University of Southern Queensland

ORGANISATIONAL COGNISANCE:

INTRODUCING A COGNITIVE DIMENSION TO THE CONCEPT OF ORGANISATIONAL ALIGNMENT

A Dissertation submitted by

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Certification of Dissertation

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, even though I may have received assistance from others on style, presentation and language expression.

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Abstract

Contemporary understandings of the concept of organisational alignment in the management and education literature are predominantly strategic and structural in nature. While researchers have postulated cognitive aspects of the concept of organisational alignment, no definitive conception of a cognitive dimension has been proffered. Furthermore, while strategic and structural aspects of organisational alignment are considered important in research-based proposals, an understanding and agreement is yet to be fully established in the education literature regarding the significance of cognitive processes, for whole school capacity building.

Based partly on the researcher's interest in the nature of cognitive processes in organisations, and partly on a review of authoritative literature on the concepts of organisational alignment and capacity building, the aim of the doctoral study was twofold: first, to explore the core underlying processes of cognition that emerge within a school's professional learning community upon completing a whole school revitalisation process emphasising strategic and structural aspects of alignment; second, to explore the impact of emergent cognitive processes on capacity building for whole school improvement.

Data were collected through various methods such as in-depth individual interviews; focus groups; mindmapping; observations and focused conversations with teachers from two Singaporean schools that had undergone a three-year trial implementation of a whole school revitalisation program entitled Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS). This program emphasises strategic/structural alignment in its core processes and also recognises the importance of shared cognition. The research data were analysed using procedures underpinning the

constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology. The collection, analysis and interpretation of data occurred in four distinct stages that resulted in two conceptual frameworks emerging: (1) an explanatory framework of the emergence of organisational cognisance and (2) the conceptual model of the impact of organisational cognisance on enhanced school capacity.

The explanatory framework of the emergence of organisational cognisance comprises five elements: 'schema'; 'factors of influence'; 'factors of support'; 'cognitive change dynamics'; and the core concept of 'the emergence of organisational cognisance'. The framework details the developmental nature of the effect of whole school revitalisation on the emergence of organisational cognisance.

The insights gained into the construct of organisational cognisance were explored through further data analysis to help enhance current understandings of school capacity building. To this end, a conceptual model that details the impact of organisational cognisance on enhanced school capacity was constructed out of the second data analysis. The model captures an understanding of organisational cognisance as a vital source in developing aspects of personal capacity, interpersonal capacity and professional capacity for enhancing schoolwide capacity.

The significance of the research resides in two postulations: first, of a cognitive dimension to the concept of organisational alignment; second, of its importance for school capacity building.

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