2024). Thus, Maturi (2024) emphasizes that using rightsizing as a punitive measure presents significant challenges for educational quality, teacher retention, school climate and ethical leadership.

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Consequently, intensive research is needed to examine the prevalence and impacts of this practice and to identify more constructive approaches to teacher management and school improvement.

Background of the study

Mashele & Mafuwane (2024) believe that rightsizing is meant to reallocate teachers to resolve staffing needs across schools. However, some principals have misused this policy as a punitive measure against teachers, significantly impacting education quality, school climate, and teacher well-being. This phenomenon involves principals using the threat of involuntary transfers to discipline or retaliate against teachers perceived as problematic (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2024). Rather than resolving issues through appropriate channels, some principals initiate unwarranted rightsizing to punish or remove teachers they dislike. Zhang (2024) argues that this unethical behavior creates an environment of fear and instability for both teachers and their students.

The adverse effects on education quality are substantial. Notably, Chanin (2024) maintain that involuntary transfers disrupt effective instruction and remove experienced teachers from established positions. Students lose access to teachers with whom they have built strong relationships, while teachers must adapt to unfamiliar environments. This instability can negatively impact overall student achievement. Meierhenrich (2024) advises that the school climate deteriorates when rightsizing is used punitively fostering distrust between teachers and administration, damaging staff morale and creating a culture of anxiety. Consequently, teachers become hesitant to voice concerns or disagree with principals for fear of retaliation through forced transfers.

Likewise, teacher well-being suffers significantly under punitive rightsizing. It generates considerable stress and uncertainty for teachers who may be uprooted from their communities. Consequently, Wilson-Forsberg et al., (2024) found that this process and practice can lead to depression, burnout and diminished job satisfaction when faced with involuntary transfers as punishment. Thus, Saltman (2024) sustains a view that this misuse of rightsizing power undermines its intended purpose of resolving staffing imbalances and instead exacerbates teacher shortages in specific areas. It also erodes trust in school leadership and the implementation of educational policies. The implications are concerning for education systems globally particularly in Africa and South Africa. Thames (2024) believes that the abuse of rightsizing authority by principals can drive experienced teachers out of the profession, worsen teacher shortages and create adversarial school environments that ultimately cause detriment to student learning. Clearly, education leaders must ensure that rightsizing policies include proper oversight and cannot be wielded as punitive tools against teachers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and implications that school principals encounter when using rightsizing as a punitive tool for teachers.

The main question guiding this study is: What are the barriers and implications of school principals executing rightsizing as a form of punishment for teachers?

Theoretical framework

In the context of rightsizing, organizational justice theory highlights how perceived unfairness in the deployment or transfer of teachers can lead to diminished trust between teachers and school leadership. Teachers who feel unfairly targeted for transfer or redeployment may experience feelings of injustice, reducing their motivation, commitment, and overall job satisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2022). These perceptions of inequity foster a hostile work environment, undermining school climate and student outcomes (Greenberg, 2023). Principals who misuse rightsizing as a form of punishment erode the culture of fairness essential for effective school governance (Jiang et al., 2023). On the other hand, the relational leadership style further emphasizes the importance of building strong, trust-based relationships between leaders and staff. This approach stresses mutual respect, open communication and collaboration (Uhl-Bien, 2023).

When rightsizing is used punitively, it severely damages these relational dynamics causing mistrust, disengagement and fear (Raelin, 2023). Principals who practice relational leadership should focus on fairness and collective decision-making but punitive rightsizing contradicts these principles by straining the leader-teacher relationship and impeding constructive dialogue (Grint & Jackson,



2023). Similarly, Transformational leadership theory (TLT) highlights the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating staff toward shared educational goals (Bass & Riggio, 2023). Principals should foster environments of support, collaboration and professional development (Avolio & Yammarino, 2023). However, when rightsizing becomes punitive, it undermines transformational leadership principles by promoting fear, distrust and instability (Northouse, 2023). This misuse of authority stifles innovation and collaboration creating barriers to positive leadership and staff engagement (Leithwood et al., 2023). Taken together, these theories organizational justice, relational leadership, and transformational leadership highlight the importance of fairness, ethical leadership and positive staff relations illustrating the broader impacts of punitive rightsizing on school effectiveness and teacher well-being.

Method

Data collection

Data collection for this study involves an intensive review of recent scholarly literature published between (2018 2024). The author consulted primary sources like scholarly books and articles to amass an in-depth insight regarding the perspectives from academics about the topic under discussion (Mertler, 2024).

Data analysis

The author employed an interpretive paradigm to gather a deeper insight of scholarly perceptions related to the topic under discussion. By using this approach, the author sought to explore the detailed and intricate viewpoints of various researchers and academics (Johnson & Christensen, 2024). This method allowed for a thorough examination of different interpretations and meanings by providing a deeper detailed insight into the subject matter. According to Tracy (2024) the interpretive paradigm provides the analysis of detailed distinctions and diverse perspectives within the existing literature.

Findings

Findings reveal that using rightsizing as a punitive measure poses significant challenges for school principals and has adverse effects on the school environment. Principals often face resistance from teachers who view the practice as unfair and demoralizing, leading to diminished morale, job dissatisfaction and feelings of distrust toward school leadership. This negatively impacts teacher-student relationships, instructional quality and overall school climate. The punitive nature of rightsizing disrupts continuity in teaching often placing inexperienced or unwilling teachers in critical roles further exacerbating and straining student outcomes. In the same vein, the practice fosters an atmosphere of fear and anxiety where teachers are hesitant to engage in open dialogue or raise concerns fearing retaliation. Principals also encounter legal and ethical challenges as rightsizing can contravene teachers' rights adding to the complexity of managing human resources effectively. These findings suggest a need for more constructive and ethical leadership practices.

Discussion

The author investigates the challenges and implications of using rightsizing as a disciplinary tool in secondary schools aligns closely with the topic "Investigating Barriers Principals Encounter Executing Rightsizing as a Whip for Teachers in Schools." Guess (2024) argues that when rightsizing is manipulated as a punitive measure by principals it creates significant barriers in school governance, teacher morale and instructional quality. Undoubtedly, Du Plessis & Mestry (2024) are of the view that principals who misuse their authority to remove or transfer teachers they dislike can disrupt school culture and the overall learning environment in schools. As a result, this unhealthy practice will erode trust between staff and the school leadership by creating tension and grievances that may lead to legal actions (Werang et al., 2023; Skiba, 2024). The misuse of rightsizing undermines teachers' sense of belonging and professional security, contributing to anxiety, demotivation, and strained relationships with principals (Li et al., 2024). In the context of rightsizing, the study emphasizes how

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such practices damage school climate, leading to inconsistency in teaching methods and student performance decline (Eckert, 2024). Ethical leadership and transparent communication are critical to overcoming these barriers, fostering a positive and productive school environment.

Clearly, Buckley (2024) found that burnout, attrition and logistical challenges further highlight the need for ethical, fair and consultative rightsizing practices to prevent these malpractices from damaging teacher-student outcomes. Okocha et al., (2024) argue that when principals use rightsizing as a punitive measure, it significantly disrupts teaching and learning processes in schools. Thus, affected teachers often experience a decline in performance and lose interest in their work, leading to strained relationships with colleagues (Shakir et al., 2024). Undoubtedly, frequent staff changes can create gaps in curriculum delivery, inconsistencies in teaching methods and an overall decline in educational quality. Similarly, Tran & Kelley (2024) concur that such punitive measures destabilize school culture and climate thereby fostering feelings of powerlessness and contributing to burnout and attrition among teachers. This approach to rightsizing undermines a supportive and collaborative environment, leading to a demoralized workforce. In many instances, the resulting disruptions can create logistical challenges, conflicts and ethical dilemmas which further exacerbate the effective management of schools (Xu et al., 2024). Clearly, there is a crucial need to resolve these barriers by implementing effective mitigation strategies on sustainable basis. Notably, these strategies should promote ethical leadership and transparent communication by ensuring that rightsizing practices align with fair and constructive principles (Khorram-Manesh et al., 2024). Such measures are essential for enhancing both teacher satisfaction and student performance in schools thereby fostering a more positive educational objective.

Rightsizing procedures to be executed in schools.

According to Barber et al., (2024) the rightsizing procedure in schools operates as a cyclical process rather than a one-time event due to the dynamic nature of educational staffing needs. It is worth noting that the rightsizing process begins with a snap survey to assess staffing needs which is followed by the establishment of posts and the development of a management plan (Conte, 2024). This step will ultimately lead to the identification of excess teachers who are then matched and absorbed into suitable vacancies in other schools thereby ensuring efficient human resource allocation. Thus, the crucial moment of all these processes during rightsizing is how to identify a teacher who is declared to be in excess (McCarroll & Hassard, 2024). The principal after a wide consultation with teachers at a formal meeting may recommend the re-matching back of teachers to vacancies that exist or will exist in the near future (Estorcién (2024). When re-matching back teachers the principal should be guided by experience, rank, competencies and qualification profile of the teachers. Notably, teacher rightsizing is a process where teachers are transferred from one school to another due to factors like excess staffing, declining student enrolment or changes in the curriculum (Mashele & Mafuwane, 2024). Nevertheless, while it's a legitimate tool for managing resources within the educational system it could also be easily manipulated by the school principal.

Emulating the relational leadership in schools.

Ansong et al., (2024) believe that relational leadership prioritizes fostering strong relationships and collaboration to enhance organizational effectiveness. However, when teachers perceive that redeployment decisions are influenced by favouritisms, distrust between staff and school leadership can emerge. This distrust becomes a barrier for principals, as it erodes the relational foundation necessary for effective school management, particularly in rural primary schools where community ties are strong. Unethical leadership during the rightsizing process, as noted by Mawritz et al., (2024) can breed further unethical behaviors among staff contributing to a toxic work environment. If principals use rightsizing to target teachers based on personal conflicts rather than professional merit, it fosters a culture of fear and mistrust. This misuse of rightsizing as a disciplinary tool (the "whip") becomes a significant barrier, leading to demoralization and reduced performance among staff. Conversely, McCarroll & Hassard (2024) relational leadership emphasizes the principal's responsibility to ensure that rightsizing aligns with the school's needs by strategically placing teachers



in roles that best match their skills and qualifications. This process aims to optimize staffing while maintaining organizational coherence and effectiveness. However, when rightsizing is perceived as punitive or arbitrary, it undermines this goal and complicates the principal's ability to effectively manage the school, particularly in rural contexts where resources and staff are already limited (Thames, 2024).

Astute mitigation strategies

Transparent communication between principals and teachers is critical to alleviating fears and building trust. Zhu & Du (2024) highlight the importance of ensuring that redeployment decisions are perceived as fair and based on objective criteria, avoiding favouritism or bias. McQueen & Williams (2024) further recommend offering support services such as counselling or relocation financial assistance to help redeployed teachers cope with the transition which can mitigate anxiety and improve morale. Likewise, involving teachers in the decision-making processes or seeking their inputs fosters a sense of inclusion which reduces feelings of estrangement (Herman & Baaki, 2024). These strategies are vital in creating a more positive and collaborative environment, preventing the misuse of rightsizing as a punitive tool, and addressing the barriers that principals encounter when executing the process in rural primary schools.

Social justice for the affected teachers in schools.

In the context of this paper, social justice plays a pivotal role in ensuring fairness and equity for affected teachers. School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in schools ought to promote inclusivity and participative decision-making processes which is essential during the rightsizing process. According to Alcaraz et al. (2024) equitable participation of all stakeholders including teachers, parents and community members ensures that the voices of those impacted by rightsizing are audible and respected. However, schools often contend with socio-economic barriers and resource limitations which can impede effective participative management. As a result, these barriers can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalization among teachers who are facing rightsizing particularly if they perceive the process as unfair or biased (Heritage, 2024). Resolving these systemic challenges is crucial for SGBs to foster a more just and democratic governance structure where decisions including those related to rightsizing are made transparently and with the welfare of all teachers in mind (Veriava, 2024). By promoting social justice, principals and SGBs can mitigate the negative impacts of rightsizing by reducing the perception of rightsizing as a punitive measure and ensuring a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

Participative management within the rightsizing context

George (2024) advises that participative management in the context of rightsizing emphasizes the involvement of teachers and stakeholders in decision-making processes by fostering transparency and trust. By engaging staff in discussions regarding rightsizing principals can mitigate resistance and ensure that decisions regarding processes are viewed as fair and objective. Undoubtedly, Burhan & Malik (2024) think that in schools where personal relationships and community ties are strong participative management is crucial to prevent the perception of favouritism or bias. When teachers feel valued and included it reduces feelings of alienation and promotes a sense of collective responsibility. This approach not only improves morale but also ensures that rightsizing is executed more effectively by aligning staffing decisions with both school needs and the well-being of the affected teachers (Lameck, 2024).

Conclusion

The misuse of rightsizing as a punitive measure presents significant barriers for principals in schools by adversely affecting teacher morale, school climate and educational quality. When principals use rightsizing as a disciplinary tool it cultivates distrust and fear which may be leading to

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disengagement and diminished performance among teachers. The resulting instability disrupts teaching and learning processes which creates gaps in curriculum delivery and undermining student achievement. To overcome these challenges, it is essential for school leaders to adopt ethical leadership practices that promote transparent communication and involve teachers in decision-making processes. By fostering a supportive environment, principals can mitigate the negative implications of punitive rightsizing and enhance overall school effectiveness ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

Recommendations

To effectively mitigate the barriers principals encounter when executing rightsizing as a disciplinary tool require several initiatives like the following. School principals should adopt ethical leadership practices that prioritize transparency and fairness in rightsizing transparent decisions-making processes. It is essential to establish collaborative partnership for open dialogue between teachers and administration which can foster trust and reduce feelings of insecurity. The implementation of professional development programs for principals on relational leadership can enhance their ability to support teachers without reservations. There is a need to involve teachers in the decision-making processes regarding staffing changes which can help cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment ultimately promoting a positive school climate and improving educational outcomes.

Limitation of the study

This study may face limitations including a potential lack of generalizability due to the focus on specific contexts within secondary schools. Similarly, the reliance on qualitative data may introduce subjective bias in interpreting findings. In addition, the consulted literature review may be limited potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of insights regarding the barriers to executing rightsizing effectively.

Author biographies

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